

Report: Berlin police delayed search for murdered refugee boy

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The abduction and murder of a four-year-old refugee boy, Mohamed, gained nationwide attention in Germany last fall. The boy disappeared from the premises of the Berlin State Office of Health and Social Affairs (Lageso), while his mother waited eight hours for an appointment.

An account in the news magazine *Der Spiegel* has now revealed that the Berlin police failed to carry out a thorough search for the child for several days. Instead, they focused their attention on the boy's family which was suspected of having faked the kidnapping in order to escape the threat of deportation from Germany.

Mohamed, whose mother came from Bosnia Herzegovina, was kidnapped by Silvio S., abused and then killed. The man had already kidnapped, abused and killed another child at the beginning of July, a six-year-old boy named Elias from Potsdam. Silvio S. finally came to the attention of the investigators, after they published a still image from a video captured by a surveillance camera near the Lageso.

Der Spiegel published a thorough report of the actions of the police in both cases. It demonstrated that police behaved entirely differently in the two instances despite their similarities. Both Elias and Mohamed both came from poor families, and their mothers both reacted coolly to the disappearance of their children and made partially contradictory reports. In the case of Elias, a thorough search was initiated immediately, and the police investigated in all directions. In the case of Mohamed, however, they focused attention for days almost exclusively on the family of the missing boy after discontinuing initial search efforts.

Two Searches

Elias disappeared in the late afternoon of July 8, 2015, on the property of the building in which his mother lives. On the same day, a mobile squad, search dogs and a helicopter with a thermal imaging camera were sent out to look for

him. The six-year-old was officially reported as missing and a nationwide search initiated. The media was informed the same evening.

In the following days, the search was intensified. The police questioned relatives, friends, neighbours and school officials. Posters with the picture of the boy were hung up, and search dogs trained to locate corpses were deployed. The sandbox at his parents' residence, in which he had been playing, was dug up. Wildlife cameras were examined in the surrounding woods and drainage pipes searched. Water levels were lowered in the Nuthe River, and the mud was dredged. Federal troops were even deployed.

Although the mother of the child was noticeably cool, and staff at the boy's former kindergarten described her as callous, the police continued to search everywhere for clues. Altogether, 1,800 officials took part in the investigation. Only after 11 days of unsuccessful searching did the investigation begin to focus on the mother and her partner.

Nothing of the sort took place in the case of Mohamed. When his mother came back in the late afternoon after waiting for eight hours for her appointment at Lageso, there was no trace of her four-year-old son. She searched for the boy with the help of an acquaintance and then spoke with police who searched the Lageso property together with the security service. Then a search squad scoured the neighbouring area.

However, at 11 p.m. on the same evening, the search was abandoned, although the boy was still missing. The next day, the Lageso premises were searched one more time. This was the last search carried out for four days. The media was not informed, and not even the missing person's department of the state Office of Criminal Investigation (LKA) received notification of the case.

Der Spiegel reported the further actions of the police as documented in the investigation. Mohamed's mother—who is virtually illiterate—made contradictory and provably false claims. As a consequence, it was “not possible to determine beyond a doubt whether it was actually a missing persons case or, rather, a family dispute,” the documents stated. “No

further measures” would now be taken.

This was a blatant violation of police investigation procedures by the responsible authorities. In cases of missing persons reports, police are required to take every necessary measure to find the individual. *Der Spiegel* points out that, in the case of minors, one can always assume that there is a danger to life and limb, and a search is required without delay.

However, nothing of the sort took place in this case. Instead, Mohamed’s mother was questioned repeatedly in the days after his disappearance, especially after the residence status of the family became clear to the police (in two and a half months they are supposed to be deported). The authorities even went so far as to tap the mobile telephone of the mother and her friends on the grounds they suspected them of faking a kidnapping in order to raise their chances of staying in Germany.

The search was only resumed on the fourth day after Mohamed’s disappearance, after police obtained new information. It took another two days until the videos from the surveillance cameras at Lageso were viewed. Almost a week after his kidnapping, the authorities first viewed video evidence that showed Mohamed leaving the premises in the hands of an unknown man.

Only at this point did they begin a murder investigation. Another video of a nearby restaurant showed Silvio S., whose photo was later published. Three weeks passed between the day of the kidnapping and the day this video was found. It took another five days for an official to view it. After the picture was published, Silvio’s mother went to the police and identified her son. He was then taken into custody and confessed to the kidnapping, abuse and killing of Elias and Mohamed and led police to the bodies.

Failure or systematic discrimination?

In a comment published on *Spiegel Online*, one of the editors who participated in the research for the report referred to the “failure” of the police and a “second class search for migrants.” In fact, the methods of the Berlin police illustrate the bitter reality of everyday life for countless migrantssystematic harassment and discrimination at the hands of state authorities.

The very circumstances of Mohamed’s disappearance illustrate the inhumane attitude that the German authorities routinely display toward refugees. Why did Mohamed’s mother have to wait for eight hours for an appointment at Lageso? Following the comment in *Der Spiegel*, one could

say: “It’s not a failure, it’s intentional.”

The political establishment and the media continue to exploit the murky events on New Year’s Eve in Cologne to call for and carry out an intensification of the attacks on refugees. At the same time, right wing extremists who regularly attack refugees go unpunished. According to research carried out by *Die Zeit*, there were 222 attacks on refugee lodgings in 2015 until the beginning of December, and 93 of these attacks were arson. In only three cases were the perpetrators sentenced for their actions, and charges were brought in only eight additional cases.

Since then, the Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA) has published figures showing that there were many more attacks. The BKA registered 1,005 attacks on refugee lodgings in 2015, including 901 of a clearly far right character.

The investigations in the Mohamed case also recall the behaviour of the authorities in the series of murders carried out by the right wing extremist “National Socialist Underground” (NSU), which had numerous connections with the intelligence agencies. The neo-Nazi group murdered nine small traders with a migrant background. Countless indications of the right wing extremist background of the perpetrators were systematically ignored and pushed aside by the prosecuting authorities. Over and over again, witnesses who brought such indications to light were subjected to intimidation. The families of the victims were placed under general suspicion and their supposed connections with the Mafia and the drug scene were cited. For many years, the series of murders of primarily Turkish citizens were dismissed as so called “Doner killings.”

Mohamed’s case shows that, despite the statements by politicians, police and intelligence agencies, nothing has changed as regards the inhumane treatment of migrants. The public prosecutor’s office in Potsdam, which is in charge of Mohamed’s case, declined to respond to the accusations when it was contacted by *Der Spiegel*. “We will not comment on that,” it said. “If there were failures, we will investigate them internally.”



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