



EMERGENCY INFORMATION MANAGEMENT: COMMUNICATION OF BAD NEWS TO THE CLOSE ENVIRONMENT IN CASES OF MISSING PERSONS BY SECURITY AND EMERGENCY PROFESSIONALS

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Abstract

Introduction: every year in Spain there are an average of 20,000 reports of missing persons. The pain and uncertainty they generate have an impact on many different levels. Relatives and friends of the missing person are some of the most affected. Knowing how to adequately communicate information that is known to be adverse to the closest environment by security and emergency professionals is considered essential due to its possible positive implications for both parties. **Objective:** this article aims to demonstrate the importance of correct communication of bad news to the immediate environment in cases of missing persons by security and emergency professionals, as well as the need for studies and research that delve into the effectiveness of specific protocols on the matter that facilitate adaptive coping with the situation. **Methodology:** a review was carried out based on the scientific evidence collected in the existing literature on the subject. The databases PubMed, Scopus, and the Google Scholar search engine were consulted. **Results:** bad news, when a person disappears, occurs at different times and at different levels. Security and emergency professionals must be

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trained not only to transmit information to the missing person's environment, but also so that they are able to then transfer it to their own environment in the most appropriate, efficient and effective way possible, reducing the resulting psychological and emotional impact as much as possible. **Conclusion:** the adequate transmission of adverse information requires good communication skills and adequate management of basic technical guidelines for action, as well as the adaptation of communication to the prevailing reality at each moment and situation. The development of specific protocols can facilitate adaptation and coping processes. Studies are needed to shed light on this issue.

Keywords:

Missing people, missing people, communication of bad news, emergency communication, information management, security and emergency professionals, responders.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The situation of missing persons in Spain.

The most recent data provided by the Ministry of the Interior indicate that, as of 31 December 2022, there were 270,093 reports of missing persons in Spain. Of these, 2.3% —that is, 6,192 reports— remained active as of the date of the aforementioned document², while 8,215 cases, representing 3%, corresponded to minors absent from residential care facilities (López et al., 2023) (Figure 1).

An average of 70 missing person reports are filed each day, and although a high proportion of these cases are resolved within the first few hours, a small percentage remain in the databases for years, generating suffering among family members and loved ones, as well as an unrelenting search for answers on the part of relatives, professionals, and society as a whole. Contrary to what might be assumed, and as occurs in other events of varying magnitude in terms of consequences and implications, the disappearance of a person can have an impact at multiple levels, affecting not only those who experience it directly, but also family members and loved ones, responding personnel, individuals connected to the affected organization or community, and even, as noted by some experts, emotionally vulnerable members of society (Álvarez Aparicio, 2015; Parada, 2008) (Figure 2).

Anyone may experience the tragedy of a disappearance within their immediate environment (Ministerio del Interior, 2017). No personal, environmental, or situational factor excludes this possibility; hence the social concern it generates and the need to implement tools and coordinate resources capable of addressing this complex and multifaceted issue at all levels, including prevention, intervention, and postvention.

In Spain, given the absence of a legal definition of “missing person,” the Recommendation of the Council of Europe (2009) has been adopted, according to which: “a missing person is a person who is absent from his or her usual place of residence for no known or apparent reason, whose whereabouts give rise to concern, or whose new residence is unknown, thereby prompting a search in the interest of his or her own safety and on the basis of family or social interest.” This definition encompasses a series of basic rights: the right of the missing person to be searched for, but also the right to disappear, as well as the right of the person’s close

² Within active reports, minors who have absconded from child protection centers within the previous 12 months and who had not reached the age of majority as of December 31, 2022, are also included (López et al., 2023)

environment to know (Audiovisual Council of Andalucía and European Foundation for Missing Persons, 2016).

Given that the typology of disappearances is highly diverse and extensive, that there exist numerous classifications based on different parameters across various countries, and that the causes or factors underlying a person's disappearance are highly heterogeneous, from the perspective of Security and Emergency Management it is emphasized that the handling of this issue must be regulated, analyzed, and specified according to the typology and the circumstances surrounding the disappearance. Thus, the Ministry of the Interior, with the aim of providing the most appropriate and timely intervention and increasing the effectiveness and efficiency in addressing this phenomenon, has adopted a classification of missing persons cases into three categories³ based on the cause that may have motivated the disappearance (Cereceda & Tourís, 2019): (a) voluntary, when the missing person intends not to be located or to withhold personal information from their environment; (b) involuntary, when the person disappears due to external causes beyond their control and without the involvement of third parties; and (c) forced, when the disappearance is based on a criminal act or activity (Table 1).

At present, of the 6,192 reports in active status, and with a significant proportion (39%) still pending classification, 48% —that is, 2,970 reports— have been considered voluntary in nature (Figure 3).

1.2. Consequences of a Disappearance

Any disappearance has an impact across different domains (biological, psychological, social, economic, legal, etc.) and at various levels (immediate environment, professionals, broader environment, etc.). With regard to the latter, it can be observed that, at the level of the immediate environment (family members and close associates), the consequences —marked by the incessant search for answers— are evident. Uncertainty, guilt, fear, anxiety over the loss, often combined with economic, social, and legal problems arising from the disappearance itself, intertwine to give rise to anxiety and/or depressive disorders, to which, in many cases, anger, helplessness, and frustration are added, stemming from the perception that the treatment received from the institutions and authorities in charge of the investigation is inadequate, and that the time and resources devoted are neither appropriate nor sufficient (Álvarez Aparicio, 2018, p. 11)

When a person dies, their relatives usually go through different stages (depending on multiple personal and/or contextual variables), which they work through and gradually overcome until they ultimately accept the reality of the loss and are able to live with it, functioning fully in their daily lives. When a person disappears, regardless of the underlying reason for the disappearance, the processing of the loss takes longer to begin and is more complex, potentially developing into pathological or complicated grief (Acinas, 2012; Boss, 2001).

As time passes and no results are obtained, physical and psychological exhaustion intensifies, and desperation, hopelessness, and pathological guilt —stemming from the desire for the situation to end as soon as possible, in whatever way— alternate with the hope of finding the missing person alive. At the interpersonal level, conflicts may arise due to differing ways of understanding and responding to the disappearance of the loved one among relatives, fueled by the emotional state resulting from an uncertain search devoid of answers. Behaviors such

³ Excluded from this classification are those cases that receive specific treatment from public authorities due to their particular characteristics (Cereceda & Tourís, 2019): (a) the abduction of newborns, (b) cases covered under the Ley de Memoria Histórica, and (c) individuals subject to a national or international arrest warrant.

as overprotection toward other members of the environment perceived as vulnerable, in an attempt to prevent the situation from recurring, may coexist with others of “neglect,” as all physical and emotional resources are devoted to the search, leading to the disregard of other obligations.

Moreover, in addition to the psychological and emotional problems that relatives must face — which make them more prone to the development and persistence of other somatic conditions— there are further economic, social, and/or legal obstacles (Álvarez Aparicio, 2018; Comité Internacional de la Cruz Roja [CICR], 2003). Thus, at the social level, the absence of answers and of a body to mourn prevents the performance of rituals that enable the bereaved to assume a new status and to accept the reality of a loss that remains uncertain. In addition, processes of transference are common, which may evoke a sense of vulnerability within the environment, as well as a lack of information and awareness among others, who do not know what to do or say and may, in turn, reinforce the physical and/or emotional isolation to which the relative may subject themselves in their attempt to continue devoting all their energy to the search for their loved one.

At the economic level, in addition to the possibility that the missing person may be the family’s main provider, there are the expenses that may arise, both directly and indirectly, from the search process (e.g., psychological treatment, bureaucratic procedures, obtaining information, employment-related problems, hiring private-sector professionals, etc.). At the judicial level, depending on the country, it may take years before a person is officially declared dead or missing, which prevents relatives from carrying out any legal or other types of procedures Comité Internacional de la Cruz Roja [CICR], 2013)

However, as has been observed, the effect that a disappearance has is not limited to the immediate environment; to a greater or lesser extent, the personnel involved may also be affected by not knowing how to adequately manage the reactions of relatives and close associates, who continue to demand answers that they are unable to provide, as well as to address psychological and emotional needs (their own and those of others) that they sometimes do not fully understand or feel capable of handling, often due to a lack of training in this regard. As Álvarez-Aparicio (2015, p. 16) notes, “to external demands —whether arising from the family, the organization to which one belongs, the administration, the media, or society itself— are added internal demands, resulting from high expectations.” In this way, the feeling of helplessness in the face of the inability to provide a clear response to a suffering environment and a demanding society may lead to psychological processes of emotional distancing, in an attempt to neutralize what is perceived as threatening; however, it may also result in overinvolvement in the resolution of the case, assuming it as a personal challenge, such that, in the absence of results, the professional may experience feelings of uselessness and guilt, thereby affecting their self-esteem, mood, and relational situation to the point of generating maladaptive functioning accompanied by clinically significant distress.

With regard to the broader community, when a person disappears, the most basic beliefs that enable individuals to confront the world may be shaken. The world may cease to be perceived as safe, controllable, benevolent, and just, giving rise to a sense of vulnerability and fear, not only concerning what may have happened to the missing person, but also regarding the possibility that the same could happen to themselves or to those closest to them.

Finally, society as a whole, unable to provide an explanation for what has occurred despite the material and human resources invested, is another of the parties affected by a disappearance (Álvarez Aparicio, 2018; García et al., 2019).

2. COMMUNICATION IN EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

The proper communication of information in emergency situations is essential, both for the professionals involved and for those affected and the population impacted to a greater or lesser extent, whether to mitigate existing situations of risk and threat or to prevent new ones from arising. Thus, once the information becomes available —especially if it generates media interest or a certain degree of social alarm (as occurs in some disappearance cases)— it will, in most instances, be disseminated regardless of the will of the parties concerned. Therefore, it is crucial that such information be conveyed by competent bodies and institutions through an informed and trained spokesperson who delivers accurate and high-quality information (Arroyo Barrantes et al., 2009; Orbe, 2012).

2.1. Delivering Bad News

Particular mention should be made of the communication of bad news in emergency contexts. As Muñoz et al. (2001, p. 350) note, “communicating information that we know will be adverse for the other person is neither an easy nor a pleasant task,” despite the recognized benefits it entails for both the sender and the recipient (Curtis, 2004; Elisabeth Kübler-Ross & David Kessler, 2005; Pacheco et al., 2012).

Thus, if we understand bad news as “any information that negatively affects a person’s expectations about themselves and their future” (Bascuñán, 2013, p. 685), its appropriate communication can have a positive impact on the recipient by facilitating acceptance and adaptation to a new reality in which their loved one is no longer present, improving decision-making capacity, increasing the perception of competence and control over the situation, promoting the initiation of the grieving process, and fostering the perception that the professional is concerned about their well-being, thereby improving the relationship and reducing the risk of litigation (Fallowfield & Jenkins, 2004; Gómez-Batiste et al., 2003). For the sender, it may lead to increased security and confidence (Hobgood et al., 2005) in future communications, enhancing effectiveness and thus reducing the risk of burnout (Álvarez Aparicio, 2020).

However, communicating information known to be adverse for the recipient also entails certain limitations that must be understood and addressed in order for the communication to be not only effective but also efficient, thereby maximizing the aforementioned benefits (Álvarez Aparicio, 2022; Pacheco et al., 2012; Parada, 2008). These limitations may be present in: (a) the sender (misconceptions and fears related to the communication of bad news or their ability to handle it, prior dysfunctional experiences, identification with the affected person and overinvolvement, deficits in coping strategies, etc.); (b) the recipient (difficulty in managing emotions, processes of denial, poor coping strategies, distrust if there is inconsistency in the information provided, etc.); and/or (c) the environment (lack of time, an inadequate setting, absence of professionals trained to carry out the communication, etc.).

Finally, it should be noted that the communication of bad news does not necessarily entail communicating a death. In some cases (such as the issue at hand), it is not always the worst possible news. As previously discussed, bad news is any information that entails negative consequences and/or a loss of gratifying stimuli for the recipient (Muñoz et al., 2001), drastically alters a person’s perception of themselves and their future (Buckman, 1992), and, ultimately, constitutes a turning point in the recipient’s life (Álvarez Aparicio, 2020). Therefore, bad news may relate to many different matters, including the disappearance of a person and its resulting consequences.

In emergency situations, moreover, bad news —such as the initial moments following a person's disappearance, the location of that person under adverse conditions, or the suspicion that their life may be in serious danger— tends to present several components (Echeburúa, 2005): (a) the unexpected nature of the news; (b) its unpredictability; (c) rapid development; (d) a high emotional impact; (e) the extraordinary nature of the situation, which makes coping difficult, as relatives must confront it using the resources available at that moment, which may be ineffective or insufficient in an unusual emergency context; and (f) possible environmental overstimulation, given the casuistry addressed here.

3. COMMUNICATION OF BAD NEWS IN CASES OF MISSING PERSONS

The latest data published by the Ministry of the Interior (López et al., 2023) show that, since the Missing Persons and Human Remains System (PDyRH System)⁴ was implemented in 2010, a total of 255,686 reports have been closed, representing 94.7% of all those recorded since records began. Statistics indicate that, on average, 48% have been resolved within the first three days and nearly 75% within the 15 days following the disappearance. Thus, in cases involving populations defined by this body as more vulnerable (minors under 17 years of age and individuals over 65), the figures show that their resolution is largely concentrated within the first three days (Figure 5).

As previously noted, the causes that may lead to a disappearance are highly varied; however, their impact on relatives and close associates shares a common element: uncertainty, which is accompanied by components of stress and anxiety as they attempt to confront and adapt to a situation that is adverse to them.

The reasons for case closure, despite having been only recently incorporated into official statistics (López et al., 2023), reveal that nearly 47% of the disappearances closed in 2022 resulted in the person being returned to a care facility or home, of which 0.8% had a fatal outcome (Figure 6), with self-harm behaviors being the most frequent cause (35%).

As may be inferred, bad news, when a person goes missing, arises at different moments and on different levels. If we focus on family members and loved ones, the very communication confirming that their loved one is missing and that there is no news of their whereabouts already constitutes such bad news. The added responsibility of having these same individuals communicate this information to their wider circle once again becomes a task for which, in most cases, they are neither technically nor emotionally prepared, as is also frequently the case with the professionals who must deliver this initial communication. For this reason, the latter must be trained not only to convey the information to the family and close contacts of the missing person, but also to ensure that they are subsequently able to communicate it to their own social environment in the most appropriate, efficient, and effective manner possible, thereby reducing, as far as possible, the resulting psychological and emotional impact.

Thus, communicating bad news is not the same as simply delivering bad news. Communication is a bidirectional process in which sender and receiver actively alternate roles. In other words, the receiver does not merely passively receive information that they may not have heard, understood, or assimilated. In this regard, as Sarabia et al. (2013) point out, communication is a complex exchange process that takes place in several stages: formulation of the idea, encoding of what is intended to be said, transmission of the message,

⁴ The PDyRH System serves as a reference framework for the compilation of official statistics published by the National Centre for Missing Persons (CNDES) of the Spanish Ministry of the Interior. This system was launched in 2010, although it did not become fully operational for all police forces until 2012.

receipt of the information by the interlocutor, decoding of the message, integration of it, and feedback (that is, the information gathered by the sender regarding the effects their message has had on the receiver, thereby assessing the degree to which it has been understood). Since information is gradually lost throughout the process —because what the sender intends to say is one thing, what is actually conveyed is another, what the receiver perceives is something different again, and what is ultimately interpreted may differ further— particular care must be taken in the transmission of such information, avoiding improvisation and planning in advance both what is to be communicated and how it is to be communicated, so as not to add further pain to that which the information concerning the loved one will already cause. Thus, as Álvarez Aparicio (2020, p. 227) notes, “communication is considered effective when the message is adapted to the interlocutor, so that it is perceived, understood, accepted, and integrated”.

As we have noted, and focusing solely on the immediate social environment, there are several moments at which professionals in the fields of security and emergency response may have to communicate bad news: (a) when it is confirmed that the person has gone missing; (b) once the person has been located, their refusal to return to their usual place of residence and/or to allow information about their condition or situation to be communicated to family members and close contacts; (c) the location of the person in poor physical and/or psychological condition or their death; and (d) the failure to locate the person and the fact that the search must continue indefinitely.

Perhaps this last one is the worst of all possible news. On many occasions, the immediate social environment experiences a sense of suspended time, frozen until the person returns home, the moment at which they hope that plans, wishes, and expectations will be resumed and/or fulfilled. As time passes, loved ones move along a fine line in which they search for a person whom they do not know to be alive or dead, although they are usually certain of one thing: they will continue searching as long as they have no evidence of that person’s death. It should not be forgotten that every primary loss (the disappearance of the loved one) is linked to a number of secondary losses (e.g., no longer being able to embrace them again, the loss of a life project, or the role one performed in relation to them). The absence of certainty regarding the person’s condition and whereabouts means that the grieving process cannot be properly worked through, or at the very least makes it extremely difficult to do so. The so-called NASH scale (Figure 4), which reflects the difficulty involved in processing grief on the basis of the variable “type of death,” does not even contemplate this circumstance, since, for their relatives, a missing person exists in a liminal space between the world of the living and that of the dead. As a result, they tend to oscillate emotionally and cognitively between these two poles in what Boss (2001) termed “ambiguous loss,” since there is a physical absence but a constant psychological presence.

Knowing how to communicate information appropriately at each stage, so that the loved ones of the missing person can adapt to the new situation and achieve a healthy balance between continuing to live and continuing to search, is essential not only for them, but also for the professional, who may in turn receive positive feedback by reducing the negative impact that these situations also have on them, as they continue seeking answers to convey until the case is finally brought to a close.

Thus, beyond the design of an action protocol aimed at managing relations with the mass media when a disappearance occurs, as requested by the competent bodies in this field (Cereceda & Tourís, 2019), in order to avoid interference in the investigation, reduce the impact of the news on family members and close contacts, improve the effectiveness of the mechanisms established for locating the missing person, and launch awareness campaigns

capable of resonating within society by making use of the visibility and dissemination capacity of these channels, there is also a clear need for protocols governing the communication of information, including bad news, addressed to the loved ones of the missing person.

Such a protocol for communicating bad news to the immediate social environment of the missing person, which should be grounded in two basic interpersonal communication skills—empathy and active listening—would need to encompass all the scenarios in which such communication might occur and which have already been mentioned.

In the healthcare field, where the greatest number of studies on the communication of bad news has been conducted, there is limited empirical evidence to support the use of protocols or basic guidelines for action (Alelwani & Ahmed, 2014; Fallowfield & Jenkins, 2004). Even so, most professionals acknowledge that having clear guidelines and being trained in their use facilitates communication and reduces levels of stress and anxiety in carrying out this task (Baile et al., 2000; Hammond et al., 1999; Hobgood et al., 2005; Monden et al., 2016; Pacheco et al., 2012; Read, 2002). As Bascuñán (2013) notes, the aim of protocols is to structure the communicative process in an efficient and effective manner, optimizing the resources available. Nevertheless, such protocols are not sufficient without the professional's appropriate adaptation to the circumstances of each case and to the prevailing sociocultural reality.

If we examine the existing protocols for communicating bad news, especially in emergency situations, it becomes apparent that most are structured around four key principles or stages: (1) preparation, (2) communication of the news, (3) management of emotions, and (4) planning of the next step.

For the proper communication of information known to be unfavorable, common sense, good intentions, or simply experience are not enough (Fellowes et al., 2004); even where there is a protocol to follow, the professional must be properly educated and trained. Knowing and appropriately applying communication skills and the basic technical guidelines for action is essential (Álvarez Aparicio, 2020). This is the only way in which such communication may have positive effects both for the recipient, by facilitating acceptance of and adaptation to the new situation, and for the communicator, who may gain confidence for future communications, thereby improving self-concept and self-esteem and, in turn, reducing the likelihood of problems such as burnout. Ultimately, for the professional, this may increase the probability of future effective communication.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The issue of missing persons, given its implications and significance, deserves a level of attention that has not yet been achieved in our country (Beltrán, 2016). It is therefore necessary to address it from a global perspective and as a matter of State policy, enabling the adoption of specific measures that tackle this issue in depth, as was endorsed by the “Special Committee for the Study of the Problem of Persons Missing Without Apparent Cause,” established by resolution of the Senate Plenary in 2013.

Although several advances have been achieved in recent years, many areas for improvement still remain in addressing this serious problem, which affects not only the immediate environment of the person who has disappeared and the person themselves, but also many other spheres in which its impact may reach different levels and take diverse forms. Thus, the professionals involved, the community to which the missing person belongs and/or their

broader social environment, as well as society as a whole, may also become victims of this situation (Álvarez Aparicio, 2015).

If there is one feature that characterizes these situations, it is uncertainty. The idiosyncratic nature of this issue makes an adapted and specific approach necessary (De Puelles, 2018), including with regard to communication-related aspects. In this respect, the development of good practices in the care of family members and close contacts of missing persons, including this dimension, as is currently being considered and worked on by bodies such as the National Centre for Missing Persons (CNDES) and the Official College of Psychology of Madrid through its Working Group on Psychological Intervention in Missing Persons Cases (GIPD), is regarded as essential (Álvarez Aparicio et al., 2023; Vinuesa, 2023).

As Muñoz et al. (2001) point out, communicating information that is known to be unfavorable for a third party is neither an easy nor a pleasant task. Properly communicating bad news appears to have positive effects both for the recipient and for the person conveying it, according to various authors (Curtis, 2004; Kübker-Ross & Kessler, 2005; Pacheco et al., 2012). The appropriate transmission of information requires strong communication skills and the proper handling of basic technical guidelines for action (Álvarez Aparicio, 2020), as well as the adaptation of communication to the prevailing reality at each particular moment and in each specific situation (Bascuñán, 2013). To this end, the preparation of the professional is essential (Álvarez Aparicio, 2015, 2022; Bascuñán, 2013; Belli, 2020).

On the other hand, as has been explained, despite the scarcity of empirical studies supporting the use of protocols or basic guidelines for action, a large proportion of professionals report feeling more confident and experiencing lower levels of stress and anxiety when they are able to use them (Baile et al., 2000; Hammond et al., 1999; Hobgood et al., 2004; Monden et al., 2016; Pacheco et al., 2012; Read, 2002).

In the context with which we are concerned, studies would be desirable that shed light on whether the existence of a specific bad-news communication protocol, to be used by security and emergency professionals with the family members and close contacts of missing persons, actually facilitates—and, if so, to what extent—adaptive coping with the situation in such cases, both with regard to the immediate social environment and to the professionals who must deliver such communication. This should take into account the range of possible scenarios. Namely: (1) the person is located in good condition but does not wish to return home or have contact with their social environment; (2) the person is located in good condition and wishes to return home and/or maintain contact with their social environment; (3) the person is located in poor health but does not wish to return home or have contact with their social environment; (4) the person is located in poor health and wishes to return home and/or maintain contact with their social environment; (5) the person is found deceased; and (6) the person is not located and, once all initial lines of inquiry have been exhausted, the investigation must continue indefinitely.

In accordance with the above, some aspects of interest that could be operationalized would include: (a) describing the attitudes toward, and satisfaction with, the use of a specific protocol among the professionals involved in the process of communicating bad news, according to level of experience, professional role, and use case; (b) comparing the effectiveness of a specific bad-news communication protocol for family members and close contacts of missing persons in promoting adaptive coping across the different possible scenarios; (c) analyzing age as a confounding variable and/or effect modifier with respect to the effectiveness of the bad-news communication protocol on the adaptive functioning of family members and close contacts of missing persons; and (d) analyzing gender as a

confounding variable and/or effect modifier with respect to the effectiveness of the bad-news communication protocol on the adaptive functioning of family members and close contacts of missing persons.

Ultimately, and in light of the foregoing, it is essential to know how to communicate appropriately information that may be adverse for a third party. It also appears necessary to study and potentially develop and implement specific bad-news communication protocols for family members and close contacts in cases of missing persons, provided that such protocols prove effective in facilitating an optimal coping process. Likewise, specific training in such protocols is of fundamental importance for security and emergency professionals assigned to this task. This latter aspect —namely, the specialized training of professionals in matters relating to missing persons— was already highlighted in the conclusions report of the “Special Committee for the Study of the Problem of Persons Missing Without Apparent Cause” (2013).

In psychology, it is well established that communication carried out properly can in itself be therapeutic. The aim is not merely to convey painful information, but also to cushion its impact, provide resources for emotional containment and coping, and prevent future complications. Thus, we should not forget, ultimately, that the purpose of the proper communication of bad news is not to eliminate pain, but to help the person cope with it, reducing, as far as possible, the impact of the news, accompanying the bereaved person, and guiding them in whatever they may need at that moment (Álvarez Aparicio, 2020).

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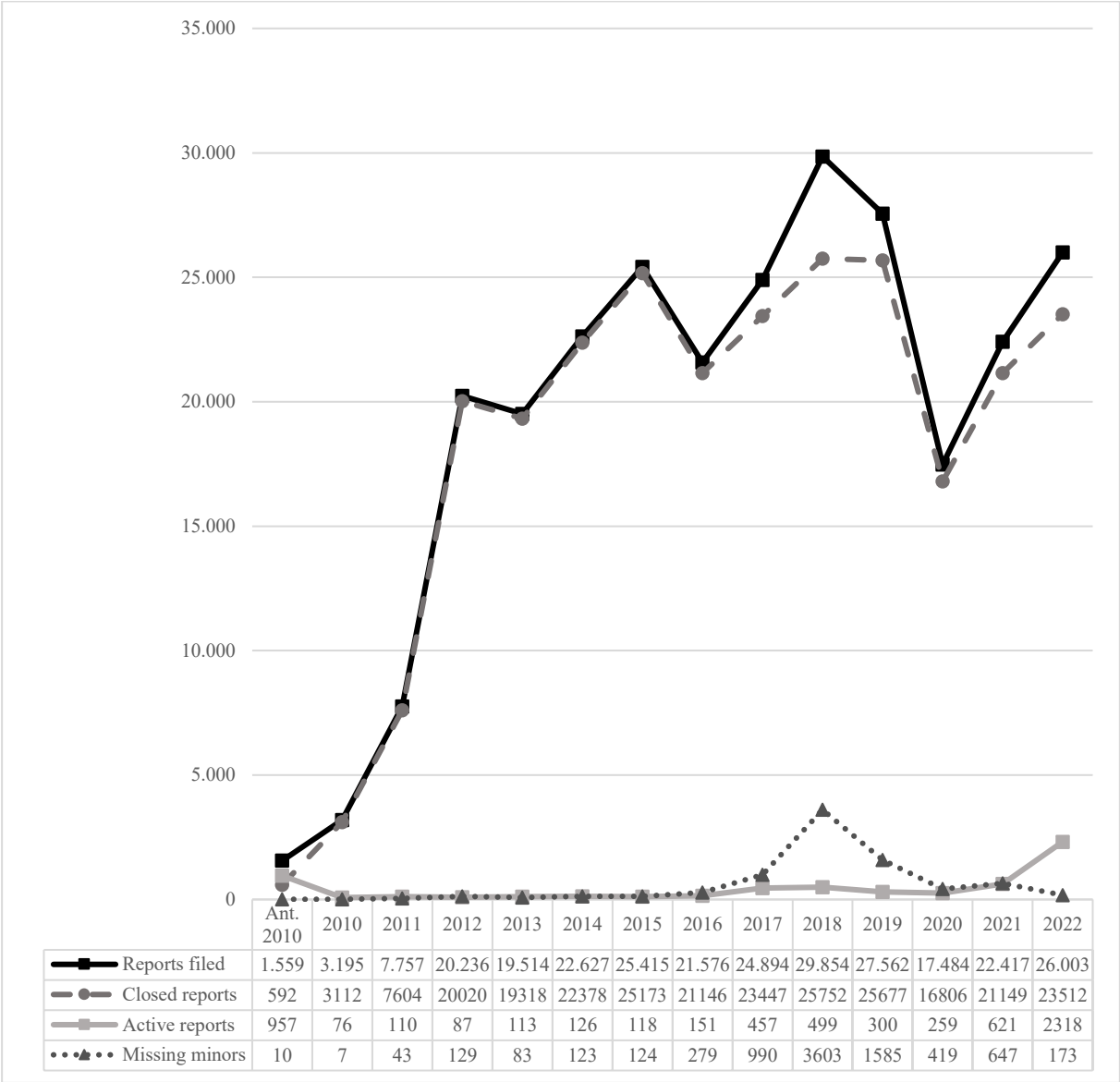
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Google Scholar: <https://scholar.google.es/citations?user=LA1IfSEAAAAJ&hl=es&authuser=2>

APPENDIX. FIGURES AND TABLES

Figure 1. *Annual evolution of the number of reports filed, reports closed, active reports, and reports concerning missing minors from care facilities*

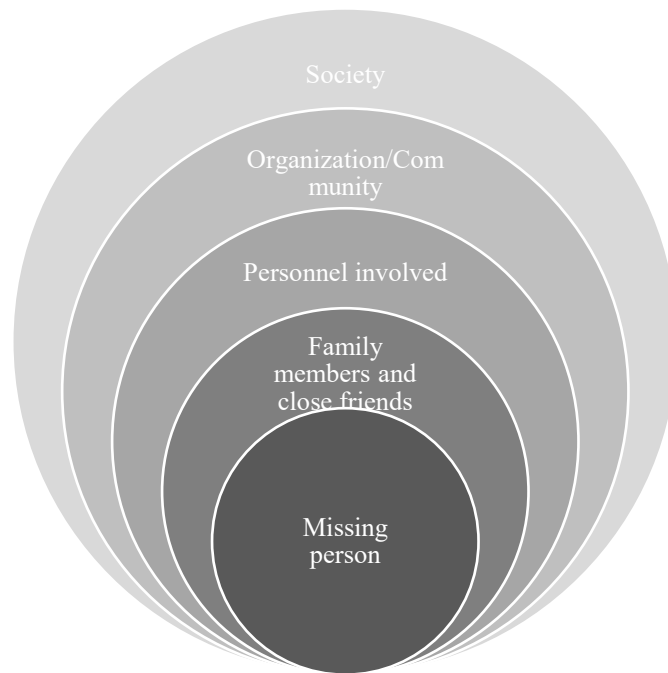
Emergency information management: communication of bad news to the close environment
in cases of missing persons by security and emergency professionals



Source: extracted and adapted from “Annual Report on Missing Persons for the year 2022,” by López et al., 2023, p. 37.

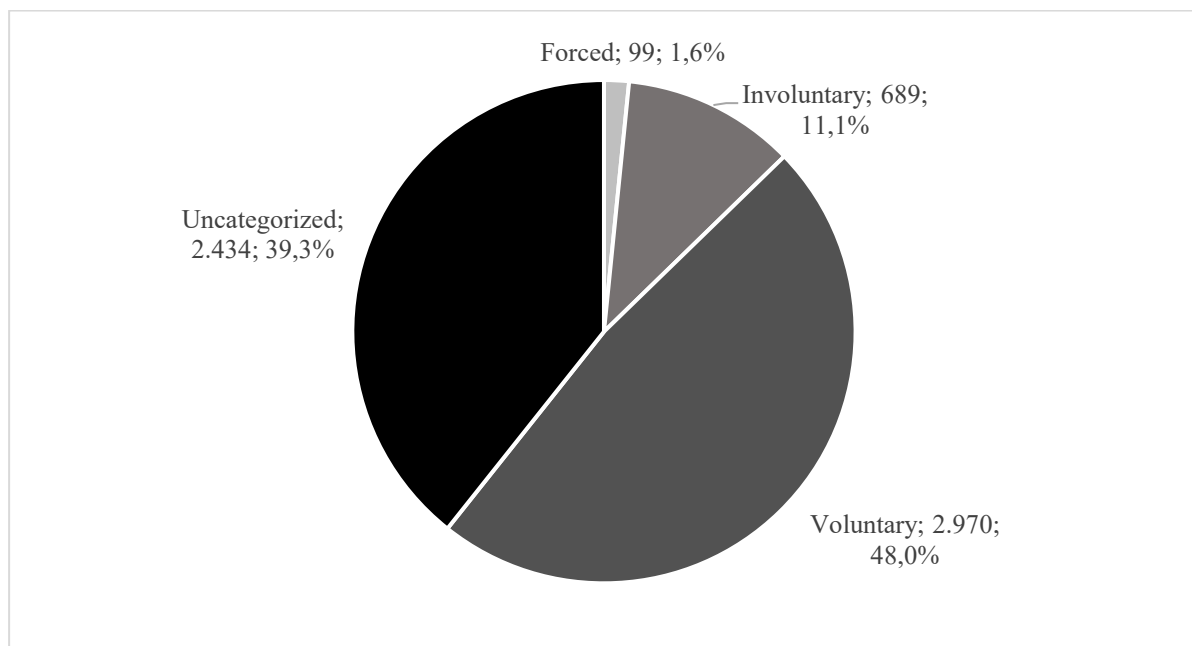
Note. Since the PDyRH System became fully operational in 2012, the increase in the number of reports recorded between 2010 and 2012 is particularly high. A decline can also be observed in 2020 as a consequence of COVID. A higher number of reports concerning the disappearance of foreign minors from the centers in which they were under guardianship coincides with increased migratory flows in Spain in 2018 and 2019. The PDyRH System is a dynamic system that is continuously updated as the status of reports changes. Thus, the resolution of cases leads to figures decreasing over time, which is why the most recent years tend to show a higher proportion of active reports.

Figure 2. Possible levels of impact in the event of a disappearance



Source: extracted from “The effect of disappearances on intervention professionals: their impact on law enforcement personnel,” by Álvarez Aparicio, 2015, p. 12.

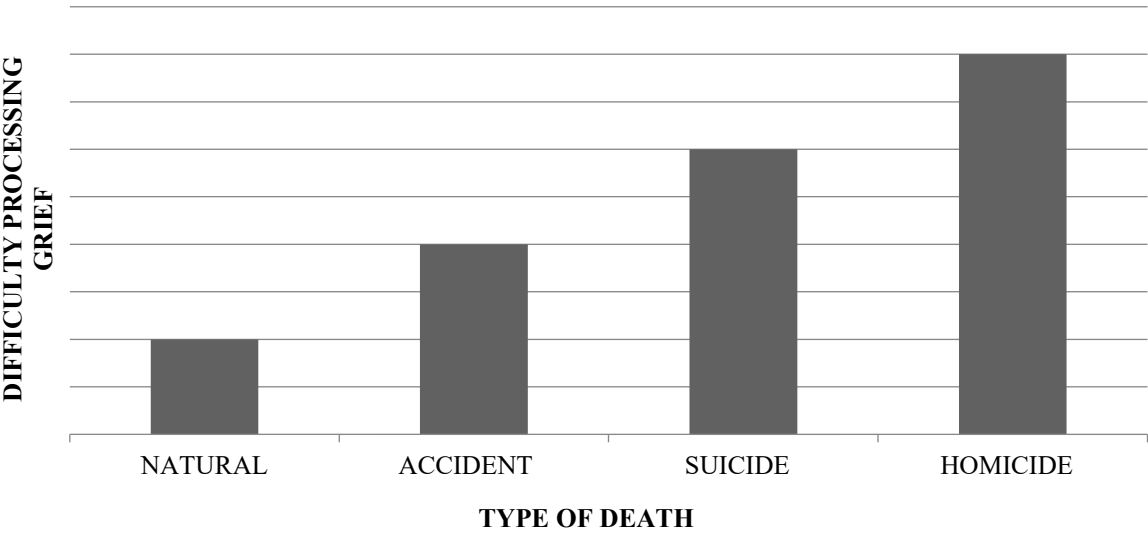
Figure 3. *Total active reports distributed by type of disappearance*



Source: extracted and adapted from “Annual Report on Missing Persons for the year 2022,” by López et al., 2023, p. 48.

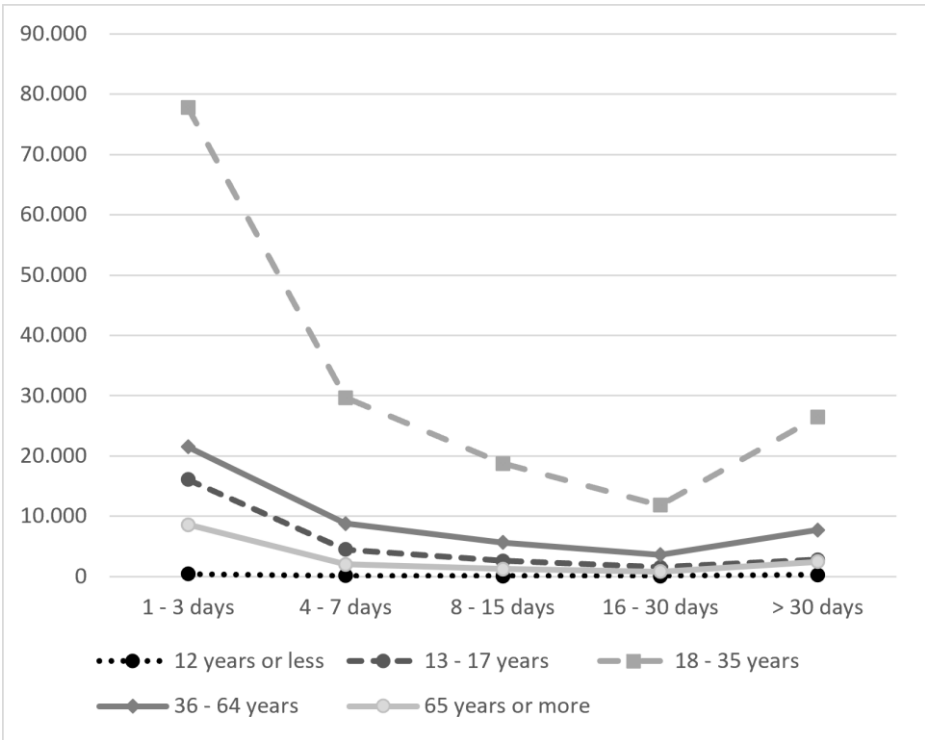
Figure 4. *Difficulty in the grieving process based on the variable “type of death.” NASH Scale*

Emergency information management: communication of bad news to the close environment in cases of missing persons by security and emergency professionals



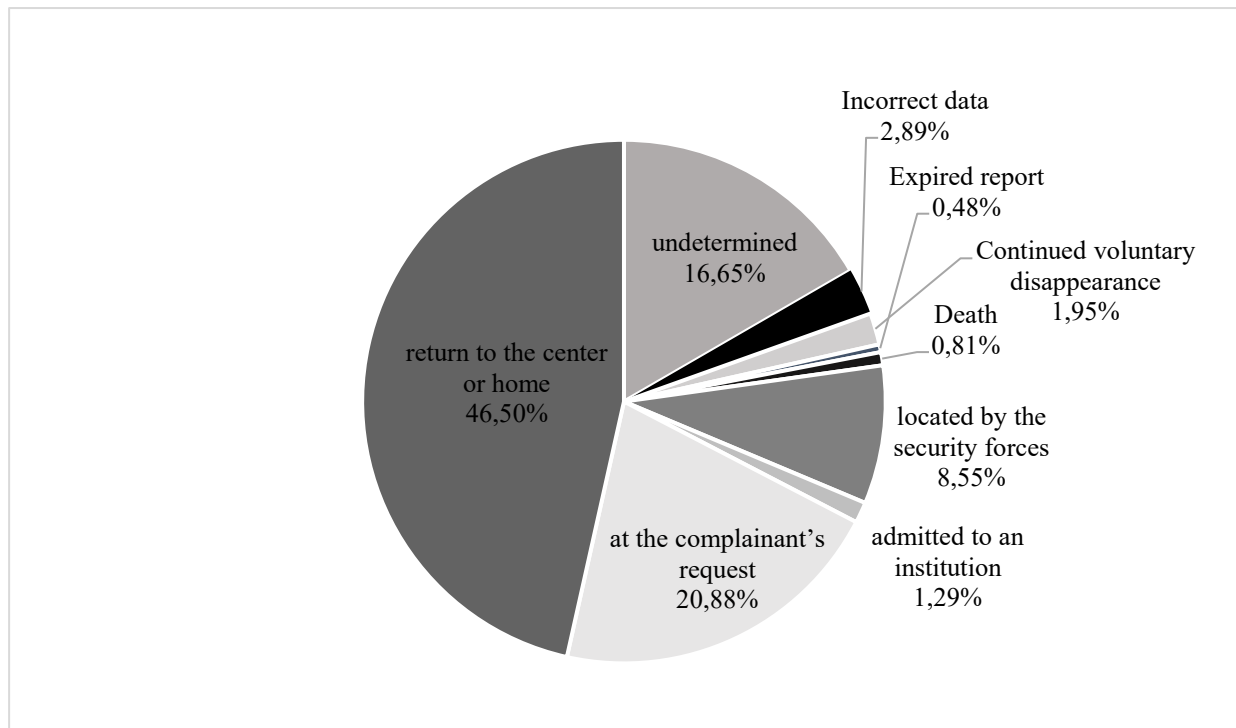
Source: extracted from “Grief in special situations: suicide, missing persons, traumatic death,” by Acinas, 2012, p. 3.

Figure 5. Total closed reports according to age and time taken to resolve them



Source: extracted and adapted from “Annual Report on Missing Persons for the year 2022,” by López et al., 2023, p. 57.

Figure 6. *Reasons for the closure of reports resolved in 2022, expressed as percentages*



Source: extracted and adapted from “Annual Report on Missing Persons for the year 2022,” by López et al., 2023, p. 58.

Table 1. *Summary of the typologies of missing persons cases based on the possible underlying causes*

TYPES OF DISAPPEARANCES		
VOLUNTARY	INVOLUNTARY	FORCED
- Runaways of minors. - Runaways of minors from child protection centers (including unaccompanied foreign minors [UFM]). - Intentional disappearances of adults with full legal capacity	- No apparent cause⁵. - Persons with cognitive impairment, mental disorders, neurodegenerative diseases, individuals with disabilities, etc. - Accidents. - Disasters caused by natural factors or resulting from human action (whether accidental or intentional).	- Disappearances of persons occurring within a criminal context or environment. - Parental abduction of minors (national and international). - Individuals forced out or expelled from the home (minors and persons with disabilities).

Source: adapted from “Protocol for action by the State Security Forces and Corps in cases of missing persons,” by Cereceda and Tourís, 2019. Extracted from “Current situation of the issue of disappearances in possible contexts of gender-based violence in Spain: the importance of psychology professionals in its approach,” by Álvarez Aparicio, 2024, p. 49.

⁵ This category includes disappearances that cannot be encompassed within any of the other established categories. Subsequently, such a disappearance may be classified as voluntary, involuntary of another nature, or even forced.