

Morals, Mobiles, and Mandatory Alerts: A Study of Amber Alerts and Canada's Emergency Alert System

Informal Summary Report of Quantitative Survey



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Disclaimer

This report is intended to provide an indicative summary of results for those who participated in the survey as part of the Ethical Approval for this project, and for other interested parties. The results in this report are not finalised and have not undergone peer-review.

Please refer to the project webpage [here](#) for updates on official publications resulting from this survey and research. The results provided here are summary and indicative, and while the best efforts have been made to ensure their accuracy, future analysis and more advanced statistical techniques may differ from the findings reported here and those published in the final thesis and peer-reviewed publications.

The author apologises for the delay in the publication of these findings during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Acknowledgements

Authorship

The author of this report is Monique Lynn of the University of Queensland, Australia. Dr Suzanna Fay, Dr Robin Fitzgerald, and Matthew Zelko provided guidance and reviews.

Contributors

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Participants

The author and supervisory team very gratefully thank and acknowledge the 723 individuals across Canada who completed this survey.

Introduction

Background

This project aims to investigate what people think and how people feel about Amber Alerts and the Alert Ready system in Canada.

Alert Ready is Canada's national emergency alert system. It is a mandatory system (meaning that individuals cannot opt in or out) that sends a message accompanied by a unique siren and vibration to all compatible cell phones near an emergency event. Alert Ready was launched in April 2018 and may be used to alert people of natural disasters, biological hazards, severe weather events, and Amber Alerts.

Amber Alerts are issued by law enforcement to advise the public when a child has been abducted or is deemed missing and at risk. They intend to ask for the public's help to safely and swiftly recover the child.

Using a mixed-methods approach with quantitative survey data and qualitative and quantitative social media data, this project seeks to understand the Canadian public's response to mandatory Amber Alerts sent to individuals' mobile/cell phones.

Report Structure

This document details the preliminary quantitative survey results of the PhD research project *Morals, Mobiles, and Mandatory Alerts: A Study of Amber Alerts and Canada's Emergency Alert System*. It is intended to provide summary results of the survey to those who participated, and others who are interested in this study.

The remaining introductory materials provide an overview of the survey's distribution and the final sample. The subsequent chapter, '[Attitudes Amongst the General Population](#)' outlines key findings from the descriptive statistics and major attitudinal trends. The final section of this report, '[Explanatory notes](#)', provides explanations and definitions of key terms and concepts, and details sample recruitment and the representativeness of the survey sample in comparison to Statistics Canada figures.

About the survey

The survey component of this study was distributed from 19th May 2019 – 6th June 2019 (Canadian time), with participants recruited via Qualtrics and completing the survey online in the Qualtrics portal. It will be referred to in this report as the *Morals, Mobiles, and Mandatory Alerts (MMMA)* survey.

The survey consisted of approximately 95 questions regarding attitudes towards Amber Alerts, Alert Ready, phone notifications, punitiveness, and morality, as well as demographic items. Further details on the distribution of the survey are located in the [Explanatory notes](#).

Data cleaning and final sample

In total, 723 completed survey responses were received over this period. A data cleaning process was undertaken following the standards for Moral Foundations studies, a theoretical framework which informs this project (Ciuk, 2018; Clifford, Iyengar, Cabeza, & Sinnott-Armstrong, 2015; Milesi, 2016; Nilsson, Erlandsson, & Västfjäll, 2016). Accordingly, respondents who did not pass attention-check questions ($n = 114$, 15.77%) and participants that appeared likely to have straight-lined responses ($n = 27$, 3.73%) were identified and removed listwise, resulting in a final sample of 582.

Timing of survey distribution

Surrounding the period of this survey's distribution, several key events related to Amber Alerts, missing children, and Alert Ready occurred in Canada. This included:

- The issuing of several Amber Alerts, as seen in Figure 1
- National Emergency Preparedness Week which involved mandatory Alert Ready tests sent to cell phones (May 6th 2019 – May 13th 2019)
- Public awareness campaign for Missing Children launched in Quebec (11th May 2019)
- International Missing Children's Day (25th May 2019)

Figure 1 below represents the relative popularity of searching for the term "Amber Alert" on Google per week between the period of 1st April 2018 – 31st August 2019 in Canada, on a scale of 0 – 100. This is included to provide an indicative timeline of potential public interest in Amber Alerts over this period (Choi & Varian, 2012; Mellon, 2014) and the relative timing of Amber Alerts being issued and the survey being distributed.

Relative Proportion of Canadian Google Searches for "Amber Alert" (01/04/2018 - 31/08/2019)

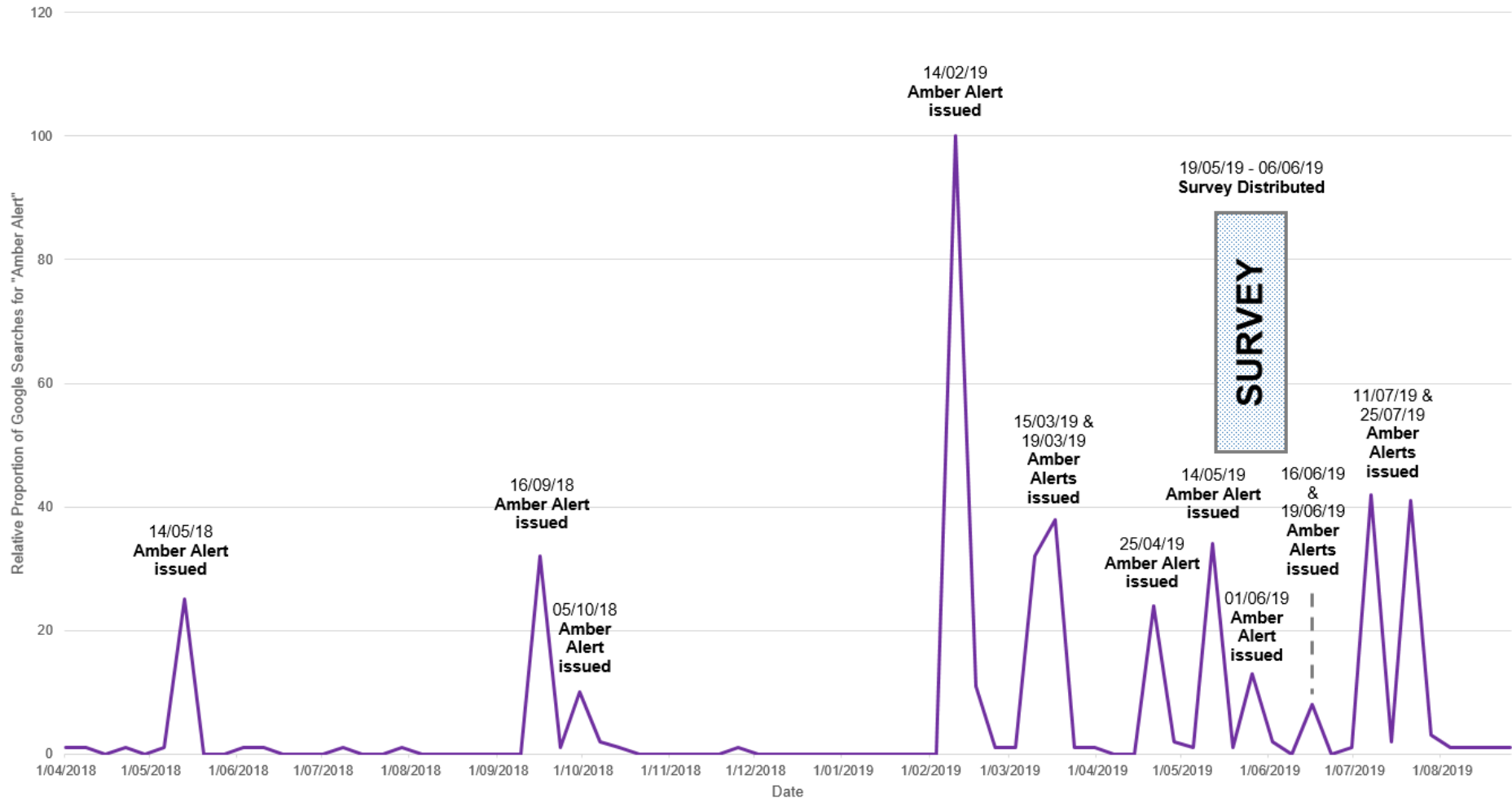


Figure 1. Relative proportion of Canadian Google searches for the term "Amber Alert" from 1st April 2018 – 31st August 2019.

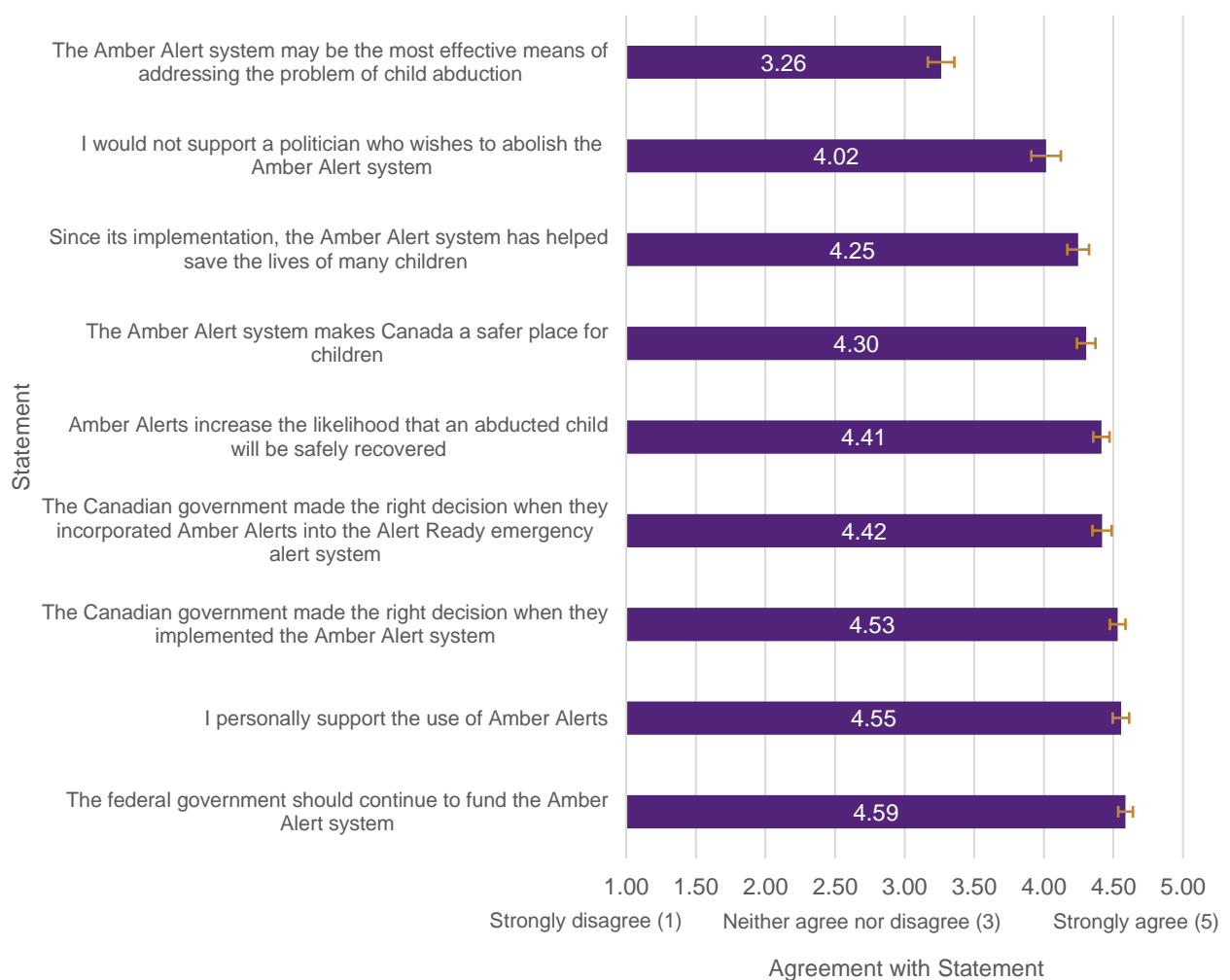
Attitudes Amongst the General Population

The following section outlines key descriptive findings from the survey. A complete table of the descriptive results is located in [Table 3](#).

Attitudes towards Amber Alerts

Overall, it appears that there were largely favourable attitudes towards the Amber Alert system in this sample of Canadians, as measured through the Amber Alert Attitudes Scale (Sicafuse & Miller, 2012). On a scale of 1 – 5, with values closer to 1 indicating less supportive attitudes and 5 indicating very favourable attitudes towards Amber Alerts, the average (\bar{x}) response to most questions from this part of the survey was favourable ($\bar{x} > 4.02$), with the exception of one item regarding the effectiveness of Amber Alerts ($\bar{x} = 3.26$).

Average (Mean) Attitudes Towards Statements About Amber Alerts, Including 95% Confidence Intervals

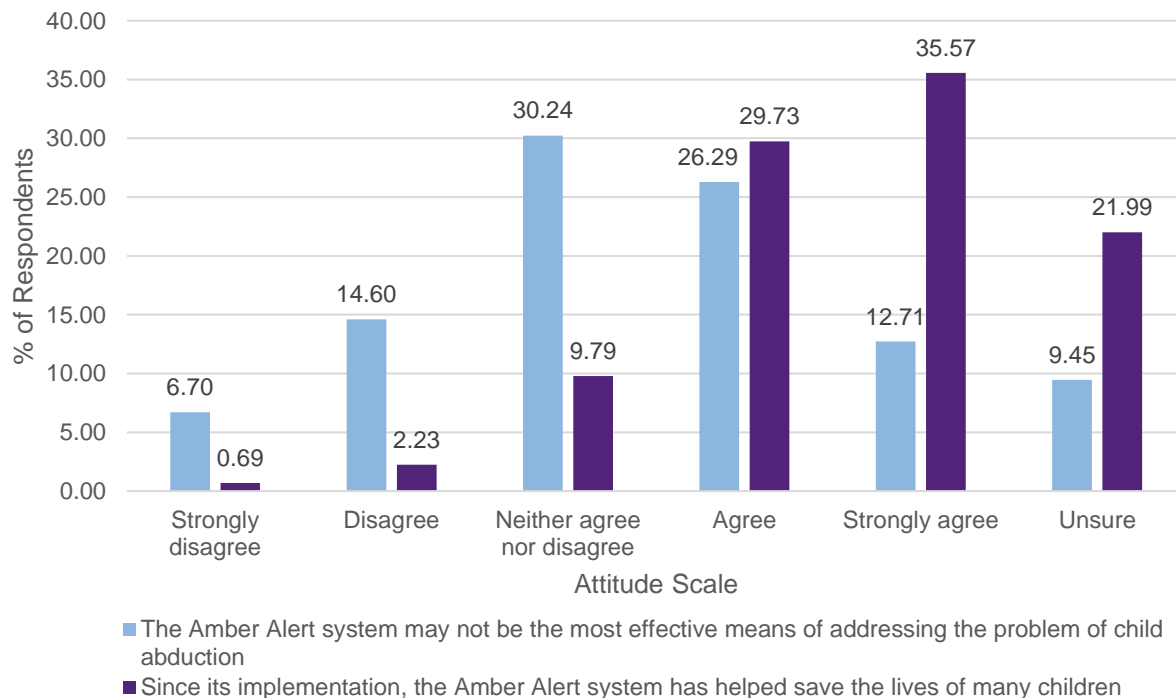


Note: Unsure responses were not included in these mean calculations

The item stating “The Amber Alert system may be the most effective means of addressing the problem of child abduction” resulted in the least agreement of all the statements ($\bar{x} = 3.26$, 95% CI [3.17, 3.36]), with most respondents (n = 176, 30.24%) indicating that they neither agreed nor disagreed, and 9.45% (n = 55) of participants responding that they were “unsure” or did not know about this statement.

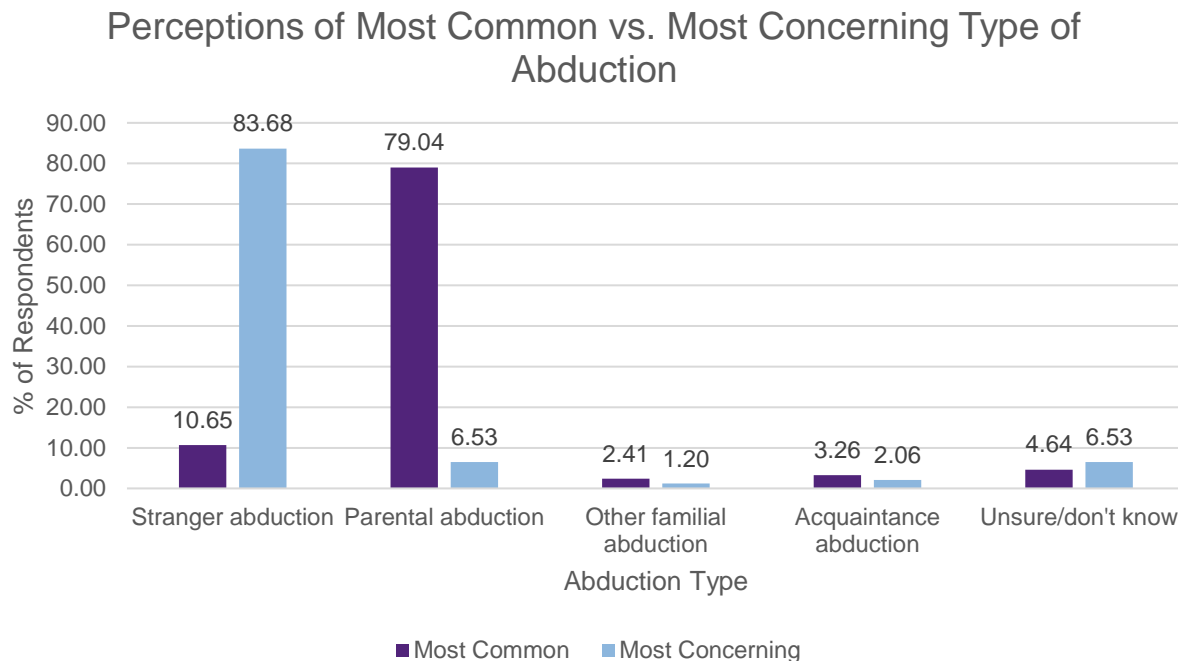
A large proportion of respondents also indicated that they were “unsure” of or did not know whether the Amber Alert system has helped to save the lives of many children (n = 128, 21.99%).

Amber Alert Statements with a Large Proportion of "Unsure" Responses



Perceptions of child abduction

When asked which type of child abduction they think is the most common in Canada, the majority of respondents indicated parental abduction (n = 460, 79.04%). In contrast, when asked which type of child abduction they think is the most concerning to the public, the most common response was stranger abduction (n = 487, 83.68%).



A chi-squared test of independence was conducted to determine whether there was a relationship between perceiving stranger abduction as the most *concerning* type of child abduction and perceiving parental abduction as the most *common* type of abduction. The association between these variables was not significant, although the p-value is close to significance, $\chi^2(1, n = 582) = 3.81, p = .051$. This indicates that perceiving stranger abduction as the most concerning type of abduction was not dependent upon perceiving parental abduction as the most common type of abduction.

Chi-squared tests of independence were also conducted between perceiving stranger abduction as the most concerning type of abduction and the control variables of:

- Gender
- Whether someone has dependent children under the age of 18
- Marital status
- Education
- Province or Territory
- Age
- Language spoken at home
- Whether someone indicated a religious affiliation, and
- Whether someone voted in the 2015 federal election

As detailed in Table 1 below, the associations between perceiving stranger abduction as the most concerning type of abduction and these control variables were not significant. Therefore perceiving stranger abduction as the most concerning type of abduction was not dependent upon any of the control variables listed, as indicated by the p-values $> .05$.

Table 1

Comparison of Characteristics by Perception of Stranger Abduction Being the Most Concerning Type of Abduction.

Characteristic	Sample	Chi-square tests of independence
Parental abduction as most common type of abduction <i>n</i> (%)	392 (85.22)	χ^2 (1) = 3.81 p = .051 ϕ = 0.08 n = 582
Gender <i>n</i> (%)		χ^2 (1) = 1.69
Male	240 (86.02)	p = .19
Female	247 (82.06)	ϕ = 0.05 n = 580
Dependent Children <i>n</i> (%)		χ^2 (2) = 4.81
Has dependent children	118 (85.51)	p = .09
Does not have dependent children	355 (83.92)	ϕ_c = 0.09
Prefer not to answer	14 (66.67)	n = 582
Marital status <i>n</i> (%)		χ^2 (1) = 0.04
Married	217 (84.11)	p = .84
Not Married	268 (83.49)	ϕ = 0.01 n = 579
Education <i>n</i> (%)		χ^2 (1) = 1.48
Does not have university Bachelor's degree	326 (84.90)	p = .22
Does have university Bachelor's degree or above	157 (80.93)	ϕ = 0.05 n = 578
Province or Territory <i>n</i> (%)		χ^2 (2) = 3.58
Ontario	182 (81.61)	p = .17
Quebec	114 (89.06)	ϕ_c = .08
Other	191 (82.68)	n = 582
Age <i>n</i> (%)		
18 – 24	48 (84.21)	χ^2 (3) = 1.83
25 – 44	152 (80.85)	p = .61
45 – 64	170 (85.86)	ϕ_c = 0.06
65 +	117 (84.17)	n = 582
Language spoken at home <i>n</i> (%)		χ^2 (1) = 2.55
English	396 (82.50)	p = .11
Other	89 (89.00)	ϕ = 0.07 n = 580
Religious status		χ^2 (2) = 0.94
Identified religion	297 (84.14)	p = .63
No religious affiliation	178 (83.57)	ϕ_c = 0.04
Prefer not to answer	12 (75.00)	n = 582
Voted in 2015 federal election <i>n</i> (%)		χ^2 (2) = 4.43
Voted	372 (84.74)	p = .11
Did not vote	106 (82.17)	ϕ_c = 0.09
Prefer not to answer	9 (64.29)	n = 582

Note: Unsure responses were excluded from these calculations

Indigenous status as a control variable has not been included here as some of the cell values in the chi-squared tests < 5

Income as a control variable has not been included here as the income categories result in degrees of freedom > 5

Chi-squared tests of independence between perceiving parental abduction as the most common type of abduction and the same control variables listed above were similarly conducted. As detailed in Table 2, the associations between perceiving parental abduction as the most common type of abduction and the variables below were significant:

- Marital status $\chi^2 (1, n = 579) = 15.13, p < .01$
- Province or Territory $\chi^2 (2, n = 582) = 22.18, p < .01$
- Age $\chi^2 (3, n = 582) = 47.61, p < .01$
- Language spoken at home $\chi^2 (1, n = 580) = 10.78, p < .01$
- Whether someone indicated a religious affiliation $\chi^2 (2, n = 582) = 8.81, p < 0.05$, and
- Whether someone voted in the 2015 federal election $\chi^2 (2, n = 582) = 27.04, p < .01$

Perceiving parental abduction as the most common type of abduction was therefore dependent upon the variables of marital status, Province or Territory location, age, language spoken at home, and whether one voted in the 2015 federal election.

Those who believe parental abduction is the most common type of abduction were more likely to be married (86.43%) than not married (73.21%), although the relationship is considered weak ($\phi = 0.16$). They were also more likely to be from Ontario (88.79%), compared to Quebec (69.53%) or other regions (74.89%), with this relationship being moderate ($\phi_c = 0.20$).

Individuals in the age bracket of 45-64 (86.87%) were more likely to believe that parental abduction is the most common type of abduction, as compared to 18-24-year-olds (45.61%), 25-44-year-olds (77.66%), and those aged 65 and above (83.45%). This relationship was also moderate ($\phi_c = 0.29$).

Those whose most common language at home is English were more likely to believe parental abduction is the most common type of abduction (81.67%), as compared to those who speak other languages (67.00%). This is however, considered a weak relationship ($\phi = 0.14$).

Individuals who did indicate a religious affiliation were more likely to believe parental abduction is the most common form of abduction (80.74%) in comparison to those who indicated no religious affiliation (78.40%), or preferred not to answer this question (50.00%). The association is noted as being weak ($\phi_c = 0.12$).

Finally, those who believe parental abduction is the most common type of abduction were more likely to have voted in the last federal election (83.60%) rather than not voted (67.44%), or having preferred not to answer that question (42.86%). This relationship was moderate ($\phi_c = 0.22$).

Table 2

Comparison of Characteristics by Perception of Parental Abduction Being the Most Common Type of Abduction.

Characteristic	Sample	Chi-square tests of independence
Stranger abduction as most concerning type of abduction <i>n</i> (%)	392 (80.49)	χ^2 (1) = 3.81 p = 0.51 ϕ = 0.08 n = 582
Gender <i>n</i> (%)		χ^2 (1) = 0.30 p = 0.58 ϕ = -0.02 n = 580
Male	223 (79.93)	
Female	235 (78.07)	
Dependent Children <i>n</i> (%)		χ^2 (2) = 3.91 p = 0.14 ϕ_c = 0.08 n = 582
Has dependent children	109 (78.99)	
Does not have dependent children	338 (79.91)	
Prefer not to answer	13 (61.90)	
Marital status <i>n</i> (%)		χ^2 (1) = 15.13 p = < .01 ϕ = 0.16 n = 579
Married	223 (86.43)	
Not Married	235 (73.21)	
Education <i>n</i> (%)		χ^2 (1) = 0.004 p = 0.95 ϕ = 0.003 n = 578
Does not have university Bachelor's degree	304 (79.17)	
Does have university Bachelor's degree or above	154 (79.38)	
Province or Territory <i>n</i> (%)		χ^2 (2) = 22.18 p = < .01 ϕ_c = 0.20 n = 582
Ontario	198 (88.79)	
Quebec	89 (69.53)	
Other	173 (74.89)	
Age <i>n</i> (%)		χ^2 (3) = 47.61 p = < .01 ϕ_c = 0.29 n = 582
18 – 24	26 (45.61)	
25 – 44	146 (77.66)	
45 – 64	172 (86.87)	
65 +	116 (83.45)	
Language spoken at home <i>n</i> (%)		χ^2 (1) = 10.78 p = < .01 ϕ = 0.14 n = 580
English	392 (81.67)	
Other	67 (67.00)	
Religious status		χ^2 (2) = 8.81 p = < .05 ϕ_c = 0.12 n = 582
Identified religion	285 (80.74)	
No religious affiliation	167 (78.40)	
Prefer not to answer	8 (50.00)	
Voted in 2015 federal election <i>n</i> (%)		χ^2 (2) = 27.04 p = < .01 ϕ_c = 0.22 n = 582
Voted	367 (83.60)	
Did not vote	87 (67.44)	
Prefer not to answer	6 (42.86)	

Note: Unsure responses were excluded from these calculations

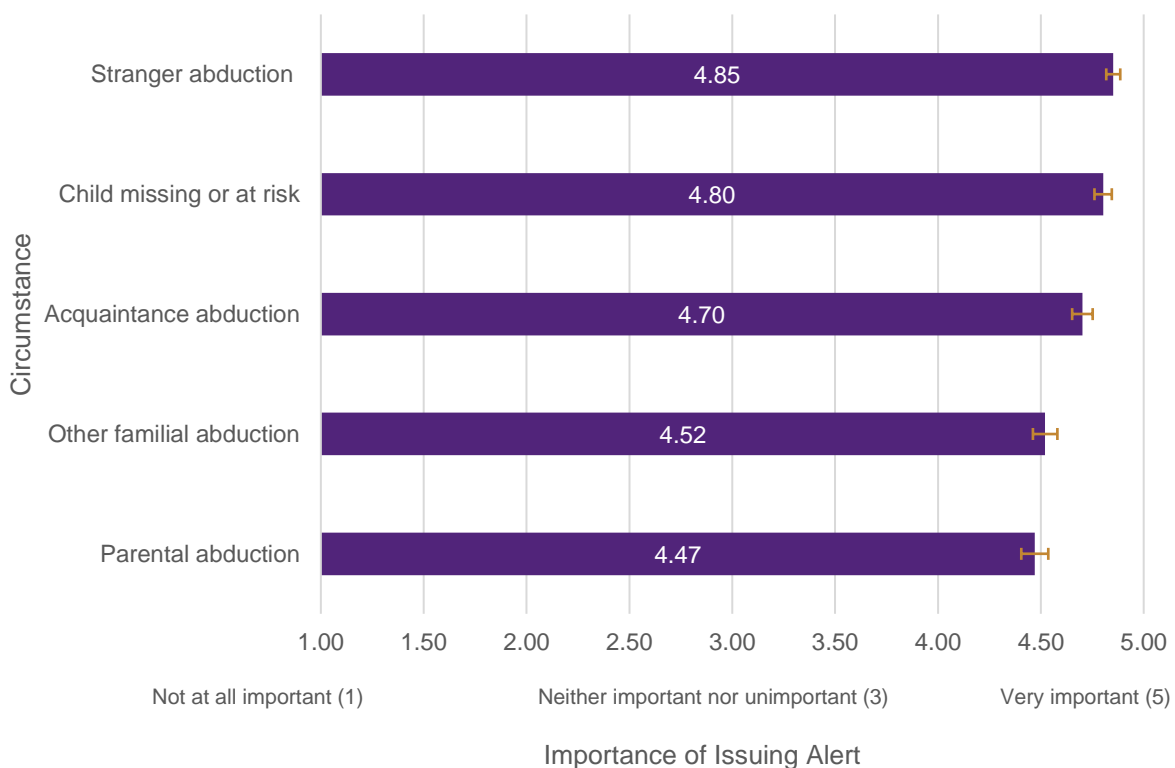
Perceived importance of Issuing Amber Alerts

With regards to how important this Canadian sample thinks it is to issue an Amber Alert depending upon the type of abduction or missing child circumstance, the average (\bar{x}) responses show there was high importance placed upon issuing an Amber Alert in each scenario. On a scale of 1 – 5, with values closer to 1 indicating it is “not at all important” to issue an Amber Alert and 5 indicating it is “very important”, the minimum average (\bar{x}) for each abduction type was ≥ 4.47 , showing high perceived importance for all circumstances.

The perceived importance of issuing an Amber Alert for each scenario is listed in order of highest to lowest average below:

- Stranger abduction ($\bar{x} = 4.85$, 95% CI [4.89, 4.82])
- Cases in which a child is deemed missing or at risk ($\bar{x} = 4.80$, 95% CI [4.75, 4.84]),
- Acquaintance abduction ($\bar{x} = 4.70$, 95% CI [4.65, 4.75])
- Other familial abduction ($\bar{x} = 4.52$, 95% CI [4.46, 4.58])
- Parental abduction ($\bar{x} = 4.47$, 95% CI [4.40, 4.54]).

Perceived Importance of Issuing an Amber Alert by Circumstance, Including 95% Confidence Intervals

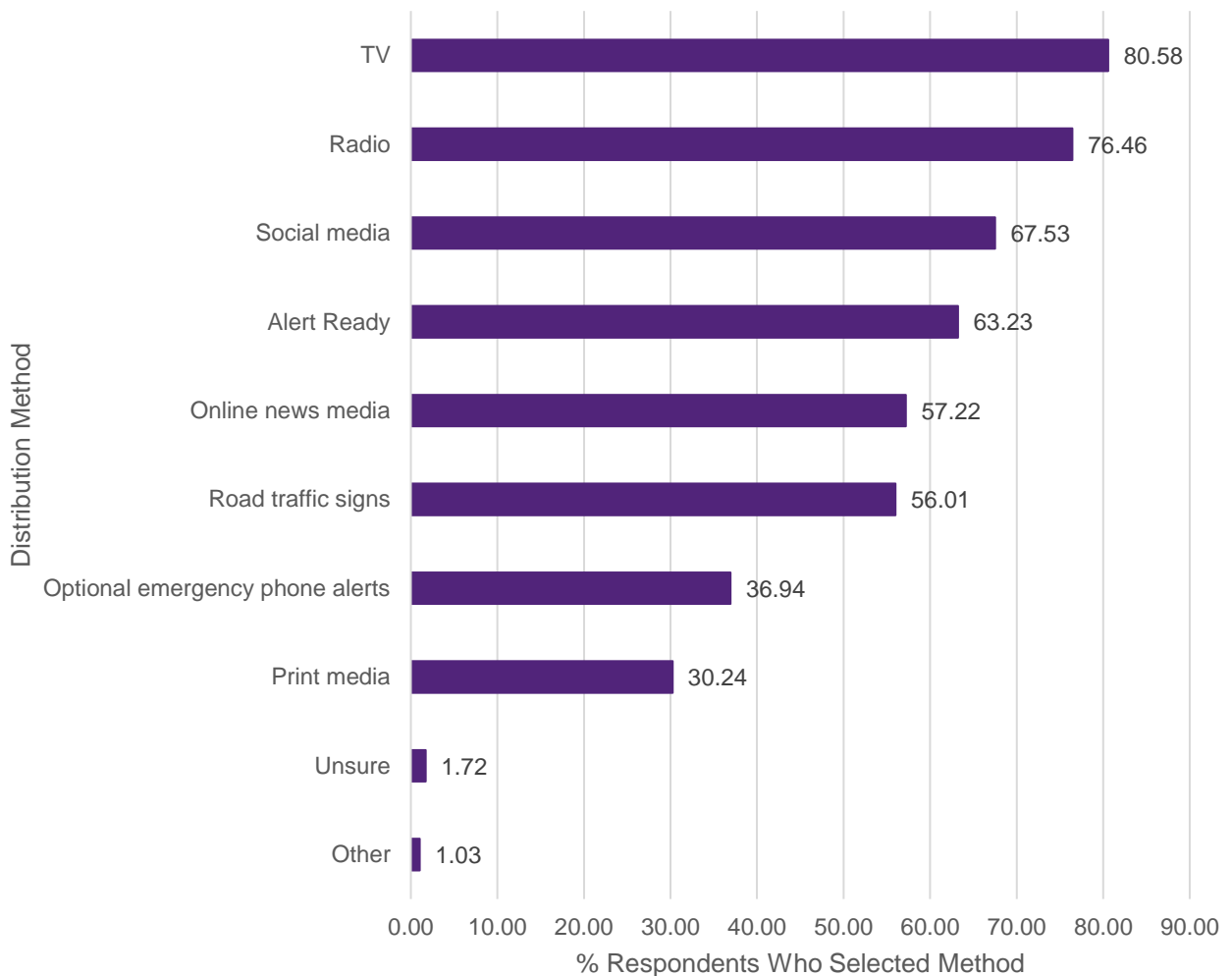


Note: Unsure responses were not included in these mean calculations

Amber Alert issuing methods

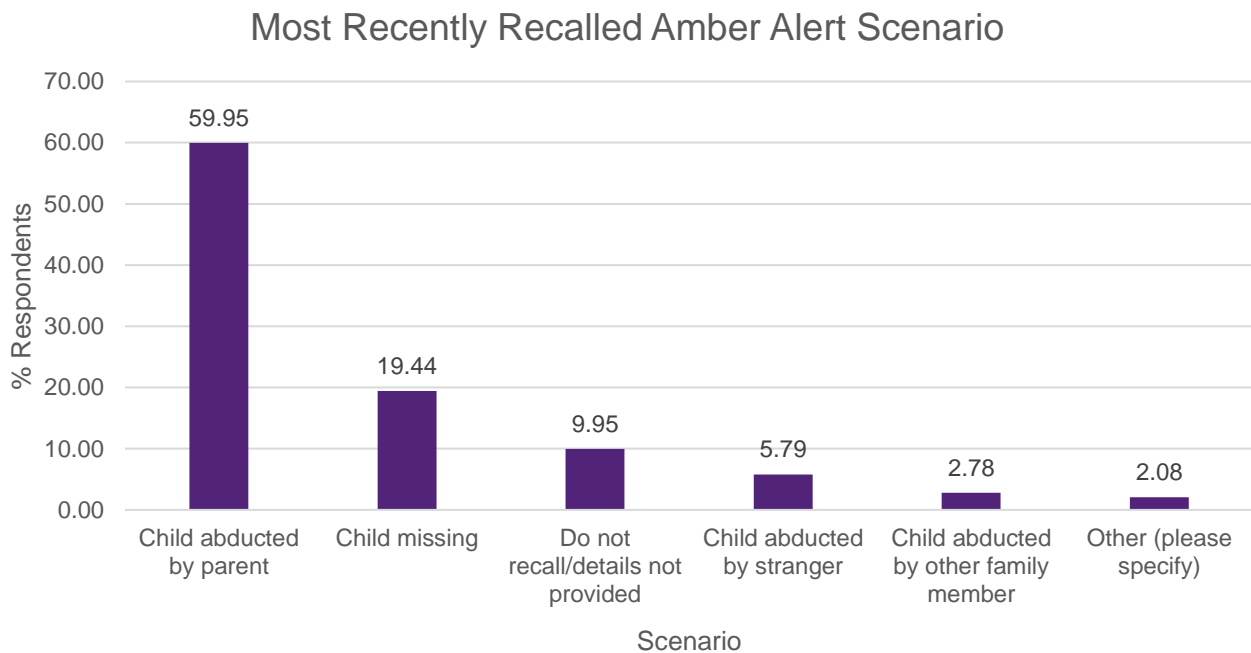
When asked which method of distribution is the most appropriate way to issue an Amber Alert, the majority of respondents indicated TV (n = 469, 80.58%), followed by radio (n = 445, 76.46%), social media (n = 393, 67.53%), Alert Ready (n = 368, 63.23%), online news media (n = 333, 57.22%), road traffic signs (n = 326, 56.01%), optional cell phone alerts (n = 215, 36.94%), and print media (n = 176, 30.24%).

Pereceived Most Appropriate Methods to Issue Amber Alerts



Amber Alert recollection

The majority of respondents recalled the last time they noticed an Amber Alert (n = 432, n = 74.23%), with this most commonly being an Alert issued within the past month (n = 160, 37.04%) and involving parental abduction (n = 259, 59.95%).



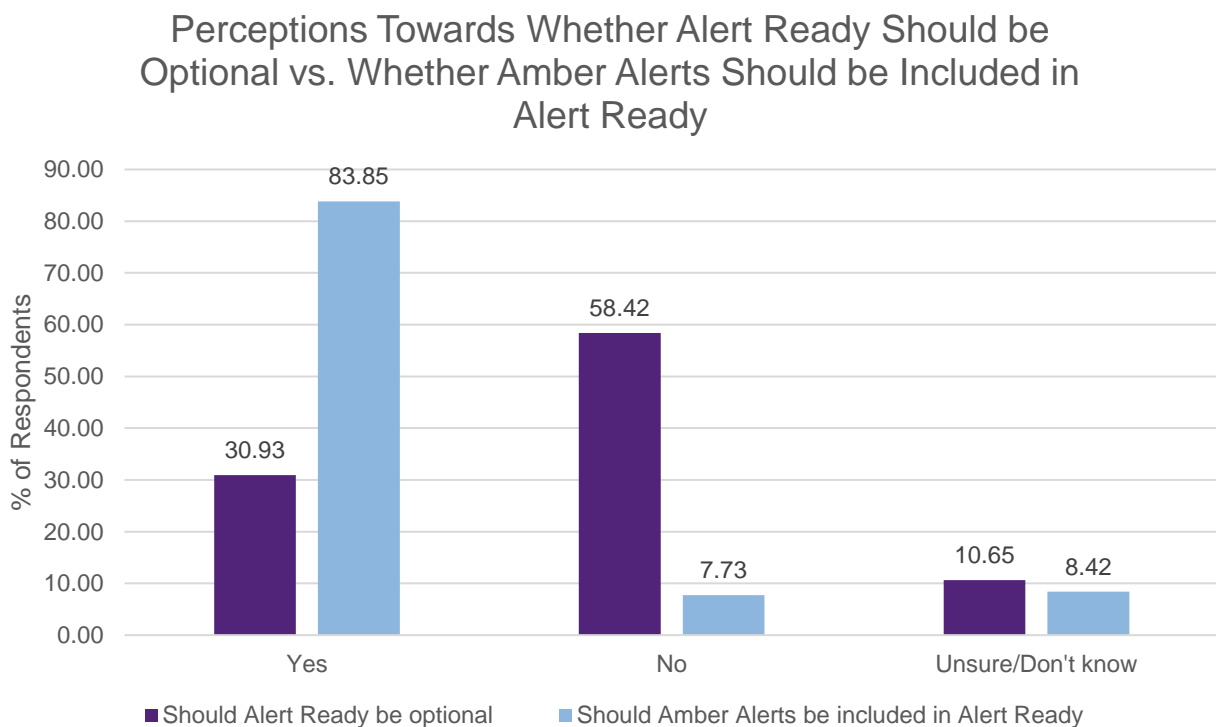
Most of the respondents who had recalled the last Amber Alert they received indicated this was via Alert Ready (n = 239, 55.32%), followed by TV (n = 188, 43.52%), and social media (n = 81, 18.75%).

The least commonly recalled methods of receiving an Amber Alert were via print media (n = 5, 1.16%), road traffic signs (n = 29, 6.71%), and online news media (n = 32, 7.41%).

Alert Ready issuing

When asked whether Alert Ready cell phone messages should be optional, most indicated that they should not be optional (n = 340, 58.42%), with 10.65% (n = 62) responding that they were unsure or did not know.

With regards to whether Amber Alerts should be included as part of the Alert Ready system, most respondents indicated that Amber Alerts should be included (n = 488, 83.85%), and 8.42% (n = 49) responded that they were unsure or did not know.



The survey asked individuals to indicate the importance of issuing an Alert Ready notification for various emergency events, all of which are listed on the official Alert Ready website as the different emergency types. On a scale of 1 – 5, with 1 representing “not at all important” and 5 indicating “very important”, the minimum average (\bar{x}) response to the importance of issuing an Alert Ready notification for each emergency scenario was slightly above “rather important” ($\bar{x} \geq 4.32$).

On average, terrorist events were rated as the most important ($\bar{x} = 4.75$, 95% CI [4.70, 4.80]) emergency for which to issue an Alert, with civil emergencies rated as the least important ($\bar{x} = 4.32$, 95% CI [4.24, 4.39]).

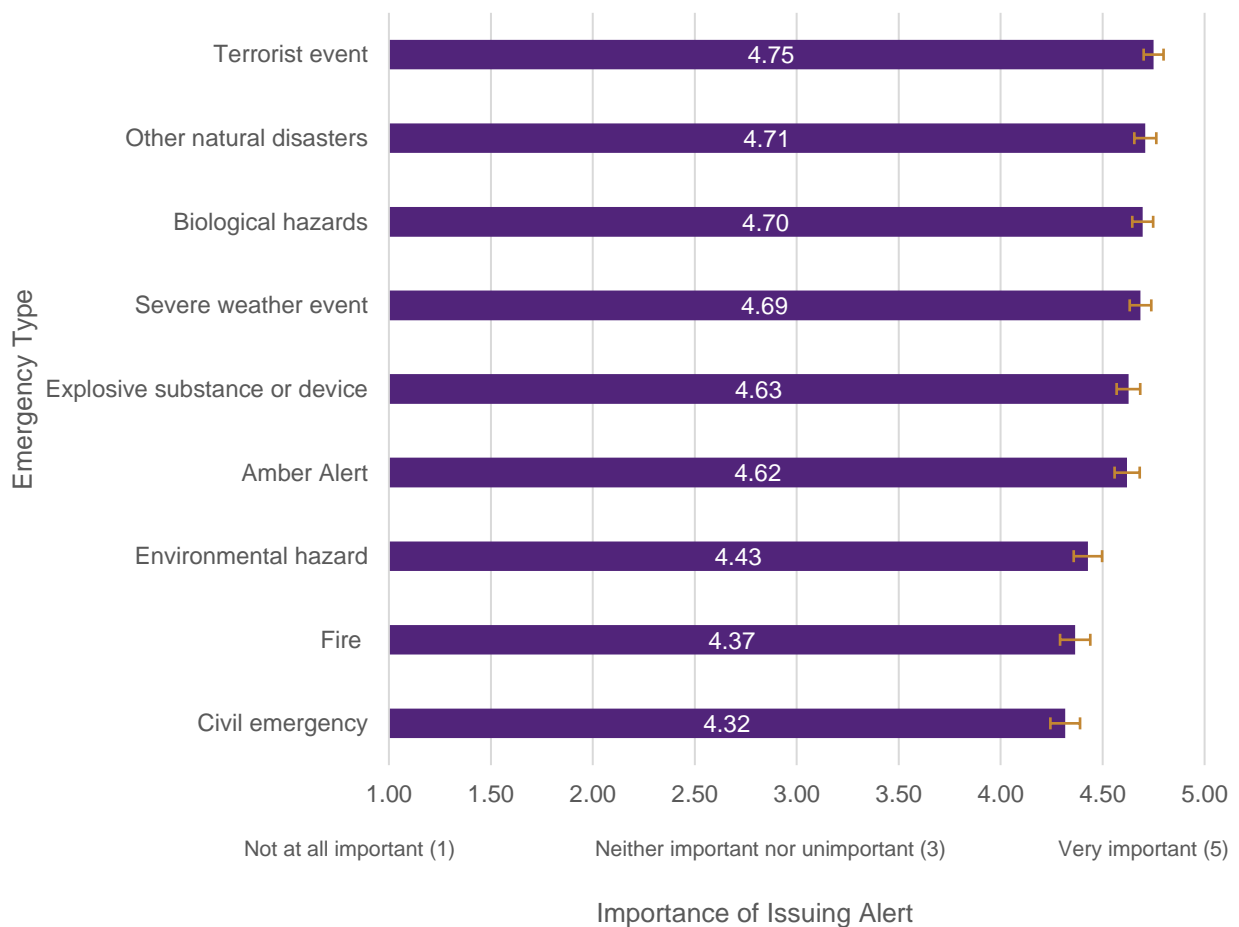
Amber Alerts were the sixth most important emergency to issue an Alert Ready notification for ($\bar{x} = 4.62$, 95% CI [4.56, 4.68]), averaging above:

- Civil emergencies ($\bar{x} = 4.32$, 95% CI [4.24, 4.39])
- Fire ($\bar{x} = 4.37$, 95% CI [4.29, 4.44]), and
- Environmental hazards ($\bar{x} = 4.43$, 95% CI [4.36, 4.50]).

Amber Alerts averaged lower importance compared to:

- Emergencies involving an explosive substance or device ($\bar{x} = 4.63$, 95% CI [4.57, 4.68])
- Severe weather event ($\bar{x} = 4.69$, 95% CI [4.63, 4.74])
- Biological hazards ($\bar{x} = 4.70$, 95% CI [4.65, 4.75])
- Other natural disasters ($\bar{x} = 4.71$, 95% CI [4.66, 4.76]), and
- Terrorist event ($\bar{x} = 4.75$, 95% CI [4.70, 4.80])

Perceived Importance of Issuing Alert Ready by Emergency Type, Including 95% Confidence Intervals



Note: Unsure responses were not included in these mean calculations

Phone notifications

Respondents were asked to indicate how much they agree or disagree with five statements about how important it is to control various features of notifications sent to their cell phone. Responses closer to 1 indicated less agreement and those closer to 5 indicated strong agreement, with 3 allowing participants to indicate that they neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. Specifically, the survey asked respondents to indicate how much they agree or disagree with the following statements, ranked in order of highest average (\bar{x}) agreement:

- It is important to me that I can control what notifications I receive on my cell phone ($\bar{x} = 3.96$, 95% CI [3.87, 4.05])
- It is important to me that I can refuse to receive notifications on my cell phone ($\bar{x} = 3.71$, 95% CI [3.61, 3.81])
- It is important to me that I be able to choose whether or not to receive emergency alert notifications on my cell phone ($\bar{x} = 2.86$, 95% CI [2.74, 2.97])
- It is important to me that I be able to control at what times of the day I receive emergency alert notifications on my cell phone ($\bar{x} = 2.67$, 95% CI [2.55, 2.78])
- It is important to me that I be able to choose what types of emergencies I receive emergency alert notifications for on my cell phone ($\bar{x} = 2.94$, 95% CI [2.82, 3.06])

Punitiveness

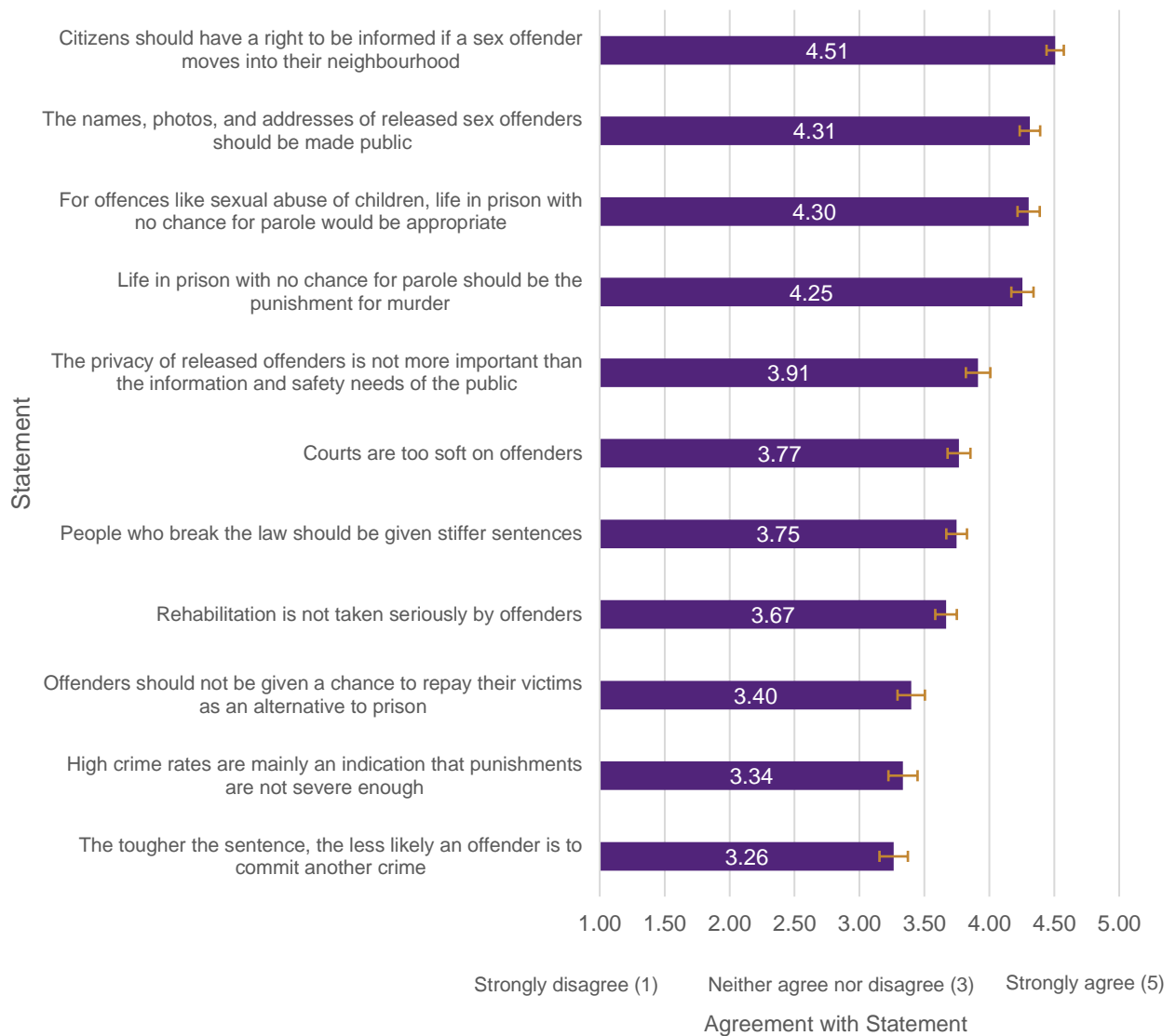
Eleven statements regarding attitudes towards offenders and criminal punishment were asked in the survey, with respondents indicating their agreement with these on a scale of (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. Overall, it appeared that statements regarding sex offenders and murder resulted in slightly more punitive attitudes, as indicated by their higher mean values.

The highest average (\bar{x}) agreement was with regards to citizens having a right to be informed if a sex offender moves into their neighbourhood ($\bar{x} = 4.51$, 95% CI [4.44, 4.57]). This was followed by:

- Making public the names, photos, and addresses of released sex offenders ($\bar{x} = 4.31$, 95% CI [4.23, 4.39])
- For offences like sexual abuse of children, life in prison with no chance for parole would be appropriate ($\bar{x} = 4.30$, 95% CI [4.22, 4.39]), and
- Life in prison with no chance for parole should be the punishment for murder ($\bar{x} = 4.25$, 95% CI [4.17, 4.34]).

The lowest average agreement was with regards to the statement “the tougher the sentence, the less likely an offender is to commit another crime” ($\bar{x} = 3.26$, 95% CI [3.15, 3.37]).

Mean Scores for Agreement with Punitiveness Statements, Including 95% Confidence Intervals



Note: Unsure responses were not included in these mean calculations

Moral Foundations

Moral Foundation scores for each respondent were calculated based upon their responses to a series of items related to each foundation. These scores consist of the average of the items that compose each respective moral construct (Moral Foundations Organisation, 2013). They will be used in subsequent multivariate analyses to investigate whether these Moral Foundations are relevant to attitudes and perceptions measured in this survey. The mean, median, standard deviation, and α for each moral foundation are reported in [Table 3](#).

Descriptives table

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics for Control, Dependent, and Independent Variables.

Variable	% of <i>n</i>	% of valid <i>n</i>	Count	M	Mdn	Range	SD	Valid <i>n</i>	α	PNA ^a	Unsure / Don't know	N/A ^b	% of unsure/don't know, PNA, and N/A responses ^c
Control Variables													
Age				48.69	49.5	67 (18, 85)	16.73	582					
Year of birth				1969.60	1969	68 (1933, 2001)	16.72	582					
Sex (female)	51.72	51.90	301	0.52	1	1 (0,1)	0.50	580		2 ^d			0.003
Region (Ontario)	38.32	38.32	223	2.65	2	9 (1, 10)	1.98	582					
Language spoken at home (English)	82.47	82.47	480	0.83	1	1 (0, 1)	0.38	582		2			0.34
Indigenous status (No)	96.22	97.22	560	0.03	0	1 (0, 1)	0.16	576		6			1.03
Married (Yes)	44.33	44.56	258	0.45	0	1 (0, 1)	0.50	579		3			0.52
Dependent children (yes)	23.71	24.60	138	0.25	0	1 (0, 1)	0.43	561		21			3.61
Number of dependent children				0.40	0	4 (0, 4)	0.79	561		21			3.61
Household income				4.07	4	7 (1, 8)	2.04	547		35			6.01
Education (non-university graduate)	65.98	66.44	384	0.34	0	1 (0, 1)	0.47	578		4			0.69
Religious (yes)	60.65	62.37	353	0.62	1	1 (0, 1)	0.48	566		16			2.75
Voted in 2015 election (yes)	75.43	77.29	439	1.23	1	1 (0, 1)	0.42	568		14			2.41
Voted Liberal in 2015 election	37.29	51.91	217	1.69	1	2 (1, 3)	0.80	418		21		143	28.18
Political views (left to right)				5.19	5	9 (1, 10)	2.14	484			98		16.84
Attitudes Towards Amber Alerts													

Amber Alert system makes Canada a safer place for children	4.30	4	4 (1, 5)	0.81	572	10	1.72
The Government should continue to fund the Amber Alert system	4.59	5	4 (1, 5)	0.64	574	8	1.37
Personally supports the use of Amber Alerts	4.55	5	4 (1, 5)	0.72	576	6	1.03
Would not support a politician who wishes to abolish the Amber Alert system	4.02	5	4 (1, 5)	1.29	567	15	2.58
Amber Alerts increase the likelihood that a child will be safely recovered	4.41	5	4 (1, 5)	0.71	566	16	2.75
Amber Alerts may be the most effective means of addressing the problem of child abduction	3.26	3	4 (1, 5)	1.11	527	55	9.45
The government made the right decision when they implemented the Amber Alert system	4.53	5	4 (1, 5)	0.68	573	9	1.55
Since its implementation, the Amber Alert system has helped save the lives of many children	4.25	4	4 (1, 5)	0.85	454	128	21.99
The government made the right decision when they incorporated Amber Alerts into the Alert Ready system	4.42	5	4 (1, 5)	0.84	567	15	2.58

Perceptions of Abduction and Amber Alert Distribution

Type of child abduction perceived as most common in Canada (parental)	79.04	82.88	460	2.12	2	4 (1, 5)	0.82	555	27	4.64
Type of child abduction perceived as most concerning in Canada (stranger)	83.68	89.52	487	1.14	1	4 (1, 5)	1.08	544	38	6.53
Importance of issuing an Amber Alert in the event of a stranger abduction	4.85	5	3 (2, 5)	0.42	581	1	0.17			
Importance of issuing an Amber Alert in the event of a parental abduction	4.47	5	4 (1, 5)	0.80	576	6	1.03			
Importance of issuing an Amber Alert in the event of other familial abduction	4.52	5	4 (1, 5)	0.73	574	8	1.37			
Importance of issuing an Amber Alert in the event of an acquaintance abduction	4.70	5	4 (1, 5)	0.61	574	8	1.37			

Importance of issuing an Amber Alert in the event of a child missing/at risk				4.80	5	3 (2, 5)	0.52	578		4	0.69
It is appropriate to issue an Amber Alert via Alert Ready	63.23	63.23	368	0.63	1	1 (0, 1)	0.48	582			
It is appropriate to issue an Amber Alert via optional emergency phone alerts	36.94	36.94	215	0.37	0	1 (0, 1)	0.48	582			
It is appropriate to issue an Amber Alert via TV	80.58	80.58	469	0.81	1	1 (0, 1)	0.40	582			
It is appropriate to issue an Amber Alert via radio	76.46	76.46	445	0.76	1	1 (0, 1)	0.43	582			
It is appropriate to issue an Amber Alert via road traffic signs	56.01	56.01	326	0.56	1	1 (0, 1)	0.50	582			
It is appropriate to issue an Amber Alert via print media	30.24	30.24	176	0.30	0	1 (0, 1)	0.46	582			
It is appropriate to issue an Amber Alert via social media	67.53	67.53	393	0.68	1	1 (0, 1)	0.47	582			
It is appropriate to issue an Amber Alert via online news media	57.22	57.22	333	0.57	1	1 (0, 1)	0.50	582			
It is appropriate to issue an Amber Alert via other means	1.03	1.03	6	0.01	0	1 (0, 1)	0.10	582			
Unsure by which methods it is appropriate to issue an Amber Alert	1.72	1.72	10	0.02	0	1 (0, 1)	0.13	582			
Think Amber Alerts should be part of Alert Ready (yes)	83.85	91.56	488	0.92	1	1 (0, 1)	0.28	533		49	8.42
Amber Alert Recollection											
Recall the last time noticed an Amber Alert (yes)	74.23	74.23	432	1.26	1	1 (0, 1)	0.44	582			
How long ago noticed Amber Alert (within past month)	27.49	37.04	160	2.15	2	3 (1, 4)	1.03	432		8	1.37
Recall details of last Amber Alert (abducted by parent)	44.50	59.95	259	2.82	2	4 (1, 5)	1.41	432		150	25.77
Noticed last Amber Alert via Alert Ready	41.07	55.32	239	0.55	1	1 (0, 1)	0.50	432		150	25.77
Noticed last Amber Alert via TV	32.30	43.52	188	0.44	0	1 (0, 1)	0.50	432		150	25.77
Noticed last Amber Alert via radio	11.86	15.97	69	0.16	0	1 (0, 1)	0.37	432		150	25.77

Noticed last Amber Alert via road traffic sign	4.98	6.71	29	0.07	0	1 (0, 1)	0.25	432	150	25.77
Noticed last Amber Alert via print media	0.86	1.16	5	0.01	0	1 (0, 1)	0.11	432	150	25.77
Noticed last Amber Alert via social media	13.92	18.75	81	0.19	0	1 (0, 1)	0.39	432	150	25.77
Noticed last Amber Alert via online news media	5.50	7.41	32	0.07	0	1 (0, 1)	0.26	432	150	25.77
Noticed last Amber Alert via other means	1.03	1.39	6	0.01	0	1 (0, 1)	0.12	432	150	25.77
Attitudes Towards Controlling Personal Phone										
Importance of being able to control phone notifications				3.96	4	4 (1, 5)	1.11	577	5	0.86
Importance of being able to refuse phone notifications				3.71	4	4 (1, 5)	1.21	575	7	1.20
Importance of being able to choose whether to receive emergency alert phone notifications				2.86	3	4 (1, 5)	1.44	577	5	0.86
Importance of being able to control time receive emergency alert phone notifications				2.67	2	4 (1, 5)	1.38	569	13	2.23
Importance of being able to control types of emergencies receive phone notifications for				2.94	3	4 (1, 5)	1.44	576	6	1.03
Alert Ready Issuing										
Think Alert Ready notifications should be optional (no)	58.42	65.38	340	0.35	0	1 (0, 1)	0.48	520	62	10.65
Importance to receive Alert Ready notification for fire				4.37	5	4 (1, 5)	0.90	572	10	1.72
Importance to receive Alert Ready notification for severe weather event				4.69	5	4 (1, 5)	0.65	579	3	0.52
Importance to receive Alert Ready notification for other natural disasters				4.71	5	4 (1, 5)	0.66	578	4	0.69
Importance to receive Alert Ready notification for biological hazards				4.70	5	4 (1, 5)	0.63	580	2	0.34

Importance to receive Alert Ready notification for explosive substance or device	4.63	5	4 (1, 5)	0.70	573	9	1.55
Importance to receive Alert Ready notification for environmental hazard	4.43	5	4 (1, 5)	0.85	575	7	1.20
Importance to receive Alert Ready notification for terrorist event	4.75	5	4 (1, 5)	0.60	576	6	1.03
Importance to receive Alert Ready notification for Amber Alert	4.62	5	4 (1, 5)	0.75	574	8	1.37
Importance to receive Alert Ready notification for civil emergency	4.32	5	4 (1, 5)	0.89	575	7	1.20
Punitiveness							
Life in prison with no chance for parole should be the punishment for murder	4.25	5	4 (1, 5)	1.03	561	21	3.61
People who break the law should be given stiffer sentences	3.75	4	4 (1, 5)	0.97	572	10	1.72
The tougher the sentence, the less likely an offender is to commit another crime	3.26	3	4 (1, 5)	1.32	558	24	4.12
The names, photos, and addresses of released sex offenders should be made public	4.31	5	4 (1, 5)	0.95	563	19	3.26
Rehabilitation is not taken seriously by offenders	3.67	4	4 (1, 5)	0.98	543	39	6.70
High crime rates are mainly an indication that punishments are not severe enough	3.34	3	4 (1, 5)	1.35	558	24	4.12
Citizens should have a right to be informed if a sex offender moves into their neighbourhood	4.51	5	4 (1, 5)	0.81	570	12	2.06
Offenders should not be given a chance to repay their victims as an alternative to prison	3.40	3	4 (1, 5)	1.25	542	40	6.87
Courts are too soft on offenders	3.77	4	4 (1, 5)	1.06	561	21	3.61
For offences like sexual abuse of children, life in prison with no chance for parole would be appropriate	4.30	5	4 (1, 5)	1.03	555	27	4.64

The privacy of released offenders is not more important than the information and safety needs of the public	3.91	4	4 (1, 5)	1.14	567		15	2.58
Moral Foundations Items								
Individualising Foundations (Harm & Fairness)			5 (0, 5)		582			0.81
Binding Foundations (Ingroup, Authority, Purity)			5 (0, 5)		582			0.83
Moral Foundations 20 Scale			5 (0, 5)		582			0.87
Moral Foundations Liberty 9 Scale			5 (0, 5)		582			0.69
Harm Foundation	3.59	3.63	5 (0, 5)	0.84	582			0.69
Fairness Foundation	3.67	3.75	5 (0, 5)	0.75	582			0.63
Ingroup Foundation	2.79	2.75	5 (0, 5)	0.93	582			0.59
Authority Foundation	2.86	3.00	5 (0, 5)	0.88	582			0.57
Purity Foundation	3.02	3.00	5 (0, 5)	1.05	582			0.72
Lifestyle Liberty Foundation	3.16	3.33	5 (0, 5)	0.99	582			0.55
Economic/Government Liberty Foundation	2.98	3.00	5 (0, 5)	0.77	582			0.57

^a Prefer not to answer responses

^b Not applicable responses

^c Cumulative proportion of unsure/don't know, prefer not to answer, and not applicable responses

^d Two respondents indicated 'Other' for whether they identify as Male, Female, or Other

Explanatory notes

Definitions

Acquaintance abduction: a type of abduction in which the child is taken by a non-family acquaintance or person known to the child/family (e.g. a neighbour or family friend).

Alert Ready: Canada's national emergency alert system which sends mandatory messages, accompanied by a vibration and unique siren, to peoples' cell phones if they are near an emergency event. The official Alert Ready website is located here <https://www.alertready.ca/>

Amber Alert: an emergency communication issued by law enforcement to the public via several communication methods if a child has been abducted or it is believed that they are in imminent danger. They seek to gain the public's help in quickly and safely recovering the child.

Biological hazard: a situation potentially deemed as an emergency and which may result in an Alert Ready notification being issued. Canadian officials included this type of event in Alert Ready as it could represent a threat to life. Examples include drinking water contamination, chemical, biological, or radiological hazard.

Child goes missing and is deemed 'at risk': a scenario in which an Amber Alert may be issued if a child has gone missing and is considered at higher risk of harm due to their young age or a medical condition.

Civil emergency: a situation potentially deemed as an emergency and which may result in an Alert Ready notification being issued. Canadian officials included this type of event in Alert Ready as it could represent a threat to life. Examples include dangerous animal and 911 service disruption.

Environmental hazard: a situation potentially deemed as an emergency and which may result in an Alert Ready notification being issued. Canadian officials included this type of event in Alert Ready as it could represent a threat to life. Examples include air quality compromise and falling object.

Moral Foundations: a psychological theory used across various disciplines, including criminology and social science, to understand and explain attitudes towards morally contentious topics and phenomena.

Other familial abduction: a type of abduction in which a child is taken by some other family member (e.g. aunt or uncle, grandparent, etc.), without the consent of the custodial parent/guardian.

Other natural disasters: a situation potentially deemed as an emergency and which may result in an Alert Ready notification being issued. Canadian officials included this type of event in Alert Ready as it could represent a threat to life. Examples include landslide, earthquake, volcanic eruption, tsunami, and dam overflow.

Parental abduction: a type of abduction in which a child is taken by a parent without the consent of the custodial parent/guardian, or in violation of a custody arrangement.

Severe weather event: a situation potentially deemed as an emergency and which may result in an Alert Ready notification being issued. Canadian officials included this type of event in Alert Ready as it could represent a threat to life. Examples include tornado, storm surge, flash flood, and hurricane.

Stranger abduction: a type of abduction in which a child is taken by an unknown stranger.

Survey mode and participant recruitment

The survey was conducted online via the Qualtrics survey portal. Participants were recruited via Qualtrics' online sampling which uses a random process to contact individuals who have opted-in to Qualtrics' research panel database. The sampling requirements for this survey were that individuals had to be aged 18 years or over and own a smartphone, as Alert Ready notifications are only issued to smartphones. The following sampling quotas based upon Statistics Canada (2019) figures were provided to Qualtrics for this study in efforts to obtain as close to a representative sample of the Canadian population as possible:

Table 4
Quotas Provided to Qualtrics for Participant Recruitment.

Demographic/sample characteristic	Desired quota
Age	
18 – 24	11%
25 – 44	34%
45 – 64	34%
65+	21%
Gender	
Male	50%
Female	50%
Region	
Ontario	38%
Quebec	23%
British Columbia	13%
Alberta	12%
Manitoba	4%
Nova Scotia	3%
Saskatchewan	3%
New Brunswick	2%
Newfoundland and Labrador	1%
Prince Edward Island	<1% ^a
Yukon	<1% ^a
Northwest Territories	<1% ^a
Nunavut	<1% ^a

Note: The remaining 1% of the sample was requested to be comprised of residents from Prince Edward Island, Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut

Individuals who were likely to meet these criteria were contacted either via email, their online panel portal, in-app notifications, or SMS notifications from Qualtrics. The survey invitations Qualtrics distributes are general in wording in an effort to avoid self-selection bias.

Before commencing the survey, a Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form was provided and is attached as [Appendix A](#) in this report. Individuals were advised that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time before the completion of the survey. They were also able to complete the survey in either English or Canadian French. As an acknowledgement of participation, those who completed the survey received a token of appreciation via Qualtrics, with the funding for this provided by the School of Social Science Higher Degree Research Bursary and the author of this report. There are numerous factors which impact the form of this token of appreciation, with Qualtrics noting that it may be monetary or include "...airline miles, gift cards, redeemable points, charitable donations, sweepstakes entrance, and vouchers" (Qualtrics, 2019, p. 4).

In total, 3,609 individuals approached the survey with the first 723 who completed the survey being the respondents for this study. Unfortunately, due to funding constraints the project was unable to obtain a larger sample via the Qualtrics sampling and compensation method. The survey was distributed from 19th May 2019 – 6th June 2019 (Canadian time).

Sample representativeness

During the survey design and recruitment processes, efforts were made in collaboration with the survey distributor, Qualtrics, to obtain a representative sample of the Canadian population. This includes requesting respondent quotas for different age groups, genders, and regional locations as benchmarks to try and obtain a highly representative sample (see Table 4 above).

It is noted that no sample will be completely representative of a population. Comparisons between the demographic characteristics of the survey sample, figures reported by 2019 government population estimates (Statistics Canada, 2020), and the 2016 Census (Statistics Canada, 2017) are detailed below. Notable differences between the sample and the population characteristics reported by or estimated by Statistics Canada include:

- The sample's median age (48.69) was greater than the population (40.80)
- Using the broadest age categories reported by Statistics Canada (2020) of 19-year age brackets and 18-24 years-old and 65+ years-old, the age representativeness was very similar to the population.
- When using 4-year age brackets, 20 – 24, 25 – 29, 80 – 84, and 85+ year-olds were slightly underrepresented ($\leq 2.83\%$). Those from the 35 – 39 and 70 – 74-year-old age groups were slightly overrepresented, and 65 – 69-year-olds were overrepresented by 6.50%
- Those who are non-English speakers at home were underrepresented, and at-home English speakers were overrepresented
- Most post-high school (or equivalent) education qualifications were overrepresented, and those who do not hold a certificate, diploma, or degree were underrepresented. It is noted however, that the Statistics Canada (2017) figures are based upon those aged 15 years or older, whilst the MMMA survey respondents were aged 18 years or older. This could potentially account for some of this discrepancy as 17-18 is the typically age of attaining a high school diploma in Canada (Education Canada, 2019), with only a small percentage of individuals having graduated high school by ages 16 – 17 (Statistics Canada, 2010)
- Those whose household income is $< \$40,000$ per year were underrepresented, and those earning $> \$80,000$ per year were largely overrepresented
- Individuals who identify as Aboriginal were slightly underrepresented

Table 5

Demographic Characteristics of the Morals, Mobiles, and Mandatory Alerts Survey Respondents and 2018 Statistics Canada Estimates (per cent).

Demographic/sample characteristic	MMMA 2019	Statistics Canada 2019	Difference MMM2019 – Statistics Canada 2019 (%)
Age			
18 – 24	9.80	11.14	-1.34
25 – 44	32.30	33.69	-1.39
45 – 64	34.00	33.46	0.54
65+	23.90	21.71	2.19
<i>Median age</i>	48.69	40.80	7.89
18 – 19	4.47	2.98	1.49
20 – 24	5.33	8.16	-2.83
25 – 29	6.36	8.65	-2.29
30 – 34	7.56	8.58	-1.02
35 – 39	10.65	8.50	2.15
40 – 44	7.73	7.97	-0.24
45 – 49	7.90	7.89	0.01
50 – 54	7.56	8.24	-0.68
55 – 59	9.45	9.05	0.40
60 – 64	9.11	8.27	0.84
65 – 69	13.40	6.90	6.50
70 – 74	8.25	5.62	2.63
75 – 79	1.89	3.83	-1.94
80 – 84	0.17	2.59	-2.42
85+	0.17	2.76	-2.59
Gender			
Male	47.94	49.69	-1.75
Female	51.72	50.31	1.41
Other	0.34	Not reported	
Region			
Ontario	38.30	38.75	-0.45
Quebec	22.00	22.57	-0.57
British Columbia	13.10	13.49	-0.39
Alberta	12.70	11.63	1.07
Manitoba	3.80	3.64	0.16
Nova Scotia	3.40	2.58	0.82
Saskatchewan	3.10	3.12	-0.02
New Brunswick	1.90	2.07	-0.17
Newfoundland and Labrador	1.00	1.39	-0.39
Prince Edward Island	0.70	0.42	0.28
Yukon	0.00	0.11	-0.11
Northwest Territories	0.00	0.12	-0.12
Nunavut	0.00	0.10	-0.1

Note. Negative % indicates the sample underrepresented the population. Positive % indicates the sample overrepresented the population.

Table 6

Demographic Characteristics of the Morals, Mobiles, and Mandatory Alerts Survey Respondents and 2016 Statistics Canada Census (per cent).

Demographic/sample characteristic	MMMA 2019	Statistics Canada 2016	Difference MMMA 2019 – Statistics Canada 2019 (%)
Language spoken at home			
English	82.47	63.7	18.77
Language other than English	17.18	36.3	-19.12
Prefer not to answer	0.34	N/A	
Education^a			
No certificate, diploma, or degree	2.92	18.3	-15.38
Secondary (high) school diploma or equivalency certificate	25.43	26.5	-1.07
Apprenticeship or trades certificate or diploma	9.11	9.8	-0.69
College, CEGEP or other non-university certificate or diploma	24.05	19.4	4.65
University certificate or diploma below bachelor level	4.47	2.8	1.67
Bachelor's degree	21.65	15.5	6.15
University certificate, diploma or degree above Bachelor's level	11.68	7.7	3.98
Marital Status			
Never married/single	26.98	28.2	-1.22
Common-law	12.20	12.0	0.20
Married	44.33	45.7	-1.37
Divorced	7.90	6.2	1.7
Separated	4.12	2.5	1.62
Widowed	3.61	5.6	-1.99
Other	0.34	N/A	
Prefer not to answer	0.52	N/A	
Indigenous			
Aboriginal identity	2.78	4.9	-2.12
Other Canadian	96.22	95.1	1.12
Prefer not to answer	1.03	N/A	
Income			
Less than \$20,000	7.56	31.1	-23.54
\$20,000 to \$39,999	16.84	25.6	-8.76
\$40,000 to \$59,999	19.59	18.2	1.39
\$60,000 to \$79,999	13.92	10.6	3.32
\$80,000 to \$99,999	11.68	6.2	5.48
\$100,000 - \$149,999	16.67	5.4	11.27
\$150,000 and over	7.73	2.8	4.93
Prefer not to answer	6.01	N/A	

^a Statistics Canada education figures are reported for those aged 15 or older. MMMA respondents were aged 18 or older.

Note. Statistics Canada Census reports figures to one decimal place. Negative % indicates the sample underrepresented the population. Positive % indicates the sample overrepresented the population.

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Appendix A

Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form

Please select your preferred language from the options in the top right-hand corner

Title: Morals, mobiles, and mandatory alerts: A study of Amber Alerts and Canada's emergency alert system

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What is this study about?

This survey aims to investigate what people think and how people feel about Amber Alerts and Alert Ready in Canada.

Police services may issue an *Amber Alert* if a child has been abducted, if there is a belief that the child is in imminent danger, or they are deemed missing and at risk. They intend to ask for the public's help to safely and swiftly recover the child and may be sent over radio, television, social media, and emergency alerts via cell phone notifications.

Alert Ready is Canada's national emergency alert system. It is a mandatory system (meaning you cannot opt in or out) that sends a message accompanied by a unique siren and vibration to all compatible cell phones near an emergency event. Alert Ready was launched in April 2018 and may be used to alert people of natural disasters, biological disasters, and Amber Alerts, as well as other emergencies.

Why is this study important?

From this study we hope to gain a better understanding of Amber Alerts and non-voluntary emergency alert notification systems for cell phones (like Alert Ready). By participating you will have the opportunity to share your views on Amber Alerts and Alert Ready, respectively. Please note that this project is not associated with the Canadian Government or any governmental plans to evaluate or make changes to these systems

What will participation involve?

Participation in this study involves completing a short (approximately 15-20min) online survey. This includes some questions regarding your thoughts about Amber Alerts and Alert Ready, some questions about decision making, and some demographic questions about you (e.g. age).

Consenting to participate in this study

Before you can participate, you will be asked to read this participant information statement and indicate your consent by a checkbox. By selecting the consent checkbox you are indicating that you have understood what this study is about and that you agree to participate.

Withdrawing from the study

All participation in this survey is strictly voluntary, you do not have to participate if you do not wish to. You are free to withdraw at any time before the completion of the survey. If you wish to withdraw from the survey before completion, please close the survey browser page.

Risks

As part of this study, you will be asked to consider some circumstances which may lead to an Amber Alert for a missing or abducted child. Some people may experience emotional distress from these descriptions.

If you should become distressed or emotionally affected by this survey, please contact one of the following organisations, free of charge, and as is appropriate and comfortable to you:

The Government of Canada mental health support page for additional services <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/mental-health-services/mental-health-get-help.html>

First Nations and Inuit Hope for Wellness Help Line 1-855-242-3310

The Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention crisis centres: <https://suicideprevention.ca/need-help/>

Acknowledgement of Participation

As an acknowledgement of your time, you will receive a token of appreciation via Qualtrics. Please note that you must complete the survey in order to qualify for this.

Confidentiality

No identifiable information will be collected or used for analysis. IP addresses will not be collected by the research team. You will not be identified in any resulting research.

Data from this project will be kept for at least 7 years and stored securely using the University of Queensland's Research Data Manager system. Only members of the research team will have access to this data.

It is anticipated that the results of this research project will be published and/or presented in a variety of

forums. In any publications and presentations, information will be provided in such a way that you cannot be identified.

Your survey data will be collected via the Qualtrics website and kept confidential as per their Terms of Service available here <https://www.qualtrics.com/terms-of-service/>

Questions

If you have any additional questions about this research, please contact Monique Lynn, PhD Student at the University of Queensland, Australia via email m.lynn@uq.edu.au

Funding

This research is supported by an Australian Research Training Program Scholarship. This project is also funded by the University of Queensland, School of Social Science Higher Degree Research Funds.

Where you can find the results of this study

A short summary of the results will be made available at the following web link in approximately March 2020 <https://social-science.uq.edu.au/project/morals-and-mandatory-alerts>. A copy of this information sheet can also be found via this link.

Ethical Clearance

This study adheres to the Guidelines of the ethical review process of The University of Queensland and the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research*. Whilst you are free to discuss your participation in this study with project staff (contactable at m.lynn@uq.edu.au), if you would like to speak to an officer of the University not involved in the study, you may contact the Ethics Coordinators on +617 3365 3924 / +617 3443 1656 or email humanethics@research.uq.edu.au

Consent

Declaration by participant

By checking the box below I acknowledge that I have read the Participant Information Sheet above in a language that I understand.

If you do not consent to participate in this survey, please close this browser page now.

- I understand the purpose, requirements, and risks of the research described in the project. I freely agree to participate in this research project as described and understand that I am free to withdraw at any time before the completion of the survey.

Contact details

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