

National Runaway Switchboard

3080 N. Lincoln Ave
Chicago, IL 60657
773-880-9860



A Decade of Trends in Crisis Calls to the National Runaway Switchboard

An analysis of trends in crisis calls to the National Runaway Switchboard's 1-800-RUNAWAY crisis hotline for the period 2000-2010.

Report Prepared by Jennifer Benoit-Bryan at the
University of Illinois-Chicago

Report Release Date: August 2011

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| <i>Executive Summary</i> | 3 |
| <i>Research Methodology</i> | 4 |
| <i>Youth Crisis Caller Status</i> | 5 |
| <i>Crisis Caller Age</i> | 7 |
| <i>Crisis Caller Means of Survival</i> | 9 |
| <i>Crisis Caller Time on the Street Before Calling NRS</i> | 11 |
| <i>Crisis Caller Whereabouts at Time of Call</i> | 13 |
| <i>Crisis Caller Problems</i> | 15 |
| <i>Crisis Caller Relationship to Youth</i> | 17 |
| <i>Crisis Caller Gender</i> | 19 |
| <i>Contact Information</i> | 20 |

Executive Summary

A number of important trends emerge through the analysis of the past 11 years of crisis call data from the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS). NRS is receiving more calls from homeless youth and throwaway youth than in the past. Increases in calls from homeless and throwaway youth may be related to the current economic downturn in the United States. In addition, there has been a 30 percent increase in crisis callers who identify economics as an important problem in their lives over the past three years.

The use of shelters as a means of survival has increased by 30 percent over the last three years to 10 percent of all crisis callers. The availability and continued funding of shelters through the economic downturn has been instrumental in assisting runaway and homeless youth in surviving. An increased number of youth report accessing assistance from law enforcement for survival. However, the fastest growing problem identified by callers over the past year was gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender issues with an increase of seven percent. Individuals who want to talk about GLBT issues may feel more comfortable calling NRS now than in the past due to the positive partnership NRS has developed with Cyndi Lauper's True Colors Fund

A greater proportion of older youth (aged 18-21) and youth who have been on the street for over six months are calling the National Runaway Switchboard than in previous years. The number of calls to the crisis hotline from youth aged 18, 19, 20, and 21 has grown by over 200 percent over the last decade and by over 20 percent over the past three years.

The effects of the National Runaway Switchboard's HomeFree partnership with Greyhound Lines Inc. is evident in the 24 percent increase in crisis calls from individuals at a Greyhound station over the last three years. This collaboration provides free bus tickets home to runaway youth. There has also been a 95 percent rise over the last decade and a 21 percent rise over the last three years in youth calling the National Runaway Switchboard for assistance with transportation.

Research Methodology

The National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) has analyzed records of crisis calls to 1-800-RUNAWAY for the 11-year period 2000-2010 for this trend report, giving us a maximum trend horizon of 10 years. Absolute and percentage change across years were calculated. This data was analyzed using Chi Square Statistical Analysis to determine statistical significance using a confidence interval of 95 percent or above. All data is significant at the 95 percent level or above unless the category has a symbol next to the variable name. An * signifies that the change is not significant for the one year trend, a + signifies that the change is not significant for the three year trend, and a - signifies that the change is not significant for the 10 year period. The sample size of these categories varies due to the fact that not all categories are pertinent to providing crisis intervention and therefore may not be addressed in every crisis call. In addition, the response category "unknown" was excluded from analyses in the categories of crisis caller means of survival, and crisis caller whereabouts.

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP)¹ defines a runaway/throwaway episode as: A runaway episode is one that meets any one of the following criteria:

- A child leaves home without permission and stays away overnight.
- A child 14 years old or younger (or older and mentally incompetent) who is away from home chooses not to come home when expected to and stays away overnight.
- A child 15 years old or older who is away from home chooses not to come home and stays away two nights.

A throwaway episode is one that meets either of the following criteria:

- A child is asked or told to leave home by a parent or other household adult, no adequate alternative care is arranged for the child by a household adult, and the child is out of the household overnight.
- A child who is away from home is prevented from returning home by a parent or other household adult, no adequate alternative care is arranged for the child by a household adult, and the child is out of the household overnight.

¹ Second National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and throwaway Children (NISMAART-2), Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, 2002; <http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org>.

Youth Crisis Caller Status

Runaways made up the largest group of crisis callers to the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) in 2010 at 42 percent (see figure one). Youth in crisis who have not yet run away from home were the second largest group of callers at 33 percent. NRS also received calls from youth contemplating running away, 10 percent of calls, homeless youth, nine percent of calls, throwaway youth, five percent of calls, and suspected missing youth, one percent of calls. Calls to NRS from homeless youth have increased by four percent over the last year, more than 100 percent over the last three years and by over 600 percent over the last decade (See figure two). There has also been a jump of more than 64 percent in crisis calls from throwaway youth over the last decade and an increase of 34 percent over the past three years. (NRS defines youth as young people up to 21 years old).

Figure One: Distribution of Youth Crisis Caller Status in 2010

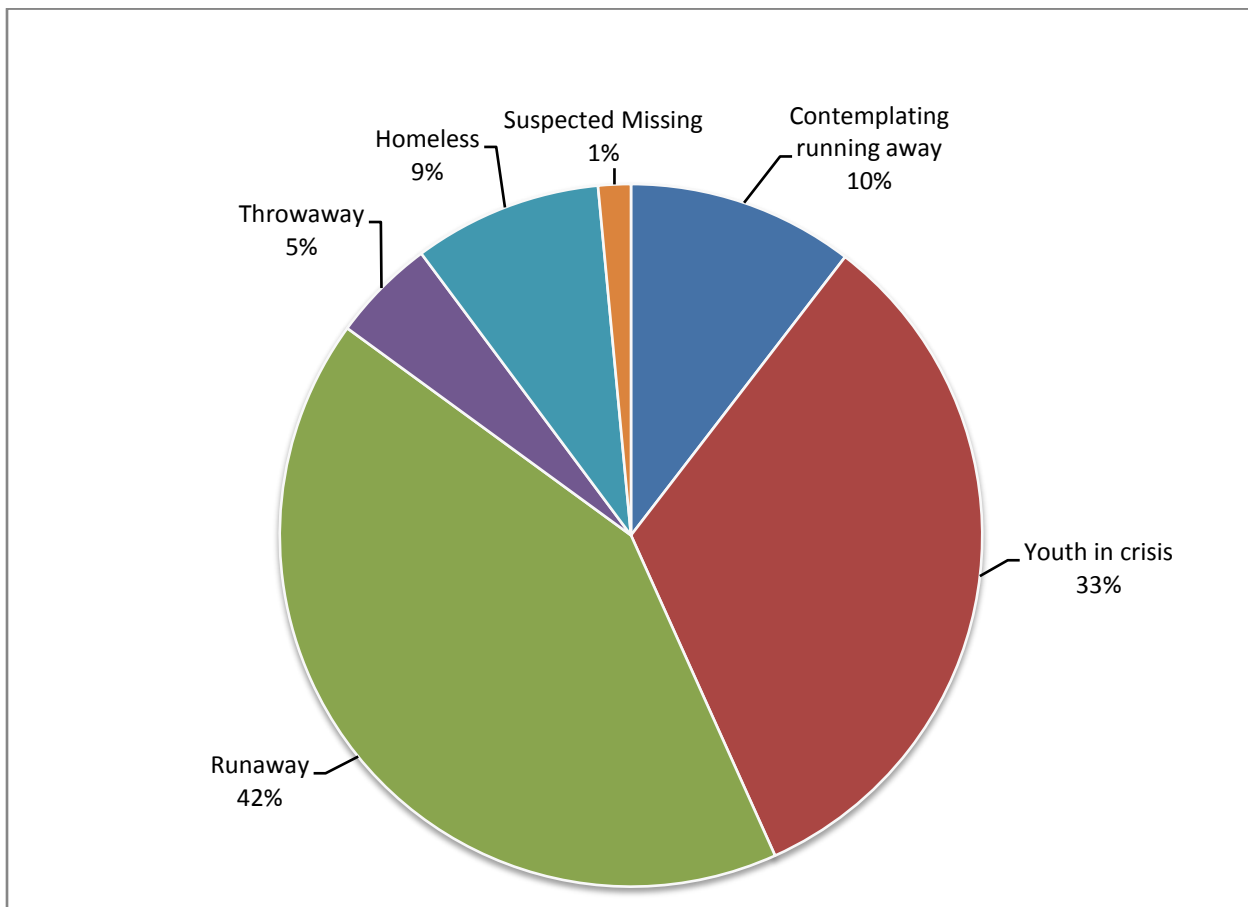
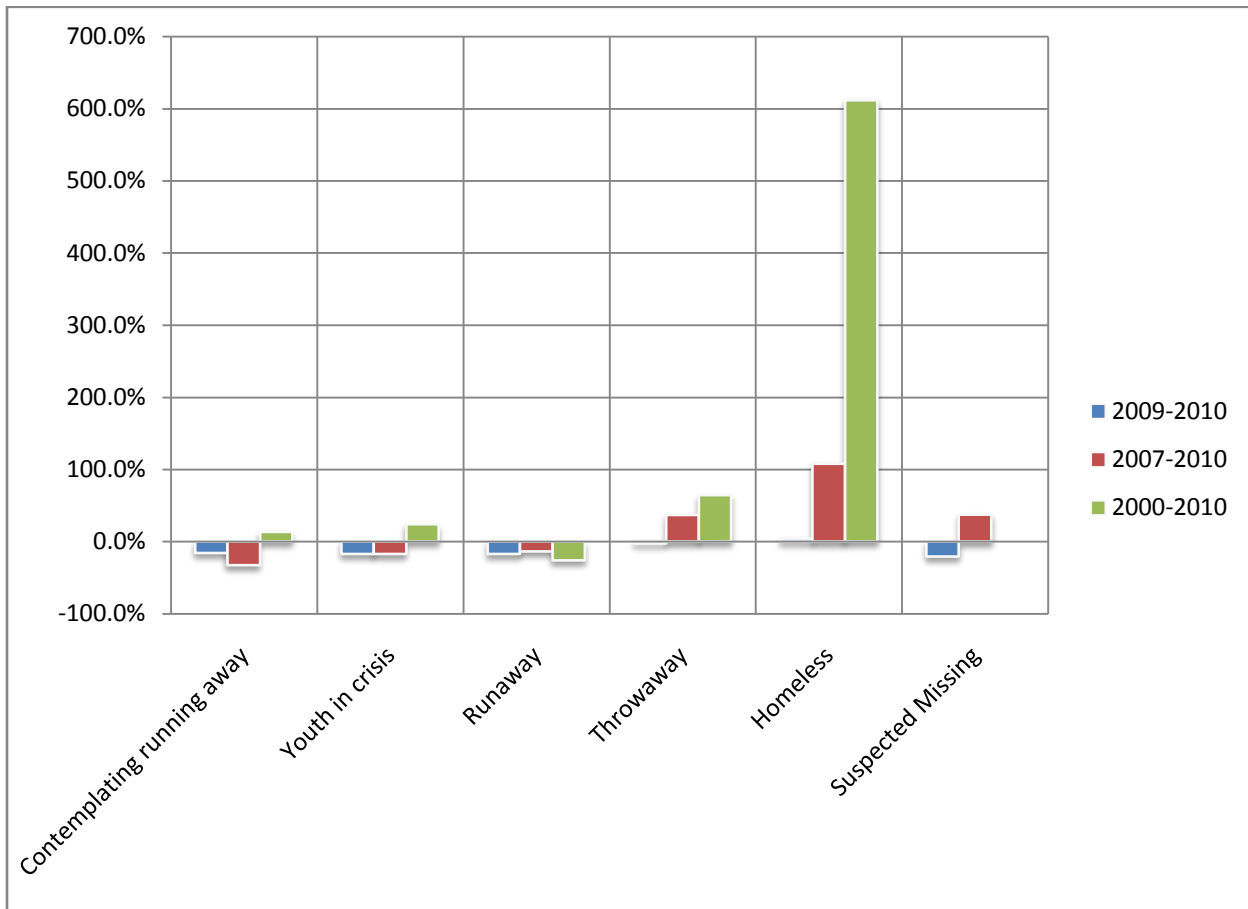


Figure Two: Trend Analysis of Percentage Change in Youth Crisis Caller Status 2000-2010

(Based on a combined sample of 157,924 for all 11 years)



NOTE: There is no information for the category "Suspected Missing" for the period 2000-2010 because the category was added in 2007.

Crisis Caller Age

The largest group of crisis callers to the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) in 2010 were aged 17 at 20 percent (see figure three). However, youth aged 18-21 are the fastest growing group of youth callers to the National Runaway Switchboard. The number of calls to the crisis hotline from youth aged 18, 19, 20, and 21 has grown by over 200 percent over the last decade and by over 20 percent over the past three years (See figure four).

Figure three: Distribution of Age of Crisis Callers in 2010

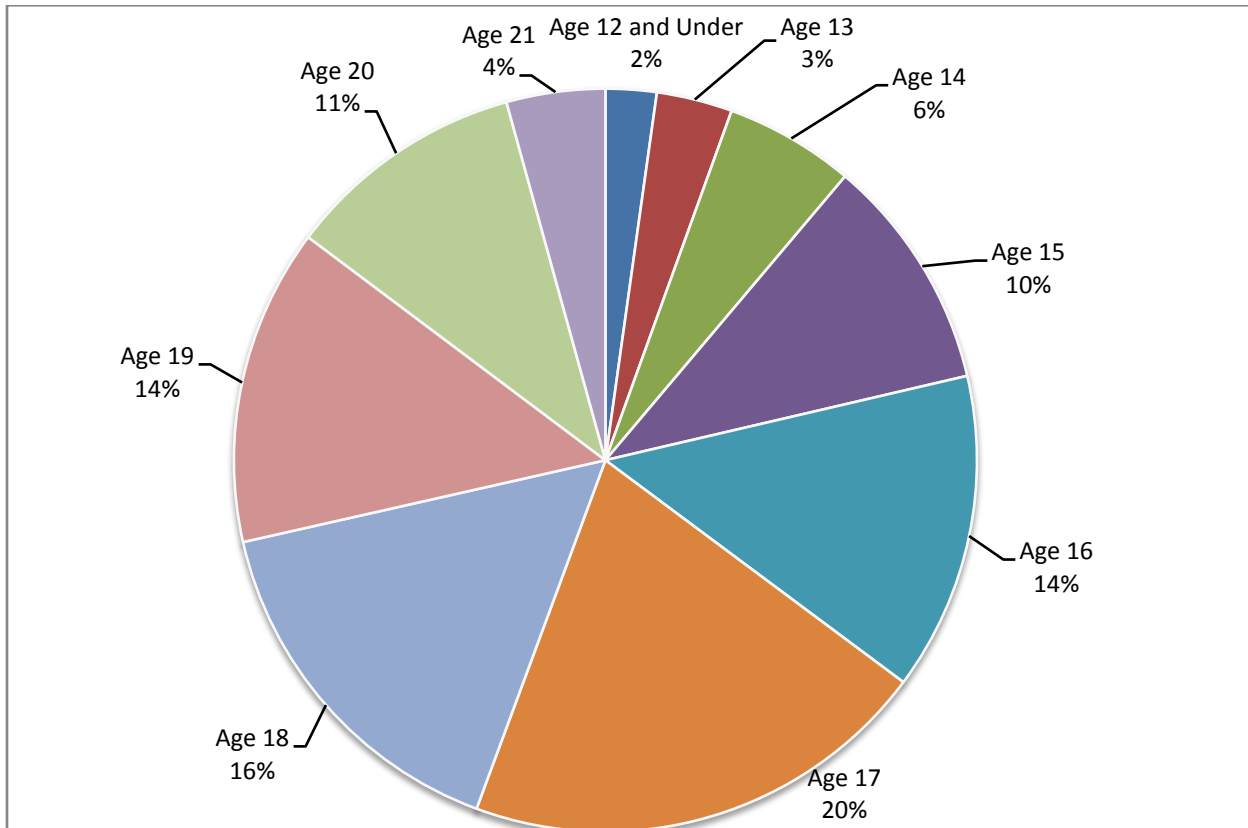
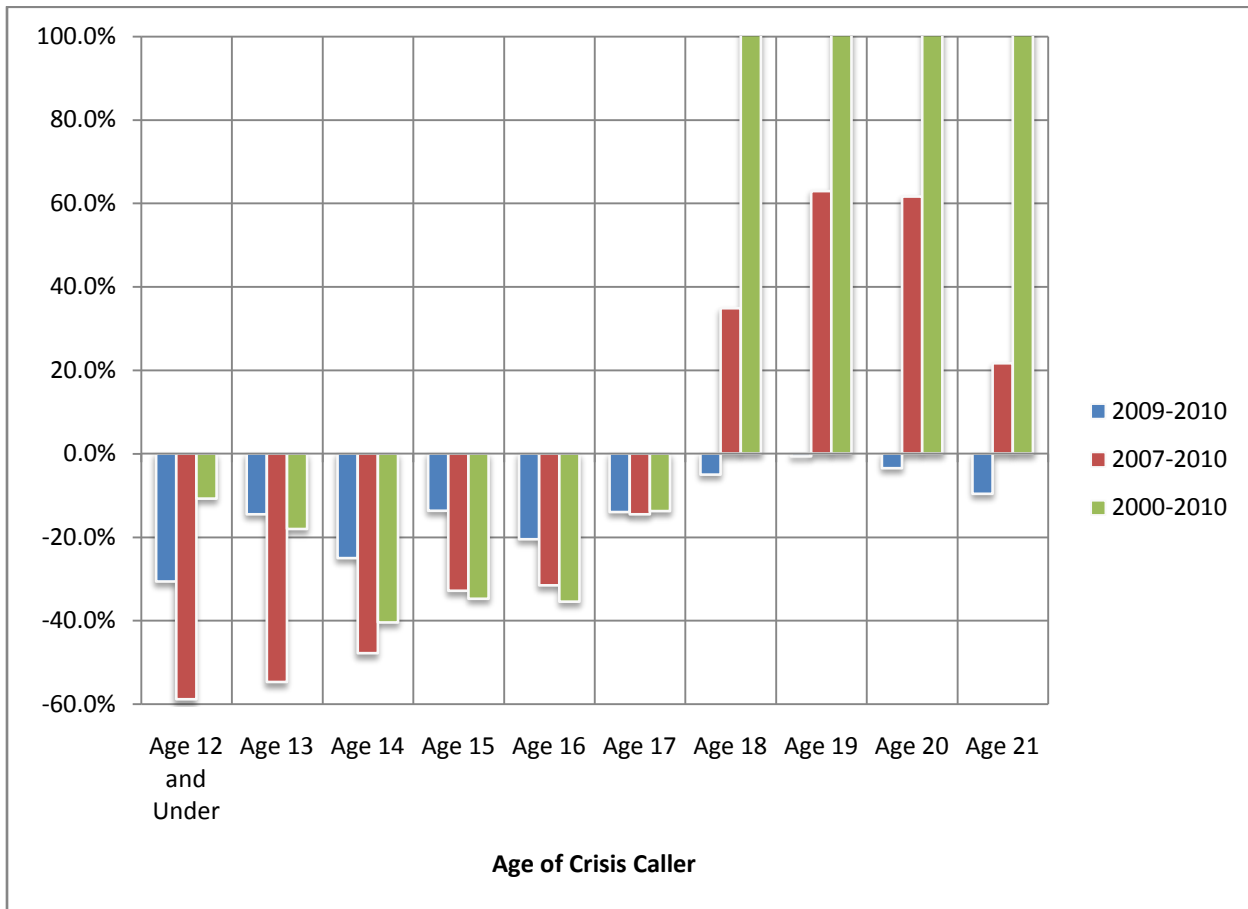


Figure four: Trend Analysis of Percentage Change in Age of Crisis Caller 2000-2010

(Based on a combined sample of 80,430 for all 11 years)



NOTE: In order to show the details of this entire graph, the categories of ages 18-21 were cut off for the trend period 2000-2010. The figures for these categories are as follows age 18 had a 234 percent increase, age 19 had a 4,604 percent increase, age 20 had a 7,363 percent increase, and age 21 had a 3,270 percent increase.

Crisis Caller Means of Survival

The majority of crisis callers to the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) in 2010 were surviving through assistance from friends and relatives at 70 percent, however that is down from 73 percent of callers last year (see figure five). Ten percent of crisis callers reported using shelters to survive in 2010, an increase of 30 percent over the last three years and 44 percent over the last decade. The use of panhandling to survive is reported by a fairly small percent of total crisis callers at four percent, but that has increased by over 80 percent over the last three years and over 175 percent over the last decade. There has also been a significant increase in the number of callers reporting detention or police as a means of survival over the past year, a thirty percent jump.

Figure five: Distribution of Crisis Caller Means of Survival in 2010

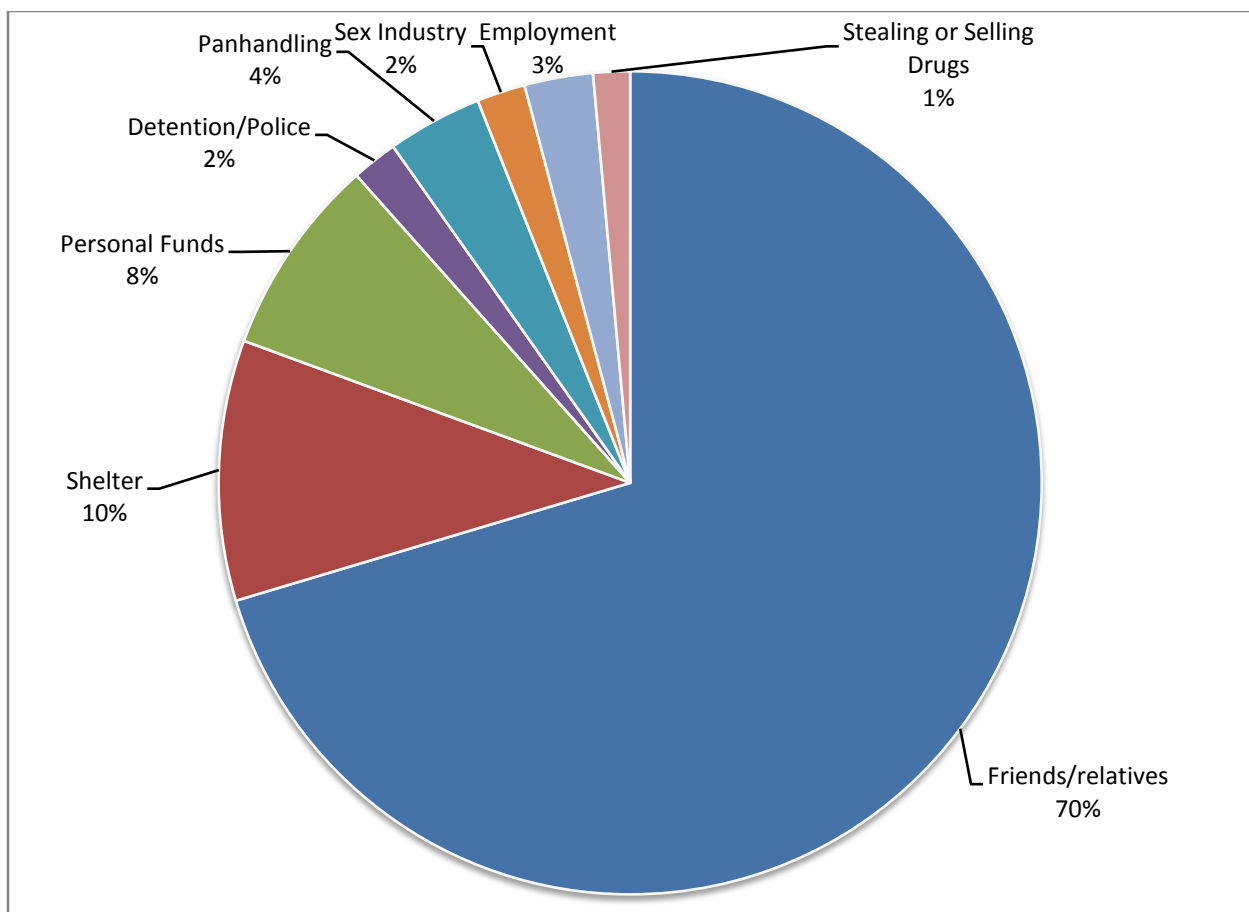
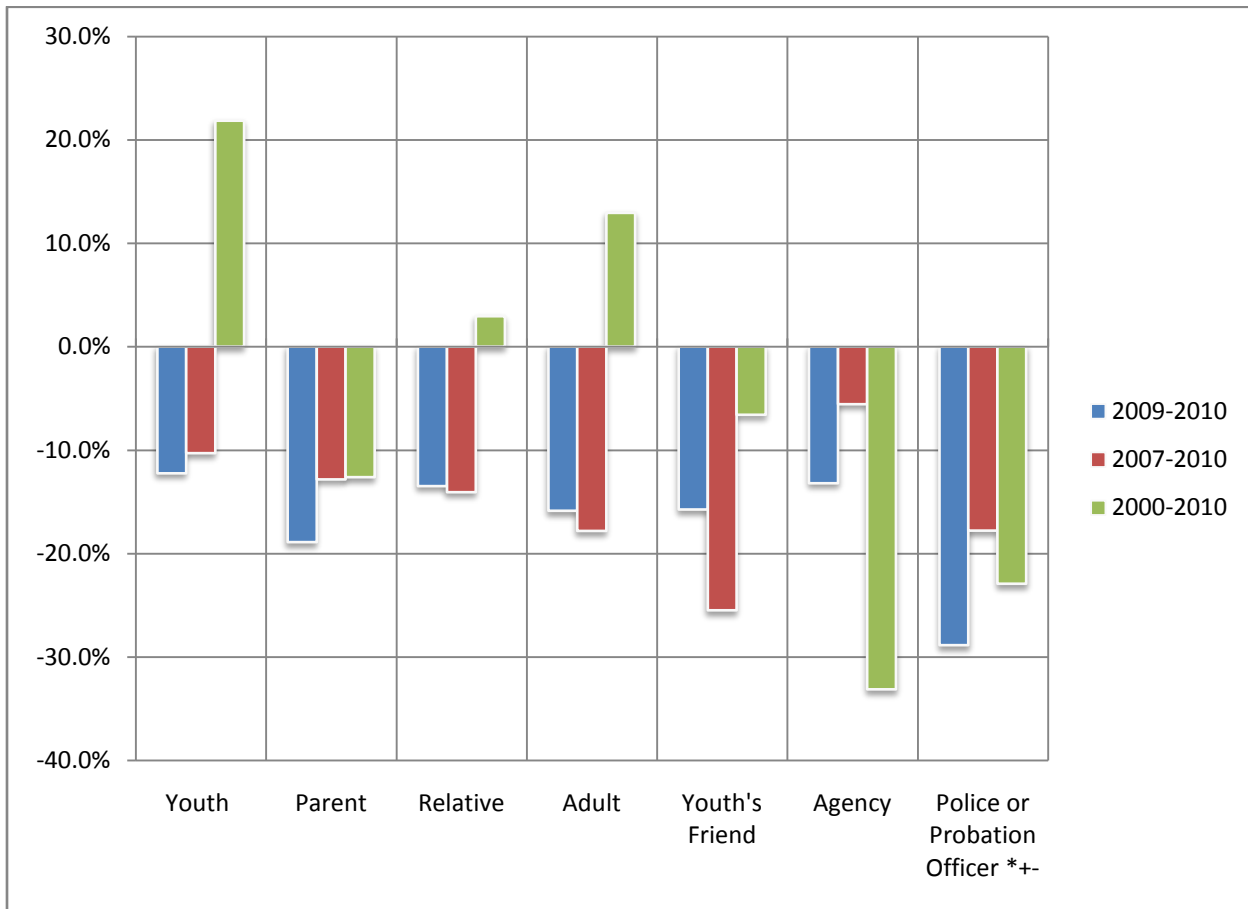


Figure six: Trend Analysis of Percentage Change in Crisis Caller Means of Survival 2000-2010

(Based on a combined sample of 60,692 for seven years of data)



Note: This category of data was not collected between the years 2001-2004. However, this only affects the total sample size and does not impact the years used for this analysis, 2000, 2007, and 2010.

Crisis Caller Time on the Street Before Calling NRS

The most common crisis caller to the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) in 2010 had been on the street for one to three days at 45 percent (see figure seven). However, the largest percentage increases in crisis calls have been from youth on the streets for over six months. Over the past three years, the number of youth calling NRS who had been on the streets for over six months has increased 72 percent and there has been an increase of 69 percent in this group of callers over the last decade (see figure eight).

Figure seven: Distribution of Time on the Street for Crisis Callers in 2010

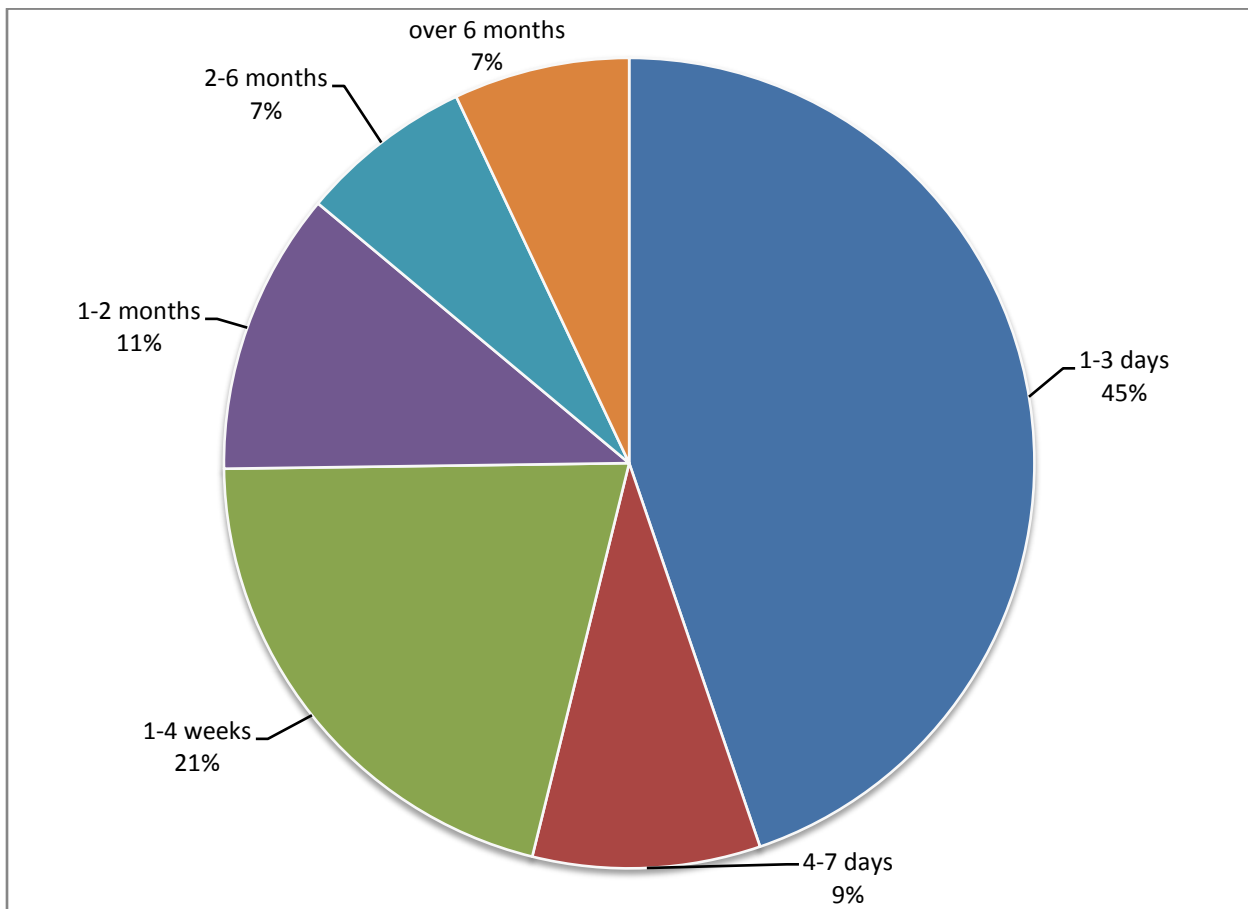
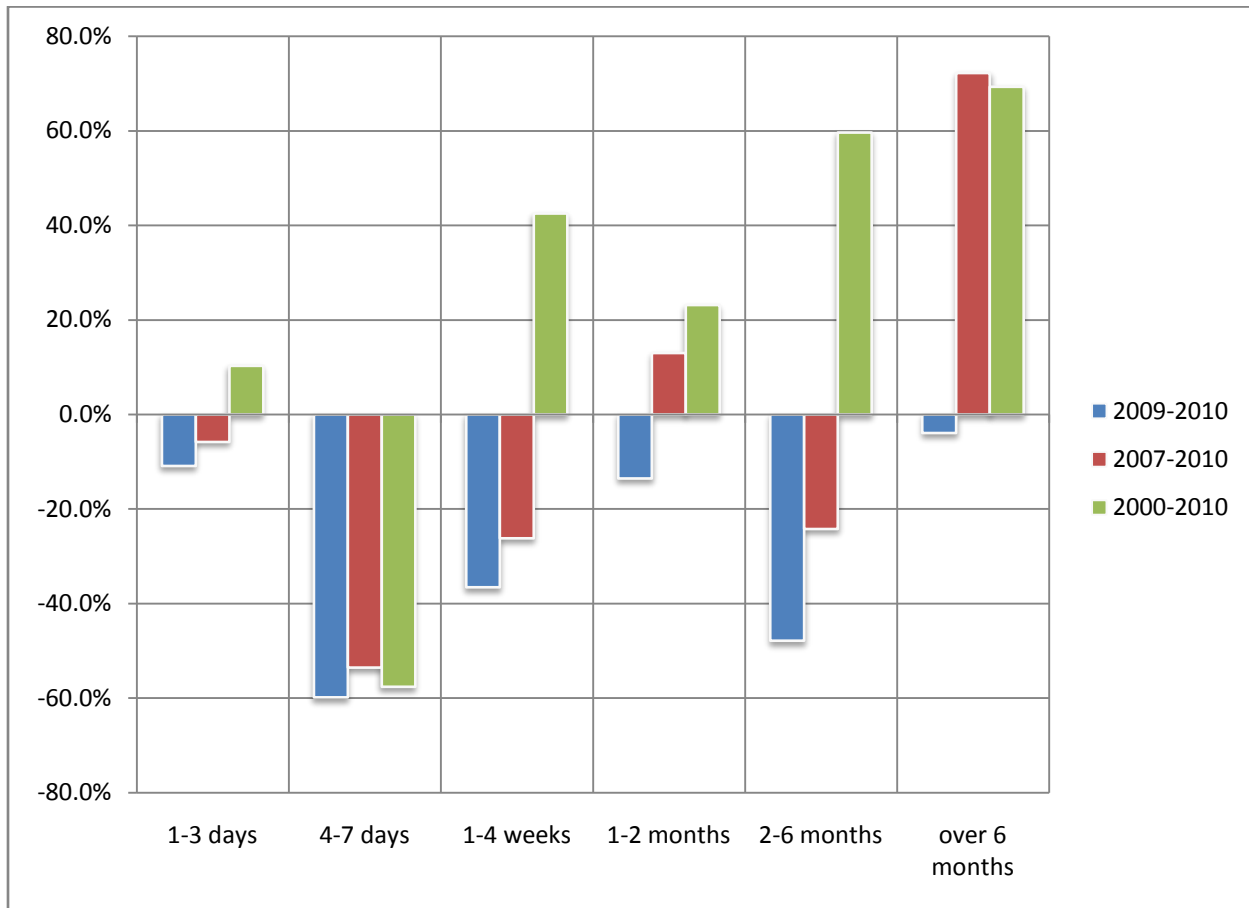


Figure eight: Trend Analysis of Percentage Change in Crisis Caller Time on the Street Before Calling NRS 2000-2010

(Based on a combined sample of 97,193 for all 11 years)



Crisis Caller Whereabouts at Time of Call

The largest proportion of crisis callers to the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) in 2009 were calling from home at 33 percent (see figure nine). Over the past three years, two 'whereabouts at time of call' are increasingly reported: Greyhound station (24 percent increase) and at the house of a recent acquaintance (53 percent increase).

Over the past three years there have also been significant increases in the number of individuals calling from a friend's house (four percent), from a relative's house (nine percent), from a shelter (eight percent), and from the street (eight percent). Over the past decade, there have been large increases in callers from school, with a 75 percent increase, and from a relative's home, with a 70 percent increase (see figure 10).

Figure nine: Distribution of Crisis Caller Whereabouts in 2010

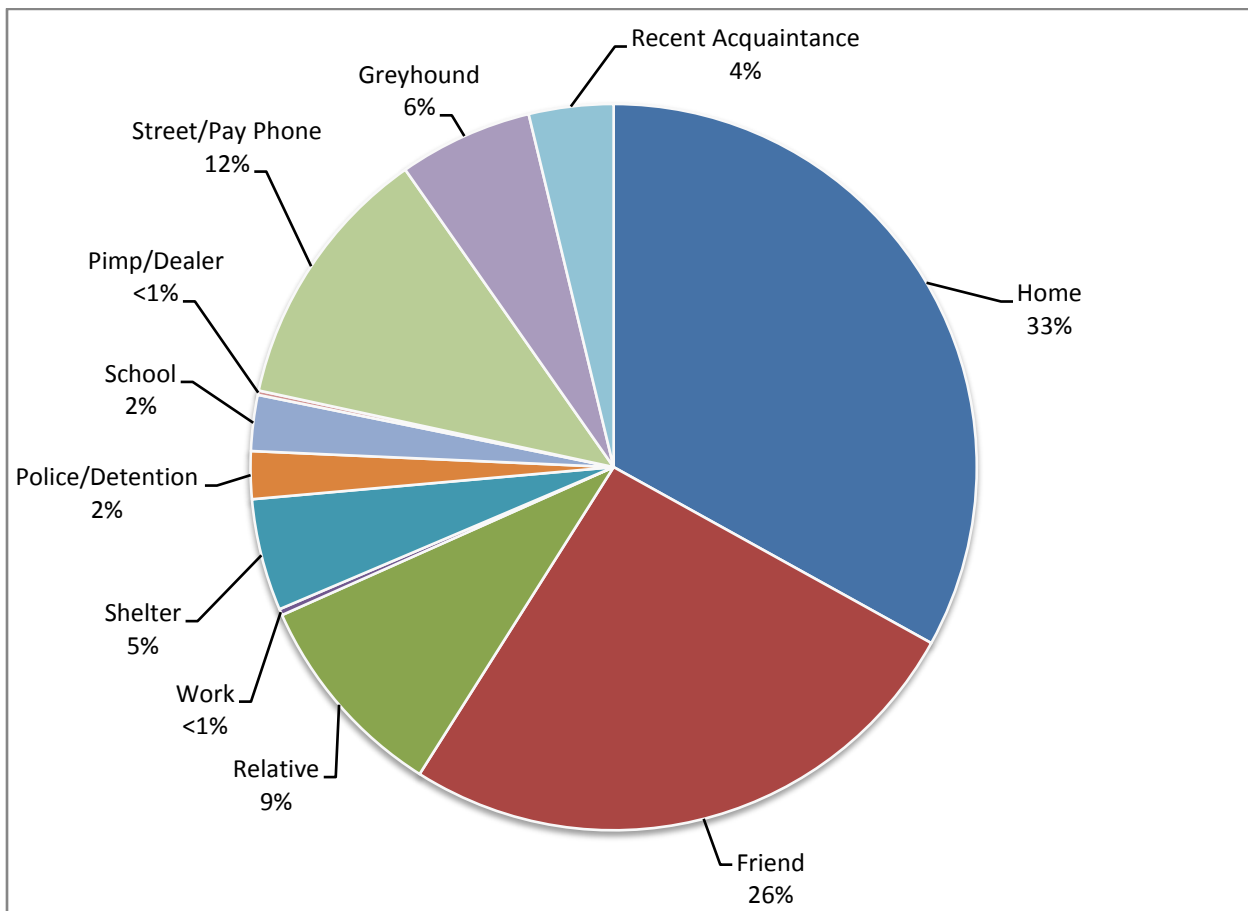
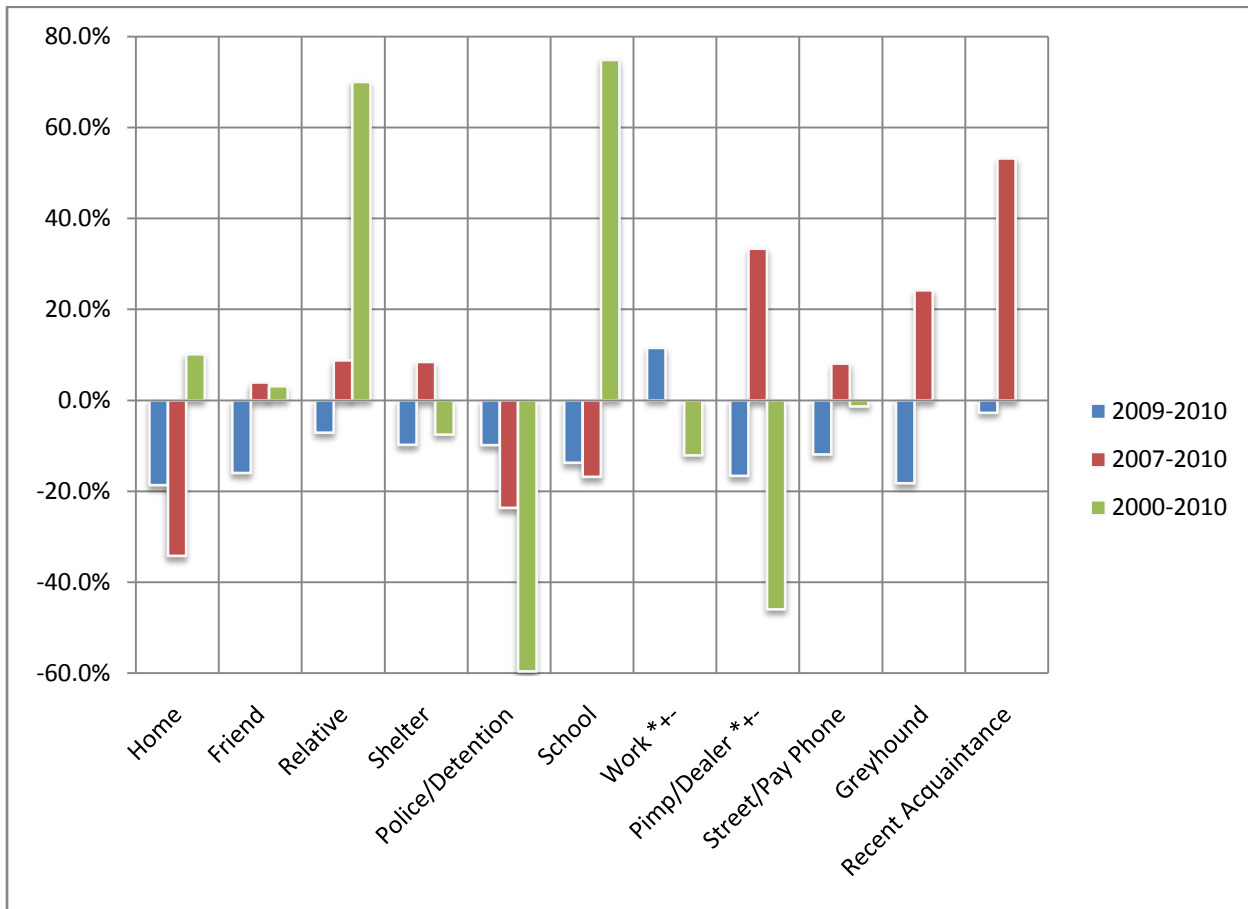


Figure 10: Trend Analysis of Percentage Change in Crisis Caller Whereabouts 2000-2010

(Based on a combined sample of 136,964 for all 11 years)



Note: The categories of Greyhound and recent acquaintance were added in 2007 and do not have data for the 2000-2010 trend horizon.

Crisis Caller Problems

The most commonly identified problem for crisis callers to the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) in 2010 was family dynamics at 29 percent. When combined, neglect, physical, emotional, verbal, and sexual abuse make up the next largest category of problems identified by crisis callers at 13 percent (see figure 11). However, the fastest growing problem identified by callers over the past year was gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender issues with an increase of seven percent. The problems of economics, the judicial system, and transportation have all increased over the past three years by 30, 35, and 21 percents respectively.

Over the past decade, there have been significant increases in callers reporting the problems of transportation (95 percent), emotional or verbal abuse (72 percent), health (47 percent), neglect (44 percent), physical abuse (29 percent), school or education (22 percent), alcohol or drug use (24 percent), the judicial system (23 percent), and mental health (11 percent) (see figure 12).

Figure 11: Distribution of Youth Crisis Caller Problems in 2010

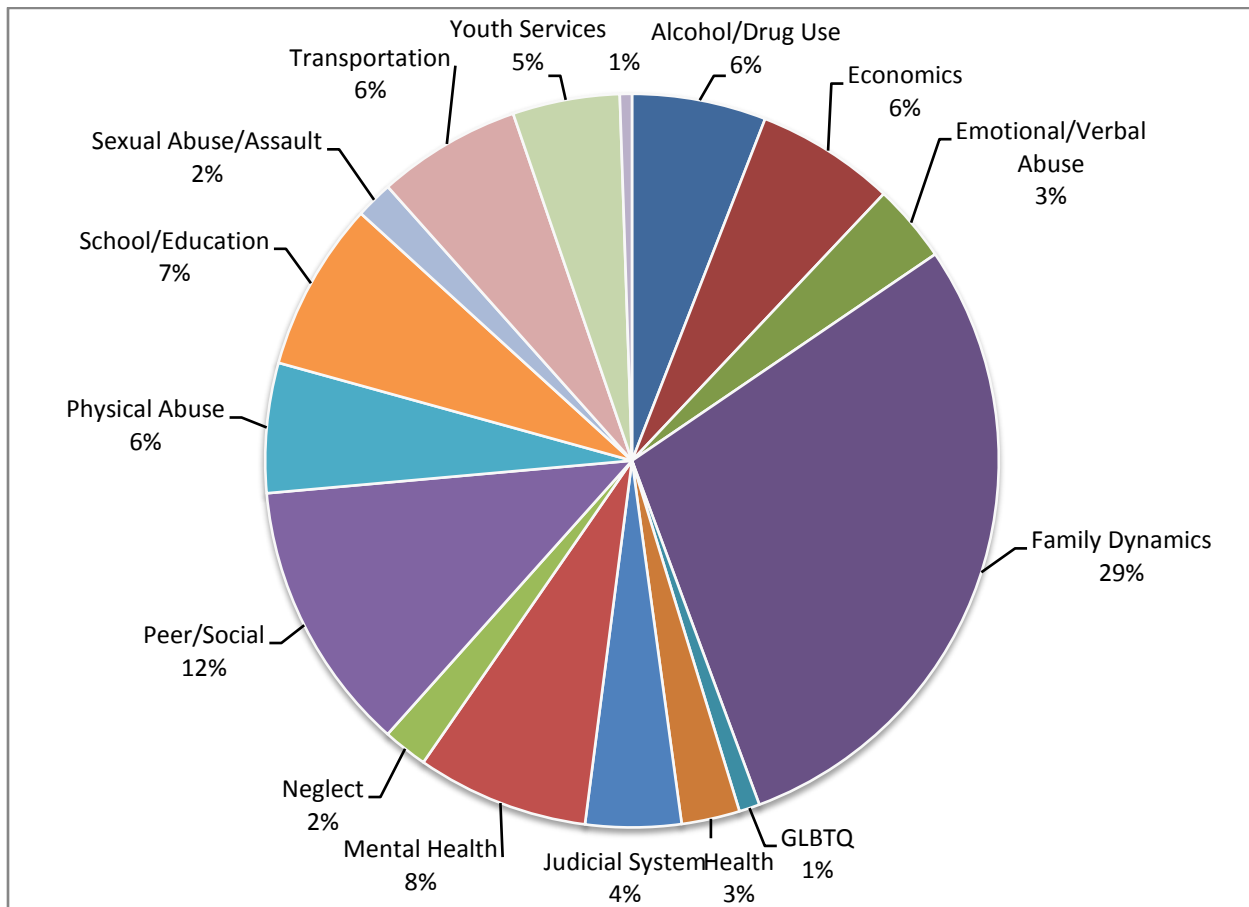
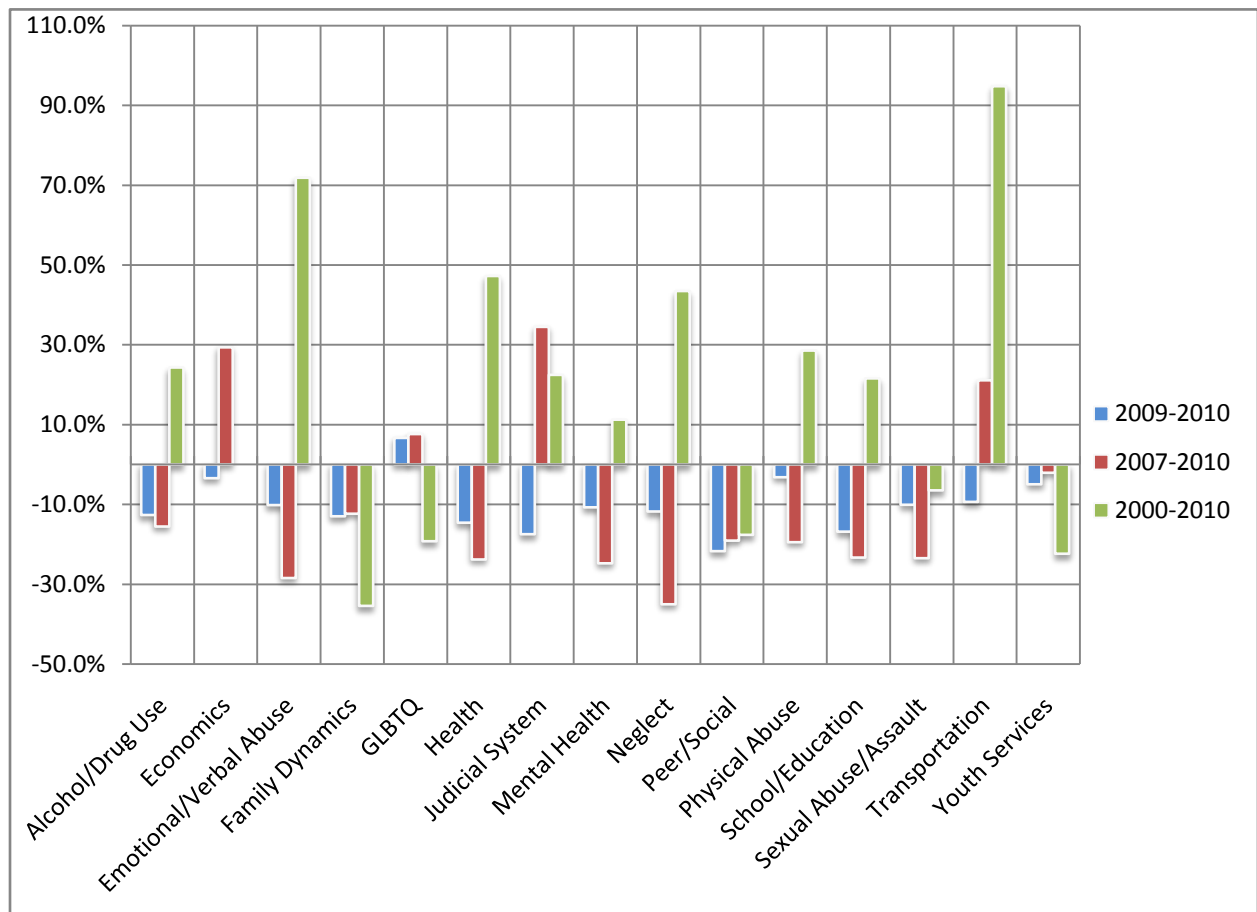


Figure 12: Trend Analysis of Percentage Change in Youth Crisis Caller Problems 2000-2010

(Based on a combined sample of 494,962 for all 11 years)



Crisis Caller Relationship to Youth

Over half of crisis callers to the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) in 2010 were youth calling about themselves at 51 percent (see figure 13). Parents made up the second largest group of crisis callers to NRS in 2010 at 30 percent. Over the past decade the number of youth calling about themselves has increased by 22 percent, calls from adults other than parents or relatives has increased by 13 percent, and calls from relatives has increased by three percent.

Figure 13: Distribution of Crisis Caller Relationship in 2010

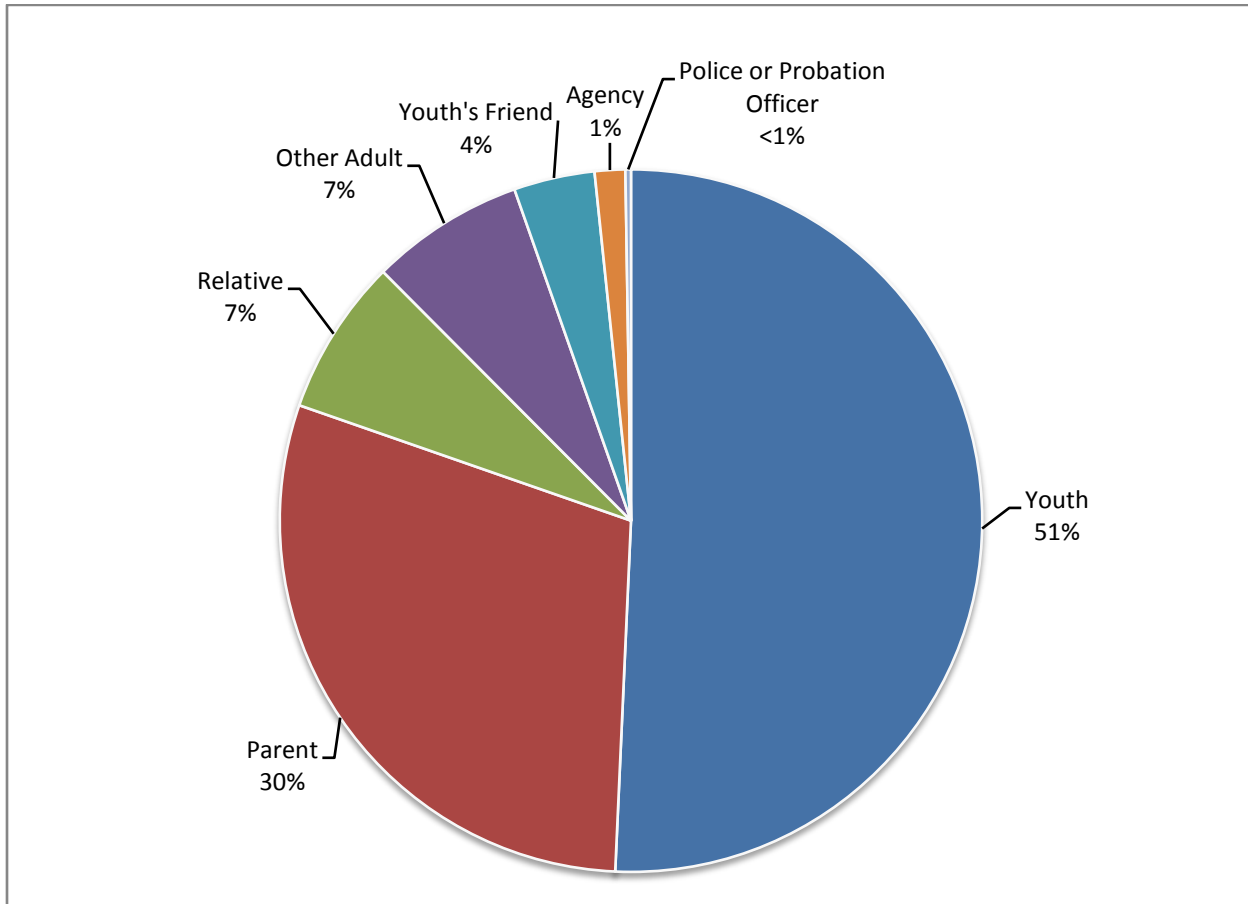
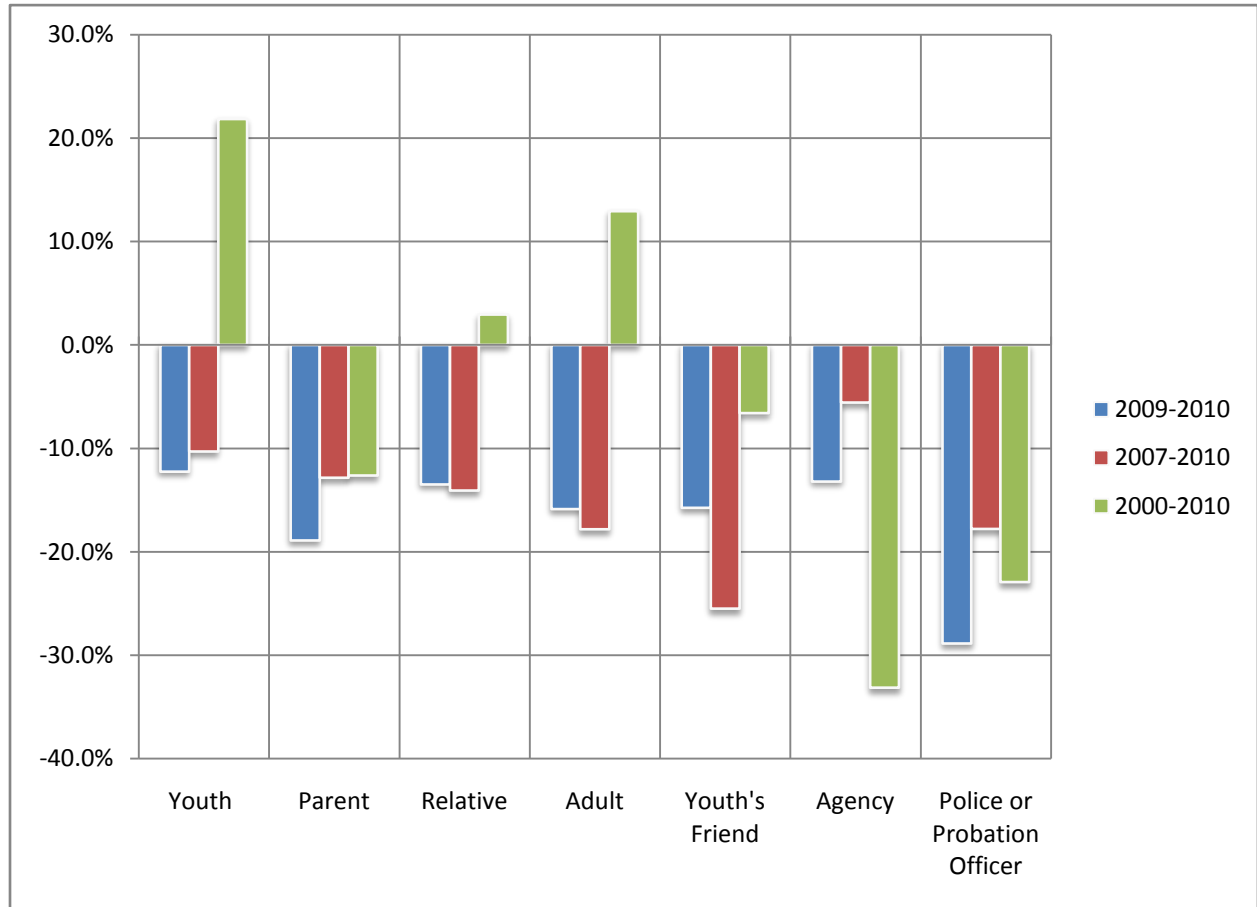


Figure 14: Trend Analysis of Percentage Change in Crisis Caller Relationship 2000-2010

(Based on a combined sample of 160,540 for all 11 years)



Crisis Caller Gender

The majority of crisis calls to the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) in 2010 came from females at 71 percent. However, there has been a 31 percent increase in the number of males calling NRS between 2000-2010 and a four percent decrease in the number of females calling NRS in the same period. This shows that male crisis calls to NRS continue to increase more rapidly than female crisis calls to NRS, and if the trend continues it will slowly equalize the call rates for males and females (see figure 15).

Figure 15: Crisis Caller Gender

(Based on a combined sample of 162,890 for all 11 years)

| Gender | Percent Change 2007-2010 | Percent Change 2000-2010 |
|---------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Female | -17 percent | -4 percent |
| Male | 3 percent | 31 percent |

Contact Information

For questions or comments on this research please contact Katy Walsh, Director of Development and Communication at the National Runaway Switchboard at kwalsh@1800RUNAWAY.org, or (773) 289-1727.

Media interested in additional information or to schedule an interview with an NRS spokesperson, please contact Joel Kessel at joel@kesselcommunications.com, or (614) 467-9083.