

Despondents

a. Category definition: any person who is thought to have disappeared deliberately, generally as a consequence of one or more of the following:

- an intention to commit suicide, either with an explicit threat or considered to be likely based on a history of previous attempts or threats
- depression, either diagnosed or suspected
- stress or distress, due to either personal or domestic problems

Gibb and Woolnough provides a useful discussion about depression³ and suicide⁴.

Reference to the abuse of drugs and alcohol has been removed from the category definition. Statistics relating to those incidents have been put into a new category called Substance Related.

b. All searches: n = 457

Table 15: Despondents, by terrain and gender, all searches

	female	male	other*	total
farmland	54	75	2	131
urban	46	51	12	109
woodland	15	46	2	63
moorland	12	45	4	61
water margin	10	33	2	45
plantation	3	29	0	32
crag / broken ground	3	13	0	16
	143	292	22	457

Table 16: Despondents, by reported characteristic and gender

	female	male	other*	total
suicide threatened	41	84	5	130
stress or distress	33	74	1	108
depression	44	51	9	104
previous suicide attempts	26	34	3	63

* 'other' means that the gender was not reported

The four characteristics shown in table 16 come from an analysis of the text fields of reports submitted via the data collection system. These were the characteristics of the missing person that were most frequently mentioned. They are not mutually exclusive, so for example a missing person could have been reported as having threatened to commit suicide as well as having a history of previous threats.

All this is dependent entirely on what the individual doing the reporting felt was worth mentioning. This should be borne in mind when considering the conclusions that we have drawn about the behaviour of missing despondents with these characteristics. It is worth noting, however, that 69% of the reports submitted for missing despondents included a reference to at least one of them, which leads us to suspect that where a characteristic was present then it was highly likely to have been reported.

- c. **Fatality rate:** the overall fatality rate for despondents was significantly higher than the fatality rate for all other categories combined. Despondent fatality rates depended on (i) the type of terrain, and (ii) in the case of males, some of the reported characteristics.

(i) by terrain:

There was considerable variation in the fatality rates for despondents missing in different types of terrain, ranging from 18% (moorland) to 56% (water margin); section (d) of this report gives all of the values.

(ii) by reported characteristics:

The fatality rate for females did not vary significantly with any of the reported characteristics; the following comments refer only to males.

The fatality rate for males who had threatened suicide was 21%. This was roughly half of the fatality rate for males who had not threatened suicide (39%). This is a significant difference.

A threat of suicide together with a history of previous suicide threats or attempts made no significant difference to the fatality rate; however, when no threat was made but the missing male had a history of previous threats or attempts then the fatality rate increased from 39% to 54%. This is a significant difference.

When depression was diagnosed or suspected in males, the fatality rate was 51%, compared with 30% where no depression was reported. This is a significant difference, and did not depend on whether or not suicide was threatened.

The presence of stress or personal distress made no significant difference to fatality rates.

- d. Outcome – condition if found:** despondents were significantly different from all the other categories in the study. Overall, significantly fewer despondents were found unhurt, and significantly more were either found injured or not found at all. The percentages varied with the terrain and, in the case of farmland, by gender. The results for plantations and woodland were similar, and were combined for ease of reporting

Table 17: Despondents, outcome by terrain and gender

	farmland female		farmland male		urban all searches	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
fatal	11	20	23	31	32	29
injured	6	11	8	11	6	6
no trace	5	9	8	11	8	7
unhurt	32	59	36	48	63	58

	plantations & woodland all searches		water margin all searches		all other terrain types all searches	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
fatal	37	39	25	56	19	25
injured	19	20	4	9	15	19
no trace	11	12	5	11	5	6
unhurt	28	29	11	24	38	49

e. Location found: significant differences were found between the different types of terrain, and there was a gender difference in farmland. As before, incidents in plantations and woodland have been combined.

Table 18: Despondents, location found by terrain and gender

	farmland female		farmland male		urban all searches	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
building	17	35	28	42	48	48
trees	7	14	8	12	8	8
water	8	16	3	4	20	20
travel aid	12	24	12	18	14	14
open ground	2	4	10	15	7	7
linear feature	2	4	5	7	3	3
not recorded	1	2	1	1	1	1

	plantations & woodland all searches		moorland all searches		water margins all searches	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
building	11	13	10	18	6	15
trees	54	64	10	18	4	10
water	5	6	7	12	22	55
travel aid	9	11	15	26	2	5
open ground	3	4	9	16	1	3
linear feature	1	1	6	11	4	10
not recorded	1	1	0	0	1	3

	crag / broken ground all searches
building	1
trees	5
water	2
travel aid	1
open ground	5
linear feature	1
not recorded	0

Table 19: Despondents, location found by terrain and gender, detail

	farmland female		farmland male		urban all searches	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
building						
building / shelter	3	6	15	23	14	14
habitation	14	29	13	19	34	34
trees						
forest / woodland	4	8	2	3	5	5
forest edge/clearing	3	6	6	9	3	3
travel aid						
path / track	1	2	7	11	2	2
road	11	22	5	7	12	12
linear feature						
stream / ditch	1	2	3	4	1	1
wall / fence line	1	2	2	3	2	2
	plantations & woodland all searches		moorland all searches		water margins all searches	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
building						
building / shelter	2	2	4	7	5	13
habitation	9	11	6	11	1	2
trees						
forest / woodland	41	49	8	14	3	8
forest edge/clearing	13	15	2	4	1	2
travel aid						
path / track	5	6	7	12	1	3
road	4	5	8	14	1	3
linear feature						
stream / ditch	1	1	4	7	4	10
wall / fence line	0	0	2	4	0	0

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Table 19 continued

	crag / broken ground all searches
building	
building / shelter	1
habitation	0
trees	
forest / woodland	5
forest edge/clearing	0
travel aid	
path / track	0
road	1
linear feature	
stream / ditch	0
wall / fence line	1

The following additional information was provided with regard to four incidents for which the location was reported as ‘open ground’: at a high vantage point overlooking the valley, close to a footpath, in a quarry, in the hospital grounds.

Significant locations: in many of the reports submitted to the system (15% of female despondents and 14% of male despondents) there are references to the missing person being found in a location that is significant to them in some way, either because it is a local beauty spot or viewpoint, or they have memories associated with the place (‘... went there regularly with the family ...’) or they often visited it (‘... on the route that he used to take the dog for a walk ...’).

Significant locations are linked in particular to male fatalities. There is no significant difference between the likelihood of a fatality when the indication is that a missing female despondent is in a location of this sort compared with any other location.

If there are strong indicators to suggest that a missing male has headed for such a location then it is highly likely that they will be found dead; 62% of missing male despondents found in these places are found dead, compared with 29% who are found in other locations. These are significantly different. If the missing male despondent has not threatened suicide then the fatality rate increases to 70% if they are found in a location of this kind. Again, this is a statistically significant result.

- f. Distance found from IPP:** the distances travelled by despondents were significantly different to the distances travelled by all the other categories in that a greater proportion of despondents was found nearer to the IPP (36% of despondents were found within 0.5 km of the IPP compared to 25% of the other categories); terrain and gender made no significant difference to the distances despondents travelled.

Table 20: Despondents, distance found from IPP, all searches

<u>percentile</u>	<u>all searches, km</u>
10	0.10
20	0.22
30	0.50
40	0.70
50	1.0
60	1.5
70	2.5
80	5.4
90	15
100	150

- g. Possible scenarios:** the principle of ‘lines and points’ is a useful guide to constructing scenarios for all categories of missing person, and for despondents in particular. ‘Points’ are the missing person’s likely destinations, and the ‘lines’ are the routes that they could have taken to get there. As a general rule, likely points towards which a missing despondent might be heading are a building, or trees, or a body of water. The likelihood of each of these being the missing person’s intended destination depends on the type of terrain in which they are missing, and, in the case of farmland, their gender.

Local knowledge plus information about the missing person’s habits and patterns of behaviour should be used in conjunction with tables 18 and 19 to identify likely destinations, in particular places which are either familiar to them or which could be described as scenic.

