



## The Dilemma of Missing People in Jamaica: A Societal Disintegration of the Family Structure and a Gendered Phenomenon

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### Abstract

**Introduction:** Missing people is a psychosocial phenomenon with a societal cost associated with it, particularly children. The Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF) has been collating missing people data, to address this phenomenon for decades. Despite the efforts and surveillance system implemented by the JCF, at least 1000 people go missing annually in Jamaica.

**Objectives:** The general objectives of this study are to 1. evaluate the probability of missing people in Jamaica, 2. assess the gender distribution of missing people in Jamaica, 3. determine the status of missing people in Jamaica, and 4. evaluate the number of hours it takes before a missing person is confirmed dead, and disaggregate this by gender.

**Methods and materials:** The data for this study was collated from the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF) which covered the period from 2018 through to July 31, 2022. The Data was recorded, stored and retrieved using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for Windows, Version 21.0 as well as Microsoft Excel. The level of significance that was used to determine statistical significance was less than 5% (0.05) at the 2-tailed level of significance.

**Findings:** Generally, children are more likely to go missing in Jamaica (probability = 0.66) compared to adults (probability = 0.34). The overall probability of continued missing cases was 0.26 or 26%, with 2018 having the least number of continued missing cases (i.e., probability = 0.13 or 13%) and the most being in 2021 (probability = 0.47 or 47%). The statistics revealed that the probability of people being confirmed dead after being reported missing was 0.03 (or 3%), with a low of 0.02 (or 2%) in 2019 and 2021. Two hundred and six missing people were confirmed dead and of this 172 were males and 34 were females. This means that males were 5.1 times more likely to be killed than females. On average, five people would go missing daily-four returned, and one is unaccountable. It took 180 hours (or approximately 8 days) before a missing person was confirmed dead. However, it took 224 hours (or 9 days) for a missing male to be confirmed dead and 912 hours (or 38 days) for a missing female to be confirmed dead, and it took 195 hours (or approximately 8 days) before a missing adult was confirmed dead. However, it took 233 hours (or 10 days) for a missing adult male to be confirmed dead and 1180 hours (or 49 days) for a missing adult female to be confirmed dead after being reported missing in Jamaica.

**Conclusion:** Jamaican families are at a crossroads and the economic marginalization of the families, as well as absent fathers, are further eroding the family units.

**Keywords:** Adult missing people, child missing people, death of missing people, family disintegration, missing people

## Introduction

Throughout history, the saga of missing persons has been a tragic event. Without including adults, it is estimated that some 8 million children go missing around the world each year (West, 2012). Jamaica is not spared from this global phenomenon. The issue of missing people in Jamaica has been ongoing for several years. Figures from earlier years showed the gravity of the situation over the years. In 2005, 1,962 persons were reported missing with an average of 163 per month (Williams, 2006). Women were also at a higher risk of going missing or being abducted. Williams (2006) further reported that of the figures of missing people reported in Jamaica, 61% were women with the majority of these missing women aged between 11 to 19 years. Several years forward, the issue has not been resolved. In 2015, it was estimated that at least one person was reported missing every three hours in Jamaica for the period, of January 2012 to April 2015. More recently in 2022, media and events, surrounding the missing and later found dead social media personality, Donna-Lee Donaldson, drew the attention of the public to the gravity of the missing person's situation in Jamaica. As of July 2022, 848 people, of which, 527 are children, have been reported missing in Jamaica since the start of the year (Barrett, 2022). Despite its global scale, there is still a lack of knowledge about the complexity and significant effects of this global issue.

The limited comprehensive and reliable statistics on the number of persons who go missing throughout the world further exacerbate the problem. For instance, Jamaica is one of the few countries in the Caribbean with sustainable mechanisms implemented to deal with the issue of missing persons including collecting data on missing persons (Williams, 2015).

**Reasons Why People Go Missing:** The International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP) reports conflict, human rights abuses, natural disasters, organized crime, migration, trafficking and gender as some of the leading reasons. The physical and mental abuse of civilians in the population are frequent goals and weapons of war, and which has led to battlefields extending into towns, cities, and villages resulting in organized violence in the form of armed conflict as one of the leading contributing factors causing an increase in the numbers of missing people worldwide (*ICMP Global Report on Missing Persons*, 2021). Human rights abuses also contribute to the number of missing people as authoritarian regimes continue to use the practice of “enforced disappearance” to exert social and political control (i.e., China, North Korea, et cetera).

Thousands of people went missing throughout history as a result of Natural Disasters. According to the ICMP Global Report on Missing Persons (2021), it should be expected that the number of missing people will continue to rise as a result of climate change and the ensuing increase in the frequency of natural catastrophes. Organized crime along with gang-related activities often use disappearances as intimidation which contributes to the number of missing people in certain geographical areas around the world. For instance, the illegal narcotics industry in South and Central America has resulted in a mixture of drug cartels, right-wing and left-wing paramilitaries, and heavy-handed security forces (*ICMP*, n.d.).

Mexican authorities reported in 2014 that 12,532 people who had disappeared during the 2006-12 Calderon administration were still missing, and a further 9,790 had already disappeared in the first two years of President Enrique Pena Nieto's term ("Mexico Says 22,322 People Now 'Disappeared'," 2014). Migration also makes up a significant part of the missing person's problem, with thousands of migrants going missing each year via travelling with inappropriate vessels, across perilous borders and through hostile terrain, all of which contribute significantly to the missing person's dilemma. Approximately, 70,000 migrants from South to North America disappeared between 2006 and 2012, according to Amnesty International (*ICMP Global Report on Missing Persons*, 2021). Human trafficking is another well-known contributor to the number of missing people, especially among women, with sexual exploitation being the most commonly identified. (79%), followed by forced labour (*UNODC*, 2009).

**Sex and Missing People:** In armed conflict and organized crime, men constitute the overwhelming majority of the missing civilians (*UNODC*, 2009). The only exception is seen in the illegal sex industry. In this case, traffickers connected to the global sex industry disproportionately target women and children who are often reported missing. Nearly two decades ago in Jamaica, women were also found to be at a higher risk than other groups, of going missing or being abducted. Of the figures reported for the year 2005, 61% were women with the majority of them between the age of 11 to 19 years (Williams, 2006). In recent years data shows the same. Of the 8,326 people reported missing across Jamaica since 2018, 5,344 (64%) of those have been women (Barrett, 2022).

**Society and Missing People:** The National Intelligence Bureau (NIB) of Jamaica reported that of the total of 9,715 reported missing persons between January 2012 and April 2015, almost 90% were found or returned home. And while the majority of missing people in Jamaica returned

home or are found, the frequency and magnitude of the murders and other serious crimes in Jamaica mean that the waiting period between the reporting and the returning of the missing persons is often fraught for families and communities. Speaking on the case of missing, social media personality Donna-Lee Donaldson, Chevelle Blake, whose own sister went missing in early 2022 said "When there is no closure, it's crazy, and it's something that can drive you insane if you don't take control of it. I hope they have better luck than us" (Barrett, 2022). When considering the families and communities that the missing people are from, the issue of missing people becomes a psychosocial phenomenon with considerable societal cost. This current study takes a descriptive method by analyzing recent figures of missing people in Jamaica and discusses the psychosocial implications of this issue on the family structure and the wider Jamaican society.

## **Theoretical framework**

To better examine the psychosocial implications of the issue of missing people in Jamaica on the family structure and the wider Jamaican society, the current study utilizes the Ambiguous Loss theory. The term Ambiguous Loss is defined as "a loss that remains unclear" (Boss, 2007). Pauline Boss first used it in the 1970s while doing family therapy to describe different types of loss reactions. This theory posits that most people find it distressing to be uninformed or unaware of the whereabouts or status of a loved one whether they are present or absent or even dead or alive. This ambiguity also affects the grieving process by stalling it and making closure unachievable. This may go on to affect one's coping skills and decision-making (Boss & Ishii, 2015). Family members are forced to create their version of the facts regarding the condition of the individual who is either absent in mind or physically.

**Ambiguous Loss, Family and Society:** This study particularly focuses on one of the two types of Ambiguous loss: physical absence with psychological presence (Boss, 2016). In this type of Ambiguous loss, a person is missing psychically. Described as one of the most traumatic types of losses, Ambiguous loss affects families, communities and the wider society that missing people are from. One of the main assumptions of the Ambiguous Loss Theory is that familial bonds are psychological rather than biological and as such, losses experienced are based on the changes or threats to the emotional and psychological relationship, or attachment, between individuals (Boss, 2007). So, while uncertainty as to the whereabouts of the missing people is happening, grieving is at a halt and families and communities struggle to make decisions regarding ceremonies and events which are often performed for closure example, funerals (Boss, 2007; Boss & Ishii, 2015). Psychologically, as a result of Ambiguous loss, families and communities may experience feelings of helplessness, guilt, depression and anxiety (Boss, 2009). Ambiguous loss may also affect families structurally and consequently, the communities to which these families belong. In addition to ignoring parenting roles, making conflicting decisions, putting off daily tasks, ignoring or cutting off community, and cancelling or postponing family events, the ambiguous loss can be devastating and traumatizing for family structures, communities, and society at large (Boss, 2004, 2009).

## Methods and materials

The data for this study was collated from the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF). The period for this work is from 2018 through July 31, 2022. The data was recorded, stored and retrieved using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for Windows, Version 21.0 as well as Microsoft Excel. The level of significance that was used to determine statistical significance was less than 5% (0.05) at the 2-tailed level of significance. The data were analyzed using percentages, probability, annual percentage change, and missing people in the 10,000 Jamaican population.

The computations for the number of hours in the research period were as follows. 1. The total number of hours in a leap year is 8,784, 2. The total number of hours in a non-leap year is 8,760, 3. The total number of hours from January 1 to July 31, 2022, is 5,064, and 4. The total number of hours in the studied period are 40,128 ( $8,760 \times 3 + 5,064 + 8,784$ ).

## Data validity

The Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF) has instituted a robust surveillance system that tracks, monitors, records, and validates missing people in Jamaica. The surveillance system is constantly assessed and updated daily to ensure that missing people are accurately recorded and accounted for. The purpose of this dataset is for national planning and record-keeping in an attempt to monitor this phenomenon.

## Operational definitions

**Death:** The absence of life. **Study period:** The study period is from January 1, 2018, to July 31, 2022. **Homicide (or Murder):** the unlawful killing (a crime causing death without a lawful justification) by another person(s) within a particular geopolitical zone (excluding police killings or homicides). For this work, homicide (or murders) represent the total number of murders for each year. **Missing people:** A person who has not reported being at home or his/her place of abode in at least 24 hours. (Reporting time according to Jamaican law)?

## Findings

Table 1 presents the data on missing people in Jamaica by reported cases, returned, still outstanding cases, and total reported dead. Over the last five years (January 1, 2018- July 31, 2022), 8,326 people have been reported missing in Jamaica, with the average being 1,665 people ( $\pm 564$  people). Since 2018, Jamaica has been seeing a decline in the number of cases of missing people. This means that on average five people were reported missing daily, with the figure being six in 2018 as well as in 2019.

**Table 1. Statistics on Missing People in Jamaica by Selected Characteristics, 2018-2022  
 (as of July 31, 2022)**

Year	Total reported missing	Annual % change	Total Returned	Annual % change	Total outstanding	Annual % change	Total reported Dead	Annual % change
2018	2200		1837		289		74	
2019	2194	-0.27	1608	-12.47	541	87.20	45	-39.19
2020	1615	-26.39	1210	-24.75	352	-34.94	53	17.78
2021	1467	-9.16	751	-37.93	689	95.74	27	-49.06
2022	850	-42.06	555	-26.10	271	-60.67	24	-11.11
Total	8326		5961		2142		223	
Average	1665		1192		428		45	
Standard deviation	564		545		181		20	

The phenomenon of missing people in Jamaica is disaggregated by age status (i.e., children and adults) for the periods 2018 to 2022 (Table 2). For the period (January 1, 2018- July 31, 2022), generally, children are more likely to go missing in Jamaica (probability = 0.66) compared to adults (probability = 0.34). This means that children are two times more likely to go missing in Jamaica than adults are, with the annual ratio ranging from 1.56 to 2.23.

**Table 2. Probability of child and adult reported missing in Jamaica if you are a child, 2018-2022  
 (as of July 31, 2022)**

Year	Total reported missing	Annual % change	Total Children Returned Missing	Annual % change	Total Adults Returned Missing	Annual % change	Probability of Children	Probability of Adults
2018	2200		1502		698		0.68	0.32
2019	2194	-0.27	1525	1.53	669	-4.15	0.70	0.30
2020	1615	-26.39	1068	-29.97	547	-18.24	0.66	0.34
2021	1467	-9.16	894	-16.29	573	4.75	0.61	0.39
2022	850	-42.06	527	-41.05	321	-43.98	0.62	0.38
Total	8326		5516		2808	0.662503	0.66	0.34

For the studied period (January 1, 2018- July 31, 2022), 8,326 people were reported missing in Jamaica, but the probability of return was 0.72 (i.e., 5,961 returned of the 8,326 missing people). Based on the findings, the least number of returned missing people was in 2021 (i.e., probability = 0.51 or 51%), with 2018 having the greatest number of reported cases (i.e., probability = 0.84 or 84%).

**Table 3. Probability of returning after going missing in Jamaica, 2018-2022 (as of July 31, 2022)**

Year	Total reported missing	Total Returned	Probability of being returned
2018	2200	1837	0.84
2019	2194	1608	0.73
2020	1615	1210	0.75
2021	1467	751	0.51
2022	850	555	0.65
Total	8326	5961	0.72

Of the 8,326 people who were reported missing in Jamaica from January 1, 2018, to July 31, 2022, the overall probability of continued missing cases is 0.26 or 26%, with 2018 having the least number of continued missing cases (i.e., probability = 0.13 or 13%) and the most being in 2021 (probability = 0.47 or 47%). It can be deduced from the findings that 53% of missing people in 2021 may be dead or a part of outstanding figures as the police continue to investigate the cases to determine people's whereabouts (Table 4).

**Table 4. Probability of being outstanding after going missing in Jamaica, 2018-2022  
 (as of July 31, 2022)**

Year	Total reported missing	Total Outstanding	Probability of being outstanding
2018	2200	289	0.13
2019	2194	541	0.25
2020	1615	352	0.22
2021	1467	689	0.47
2022	850	271	0.32
Total	8326	2142	0.26

Table 5 presents the number of missing cases, those confirmed dead, and the probability of deaths of missing people in Jamaica from January 1, 2018, to July 31, 2022. The statistics revealed that the probability of people being confirmed dead after being reported missing is 0.03 (or 3%), and this low is 0.02 (or 2%) in 2019 and 2021. An extrapolation from the current findings is that missing people are not synonymous with death, but instead separation from one's normal place of abode.

**Table 5. Probability of confirmed deaths after going missing in Jamaica, 2018-2022  
 (as of July 31, 2022)**

Year	Total reported missing	Total confirmed dead	Probability of confirmed dead
2018	2200	74	0.034
2019	2194	45	0.021
2020	1615	53	0.033
2021	1467	27	0.018
2022	850	24	0.028
Total	8326	223	0.027

Table 6 presents statistics for reported missing people in Jamaica disaggregated by gender and the probability of the gendered missing people. Based on the statistics, there is a gender disparity in the number of missing people in Jamaica. For the studied period (January 1, 2018- July 31, 2022), generally, the probability of missing people being female is 0.64 (or 64%) compared to 0.36 for males (or 36%). This means that for every 100 reported cases of missing people in Jamaica, 64 will be females and 36 males.

**Table 6. Probability of reported missing by gender in Jamaica, 2018-2022 (as of July 31, 2022)**

Year	Total reported missing	Male	Female	Probability of missing	
				Male	Female
2018	2200	813	1387	0.37	0.63
2019	2194	767	1427	0.35	0.65
2020	1615	554	1061	0.34	0.66
2021	1467	541	926	0.37	0.63
2022	850	306	544	0.36	0.64
Total	8326	2981	5345	0.36	0.64

For the period of study (January 1, 2018- July 31, 2022), the probability of return was 0.72 and when this is disaggregated by gender, it is 0.69 for females and 0.31 for males.

**Table 7. Probability of reported returned after going missing by gender in Jamaica, 2018-2022 (as of July 31, 2022)**

Year	Total reported returned	Male	Female	Probability	
				Male	Female
2018	1837	606	1231	0.33	0.67
2019	1608	490	1118	0.30	0.70
2020	1210	358	852	0.30	0.70
2021	751	243	508	0.32	0.68
2022	555	176	379	0.32	0.68
Total	5961	1873	4088	0.31	0.69

Table 8.1 presents the number of confirmed cases of dead missing people along with the probabilities based on age distributions. The statistics already revealed the probability of people being confirmed dead after being reported missing is 0.03 (or 3%), and this low is 0.02 (or 2%) in 2019 and 2021. When the confirmed death cases of missing people are disaggregated by age cohort, the probability of an adult being killed is 0.924 (or 92.4%) compared to 0.076 (or 7.6%) for a child. This means that an adult missing person is 12 times more likely to be killed compared to a missing child.

**Table 8.1. Probability of confirmed dead after going missing by age cohort in Jamaica, 2018-2022 (as of July 31, 2022)**

Year	Total confirmed dead	Total Adults confirmed dead	Total Children confirmed dead	Probability of death	
				Adult	Children
2018	74	69	5	0.932	0.068
2019	45	40	5	0.889	0.111
2020	53	47	6	0.887	0.113
2021	27	26	1	0.963	0.037
2022	24	24	0	1.000	0.000
Total	223	206	17	0.924	0.076



Table 8.2 presents the number of confirmed cases of dead missing people along with the probabilities based on gender distributions. The statistics already revealed that the probability of people being confirmed dead after being reported missing is 0.03 (or 3%), and this low is 0.02 (or 2%) in 2019 and 2021. When the confirmed death cases of missing people are disaggregated by gender, the probability of males being killed is 0.8 (or 80%) compared to 0.2 (or 20%) for females. This means that males who go missing are 4 times more likely to be killed compared to females. Currently, 88% of the dead missing people are males.

**Table 8.2. Probability of confirmed dead after going missing by gender in Jamaica, 2018-2022 (as of July 31, 2022)**

Year	Total confirmed dead	Male	Female	Probability	
				Male	Female
2018	74	57	17	0.77	0.23
2019	45	36	9	0.80	0.20
2020	53	44	9	0.83	0.17
2021	27	21	6	0.78	0.22
2022	24	21	3	0.88	0.13
Total	223	179	44	0.80	0.20

In Jamaica, most missing people are children. For the period of study (January 1, 2018- July 31, 2022), on average, 66% of the missing cases were children and the figure was 70% in 2019 (Table 9).

**Table 9. Probability of children reported missing in Jamaica, 2018-2022 (as of July 31, 2022)**

Year	Total reported missing	Total Children reported Returned	Annual % change	Probability of Children Reported Returned
2018	2200	1502	-	0.68
2019	2194	1525	1.53	0.70
2020	1615	1068	-29.97	0.66
2021	1467	894	-16.29	0.61
2022	850	527	-41.05	0.62
Total	8326	5516	-	0.66

In Jamaica, less than 40% of the missing people are adults. For the period of study (January 1, 2018- July 31, 2022), on average, 34% of the missing cases were adults and the figure was 39% in 2020 (Table 10).

**Table 10. Probability of adults reported missing in Jamaica, 2018-2022 (as of July 31, 2022)**

Year	Total reported missing	Total Adults Returned Missing	Annual % change	Probability of Adults Returned Missing
2018	2200	698	-	0.32
2019	2194	669	-4.15	0.30
2020	1615	547	-18.24	0.34
2021	1467	573	4.75	0.39
2022	850	321	-43.98	0.38
Total	8326	2808	-	0.34

In Jamaica, adult males are 1.86 times more likely to be reported missing than females. For the period of study (January 1, 2018- July 31, 2022), on average, 66% of the missing cases were male adults and currently, it is 67% (in 2020, Table 11).

**Table 11. Probability of reported missing in Jamaica if you are an adult by gender, 2018-2022 (as of July 31, 2022)**

Year	Adults reported missing	Male	Female	Probability	
				Male	Female
2018	698	464	234	0.66	0.34
2019	669	416	253	0.62	0.38
2020	547	352	195	0.64	0.36
2021	573	380	193	0.66	0.34
2022	321	214	107	0.67	0.33
Total	2808	1826	982	0.65	0.35

Among the children missing cases, 3.8 times more of the cases are females compared to males (i.e.,  $4362/1154 = 3.8$  times; 79%; Table 12).

**Table 12. Probability of reported missing in Jamaica if you are a child by gender, 2018-2022 (as of July 31, 2022)**

Year	Children reported missing	Male	Annual change	%	Female	Annual change	%	Probability	
								Male	Female
2018	1502	349			1153			0.23	0.77
2019	1525	351	0.01		1174	0.02		0.23	0.77
2020	1068	202	-0.42		866	-0.26		0.19	0.81
2021	894	161	-0.20		733	-0.15		0.18	0.82
2022	527	91	-0.43		436	-0.41		0.17	0.83
Total	5516	1154			4362			0.21	0.79

The statistics revealed that the confirmed dead cases among adults who go missing are mostly men. In fact, for the period of study, 206 missing people were confirmed dead and of this 172 were males and 34 were females. This means that males were 5.1 times more likely to be killed than females. Currently, of the 24 confirmed dead of the missing cases, 21 were males and this means that the death rate was 7 times more for this gender than for females.

**Table 13. Probability of reported dead in Jamaica if you are an adult by gender, 2018-2022 (as of July 31, 2022)**

Year	Adult reported dead	Male	Annual change	%	Female	Annual change	%	Probability	
								Male	Female
2018	69	56			13			0.81	0.19
2019	40	35	-0.38		5	-0.62		0.88	0.13
2020	47	39	0.11		8	0.60		0.83	0.17
2021	26	21	-0.46		5	-0.38		0.81	0.19
2022	24	21	0.00		3	-0.40		0.88	0.13
Total	206	172			34			0.83	0.17

Over the last five years, 17 children who went missing were confirmed dead or killed (Table 14). Female children were more likely to be killed than male children (i.e., 10 to 7, respectively). However, in 2021, the only child who was killed after going missing was a male child. Currently (to July 31, 2022), no cases of missing children have been confirmed dead.

**Table 14. Probability of reported dead in Jamaica if you are a child by gender, 2018-2022 (as of July 31, 2022)**

Year	Children reported dead	Male	Annual % change	Female	Annual % change	Probability	
						Male	Female
2018	5	1		4		0.20	0.80
2019	5	1	0.00	4	0.00	0.20	0.80
2020	6	5	4.00	1	-0.75	0.83	0.17
2021	1	0	-1.00	1	0.00	0.00	1.00
2022	0	0	Undefined	0	-1.00	Undefined	Undefined
Total	17	7		10		0.41	0.59

Table 15 presents statistics on selected issues relating to the number of missing people daily in Jamaica from 2012 to July 31, 2022. For the period of study (January 1, 2018- July 31, 2022), on average, five people go missing daily—four were returned, and one is outstanding.

**Table 15. Number of missing people daily in Jamaica, 2018-2022 (as of July 31, 2022)**

Year	Daily reported missing	Daily returned	Daily outstanding	Daily reported dead
2018	6	5	1	0
2019	6	4	2	0
2020	4	3	1	0
2021	4	2	2	0
2022	4	3	1	0
Total	5	4	1	0

Note: Leap year was 2020

The total number of days in the period of study is 1,672

Table 16 presents statistics on selected issues relating to the number of missing people every 4 hours in Jamaica from January 1, 2018, to July 31, 2022. For the period of study (January 1, 2018- July 31, 2022), on average, one individual goes missing every four hours-one is returned, none is outstanding and none is confirmed dead in this period.

**Table 16. Number of missing people every 4 hours in Jamaica, 2018-2022 (as of July 31, 2022)**

Year	Every 4 hours reported missing	Every 4 hours reported returned	Every 4 hours reported outstanding	Every 4 hours reported dead
2018	1	1	0	0
2019	1	1	0	0
2020	1	1	0	0
2021	1	0	0	0
2022	1	0	0	0
Total	1	1	0	0

Note: Leap year was 2020

Table 17 presents the total number of hours before a missing person is reported dead in Jamaica. For the period of study (January 1, 2018, to July 31, 2022), on average, it takes 180 hours (or approximately 8 days) before a missing person is confirmed dead. However, it takes 224 hours (or 9 days) for a missing male to be confirmed dead and 912 hours (or 38 days) for a missing female to be confirmed dead.

**Table 17. Total number of hours before a missing person is confirmed dead by gender in Jamaica**

Year	Total reported dead (male)	Total reported dead (female)	Total reported dead
2018	154	515	118
2019	243	973	195
2020	200	200	976
2021	417	1460	324
2022	241	1688	211
Total	224	912	180

Note: The total number of hours in a leap year is 8,784

The total number of hours in a non-leap year is 8,760

The total number of hours from January 1 to July 31, 2022, is 5,064

The total number of hours in the studied period are 40,128 ( $8,760 \times 3 + 5,064 + 8,784$ )

Table 18 presents the total number of hours before a missing adult is reported dead in Jamaica. For the period of study (January 1, 2018, to July 31, 2022), on average, it takes 195 hours (or approximately 8 days) before a missing adult is confirmed dead. However, it takes 233 hours (or 10 days) for a missing adult male to be confirmed dead and 1180 hours (or 49 days) for a missing adult female to be confirmed dead after being reported missing in Jamaica.

**Table 18. The total number of hours before an adult missing person is confirmed dead by gender in Jamaica**

Year	The total number of hours before an adult missing person is confirmed by gender		The total number of hours before an adult missing person is confirmed
	Male	Female	
2018	156	674	127
2019	250	1752	219
2020	225	225	1098
2021	417	1752	337
2022	241	1688	211
Total	233	1180	195

Note: The total number of hours in a leap year is 8,784

The total number of hours in a non-leap year is 8,760

The total number of hours from January 1 to July 31, 2022, is 5,064

The total number of hours in the studied period are 40,128 ( $8,760 \times 3 + 5,064 + 8,784$ )

Table 19 presents the total number of hours before a missing child is reported dead in Jamaica. For the period of study (January 1, 2018, to July 31, 2022), on average, it takes 2,360 hours (or approximately 98 days) before a missing child is confirmed dead. However, it takes 5733 hours (or 239 days) for a missing male child to be confirmed dead and 4013 hours (or 167 days) for a missing female child to be confirmed dead after being reported missing.

**Table 19. The total number of hours before a missing child is confirmed dead by gender in Jamaica**

Year	Total reported dead (male child)	Total reported dead (female child)	Total children reported dead
2018	8760	2190	1752
2019	8760	2190	1752
2020	1757	1757	8784
2021	undefined	8760	8760
2022	undefined	undefined	Undefined
Total	5733	4013	2360

Note: The total number of hours in a leap year is 8,784

The total number of hours in a non-leap year is 8,760

The total number of hours from January 1 to July 31, 2022, is 5,064

The total number of hours in the studied period are 40,128 ( $8,760 \times 3 + 5,064 + 8,784$ )

Table 20 summarizes the missing people data in Jamaica. Of the 8,326 people who were reported missing from January 1, 2018, to July 31, 2022, 72% have returned, 26% are still outstanding, and 32% were killed. In 2021, of the total number of missing people (i.e., 1467), 47% of the people were not returned compared to only 13% not returned in 2018.

**Table 20. Summative Probabilities of missing people in Jamaica, 2018-2022 (as of July 31, 2022)**

Year	Probability of return	Probability of outstanding	Probability of death	Total Probability
2018	0.84	0.13	0.03	1
2019	0.73	0.25	0.02	1
2020	0.75	0.22	0.03	1
2021	0.51	0.47	0.02	1
2022	0.65	0.32	0.03	1
Total	0.72	0.26	0.02	1

Table 21 presents the summative probabilities of missing people by gender in Jamaica from January 1, 2018, to July 31, 2022. Generally, the probability of the male child reported missing is 0.14 compared to 0.52 for a female child. This means that a female child is 3.7 times more likely to go missing compared to a male child. In addition, the probability of an adult male reported missing is 0.22 compared to 0.12 for an adult female. An adult male is 1.8 times more likely to be reported missing compared to an adult female.

**Table 21. Summative probabilities of missing people by gender in Jamaica, January 1, 2018, to July 31, 2022**

Year	Total reported missing	Male	Female	Total Probability	Male child	Female child	Adult male	Adult female	Total Probability
2018	2200	0.37	0.63	1.00	0.16	0.52	0.21	0.11	1.00
2019	2194	0.35	0.65	1.00	0.16	0.54	0.19	0.12	1.00
2020	1615	0.34	0.66	1.00	0.13	0.54	0.22	0.12	1.00
2021	1467	0.37	0.63	1.00	0.11	0.50	0.26	0.13	1.00
2022	850	0.36	0.64	1.00	0.11	0.51	0.25	0.13	1.00
Total	8326	0.36	0.64	1.00	0.14	0.52	0.22	0.12	1.00

Unsolved (i.e., outstanding) missing people continue to be a phenomenon in Jamaica. Over the last four and a half years, the probability of unsolved missing cases was 0.57 for females and 0.43 for males. On disaggregating the missing cases by gender and age status, Table 22 revealed that the probability of unsolved missing cases among female children was 0.44 and 0.33 among adult males. For seven months (i.e., January 1, 2022, to July 31, 2022), the probability of unsolved missing females stood at 0.60 and 0.40 for males. Furthermore, the probability of a female child remaining missing was 0.49 and 0.27 for an adult male. Generally, male children are the least likely to remain missing among children and adults.

**Table 22. Summative analysis of the probabilities of outstanding missing in Jamaica, January 1, 2022, to July 31, 2022**

Year	Total reported outstanding missing	Male	Female	Total Probability	Male child	Female child	Adult male	Adult female	Total Probability
2018	289	0.52	0.48	1.00	0.08	0.36	0.44	0.12	1
2019	541	0.45	0.55	1.00	0.12	0.42	0.33	0.13	1
2020	352	0.43	0.57	1.00	0.10	0.45	0.33	0.12	1
2021	689	0.40	0.60	1.00	0.10	0.46	0.30	0.14	1
2022	271	0.40	0.60	1.00	0.13	0.49	0.27	0.11	1
Total	2142	0.43	0.57	1.00	0.11	0.44	0.33	0.13	1

Table 23 presents the missing people per 10,000 mid-year population in Jamaica. In 2018, 8 people were reported missing per 10,000 populations in Jamaica and the rate has been declining since that time.

**Table 23. Missing People per 10,000 population of Jamaica**

2018	2,727,503	2200	8.07
2019	2,732,538	2194	8.03
2020	2,740,000	1615	5.89
2021	2,743,901*	1467	5.35
2022	2,749,389* <sup>1</sup>	848	5.29

\*This figure is computed by Paul Andrew Bourne (using a geometric progression ratio, where  $r = 1.002$ )

<sup>1</sup>The figure for January to July 31 is 1,603,810 (i.e.,  $2,749,389 \times 7/12$ )

## Discussion

Major migrations, war, political instability and organized crime all contribute to persons going missing (International Commission on Missing People, nd)

The perspective of the International Commission on Missing People (nd) provides some context for the rationale behind missing people in a society. From the articulation of the International Commission on Missing People, civil unrest has been responsible for some people being reported missing from their societies and this dates back to prehistoric periods (Ferguson, 2000; Friedman, 2014; Gat, 2006; Kelly, 2000; Thorpe, 2003). Political instability and organized crime also account for missing people in a society, and a combination of those phenomena may explain higher rates of missing people.

Many contemporary societies have not experienced wars, but they have experienced either political instability or organized crime that are features of missing people (Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), 2019; International Commission on Missing People, nd; International Committee of the Red Cross, 2019; U.S. Department of Justice, 2022; World Population Review, 2022). On examination of the literature on missing people, Taylor *et al.* (2018) noted that there has been an increase in the number of studies from two in the 1960s to 331 from 2010-2016. Jamaica like many contemporary societies has undergone political instability and organized crime throughout its history, and therefore these factors account for the many cases of missing people. The current study found that, generally, on average, 66% of the missing people were children and the figure was 70% in 2019.

Although Jamaica has a significantly smaller human population than the United States (US) or many states within the US, it has more cases of missing people than many states in the US. Currently (2022), Jamaica recorded 850 cases of missing people compared to Washington (643), New York (606), and Michigan (556)-(World Population Review, 2022). In addition, in 2021, 521,705 people were reported missing in the US and 485,000 people were found (i.e., 93.0% recovery rate; U.S. Department of Justice, 2022) compared to 8,326 missing people and 5,961 returned people in Jamaica (i.e., 71.5% recovery rate). In 2021, of the reported missing people in Jamaica (8,326), 61% were children, and 61% of children reported missing were reported to return compared to 39% of adults who were reported to return. In addition, 96.3% of the missing people in Jamaica were adults and 3.7% were children. The U.S. Department of Justice (2022) indicated that of the number of missing people, children are quickly found and alive compared to adults, which is also the case in Jamaica.

Statistics on missing people in the United Kingdom (UK) showed that it is a male and young people phenomenon (Biehal *et al.*, 2003). However, in Jamaica, missing people are a substantially adult male phenomenon, highlighting males' involvement in social deviant activities. The current study also revealed that it takes 195 hours (or approximately 8 days) before a missing adult is confirmed dead. However, it takes 233 hours (or 10 days) for a missing adult male to be confirmed dead and 1180 hours (or 49 days) for a missing adult female to be confirmed dead after being reported missing in Jamaica. Continuing with the current statistics, it takes 2,360 hours (or approximately 98 days) before a missing child is confirmed dead. However,

it takes 5733 hours (or 239 days) for a missing male child to be confirmed dead and 4013 hours (or 167 days) for a missing female child to be confirmed dead after being reported missing.

Statistics for Jamaica revealed that one individual goes missing every four hours in Jamaica compared to one every two minutes in Britain (UK Missing People Bureau, 2012). Such statistics denote that Britain is experiencing a missing people pandemic and highlights the family's social disintegration, which is a reality in Jamaica. The rationale for the social disintegration of the family structure is embedded in the number of missing people, who return home or are confirmed dead. The present study found that most of those missing people are female children, and the majority are returned home. From the current statistic, on average, it takes 2,360 hours (or approximately 98 days) before a missing child is confirmed dead. However, it takes 5733 hours (or 239 days) for a missing male child to be confirmed dead and 4013 hours (or 167 days) for a missing female child to be confirmed dead after being reported missing. Those figures highlighted a systematic social disintegration of the family structure as the female children are becoming involved in activities that warrant avoiding home, and some of their activities are 'leaving them dead'. Outside of the direct involvement of children in social deviant activities, family members abduct some of them. Dimetman (2022) postulated that mothers in the United States abducted most of the missing children (58%), 33% by their fathers, and 9% by other family members. The current study can argue the involvement of biological members in the abduction of children in Jamaica, but Dimetman's perspective also explains the missing children phenomenon in Jamaica.

Children are also abducted for exploitative reasons, and this constitutes a percentage of missing people that cannot be examined in this study owing to the lack of information on the issue. Nevertheless, the issue of abduction must be brought into the discourse of missing people as it plays a role in explaining the rationale for missing children in society. The International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (2022) indicated that family members, for child-service labour and self-gratification, abduct many children. The issue of child-service labour or child labour is an undeniable fact in Jamaica (International Labour Organization (ILO), 1999, 2018; Ministry of Labour and Social Security, 2018; Serju, 2018). The ILO (2018) provides some context on child labour in Jamaica, and by extension, this explains missing child statistics in Jamaica. The ILO opined that:

Child labour in Jamaica affects 38,000 children aged 5-17 years, about 6 per cent of this age group. Out of them, about 13,000 children fetch water or collect firewood, constituting an argument for accelerated efforts to reach universal water and electricity coverage. These overall estimates mask important differences by sex, age and residence. Boys are more likely to be involved in child labour than their female peers: there is a 4 percentage point difference between boys and girls for the overall 5-17 years age group. The difference in child labour involvement between rural and urban children is also significant: the rate of child labour in rural areas (8 per cent) is twice that in urban areas (4 per cent) (ILO, 2018, p. 8)

An extrapolation from the statistics is that children are primarily abducted because of the social disintegration of the family and for child-service labour. The current statistics revealed that a small per cent of the missing children are confirmed dead, and this may be owing to abductor



error than a primary purpose of the abduction. Missing children, therefore, plays on the psychological state of the family as well as the child and this must be brought into this missing people discourse.

An important issue in the missing people discourse is the fear of abductees being killed. This fear of death is even more intensive on the abductors' biological parents' mental health. Boss (2017) refers to this fear of death or being alive of the abductor as "[an] ambiguous loss" and this non-closure creates a long-lasting negative psychological effect on the family of the abductee. Boss (2017) explained the gravity of the missing people by postulating, "Without proof of death, remaining family members are understandably confused and predictably disagree on the fate of their missing loved one. Some continue to hope for return; others perceive the lost person as clearly dead" (p. 521).

Lenferink, *et al.* (2019) opined, "Number of experienced traumatic events and kinship to the missing person was identified as correlates of psychopathology. Comparative studies showed that psychopathology levels did not differ between relatives of missing and deceased persons" (p. 287). Lenferink, *et al.* (2017, 2019) compared the psychological state of the families of those who are missing to those lost by way of death (or bereavement), and this encapsulates the extent of the trauma of missing people on families and relatives (Boss, 2017).

Some of the missing people, particularly children and more female children than male children, voluntarily choose to abscond their family homes because of being victims of a crime, dislike their social home settings, and certain mishaps may have occurred as well as a belief that they are not allowed some degree of adventurous living (Victoria Police, 2022). This speaks to the psychological trauma experienced by some children that they would run away from their homes. One may postulate from the current findings that many of the missing children in Jamaica are not abducted but are voluntarily abstaining from their homes for a myriad of reasons including sexual explorations.

Oshi et al (2019) indicated that single-parent families (unmarried mothers) account for 41% of Jamaican family units, and Livingston (2018) found that this is 53% in the United States of America. Livingston (2018) indicated that unmarried mothers declined from 68% in 1997 to 53% in 2017. The rise of single-parent (i.e., mother) family units away from the nuclear family unit have come with many economic and psychosocial challenges (Fyffe, 2021a, 2021b; Hill, 2011; Leslie, 2020; Livingston, 2018; Samms-Vaughn (2006). One of the clear economic costs of a single-parent family unit is the difficulty with which mothers have to work, care for, and finance their children (Oshi, et al., 2019). The psychosocial costs are even more catastrophic than the economic costs to the children.

Hill (2011) opined, "[Dr Ralphi] Thompson says an increasing number of a sibling, visiting relationship and single parent families have replaced the original family structures. As is expected, these new family types lack the support and assistance in parenting and cultural socialization, which were traditionally present in the nuclear and extended family". The father being absent from the home is more than a financial issue as it extends to the psychological and sociological function of the child as well as the mother. Hill continued by citing Thompson, "For

the children, the lack of a father figure can be disturbing in their socialisation. The problem is neither uptown nor downtown. It is right across the board. There are just too many mothers out there playing the single-parent role," The argument that a child does not need a father to be effectively socialized can be examined by examining the facts. Fyffe (2021a) opined:

The absence of the father means added stress and demands on the mother. It means potential disadvantages in future relationships for a young girl. It means not having an example of how to be a husband and a father, for a young boy. That is the main reason, why there is a proliferation of single-family units in the Caribbean. Because the example that is left, for boys, is that of an absent father; never seeing a man, in the home supporting his spouse. It leaves an indelible mark on the conscious, and subconscious minds of young children.

This study is not arguing for and/or otherwise single-parent family households, but the evidence exists that such a family structure aids in retarding the effective socialization of children, particularly the boys (Green, 2018; Lamb & Lewis, 2010; Lewis & Lamb, 2003; Yarrow, et al., 1984). Lamb & Lewis (2010) noted that the father-child relationship has a significant statistical influence on the later psychosocial development of the child (see also, Grossmann, *et al.*, 1964; 2002). The previous thought can be supported by evidence. Oshi et al. (2019) postulated, "The study found a significant association between single-parent family structure and age of sexual debut" (p. 177). The absence of the father accounts for earlier involvement in sexual relations of children of unmarried mothers, and this can be extended to the engagement of young males in criminal activities (Howell, 2015; Kroese, et al., 2021a, 2021b; Seltzer, 1991; Wright & Wright, 1995). A life without a father is a catastrophic one that leads to many antisocial behaviours (Allen & Daly, 2007; Davidson, 1990; Harper & McLanahan, 2004; Jensen, 1972; Lamb, 1976a, 1976b; Popenoe, 1996).

According to Behere, *et al.* (2017), "More emotional and behavioural problems occur in families disrupted by divorce than compared to other types of disruptions, for example, death of a parent. Certain characteristics have been identified in caregivers as well as the children themselves that serve as risk factors for abuse" (p. 458). The disintegration of the family structure negatively influences the mental health of children, and some are opting to run away from their homes because of the trauma they undergo in their homes (i.e., incest, child labour, physical and psychological abuses). The societal disintegration of the family is retarding the psychological state of children and a coping mechanism is 'voluntarily' absconding from their homes.

Although some children may voluntarily disappear from their normal place of abode, a long-term disappearance may result in post-traumatic stress disorder(PTSD) and major depressive disorder (MDD) for the family felt at home (Lenferink, et al., 2018).The uncertainty of the missing person's disappearance creates a negative psychological impact on the relatives (Heeke, *et al.*, 2015; Lenferink, et al., 2017, 2018). There are two sides to the coin of missing children. One is, that the social disintegration of the family structure is retarding the psychological state of children and many of them run away because they are unable to deal with the trauma in their homes. Two is, that the missing person negatively affects the families and relatives of those who go missing, and this is more so if the period is a prolonged one.

In Jamaica, some relatives and families are cognizant of the social deviant activities engaged in by male relatives. Notwithstanding the mother's level of knowledge of the involvement of their male child in criminal activities (Rodrigues, nd), families oftentimes suppress these to their subconscious minds in an avoidance attempt to deal with their dysfunctional family units. The matter is brought to the forefront of the mind when these males become missing persons. Some of the biological mothers of these socially deviant male children are aware that their sons resist parental rules (Burke & Kuczynski, 2018), and so they are in denial when these boys go missing and are later found dead. The current study found that males are more likely to be reported missing compared to females, and they are also more likely to be confirmed dead after being reported missing. The preponderance of males (i.e., ages 15 to 44 years) being involved in criminality accounts for their higher rates of being victims of crimes than females (Harriott, 2004; Lemard & Hemenway, 2006; Poyser, 2016; Spence, 2021; Smith & Green, 2007; Statistical Institute of Jamaica (STATIN), 2017, 2020; The Ministry of National Security, 2016; Ward, *et al.*, 2017). Young males are perpetrators of crimes, this known fact is still difficult to grasp among their families when these males themselves become victims of criminality. The reality is, that even with the inclination of the involvement of males in crime, long-term missing cases and death are psychologically overwhelming for relatives to deal with when the perpetrator becomes the victim of criminality.

Behere, *et al.* (2017) opined, "History of parental psychopathology predisposes children to increased rates of depression and other psychopathology when compared to children of parents who do not have any affective illness" (p. 458). The study of Behere (2017) provides some context for their involvement in criminality (see also, Brown, 2022; Charles, *et al.*, 2018; Coley and Medeiros, 2007; Hill & O'Neill, 1993; Snell, *et al.*, 1991; Zimmer, 2021). With the high percentage of female-headed households (i.e., according to Bose-Duker, *et al.* (2021), 45.6% as of 2012, and 26% having an adult male resident), the absence of the father is creating psychological turmoil for children (Allen & Daly, 2007), and maybe a pull factor for criminal involvement because of the silent depression they experienced (Tingling, 2014).

To grasp the complexity of fatherless children, Allen & Daly's findings may provide some context for gang affiliations among fatherless children. They found that children who do not have a father living in their household are more likely to be bullied and abused, and so the young males' involvement in criminality may be the source of the evening social injustices they experience. The father's absence, therefore, is creating psychological turmoil for children in Jamaican families, and the actions of these fatherless children are the outcome of the family's disintegration (i.e., going missing and criminality). Then, there is the issue of the psychology of economics of single-female households that is hurting families.

There is the social psychology of economics that is inherent in a single-female household that must be brought into the missing people discourse. A household that has two parents is exposed to more resources, and this allows for access to more material and other resources. The difficulty of providing for a household on one salary is a difficult task, particularly for working parents. Children, therefore, who live in single-female households, are at an economic disadvantage because of less access to dual resources if they were residents of nuclear households (Barnett, 2008; Bose-Duker, *et al.*, 2021). Those economically disadvantaged children are likely to

experience many life challenges (Barnett, 2008; Golm, *et al.*, 2020; Wagmiller *et al.*, 2006), and their realities will influence adult outcomes. Furthermore, the current findings found that 66% of missing people are children, and the economics of single-mother households is accounting for part of the psychological turmoil experienced by these young minds. In addition, the economically disadvantaged children who later become socio-economically disadvantaged and psychologically depressed adults who in their adult years are unable to effectively socialize with their children and their social realities create turmoil for them and act as pull factors for them and their children in social deviant activities including criminality.

## Conclusion

The social disintegration of the Jamaican family is retarding the effective socialization of children, producing psychologically challenged children, and aiding continued dysfunctional as well as fractured family units. The current reality is that 66% of overall missing people are children (i.e., female child, 52%; male child, 14%), and 64% of missing people are females (i.e., female children, 52%; adult females, 12%). Although females, particularly children, continue to account for most of the missing people in Jamaica, an adult male is 1.8 times more likely to be reported missing compared to an adult female, and 5.1 times more likely to be killed when reported missing. Adult males are at risk of being murdered if they are not found within nine days of being reported missing. The missing people statistics revealed that it takes 233 hours (or 10 days) for a missing adult male to be confirmed dead and 1180 hours (or 49 days) for a missing adult female to be confirmed dead after being reported missing in Jamaica. Jamaican families are at a crossroads and the economic marginalization of the families, as well as absent fathers, is further eroding the family units.

## Recommendations

1. **Policy:** The Ministry of Health and Wellness should ascertain the reasons behind children abduction, exploitation, labour and any other reason behind missing children and develop tight policies for protecting innocent children.
2. **Research:** Further study should be conducted to correlate missing children and demographic characteristics such as single parenthood, economic status, and the number of siblings.

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