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Do the media help paedophiles?

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There are disturbing parallels between the case of Natascha Kampusch, the Austrian girl who recently escaped her paedophile kidnapper after eight years in captivity, and that of Sabine Dardenne, a 12-year-old who survived 80 days of abuse in 1996 by the notorious Belgian paedophile Marc Dutroux.

Both girls were snatched from the street; both were kept in home-made dungeons. The police paid routine visits to both kidnappers soon after the disappearances but failed to spot the crime. Most important, both girls have been the subject of intense scrutiny by the media to the point of intrusion.

Ten years ago, the Belgian tragedy prompted a public repugnance so fierce it led to ongoing reorganisation of the country's police and justice system. Subsequent disclosures of Dutroux's atrocities -



An Austrian girl's decade of abuse may have been inspired by atrocities in Belgium, says PATRICIA KELLY

he was blamed for the deaths of four missing girls as well as the abductions of Sabine (*left* at Dutroux's trial in 2004) and another girl - led to the lifting of self-imposed reporting restrictions by the media on anything to do with paedophilia.

Ten years ago it was a taboo subject, rarely written about and never mentioned on television. The floodgates were opened to stories revealing child abuse in homes, schools and congregations across the world, encouraging investigation and prosecution.

Yet far from contributing towards the protection of children from paedophiles, the media attention may have backfired. For it now transpires that two years after Dutroux's arrest and Sabine's discovery in 1996, none of these public revelations prevented Wolfgang Priklopil from grabbing 10-year-old Natascha in Austria ►

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