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Abduction by strangers rare; DISAPPEARANCES: Even those defined as strangers tend to have a connection, RCMP says

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The odds are that Victoria (Tori) Stafford knew the person who took her.

In 2007, the RCMP reported only 56 "stranger abductions" -- by someone other than a parent -- took place in Canada.

Among those, "a vast majority, more than 95 per cent," were by someone the child knew, Julie Gagnon, spokes-person with the RCMP's National Missing Children's Service in Ottawa, said yesterday.

"True stranger abductions rarely happen in Canada, very rarely," said Gagnon.

The abductor may be a neighbour, babysitter, other family member or associate of one of the parents, she added.

Peter Jaffe, director of the Centre for Research on Violence against Women and Children in London, agreed, saying a complete stranger taking a child off the street "is like being hit by lightning.

"The research on abuse states it is more likely a child is abused by someone they know, that they trust. That is the reality of abuse and the research on abductions points in the same direction," he said.

Eight-year-old Tori was seen on a surveillance video walking with a woman a week ago.

"You are talking about a willful act where a person has to overcome inhibitions most of us have. I think everyone has seen enough signs on buses and pictures on milk containers to understand the horror of a missing child," Jaffe said.

The Oxford Community Police has come under questioning for taking 12 hours to report Tori's disappearance.

Although Gagnon declined comment on the case, she agreed with other experts that the first three hours are the most critical with a missing child and that information must be made public.

"Any delay when a child goes missing is critical," Gagnon said. "After a few hours there is a concern."

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