

**The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**

Child Safety

**An Administrative Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Required for Graduation from the
Leadership Command College**

**By
Patrick V. Gabbert**

**Brownsville ISD Police Department
Brownsville, Texas
June 2007**

ABSTRACT

Child Safety Programs are relevant to contemporary law enforcement because they enable the children and the community to become aware of the dangers of child abductions and internet predators. The purpose of this research is to take a look at the concept of implementing programs geared toward child safety and developing a more confident child. Will the implementation of this program reduce a child's vulnerability to opportunistic criminals through education and preventive techniques? Are children who are exposed to basic child safety and awareness programs less vulnerable than those children who have not been exposed to child safety awareness programs? Such questions are examined by this author's research.

The method of inquiry used by the researcher included: journal articles, websites, surveys and interviews of school teachers and law enforcement officers. The researcher discovered that children who are exposed to basic child safety and awareness programs were less vulnerable than those children who were not exposed to child safety awareness programs. According to the survey responses and interviews, a child who was exposed to child safety programs was more likely to report an offense by a stranger or a family member than a child who was not educated regarding what to do in case he/she encountered a predator.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	
Introduction.	1
Review of Literature	2
Methodology	8
Findings	10
Discussions/Conclusions	12
References	14
Appendix	

INTRODUCTION

The problem or issue to be examined considers whether or not all law enforcement agencies throughout our nation have been given the responsibility and task of protecting our community's most valuable resource, our children. According to studies conducted by the United States Department of Juvenile Justice and the Delinquency National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway and Throwaway Children in America (NISMART), it is estimated that there were 58,200 non-family abductions and 797,500 children (younger than 18) reported missing in the United States. In the time it takes to read this introduction, another child may be reported missing somewhere in the United States.

The relevance of a Child Safety Education Program to law enforcement agencies (when implemented at schools) is that it enables the children and the community as a whole to become aware of the dangers of child abductions and internet predators.

The purpose of this research is to take a look at the concept of implementing programs that are geared towards child safety, which enables a child to develop into a more confident and self-assured child. Will the implementation of this program reduce a child's vulnerability to opportunistic criminals through education and preventive techniques? Are children who are exposed to basic child safety and awareness programs less vulnerable than those children who have not been exposed to child safety awareness programs?

The research question to be examined focuses on whether or not children who are exposed to child safety programs will develop to be more confident and self assured and less likely to be victimized.

The intended method of inquiry includes: the review of books, governmental documents, journals, articles, internet, and the data collected by a survey of a diverse group of fellow officers, school teachers and peers who represent agencies of varying manpower, and jurisdictional coverage from different Law Enforcement agencies throughout the State of Texas.

The intended outcome or anticipated findings of the research was that school children, that are familiarized to the basic safety and awareness programs at an early age, grow up more confident and self-assured. Additionally, the research will show that law enforcement practitioners, who work at a department that have a child safety program in place, believe that children exposed to this type of program become less vulnerable to predatory crime than those who have not attended such programs.

The field of law enforcement will benefit from the research or be influenced by the conclusions because the law enforcement agencies can provide a social statement to community members and to our children who are our most precious resource. Through this effort law enforcement agencies can bridge the gap that exists between the community and schools by bringing educators, parents and law enforcement agencies together in a common group effort to provide a safer environment for our children.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In order to discuss the subject of “child safety”, one must understand that the children of this day and age need to be educated not only on the concept of “stranger danger”, but also in the concept of “cyber safety skills”. According to the Wikipedia encyclopedia, “Stranger Danger”, is described as the perceived danger to children

presented by “stranger”. The phrase is intended to sum up the various concerns associated with the malevolent threat presented by adults. The implementation of “child safety,” programs in schools focuses on education “Stranger Danger”.

According to Gavin de Becker & Associates, a firm of experts and practitioners in the field of threat assessment who share experience who after having managed over 30,000 cases with other professionals through training programs, and with government agencies, public figures, and corporations through assessment service stated “that a child who finds himself to be lost or stranded from his parents, should be taught to approach a female rather than a male, because she less likely: First, if your child selects a woman, it’s highly unlikely that the woman will be a sexual predator. Next, a woman approached by a lost child asking for help is likely to stop whatever she is doing, get down to the kid’s eye level, commit to that child, and not rest until the child is safe. A man approached by the same child might say, “Head over there to the manager’s desk,” whereas a woman is most likely to get involved and stay involved. The fact is that men in all cultures and at all ages and at all times in history are more violent than women.” Teach a child that if she or he is ever lost “go to a woman.” This will work because it’s practical (there will almost always be a woman around) and simple (easy to teach, easy to learn, easy to do). “Finally, teaching children to choose someone rather than wait for someone to choose them will be a useful lesson their whole lives” (n. p.).

In recent years our nation has been shocked by the news of several non-parental abductions throughout our communities. These events have reaffirmed the vulnerability of our children. Ernie Allen, President and Chief Executive Officer of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children makes reference to a documentary

conducted on May 19, 2004, by the Advertising Council, in partnership with the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC). The campaign announced of a national public service advertising (PSA) campaign designed to raise awareness about the prevalence of online sexual exploitation and to help parents and teens better protect against online sexual predators. The prevalence of sexual victimization of children in the United States is overwhelming, yet largely unrecognized and underreported. According to NCMEC, "leading scholars and researchers estimate that one in five girls and one in ten boys will be sexually victimized before they reach adulthood, and less than 35% of these sexual assault cases are reported. With the advent of the Internet, child predators have a new avenue to contact their victims with perceived anonymity and to perpetrate crimes against children. According to a U.S. Department of Justice study, of the estimated 24 million child Internet users, one in five has received unwanted sexual solicitations yet only one in four told a parent" (n.p.).

The documentary further stated that, "Too many parents are unaware of the prevalence of online sexual exploitation and do not believe that their own children are at risk. By providing parents with information and resources, we can prevent thousands of children from becoming victims," according to Peggy Conlon, President & CEO of The Advertising Council. "I am confident that this compelling advertising, created by Merkley + Partners, will open parents' eyes to the dangers of their child's Internet use and empower them to get involved to protect their children from online sexual predators."

Since its' inception in 1984, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) in Arlington, Va., have tried to educate parents about the need to be cautious, to be prepared, and the ability of open communication with their children in

this day and age; as citizens take precautions by installing alarm systems into their vehicles and residences and take time to learn and implement the basic safeguards for crime prevention we need to do the same with our children. Since 1984, NCMEC has assisted law enforcement with more than 122, 600 missing child cases and of those recovered more than 104, 900 children.

The Internet has created a new tool for child-pornography collectors, traders, and manufacturers to sexually exploited children. The Internet provides predators an instant, somewhat anonymous, at-home access to meet one another online, trade files, and have access to victimize children. As the tools of crime developed, so did that of law enforcement in the fight of crime. There are now high-tech investigators who are highly trained in Internet crimes. The expansion of electronic crime requires new laws and resources for law enforcement to aid in the conviction and sentencing of those who are guilty.

According to Sgt. Kimberly Bustos from the Office of the Attorney General's Cyber Crimes Unit, Internet crime is the fastest growing crime in the U.S. and children are the fastest growing victim pool. According to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, there are 563,000 sex offenders in the U.S. there is on average one child molester per square mile in the United States. The average child molester victimizes between 50 and 150 children before they are ever arrested. The most common age at which sexual abuse begins is three years of age.

Sgt. Bustos provided statistics that show that the predator profile tends to be a 35 year old married male with children at home and is a college graduate or professional. Additional statistic provided by Sgt. Bustos showed that according to the Texas Attorney

General Statistics from 2002 to 2006, Cyber Crimes Unit has arrested 91 online predators for traveling to have sex with someone they believe to be a minor. Cyber Crimes Unit has arrested 69 child pornographers and has convicted 47 predators. Fugitive Unit has arrested 312 predators, 250 child sex offender/parole violators and 62 unregistered sex offenders.

The NCMEC Child Victim Identification Program (VIP) serves as the national clearing house for child-pornography cases across the country and the main point of contact to international agencies about child-pornography victims. NCMEC not only stores case and image information which might be important in securing convictions and sentences, the CVIP Analysts, after working with child-pornography images for years, have extensive institutional knowledge of the pictures and suspects. This information may be useful to law enforcement agencies, whether they have worked numerous child-pornography cases or not. In 2005, the average number of children identified weekly by CVIP Analysts was from one to eight.

NCMEC works with age-progression and facial-reconstruction of missing and exploited children. The NCMEC enhances photographs of children missing for two years or more so that law enforcement and the public can more easily continue to search for the children. More than 600 missing children whose photographs were computer age-enhanced have been located. More than 17 unidentified deceased children have been identified as a result of facial reconstructions.

The NCMEC provides numerous services ranging from age-progression of the photographs of long-term missing children, reconstruction of facial images from morgue photographs of unidentified deceased juveniles so that posters may be made to assist

in the child's identification, computer assistance in creating artist composites, and assists in identifying faces of children from confiscated child pornography and training personnel in imaging applications and techniques.

NCMEC released documents with details of approximately 9000 missing children that are currently entered into their database. Some of these children have been reported as missing for several years. An example of Information Technology that is being used by NCMEC is a 15 million dollar program that gives law enforcement agencies internet enabled computers equipped with scanners for the purpose of distributing the pictures of missing children within minutes of the incident to other law enforcement agencies through the internet.

Rick Minicucci, Chief Technology Officer for NCMEC said, "...those who have used the NetSmartz Workshop report a positive change in their online behavior and an increased awareness of the possible dangers" (n.p.).

The AMBER Alert is a notification to general public, by various media outlets, of a confirmed child abduction. AMBER is an acronym for "America's Missing Broadcasting Emergency Response: and was named for 9-year -old Amber Hagerman. Amber Hagerman was abducted and murdered in Arlington, Texas in 1996. Exceptions are in Georgia, where it is called Levi's Call, Hawaii, where it is called a Maile Amber Alert and Arkansas, where it is called a Morgan Nick Amber Alert. Those plans were name after children who went missing in those states. Since 1997, the AMBER program has been credited with the safe recovery of 308 children. Since it inception, there are 116 Amber Alert plans across the country.

The decision to declare an AMBER Alert is made by law enforcement agency investigating the abduction. Public information in an AMBER alert usually consist of the name and description of the abductor, a description of the suspected abductor, and a description and license plate number of the abductor's vehicle, when available. AMBER Alerts are distributed via commercial radio stations, television, satellite radio, and cable TV by the Emergency Alert System. The alerts are also sent via e-mail, electronic traffic-condition signs, and wireless dive SMS text messages.

In order to avoid both false alarms and having alerts ignored as a "wolf cry", the criteria for issuing an alert are rather strict. Each state provides its own criteria for activating an AMBER Alert. However, the U.S. Department of Justice issues the following "guidance", which most states are said to "adhere closely to". In order for law enforcement to issue an AMBER Alert, they must first confirm that an abduction has taken place, the child must be at risk of serous injury or death, there must be sufficient descriptive information of child, captor, or captor's vehicle to issue an alert, and finally the child must be 17 years or younger. It is recommended that immediate entry of AMBER Alert be entered into the FBI's National Information Crime Center.

METHODOLOGY

The research question to be examined considers whether or not school age children who are exposed to basic safety and awareness programs are less vulnerable to predatory crime than children who have not been exposed.

The researcher hypothesizes that children who have been exposed to basic child safety and awareness are more aware and less vulnerable to predatory type offenses. The method of inquiry will include a review of articles, Internet sites, periodicals,

journals, a survey distributed to law enforcement officers, school teachers, and personal interviews. The instrument that will be used to measure to researcher's findings regarding the subject of child safety educational programs will include a survey questionnaire, journal articles, websites, and interviews of school teachers and law enforcement officers. The size of the survey will consist of 11 questions, distributed to 25 survey participants from the Brownsville, Texas I.S.D. and 25 Law Enforcement officers.

The response rate to the survey instrument resulted in most survey participants agreeing that elementary age children who have participated in "child safety" programs would become less vulnerable to child predatory crime as their sense of awareness would be heightened by the lessons taught in the program.

The author interviewed Sergeant Kimberly Bustos, from the Attorney General's Cyber Crimes Unit, who provided me with statistics on investigations conducted by the Attorney General's Cyber Crime Unit. Sergeant Bustos believes that "Education is the most important aspect of prevention." Sergeant Bustos stated that, "Children tend to retain the material presented to them." According to Sergeant Bustos, "Children may not always do the correct thing but if material is taught or presented to them it is there in the back of their minds." Sergeant Bustos indicated that the Attorney General's Office has an officer assigned to perform outreach programs to communities, parents and schools through presentations on "internet safety". Sergeant Bustos further stated that the office of the Attorney General partners up with Law Enforcement, District Attorneys Offices, Sheriff's Departments and other agencies as well as parents in order to network with communities and schools on the subject of "child safety" (K. Bustos, personal

communication, April 13, 2007). The information obtained from the survey will be analyzed by the author of this research.

FINDINGS

Of the twenty-five police officers that responded to the, fourteen of them indicated that they believed that children who are exposed to basic child safety programs are less vulnerable than children who have not had any exposure to this type of programs. One of the officers indicated that the children who would be exposed to the program would benefit, somewhat, from the program because children are very vulnerable by nature. Four of the officers surveyed indicated that the children would not benefit from these types of programs. The remaining five officers who were surveyed indicated that they were not sure if the children would benefit at all from child safety programs. One of the officers who was unsure about the benefits of child safety programs indicated that there were no studies currently available on the subject.

Of the twenty-five elementary school teachers who responded to the survey, twenty-three teachers were of the opinion that if children were educated on “child safety” topics they would be more aware of potentially dangerous situations and this could help the child should he/she be placed in a situation where the child might become a victim of a crime. One teacher commented that “education on “child safety” would open the mind of the child and this would enable the child to be more aware.” Another teacher commented that “it was logical that a child would be less likely to fall into vulnerability if the child had been taught some basic knowledge on safety tips.”

In conducting a telephone interview with Sergeant Kim Bustos from the Attorney General's Cyber Crimes Unit, Sergeant Kim Bustos favored educating not only the child

but the community, law enforcement and prosecutors a whole because “education is the most important aspect of prevention.” Sergeant Kimberly Bustos teaches “Cyber 101” to law enforcement agents throughout the state of Texas.

According to the Texas Attorney General Statistics from 2002 to 2006, Cyber Crimes Unit has arrested 91 online predators for traveling to have sex with someone they believed to be a minor. Cyber Crimes Unit has arrested 69 child pornographers and has convicted 47 predators. Fugitive Unit has arrested 312 predators, 250 child sex offender/parole violators and 62 unregistered sex offenders.

Since 1984, NCMEC has assisted law enforcement with more than 122,600 missing child cases and of those recovered more than 104,900 children. More than 600 missing children whose photographs were computer age-enhanced have been located. More than 17 unidentified deceased children have been identified as a result of facial reconstructions.

The NCMEC provides numerous services ranging from age-progression of the photographs of long-term missing children, reconstruction of facial images from morgue photographs of unidentified deceased juveniles so that posters may be made to assist in the child’s identification, computer assistance in creating artist composites, and assists in identifying faces of children from confiscated child pornography and training personnel in imaging applications and techniques.

NCMEC now has a 90% success rate in locating missing children. This statistical increase is being credited to the improvement and advancement of information and technology.

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS

The problem or issue examined by the researcher considered whether or not elementary school age children who were taught basic “child safety” information were less vulnerable to child predatory crime than school who were not exposed to basic “child safety” programs.

The purpose of this research was to determine whether “child safety” programs are a worthwhile educational tool that should be implemented in schools and communities or are “child safety” programs merely a good public relation tool.

The research question that was examined focused on whether elementary school age children who had prior exposure to basic “child safety” programs were less vulnerable to child predatory crime than those children who were not exposed to basic “child safety” programs.

The researcher hypothesized that children who are exposed to “child safety” programs are less vulnerable to predatory crimes committed by strangers, known predators, and internet predators. Educating children about predatory crimes helps to curb the potential of falling prey to these types of crimes and enables them to know about reporting crimes in the event that it happens to them. Open communication is important to have with school staff, law enforcement and parents in order for children to feel comfortable in reporting crimes.

The researcher concluded from the findings that children who have been exposed to child safety programs are more aware of perceived dangers that they might encounter. The findings of the research did support the hypothesis. The reason why the findings supported the hypothesis is probably due to the fact that most participants

agreed that education is a major contributing factor in establishing awareness in elementary school age children.

Limitations that might have hindered this study resulted because children are vulnerable by nature and even a self aware and educated child can become a victim of child predatory crime.

The study of child safety is relevant to contemporary law enforcement agencies because we as law enforcement officers have been given the task of protecting our community's most valuable resource, our children.

Our children and communities stand to benefit by the results of this research as through educational programs, law enforcement agencies can gap the bridge between law enforcement, parents, communities, schools, and educate them on how to take proactive measures in safety as well as by making a strong social statement that we are here to protect those who cannot fully protect themselves.

In conclusion, because children cannot fully lookout for themselves, it is our responsibility to lookout for them. Every home and school should establish a program that effectively teaches children about safety and protective measures. As a parent, reassuring message about situations and actions to lookout for is easier for a child to understand, than a particular profile or image of a "stranger" (NCMEC).

REFERENCES

- U.S. Department of Justice, National center for Missing and Exploited Children.
(1994, September). *A law enforcement guide to case investigation and program management, non-family abduction*, 47.
- U.S. Department of Justice, National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.
(1986, March). *America's missing and exploited children: Their safety and their future*. 5 – 6 J.
- U.S. Government Amber Alert site. (2007). Retrieved April 12, 2007, from
<http://www.amberalert.gov>.
- Congressional Research Services (CSR) report on amber Alert program technology.
Retrieved April 12, 2007, from
<http://digital.library.unt.edu.govdocs/crs/permalink/meta-crs-7629>
- NISMART -2. (2002, October). *National estimates of missing children: An overview*.
- NISMART -2. (2002, October). *Non-family abducted children: National estimates and characteristics*.
- Allen, E. *Ad Council and National Center for Missing & Exploited Children Unveil First National Multi-Media Campaign to Address Online Sexual Exploitation*.
<http://www.prnewswire.com/cgi-bin/stories.pl?ACCT=104&STORY=/www/story/05-19-2004/0002177545&EDATE>
- Conlon, P. *Ad Council and National Center for Missing & Exploited Children Unveil First National Multi-Media Campaign to Address Online Sexual Exploitation*.

<http://www.prnewswire.com/cgi-bin/stories.pl?ACCT=104&STORY=/www/story/05-19-2004/0002177545&EDATE>

Child Safety. (1999-2007). Retrieved April 12, 2007, from

<https://www.gavindebecker.com/familyQA/36.cfm>

Minicucci, R. Retrieved April 29, 2007, from

<http://ww.davis.k12.ut.us/staff/lshupe/netsmartz.html> - 20k