

Whenever a person, especially a child, goes missing, the psychics/mediums won't be too far behind. Most of them no doubt believe sincerely in their special powers and that they are only there to help, but they can cause a great deal of harm -- emotional, psychological, even economic -- and interfere with the real investigation.

Every time a media outlet reports on a medium's involvement approvingly, they provide more marketing material for this industry and more tacit approval for the psychological manipulation of desperate vulnerable people.

Law Professor Christine Corcos, author of a book on the 1944 trial of psychic Helen Duncan, notes:

Law enforcement officials who allow non-law enforcement trained personnel to participate...are putting both the cases and their jobs at risk. The fact is that few, if any, police departments actually admit to using psychics. Most officials [say] that psychics simply waste time predicting that bodies or missing persons will be found near water, or trees, or buildings with red roofs. Experienced detectives combing particular areas can do as well, and will not raise false hopes among the families and friends of the victims.

I Sleuth Dead People

Few families are prepared to reject any possible chance of finding missing loved ones, or to publicly criticise. But those who don't want to be

manipulated have reported being badgered and tormented by people claiming to have useful information which turns out to be hurtful hype.

The NZ Skeptics received this comment following celeb psychic Deb Webber commenting on a missing child case as part of a publicity tour:

With regard to psychics, mediums and the like, I can tell you that in the months and years following my sister's disappearance, my family was contacted by no less than 100 of these people. No two of them were able to agree on the location of my sister, alive or dead.

And the police were obliged to follow up each and every one of them, on the chance that the information was real, i.e. someone pretending to be a psychic to convey something they knew about the case. So not only do these freaks inflict profound emotional harm, they are also an enormous waste of police resources.

Psychics Strike Out

A survey of the New Zealand police force concluded that, unlike practical shows like *Crimewatch* or public appeals for witnesses, there had never been any accurate, useful psychically derived information that was instrumental in leading to a successful conclusion.

In 1975, 18-year-old hitchhiker Mona Blades went missing. British psychic-medium Doris Stokes claimed to have assisted the New Zealand police

to recover her body, but this is untrue as the body has never been found and the case remains open.

In 1983, the Kirska Jensen case saw over a hundred contacts from psychics and others. Ian Holyoake, the officer in charge, said: "[It] did not advance the investigation one bit. Most of the information was not specific as to any area where a body might be located, but some was quite graphic in detail and disturbing by its very nature".

In 1992, the disappearance of 2-year-old Amber-Lee Cruickshank brought "letters from clairvoyants, card readers, star watchers, prayer groups, crystal readers, palm readers, spiritualists, people who have visions, premonitions and total lunatics". None of them assisted the search. Initial claims saw her being found "near water or trees"; a 2007 episode of *Sensing Murder* claimed she had been abducted.

In 1992, clairvoyants and a Spiritualist medium told the family of missing Wellington man Michael Kelly that he was still alive. They appealed to racist stereotypes by saying he had been assaulted and abducted by "rough-looking" tattooed Maoris, and dumped at various locations. Police received calls from people worried about Maoris, and private searches were made. Kelly's body was eventually found at the bottom of a light shaft in central Wellington where he had fallen.

In 1998, Nelson clairvoyant Margaret Birkin and four other psychics went out on a boat to look for missing Blenheim friends Ben Smart and Olivia

Hope. Birken stated that she knew where the pair was to be found. Despite additional searches with professional divers and support by the *Holmes* show, she failed to locate the pair, whose bodies remain undiscovered.

In December 2001, psychic Kathy Bartlett joined searchers looking for missing teenager Elon Oved. Her examination of the "aura" at the scene was of no help, and it was another anguishing couple of months for his family before his body was found by a search-and-rescue team member.

In March 2003, a \$20,000 reward was offered for information on missing woman Sara Niethé. Several psychics called police saying that they had had visions of where she and her car could be found, but neither has ever been located.

Sensing Murder? Sensing Nonsense

The exploitation TV show *Sensing Murder* titillates viewers with the idea that psychics can provide new information about unsolved cases, but not one murder has been solved and many grieving people have been exploited. What has been revealed are the usual tricks and techniques common in the psychic industry:

- extravagant claims with no supporting evidence

In the episode *A Bump in the Dark*, about the rape and murder of Alicia O'Reilly, the psychics were said to have established "key facts" about the girl's personality. One had said Alicia was a little shy, her mother described as out-going.

- truisms touted as amazing revelations
- Psychic Kelvin Cruickshank said "It sounds a little weird, but she must have been buried in a white coffin." However, this is common for children.
- obvious cueing or spurious affirmations
- Cruickshank, in looking at Alicia's drawings, spots "her dog". Off-camera someone says "a cat" (the film crew knew there was a pet cat). "O cat is it?" says Cruickshank, "oh it is too."
- bare-faced errors going unchallenged
- Cruickshank made much of Alicia talking about children's TV show *What Now?*, a Saturday morning treat in the 80s. A dramatic voice-over noted that Alicia had been murdered in 1980, apparently supporting his claim. However, *What Now?* didn't start on air until nine months **after** Alicia's murder. Perhaps the implication there is that TVNZ shows are good enough to appeal to spirits in the after-life! What do you think?



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[Psychic sleuthing programme]
Sensing Murder might be the most important TV show of our times. It all boils down to this: the show is either a colossal fraud, an entertainment conspiracy the size of Watergate, or it's the most amazing and incontrovertible evidence of paranormal activity ever recorded. And it has to be one or the other. It can't be neither.

Philip Matthews, The Press