Original Article

"Did Not Return in Time for Curfew": A Descriptive Analysis of Homeless Missing Persons Cases

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Abstract
Homeless communities have garnered recent public attention in Canada due to their high rates of violence, victimization, and being reported as missing. There have been several high-profile cases, investigations, and inquiries involving missing homeless persons, yet very little is known about what cases are reported to the police, under what circumstances they go missing, and the outcomes of those cases. As a result, the purpose of this study is to provide some insights into some of these unresolved issues by offering an exploratory, descriptive analysis of 291 closed missing person cases from the records of a municipal police service. What this analysis reveal is a somewhat more mundane picture. Specifically, results indicate that the majority of missing person reports are of those who are female and White, have a drug/alcohol addiction, are residing at homeless shelters/ missions, and have a history of being reported as missing. As well, it was revealed that most people are reported as missing due to shelter/mission reporting issues with curfews and that all are located alive. This study extends the minimal existing scholarship on the missing homeless population by providing some preliminary insights on the vulnerabilities and factors that can impact these cases.

Over the course of 7 years, several men have disappeared from the Gay Village in the city of Toronto, Ontario, Canada. One of these men, Dean Lisowick, was a homeless sex worker, who often relied on the city's shelters and missions for a bed for the night (Gibson & Matthieu, 2018). His last reported admission to a shelter was in April 2016, the same month in which he disappeared (Ferreira, 2018). What marked Lisowick's case as different from those of the other Toronto victims was that Lisowick was never reported as missing (Ferreira, 2018). However, overall, Lisowick's case was not all that unusual: Homeless or temporarily housed individuals have been the victims of other serial killings, often going unreported when missing, or reports of their missing status appearing to

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generate little investigative attention (LePard, 2010; Oppal, 2012). As such, stemming from these reports and other cases of a similar nature, there has been significant public attention to the links between homelessness, missing reports, and criminal victimization as exemplified by several recent inquiries and reviews[1] and reports.[2]

Despite the increased awareness of this phenomenon, there has been surprisingly little detailed research produced on the homeless population and missingness. Much of what is available from the scholarly community include editorial comments on specific issues (Hansen & Dim, 2019) and media and other discourse analyses (Gilchrist, 2010; Morton, 2016). This is also the issue with the analysis of missing person cases more generally, which has only recently become a field of serious academic interest. As a result, despite a wealth of literature showing high rates of violence within homeless communities (D'Ercole & Struening, 1990; Fitzpatrick et al., 1993; Perron et al., 2008; Tucker et al., 2005), and several high-profile cases, investigations, and inquiries involving missing homeless persons, we know very little about who goes missing, what cases are reported to the police, under what circumstances they go missing, and the outcomes of these cases.

The present study seeks to provide some first insights into some of these unresolved issues by offering an exploratory, descriptive analysis of 291 closed missing person cases from the records of a municipal police service. What this analysis reveals is a rather more mundane picture of who is reported missing, the circumstances under which they are reported missing, and the outcomes for cases studied.

Missing Persons

At present, there is no one standard definition of "missing" or "missing person." Definitions vary and include, "if a person is absent from their usual places" (Payne, 1995, p. 334) and "someone whose whereabouts are unknown, and there are serious concerns for their safety and welfare" (James et al., 2008, p. 4). Different terms have also been used interchangeably within the research literature— including absconding, eloping, and unexplained absence—resulting in a "lack of specificity," "inconsistent usage" of terms, and "overlapping definitions" (Lissemore et al., 2019, p. 143). Further, "wandering" among individuals with dementia and other cognitive impairments is sometimes included and, at different times, treated as a separate phenomenon (Lissemore et al., 2019.). Some have even attempted to distinguish missing persons based on intent or outcome, such as "runaway," "suicide," and "foul play" (Foy, 2016). What this highlights is the issue of ambiguity and lack of standardization in the definition and classification of what constitutes a person as missing.

For the purposes of this study, the definition employed was created by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO, 2013): "Anyone reported to police or by police as someone whose whereabouts are unknown, whatever the circumstances of their disappearance, and they are considered missing until located" (p. 5). Simply put, a definition that includes the aspect of policing reporting makes sense in the present context, given the reliance on police data for the analysis to follow. Further, the ACPO definition is echoed by other police groups, including what is used by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (2019), "a missing person is anyone reported to, or by police, as someone whose whereabouts are unknown, whatever the circumstances of their disappearance may be."

Recent estimates on the number of missing cases in Canada indicate that there are anywhere from 70,000 to over 100,000 missing reports generated each year (CCIMA, 2012). For adults, most of these reports are said to involve males (57%) and are concluded within the first 24 hours (60%), with 88% being solved within a week. In contrast, for reports concerning children, most cases involve females (58%), are runaways (73%), and are found within 24 hours (62%), while 92% are concluded within a week (Canada's Missing, 2018). This suggests that the overall picture of missing persons in Canada includes adult male and female youth cases that are resolved within a short period of time.

Who Goes Missing?

One of the earliest studies to explore the phenomenon of missing persons was conducted by Hirschel and Lab (1988). Using police data, they explored the demographic characteristics of 864 individuals reported missing for the year of 1984 as well as the circumstances under which they went missing and returned. What these authors observed was that, while females and African American people were overrepresented given their numbers in the general population of the city from which the cases came, there was a significant degree of variability in their sample. From this, they concluded that "the diverse nature of the population of missing persons prevents the proposal of any single line of remedial action" (Hirschel & Lab, 1988, p. 44). Subsequent studies have confirmed these results, similarly finding demographic variability as a result of the diverse personal motivations and factors involved in people's disappearances—from avoiding economic and personal stressors (Sveticic et al., 2012) to "wandering" (Albert, 1992) to mental health problems (Sowerby & Thomas, 2017).

Over the past decade, much of the interest in homeless or temporarily housed missing persons has been driven by media attention on a handful of high-profile serial killer investigations (i.e., the McArthur case in Toronto noted above, the Green River Killer case in Seattle, the Pickton Case in Vancouver, among others), and by an ongoing Canadian federal inquiry into murdered and missing Indigenous women. This is no less the case concerning scholarly research in the area, which has tended to disproportionately focus on these types of police investigations rather than on the more voluminous, if routine, missing person cases involving homeless communities as a whole. As a result, the image of the missing homeless person—both in mass media and in scholarly communications—has primarily been of a sex worker, who is typically a female and often Indigenous. To illustrate, several of the published, peer reviewed articles on homeless missing persons located for this paper focused, in whole or in part, on impoverished sex workers missing from street-based communities and/or murdered by a serial killer (Horan & Beauregard, 2018; LePard et al., 2015; Morton, 2016; Strega et al., 2014). Others simply stated that homeless persons are underreported among the missing (James et al., 2008).

One notable exception to the literature described above is a study by Pakes et al. (2014), which, by drawing on case notes from the UK Missing Persons Bureau database, analyzed 15 cases of individual "absconders." It was observed that these individuals had multiple risk factors—including mental health issues, suicidal ideation, physical disabilities, and a lack of family and social ties. Several were also homeless. It is important to note these were not individuals who were abducted or became lost; each chose to leave health care and other facilities, were subsequently reported as missing, and deliberately sought to avoid detection. Rather than being helpless victims, absconding was seen as a form of personal autonomy and resistance to institutions and situations in which their autonomy felt threatened (Pakes et al., 2014). Another exception was a study by Cohen et al. (2008) examining 1,907 uncleared missing person cases that found that approximately 7% of these cases involved homeless individuals or those who were known to be involved in street-based communities. Other than these two studies, no research was located which included information on the missing homeless population, thereby rendering this group as invisible and understudied within missing person literature.

Possible Outcomes of a Missing Person Case

While ongoing missing person cases garner a significant amount of media attention in the form of "whodunnit mysteries," most cases reported to the police are solved (Payne, 1995; Shalev et al., 2008). For closed cases, there are only two possible outcomes: The individual was located alive, or the individual has been found deceased.

In relation to the former, studies show that individuals are located alive, often within a matter of days (Cohen et al., 2008; Payne, 1995; Shalev et al., 2008; Tarling & Burrows, 2004). One UK study

found that the majority of missing persons located tend to be found within 50 miles of where they were last seen (Shalev et al., 2008). Such findings echo the earlier study by Hirschel and Lab (1988) who said that "most people reported missing had disappeared voluntarily for a variety of personal reasons and remained away a short period of time until they decided to return on their own or were located by others" (p. 43). Unfortunately, none of the individuals in that studied sample were identified as homeless, so we have little way of knowing whether this pattern holds for individuals within this population. Less frequently, individuals reported missing will be found deceased, having died as a result of one of the several causes: accident, natural causes, suicide, and homicide. One of the few studies to directly examine the likelihood of a missing person case closing due to the death of the subject found that the overall risk of a fatal outcome is "low" (Newiss, 2006).

Concerning accidents, beyond media reports of hikers and skiers who wander off trails or otherwise become lost and die from falls or avalanches, little is known about the rates of accidental deaths among those reported missing. One of the few studies to explore this possibility found that "in only three cases (of 824 reports) was the ultimate fear, the death of the subject" (Hirschel & Lab, 1988, p. 43). We know a little more about mortality rates among homeless populations. Accidents are a frequent cause of higher mortality for this group. Accidents in this context include "poisoning [drug overdoses], traffic accidents and falls" (Nilsson et al., 2013, p. 55). Aside from the higher rates of overdose deaths, one study of the leading causes of death for younger men (aged 18–24) who accessed shelter systems found "the most frequently identified mechanisms of traumatic accidental death were falls from stairways or buildings and being struck by a motor vehicle, streetcar, or train" (Hwang, 2000, p. 2155). Similarly, a 30-year study of homeless mortality in Scotland found that homeless citizens were 5.4 times more likely to be admitted to hospital with an accidental head injury, and those reporting head injuries were significantly more likely to have died during the study period (McMillan et al., 2015).

Studies on the outcomes of missing persons cases have identified deaths as a result of natural causes as a factor in why some individuals are reported missing. Having failed to turn up, they are reported missing and then subsequently discovered having died (Tarling & Burrows, 2004). Elderly individuals who "wander" as a result of dementia or other cognitive impairments, as well as young people or others who become lost, are at risk of dying of natural causes if not found. Weather is thus a critical factor in some instances, leading to both hypothermia and hyperthermia (Kibayashi & Shojo, 2003). While the weather can also lead to deaths among homeless individuals (Roncarati et al., 2018), more commonly reported are deaths due to disease processes. In particular, it has been found that the leading causes of natural death in this population are cancer and heart disease (Hwang, 2000) as well as chronic liver disease (Roncarati et al., 2018) and, in some studies, AIDS and other communicable diseases (Hwang, 2000).

Suicide is a significant concern in missing person cases, as 'going missing' has been identified as often being a precursor to a suicide attempt (Sveticic et al., 2012), and within homeless populations. Indeed, it has been well-reported within the literature that homeless individuals are at an increased risk of suicidal ideation (Desai et al., 2003), are more likely to attempt suicide (Coohey et al., 2015), and experience relatively high rates of death by suicide (Sinyor et al., 2017; Vasiliadis et al., 2015). To briefly illustrate, one study found that suicide rates among a homeless sample were 10 times higher than in the general population (A. A. Patterson & Holden, 2012).

Although media attention on missing person cases tends to focus near-exclusively on the possibility of homicide as an outcome—particularly at the hands of a serial murderer—in many countries, including Canada, homicide continues to be a statistically rare phenomenon relative to other possible outcomes (UNODC, 2019). In each of the general studies on missing persons that explored case outcomes, homicide was observed to be infrequent. For example, Hirschel and Lab (1988) found that homicide occurred in only three of the cases they studied. Similarly, in an analysis of 250 missing person cases in the UK, Newiss (2011) observed that only two of these involved a homicide.

Death by homicide is also infrequent within the homeless community. In a 10-year study of mortality rates among 708 homeless individuals in Sydney, Australia, researchers found that of the 83 who died, "there were no deaths from homicide" (Babidge et al., 2001, p. 106). Similarly, the Toronto shelter mortality study found that homicide was not a leading cause of death in any age category, including among those aged 18–24 years (Hwang, 2000). In contrast, homicide was a principal factor in deaths among young persons in a study of homeless mortality in Boston (Baggett et al., 2013). That said, homicide accounted for 21 (or 1.6%) of the 1,306 deaths recorded (Baggett et al., 2013). In a Dutch study, researchers reported that suicide and homicide caused 50% of all unnatural deaths; however, closer scrutiny revealed that homicide accounted for 9 of the 261 deaths at follow-up, behind suicide ($n = 25$), which made up the bulk of these deaths (Slockers et al., 2018). Similarly, a study in Maryland noted that approximately 21% of violent deaths experienced by homeless citizens were homicides; however, the total number of homeless deaths observed was 279 of 14,327 deaths (Stanley et al., 2016). Therefore, while still high in relative terms when compared to the general population, the overall number of homicide deaths is low. It is worth noting, however, that there are no known national databases or data sets comprised of information on homeless victimization, including homicide rates within this population, and the possibility of underreporting exists in some countries—notably the United States—because police reports may not include information on housing status (Donley & Gaultieri, 2017).

As the preceding review of the literature makes evident, there is much we do not know about missing persons, and even less about the circumstances under which homeless individuals go missing, are reported missing, and are found.

Method of Inquiry

The purpose of the present study is to address the following research questions:

1. What are the demographic, health, and other characteristics of homeless adults reported missing?
2. Under what circumstances are they reported missing?
3. What are the typical outcomes for closed cases involving homeless subjects?
4. What factors are associated with homeless people being reported as missing?

To answer these questions, missing persons data was collected from the record management system (RMS) of one municipal police service in Southwestern Ontario, Canada. This data set included all closed missing person reports for a 5-year period (2013–2018), as 5 years is the maximum retention period for these files. The choice to examine closed cases was made as, when cases are still classified as open (i.e., not resolved), there is often a large amount of missing data on the individual, and there is no information available on the case outcomes. To provide a fuller picture of the adult missing and homeless population, the decision was made to examine only those cases that had been concluded. The search produced 9,023 records involving reports where the primary role code assigned was 55 for "missing person." These records were extracted into an Excel file and then anonymized. All data handling was in accordance with university research ethics guidelines.

The initial data set was organized by unique personal identifier codes and contained occurrence report data as well as detailed data from any follow-up reports, including additional demographic and location information and relevant personal history (such as health information). As the focus of this study is on homeless adults, all records where the individual did not meet that criteria had to be manually excluded, which was done by sorting based on police codes: location type (homeless) and remarks (homeless or NFA for no fixed address; see Figure 1) and deleting irrelevant entries. Then, all entries involving anyone under the age of 22 (as the RMS classified 22 years old and above as "adult"), as well as anyone with no age information provided, were also manually deleted. The result was a final data set comprised of 291 records.
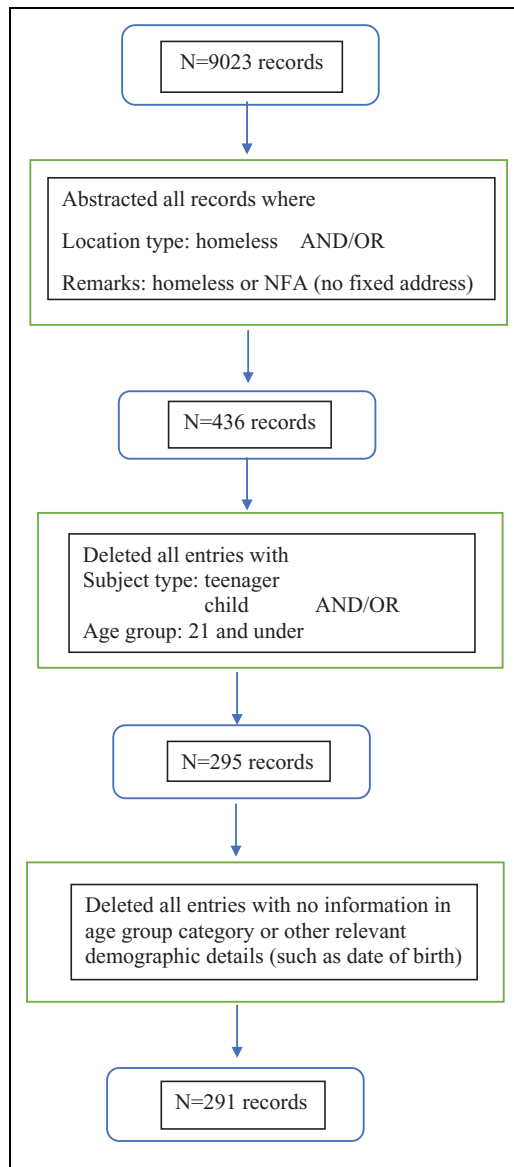
Figure 1. Data sorting process.

Coding and Analysis

Given that police data contained both fixed and variable content, a mix of inductive and deductive thematic coding was employed. Demographic data were extracted from information entered in the form of fixed, preexisting codes in the RMS. This produced the following categories: "Gender" (male and female), "Age" (22–29 years, 30–49 years, 50–65 years, and 65+ years), "Race/ Ethnicity" (White, Aboriginal, Black, Hispanic, Other, blank), and "Health/Risk Factors" (drug/ alcohol dependency, mental disability/senile, physical disability, medical dependency, mental illness/possibly suicidal, other, and none known).

Information as to an individual's history of repeat missing episodes was collected from data input under the police codes "missing before" and "missing previously." Reviewing the data on "missing before" provided a preexisting history classification system indicating whether the person went missing either repeatedly ("repeat"), chronically ("habitual/chronic"), never before ("no previous history"), or unknown. For "missing previously," the data provided either a "yes" or "no" as to whether the individual had any previous missing reports generated.

Mental health codes were constructed inductively from information entered into the "Remarks" field of each occurrence report. For example, under the thematic code "mental health," comments such as the "historical flag of MHA [Mental Health Act]" would be placed. These were then coded under the "Health/Risk Factor" category of "mental illness/possibly suicidal" and were remarked as "psychological problems" if a comment was noted for mental health being a reason for why the person was reported as missing.

Then, to answer the question "under what circumstances were individuals reported missing?" we drew on the responses to another preexisting police code titled "missing from." This resulted in the classification of eight different location types, which are the following: other commercial dwellings, halfway houses, dwelling units, streets/roads/highways, open areas, schools, hospitals, and homeless shelters/missions. To round out answers to this question reasons as to why individuals were "missing" were constructed inductively from information entered into the following field: "Remarks" (e.g., "failed to call in," "left shelter of own accord"). These were clustered under themes such as "missed curfew/appointment" ("failed to call in," "didn't return when expected"), "lost/wandering" ("got lost on bus"), "missing from shelter," and "left" ("left shelter").

Case outcomes were derived from standard coroner categories for reported deaths (i.e., "natural," "accidental," "suicide," and "homicide"). Additionally, a category of "located" was included. The codes for outcomes were constructed inductively from the information entered into the following fields: *Place located* (e.g., "returned on own," "house residence," and "Howard Johnson"), *remarks* (e.g., "attempted suicide," "located in unit," and "failed to inform family she wasn't coming home"), and *name type* (e.g., "missing person," "arrest/chg [charge]," and "deceased").

Verification

When it comes to both coding and analysis, verification affords researchers opportunities to increase the rigor of their work, and thus the validity and reliability of their findings. One of the ways in which this study departs from similar to other studies using police data is that we were able to verify both coding choices and interpretations with some of the front-line police officers at the police service from which the data were drawn. In this way, some potential mistakes concerning interpretation were avoided. For example, the frequently used term "women's shelter" or merely the name of the shelter (omitted here due to confidentiality) in the "Remarks" section of occurrence reports served as an internal code for officers. Officers who were familiar with the reporting processes at that shelter knew that shelter workers lacked discretion with late curfews, and thus reported women missing even when they knew they were likely to return. This information, otherwise unexplained by the officers, would have thwarted a better understanding of who gets reported missing and why.

Results

Demographic and Health Factors

Table 1 presents the demographic and health factors of all examined closed missing person reports from 2013 to 2018. As can be seen, the categories of female (86.6%) and White (60.1%) were largely overrepresented among the population of homeless persons reported missing. Aboriginal was the

Table 1. Demographic and Health Characteristics of Homeless Persons Reported Missing.

Characteristic	Frequency (%)	Characteristic	Frequency (%)
Sex		Drug/alcohol dependency	
Female	252 (86.6)	Yes	60 (20.6)
Male	39 (13.4)	No	231 (79.4)
Race		Mental disability/senility	
White	175 (60.1)	Yes	18 (6.2)
Aboriginal	82 (28.2)	No	273 (93.8)
Black	21 (7.2)		
Hispanic	2 (0.7)	Physical disability	
Other	4 (1.4)	Yes	3 (1.0)
Blank	7 (2.4)	No	288 (99.0)
Medical dependency		Possibly suicidal	
Yes	9 (3.1)	Yes	3 (1.0)
No	282 (96.9)	No	288 (99.0)
Other		None known	
Yes	10 (3.4)	Yes	188 (64.6)
No	281 (96.6)	No	103 (35.4)

second most frequently documented missing homeless group, totaling 28.2% of reports. Approximately one fifth (20.6%) of missing person cases during this time period were found to be drug/alcohol dependent. The only other categories with high percentages are "Other" and "None Known," suggesting that there are substantial differences in the data recorded on homeless missing person cases due to incomplete information. A significant minority had a mental disability/senility (6.2%), medical dependency (3.1%), and physical disability (1.0%) and were mentally ill/possibly suicidal (1.0%).

Incident Characteristics

Characteristics regarding the incident and the factors surrounding the reporting of the incident are shown in Table 2. In nearly all of the cases (96.6%), homeless individuals were documented as missing from homeless shelters/missions. Reports state that individuals had no previous history of being reported as missing (40.2%); however, many were described as repeat (36.8%) and habitual/chronic (22.7%) missing person cases. Thus, reports commonly involve individuals who go missing more than once as the majority are repeat and habitual/chronic missing cases (59.5%).

Table 2. Incident Characteristics of Homeless Persons Reported Missing.

Incident Characteristics	Frequency (%)
Reported as missing from	
Homeless shelter/mission	281 (96.6)
Hospital	2 (0.7)
Other commercial dwelling	2 (0.7)
Streets, roads, or highways	2 (0.7)
Dwelling unit	1 (0.3)
Halfway house	1 (0.3)
Open areas	1 (0.3)
School	1 (0.3)
Missing before?	
No previous history	117 (40.2)
Repeat	107 (36.8)
Habitual/chronic	66 (22.7)
Unknown	1 (0.3)

Table 3. Reasons for Going Missing.

Reason	Frequency (%)
Missing from shelter/mission	79 (49.1)
Missed curfew appointment	19 (11.8)
Alcohol and drugs	12 (7.5)
Error situation	11 (6.8)
Homeless	9 (5.6)
Left	8 (5.0)
Habitual/chronic	6 (3.7)
Psychological problems	6 (3.7)
Failed to call	5 (3.1)
Adverse home/living conditions	3 (1.9)
Lost/wandering	3 (1.9)
Total	161 (100.0)

Note. The total in this table will not match the total number of cases included in this study as some reports documented multiple reasons for why the individual went missing.

Reasons for Being Reported as Missing

Reports also noted the reason(s) for why people are being reported as a missing person (see Table 3). Of the 291 reports, 140 cases had this information particularized in the "Remarks" section. Ergo, the vast majority of homeless missing person reports (52.0%) omitted such details. Of those that did include this information, a considerable amount (49.1%) state the reason for going missing as missing from shelters/missions. Related to this, another explanation offered surrounds issues with curfew times and returning to their place of residence on time, which was detailed in 11.8% of reports. Specifically, multiple statements express that the individual did not return to the shelter or mission by the designated curfew time. Another reason for why individuals went missing was alcohol and drug problems, which was discussed in 7.5% of reports. Others identified that the filing of a missing person report was due to error situations (6.8%), in which there was a mix-up of communications concerning the whereabouts of the person reported missing. Interestingly, some reports (5.6%) described the person being homeless as the reason for going missing, such as "is currently homeless and decided to travel to montreal and ottaw." The remaining reasons for why individuals went missing were the following: The individual left on their own accord (5.0%), habitual/chronic missing persons (3.7%), psychological problems (3.7%), they failed to call and/ or check-in (3.1%), adverse home and living conditions (1.9%), and they are lost/wandering (1.9%).

Case Outcomes

Table 4 shows the case outcomes of those reported as missing. As can be seen, 100% of the cases were located alive. Surprisingly, despite media stories fueling the notion that there is a large number of missing person cases involving homicides, this was not an outcome in any of the cases (0%). Additionally, there was one suicide attempt reported, no accidents, and no deaths due to natural causes. In essence, then, our preliminary study suggests that, concerning cases reported to police, outcomes for homeless citizens reported missing are very similar to those reported in the general population—that is, they are usually found alive and well (Payne, 1995; Shalev et al., 2008). This is not to suggest that homeless individuals are not at a higher risk of violent victimization more generally, as a wealth of research already indicates (D'Ercole & Struening, 1990; Perron et al., 2008), but rather that missing cases reported to police involving a homeless subject are just as likely to have a positive outcome as any other group reported as missing.

Table 4. Case Outcomes.

Case Outcomes	Frequency (%)
Located alive	291 (100.0)
Accident	0 (0.0)
Suicide	0 (0.0)
Natural	0 (0.0)
Homicide	0 (0.0)

Note. There was one suicide attempt noted in the case files.

Discussion

Inspired by numerous media reports, commissions of inquiry into missing persons cases, and provincial reviews into police investigational processes in cases of missing and murdered individuals, the present study sought to examine the link between homelessness, missing person reports, and fatal outcomes. We did this by analyzing 291 closed missing persons case files involving a homeless subject that was reported missing from 2013 to 2018. The purpose of this article was to provide preliminary insights into this phenomenon through a descriptive analysis of these cases.

The overall demographic picture obtained from the data is that most homeless people reported missing are female and White. Although females constituted a large percentage of reported cases in this study, recent data highlights that they comprise 42% of adults reported missing across Canada (Canada's Missing, 2018) and 27% of the homeless population (ACPO, 2013). These results are inconsistent with national figures, which show that males go missing and occupy the homeless population more, suggesting that females are overrepresented among the homeless population reported missing in this city. However, females may disproportionately comprise these cases because they may be more likely to visit certain homeless shelters/missions. To expand on this, two of the included homeless shelters/missions were services specifically focused on assisting females in need, such as abused women, and research on homelessness in Canada highlights that Violence Against Women shelters are predominately occupied by females (Homeless Hub, 2017). This finding may represent the various economic, political, and social issues affecting women and influencing the link between homelessness and going missing, such as family violence and financial disparities (Homeless Hub, 2017). Future research would benefit from further exploring these matters and accounting for the gender-specific experiences when examining and developing policy responses to homelessness and missingness. While the vast majority of cases in this study are reported as White, scholarship indicates that Aboriginal people are overrepresented among the homeless population in virtually all cities in Canada (ACPO, 2013), whereby it is estimated that as many as 40% of the homeless population in Canada is Aboriginal (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2001; Saddichha et al., 2014). However, finding that Aboriginal people are the second most frequently reported racial group in this city may be more so to do with the fact that the population of people in this city is mostly White (Statistics Canada, 2016). Thus, it could be hypothesized that these findings are an indication of the demographic characteristics of the city instead of revealing who is routinely reported as missing, which is consistent with other studies on missing persons (e.g., Hirschel & Lab, 1988;Sowerby & Thomas, 2017; Sveticic et al., 2012). Regardless, our findings imply that homeless women and Aboriginal people are disproportionately reported as missing when compared to the general population of this city and can, therefore, constitute a population perceived to be at risk. Additionally, we should note that the increased media coverage and public interest may also be helping to sensitize potential reporters to the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women, thus helping to ensure cases are reported and resolved more quickly.

Our results also show that those with a drug/alcohol addiction make up a more significant proportion of police missing person reports concerning homeless individuals. Coupled with the high prevalence of violence and victimization for the homeless, this gives rise to the possibility of increased exposure to harm. Thus, this observation can be thought of as concerning as this factor can contribute to the already existing problems associated with homelessness and going missing. This demonstrates one possible avenue for interventions to address the link between homelessness and missingness. Contrary to a previous study by Hirschel and Lab (1988), which examined the incident characteristics of missing person cases, a significant minority of cases were identified as having a medical dependency, mental disability/senility, and physical disability as well as being possibly suicidal. However, the extent to which these differences mirror the characteristics of homeless people reported as missing is questionable as there are several reports with no known information on these factors. While the substantial differences in the information documented influences data quality and availability, it must be noted that obtaining such information on this population has been established as challenging in existing scholarship (e.g., McNamara et al., 2012; Hirschel & Lab, 1988; G. T. Patterson, 2007). Since information on health factors was not collected on police report forms in a standardized manner, the percentages found for these characteristics are likely to be underestimates of the true situation.

Other factors identified were that missing homeless individuals often disappear from homeless shelters/missions and have a history of going missing. The high rates of homeless citizens going missing from shelters/missions are primarily due to reports being generated when these individuals fail to return at their designated curfew time and do not call into these facilities to communicate their whereabouts. This finding should be contextualized as the data involves information only on the missing homeless persons that are reported to the police and are involved with such services. Thus, it could be said that the higher rates of homeless individuals being reported as missing from shelters/missions may, in part, be due to their contact with services as staff and others are expecting their return at a designated time. This may mitigate the issue of underreporting those as missing who live transient lifestyles due to their lack of consistent contacts and contact information (i.e., address). Additionally, it suggests that homeless people are less likely to be reported as missing by family and friends and are more likely to be reported by the services they are in touch with, if any. What this suggests is that homeless missing cases can be particularly problematic for the police for reasons such as their transient lifestyle, as mentioned above, but also because them being reported as missing relies on someone missing them at an expected location, whether that is a shelter/mission or family and friends. Regardless, the high incidence of reports generated due to them not returning for the shelter/mission curfew in time represents an area in which collaboration between the police and shelters/missions would benefit from exploring. Additionally, this exposes one area for policy initiatives, as well as future research, to focus on for the development of prevention and intervention strategies.

Finally, our primary focus here was on case outcomes and the volume of cases in which individuals were met with some type of fatality. Our data showed that all individuals reported missing were located alive. These results cohere with the existing international literature on missing person cases more generally, which has found that individuals are typically found alive (Cohen et al., 2008; Payne, 1995; Shalev et al., 2008; Tarling & Burrows, 2004). This is an important finding as, contrary to a significant body of often sensationalized media reportage, no cases involved a homicide or other fatal outcome. Indeed, in the majority of instances, individuals simply left shelters/missions and did not return by curfew or call in.

In sum, although preliminary in nature, this research is essential because it provides first insights into the reality of homeless missing person cases. Specifically, this study reveals that in the majority of reported cases, people are likely to go missing for reasons that have nothing to do with violence and victimization, contrary to media reportage and scholarly interest. Other key findings of this

study have been that there are high rates of missing person reports for those that are female and White, have a drug/alcohol addiction, and are from shelters/missions. Despite its contributions to scholarship on both homelessness and missing persons, there are a few limitations in the current study that should be addressed. First, this study is limited to an investigation of missing person reports filed with the police and does not gauge the extent to which people go missing without the matter being reported to law enforcement officials. Second, the information obtained in these reports is, at times, incomplete; thus, restricting the availability of data and influencing data quality. Future research would benefit from extending this analysis to include more police closed missing person reports as this study only considers one Canadian police service. Thus, including more agencies in other cities would help produce more insights into missing homeless individuals in Canada. As well, it must be noted that our results highlight that there are higher rates of White missing women, which is contrary to some existing literature that indicates that Aboriginal women are significantly over-represented among the Canadian homeless population. Future studies, by examining other/more missing person files, may be able to explain this discrepancy in our findings.

Notes

1. In Canada alone, these include The Independent Civilian Review Into *Missing Person* Investigations, the National *Inquiry* Into *Missing* and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and the Missing Women Commission of *Inquiry*.
2. For example: *Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry Into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls* (2019), *Forsaken: The Report of the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry* (2012), *VPD Missing Women Investigation Review* (2010), *Those Who Take Us Away: Abusive Policing and Failures in Protection of Indigenous Women and Girls in Northern British Columbia, Canada* (2013).

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