

National Runaway Safeline

3141B N. Lincoln Ave
Chicago, IL 60657
773-880-9860



National Runaway Safeline's 2015 Reporter's Source Book on Runaway and Homeless Youth

**Research compiled from Federal documents, published articles,
agency reports, and crisis contact data from the National Runaway
Safeline.**

Report Prepared by Dr. Jennifer Benoit-Bryan

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Introduction to the 2015 Reporter's Source Book

The Reporter's Source Book (RSB) is designed to be a guide for media about runaway and homeless youth. It contains information compiled from federal reports, journal articles, issue briefs, crisis calls, and online contacts to the National Runaway Safeline (NRS). The 2015 RSB contains eight issue briefs that summarize the major issues surrounding runaway and homeless youth. The topics of these briefs are:

- The definition of a runaway
- The number of runaways/throwaways in the U.S.
- How youth survive on the run
- The demographics of a typical runaway/throwaway
- The impacts of running away on youth
- How parents can prevent their child from running away
- Why youth run away
- Trends in runaway statistics

The RSB is not a comprehensive collection of research on homeless and runaway youth. Instead, it provides a range of research results relevant to the key issues surrounding runaway and homeless youth that can help journalists obtain helpful information to fuel public dialogue.

Media interested in additional information or to schedule an interview with an NRS spokesperson, please contact Katy Walsh at Kwalsh@1800RUNAWAY.org, or (773) 289-1727.

What is the definition of a runaway? Throwaway?

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) 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 (Sedlak, Finkelhor, Hammer, & Schultz, 2002).

How many runaway and throwaway youth are there in the United States?

It is difficult to say exactly how many youth are classified as runaways or throwaways, because studies define and count this group in different ways. Studies vary in the age ranges included, lengths of time away from home, survey methods, and definitions of runaways, which can lead to different findings. In addition, this is a very difficult group to track with multiple sub-populations of youth staying in different areas (on the street, at a friend's home, in a shelter) which causes estimates to range in size.

- In 1992, approximately 2.8 million youth between the ages of 12 and 17 ran away from home (J. Greene, Ringwalt, Kelley, Iachan, & Cohen, 1995).
- The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention estimated that roughly 1.7 million youth (4 percent) between the ages of 7 and 17 had a runaway or throwaway experience in 1999 (Hammer, Finkelhor, & Sedlak, 2002).
- The National Survey on Drug Use in 2002 found that about 1.6 million youth (7 percent) between the ages of 12-17 had run away from home and slept in the street in the previous year (Office of Applied Studies, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2004).
- The prevalence of youth homelessness for a one-year period (measured as a percent of youth who had experienced at least one night of homelessness in the last 12 months) is higher (Ringwalt, Greene, Robertson, & McPheeters, 1998) than the prevalence of adult homelessness for a five-year period (Link et al., 1994).
- A study by the Urban Institute found that one in five youth have run away from home by the age of eighteen and half of those youth run away two or more times (Pergamit, 2010).

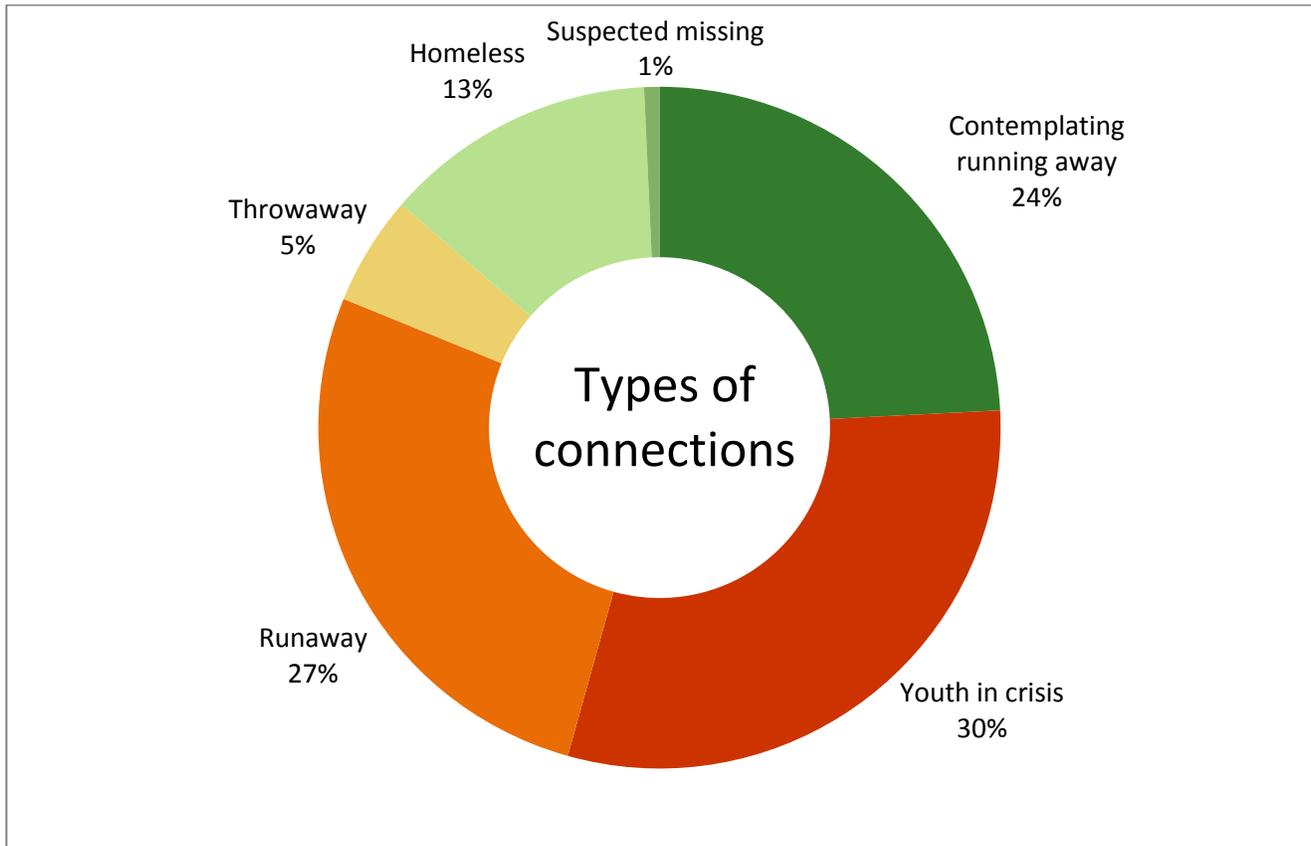
In 2014, NRS handled 15,319 hotline crisis connections and 2,434 crisis chat connections for a total of 17,753 crisis connections. In order to track trends in youth in crisis when they connect with NRS, connectors are categorized into one of six categories: contemplating running away, youth in crisis, runaway, throwaway, homeless, or suspected missing. The table below has descriptions that illustrate the distinction between these six types of connectors.

Youth who are currently in crisis but have not yet run away from home (30 percent of crisis connections) have surpassed runaways (27 percent of crisis connections) as the largest group of individuals in crisis to contact the National Runaway Safeline (NRS). (see Figure 1 below) (Benoit-Bryan, 2015).

Table 1: Description of Status for Youth in Crisis

Type of Connector	Description of Status
Contemplating running away	Youth who mention thinking about running away from home during a call
Youth in crisis	Youth who is in a serious situation that is not necessarily related to being away from home
Runaway	Youth up to age 18 who left home without permission
Throwaway	Youth who were forced to leave their home by their parent or guardian
Homeless	Youth who are homeless because their family is also homeless and youth who are ages 18-21 and are on the street
Suspected Missing	These are calls about a youth who is missing from home; they may have been abducted or may have run away

Figure 1: Distribution of Youth by Crisis Status in 2014, n=11,220



How do youth survive when they are a runaway, or a throwaway?

A study contracted by the National Runaway Safeline (NRS) and conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago involved interviewing 83 youth living on the streets and in shelters. This study found that most youth did not plan their departure and had \$10 or less when they left home. These circumstances force most runaway youth to find a source of money to survive on the street (Pergamit & Ernst, 2010).

Runaway/throwaway youth sometimes turn to illegal, and dangerous, activities to survive. Nearly one-third (30 percent) of youth in shelters have dealt drugs to survive on the street (Sedlak et al., 2002).

About 10 percent of youth in runaway/homeless youth shelters have turned to commercial sexual exploitation (CSE)—defined as trading sex for money, food, shelter, drugs, or other subsistence needs. The numbers for those on the street are worse – as many as 28 percent of street youth have engaged in CSE (J. Greene, Ennett, & Ringwalt, 1999).

There are a number of factors that can increase the likelihood of CSE among runaway and homeless youth including maternal substance abuse and social alienation (Reid & Piquero, 2014). African American male youth are at heightened risk for CSE among males, whereas female youth of all races or ethnicities have similar levels of CSE risk. Youth victims of CSE have particularly severe symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse, truancy, and conduct disorder when compared to youth victims of sexual abuse/assault who were not exploited in commercial sex. CSE is also associated with lower educational attainment in late adolescence and early adulthood as well as increased risk of substance abuse. Youth who engage in CSE are two to three times as likely to have been robbed, assaulted, or physically abused after running away (Greene, Ennett, & Ringwalt, 1999).

But many youth find other means of support. Seventy-five percent of youth who provided NRS with information about their means of survival cited friends or relatives as a source of support in 2014 (Benoit-Bryan, 2015).

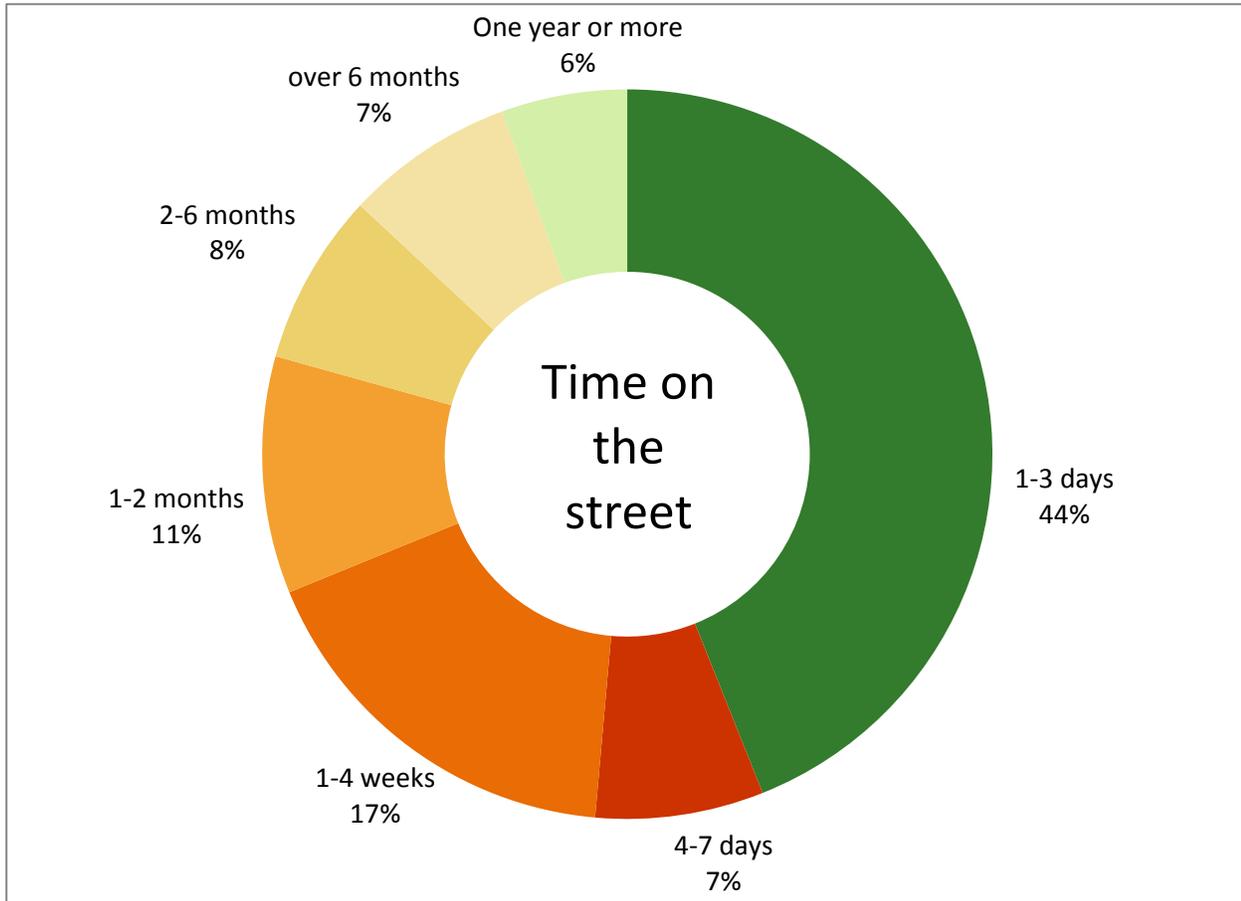
Exact figures of how long youth are gone can be difficult to track, but the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) estimates that in 2001 over 75 percent of youth are gone for less than one week (see Table 2). In contrast, 49 percent of youth in crisis who contacted NRS in 2014 had been away from home for over a week when they reached out (see Figure 1). The OJJDP estimates also suggest that most runaways don't leave the state, but rather stay within 50 miles of their homes (Hammer et al., 2002). However, there is a significant number of youth who have run beyond their state lines and, at some point, decide they want to return home. NRS' Home Free program is a partnership with Greyhound Lines, Inc. that helps runaway youth return home. The program has reunited more than 14,000 youth with a family member through a free bus ticket home. Ninety-one percent of the youth who participated in this program left their home state during a runaway episode.

Table 1: Prevalence and Percentage of Runaway Youth by Time on the Street

Duration	OJJDP Study Estimate 2002 **	OJJDP Study Data % (n=1,675,100)
Less than 1 Week	1,304,100	77%
1 Week to less than 1 Month	248,000	15%
1 Month to less than 6 Months	123,000	7%
More than 6 Months	NA *	NA *

*The NISMART Study does not have a category for greater than six month's runaway duration.

Figure 1: Distribution of Time on the Street for Youth in Crisis in 2014, n=5,915



What are the demographics of a typical runaway/throwaway?

There is no easy way to define what a runaway looks like – they can be male or female and range in age and hometown. However, the statistics below show differences in runaway rates for a variety of demographic variables.

The evidence suggests that girls are more likely to run away from home than boys, and they're also more likely to reach out for help. Data on crisis connections collected by the National Runaway Safeline (NRS) in 2014 showed that 70 percent of contacts from youth in crisis were from females, 29 percent were from males, and 1 percent were from transgender youth. Over the past year, contacts from females decreased by 2 percent, whereas contacts from males increased by 3 percent (Benoit-Bryan, 2015).

The longitudinal study found that over their entire adolescence, ten percent of girls report having run away from home compared to only 7 percent of boys (Benoit-Bryan, 2011). The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) also found that females are more likely to seek help from shelters and hotlines (Hammer et al., 2002). In addition, females are more likely to run away multiple times than male youth (Thompson & Pollio, 2006).

GLBTQ youth are more likely to run away from home than heterosexual youth (Rice et al., 2013). GLBTQ youth suffer disproportionately when they age out of the foster care system which includes higher rates of homelessness. While many youth who age out of the foster care system suffer economic hardship, 38 percent of GLBTQ youth report not being able to pay their rent in the past year compared to 25 percent of heterosexual youth (Dworsky, 2013). GLBTQ youth who age out of the foster care system report high levels of food insecurity with 34 percent of youth reporting that they had been hungry but couldn't afford food at some point during the past year compared to 14 percent of heterosexual youth (Dworsky, 2013). Among youth who experience homelessness GLBTQ youth are more likely to stay with a stranger and less likely to stay in a shelter than heterosexual youth (Rice et al., 2013).

Data from a study conducted by the OJJDP shows that the majority of runaway youth are aged 15-17 (Hammer et al., 2002). However the OJJDP only considers youth to be up to the age of 18, whereas NRS considers a youth to be an individual up to the age of 21. There was a significant increase in the number of contacts from younger youth, particularly those under age 13, age 16, and age 17 over the past year. Contacts from youth ages 13 and under are still a fairly small proportion of overall contacts despite the increase of 14 percent over the past year. The number of contacts from older youth ages 18-21 decreased by 15 percent in the same time period. NRS received the largest proportion of crisis contacts from youth aged 17 at 28 percent in 2014 (Benoit-Bryan, 2015).

Table 2: The Prevalence and Percentage of Runaway Youth by Age

Age (years)	OJJDP Study Estimate **	OJJDP Study Percent(n=1,682,700)
7-11 Years	70,100	4%
12-14 Years	463,200	28%
15-17 Years	1,149,400	68%
18-21 Years	Not Applicable *	Not Applicable *

* The NISMART Study defines youth as under age 18.

The predominant race for runaways is White, non-Hispanic (57 percent), followed by Black, non-Hispanic (17 percent), Hispanic (15 percent), and Other (11 percent) according to the OJJDP’s NISMART study as shown in table three (Hammer et al., 2002). The longitudinal study examined the effects of race on runaway rates. African American respondents are less likely to run away at 7.5 percent compared to 8.2 percent of non-African Americans. American Indian / Native American respondents were more likely to have run away at 12.9 percent than non-American Indian / Native Americans at 8.4 percent. Almost 11 percent of Asian or Pacific Islanders had run away compared to 8.4 percent of non-Asian or Pacific Islanders (Benoit-Bryan, 2011).

Table 3: The Prevalence and Percentage of Runaway Behavior in youth by Race in 2002

Race/Ethnicity	OJJDP Study Estimate	OJJDP Study Data % (n=1,682,900)
White, non-Hispanic	963,500	57%
Black, non-Hispanic	283,300	17%
Hispanic	244,300	15%
Other	188,900	11%

In addition, the longitudinal study by Benoit-Bryan found significant differences in runaway rates for individuals born in and born outside of the United States. Only 6.2 percent of individuals who were born outside of the United States ran away from home before turning 18, significantly less than the 9.6 percent of respondents who were born in the United States.

Two geographical dimensions were also found to impact runaway behaviors. Among youth who are in school, those attending urban schools were more likely to run away from home than adolescents attending suburban or rural schools (Hammer et al., 2002). In terms of region of the country, youth living in the Southern United States were least likely to run away from home, followed by youth in the Northeast and Midwest, while youth from the West were the most likely to run (Hammer et al., 2002).

Students from schools in the south are the least likely to both run away (3.3 percent) and spend a night away (11.2 percent) from home. Students from schools in the west are the most likely to run away (5.2 percent) and spend a night away from home (16.2 percent). Students from schools in urban areas are less likely to spend a night away from home (12.4 percent) than students in either the suburbs or in rural areas (14.6 percent each) (Benoit-Bryan, 2012a).

The longitudinal study is the first nationally representative study to measure the differences in runaway rates by sexual orientation. Heterosexuals had the lowest run away rate at 7.6 percent. The highest run away rate was reported by bisexuals at 21.7 percent, almost three times higher than the rate for heterosexuals. Homosexuals were also more likely to run away from home at 13 percent than heterosexuals (Benoit-Bryan, 2011).

What are the impacts of running away or being thrown away on youth?

A longitudinal study conducted at the University of Illinois, Chicago with support from the National Runaway Safeline (NRS) examined the long term impacts of running away from home as an adolescent on health, economic, and justice system outcomes in adulthood. This longitudinal study is the first study to use nationally representative data to examine the consequences of running away as an adolescent on adult outcomes.

HEALTH IMPACTS

The longitudinal study found that running away from home as an adolescent increases the odds of having suicidal thoughts as an adult by 51 percent. An even stronger relationship was found between suicide attempts and previous run away experience, with runaways having over three times higher odds as non-runaways of attempting suicide as adults (Benoit-Bryan, 2011).

These findings line up with a number of other studies that look at suicide thoughts and suicide attempts by current runaways. In a study by Yates et al, a convenience sample of 765 visitors to an outpatient clinic in 1985 was analyzed to show that suicide attempts by runaway youth were over four times higher than for non-runaway youth (Yates, MacKenzie, Pennbridge, & Swofford, 1991). An analysis of youth in shelters using data from the Runaway / Homeless Youth Management Information System found that 31 percent of youth in shelters have had suicidal thoughts (Thompson & Pollio, 2006).

Homeless and runaway adolescents are six times more likely to have two or more mental disorders than their non-homeless peers (Whitbeck, Chen, Hoyt, Tyler, & Johnson, 2004). A study conducted in 2010 found an erosion of mental health over time, the longer a youth was on the street without stable housing, the worse their mental health (Cleverley & Kidd, 2010). Runaway and throwaway youth who are GLBTQ have increased symptoms of anxiety and depression (Rosario, Schrimshaw, & Hunter, Joyce, 2012). Crisis call and chat data suggests that youth who contact NRS have already taken steps toward ensuring their safety. Of youth who disclose how they are surviving, 75 percent have help from friends and relatives (Benoit-Bryan, 2015) (see Figure 1 below).

The longitudinal study also reported significant correlations between runaway behavior as an adolescent and physical health as an adult. Someone who ran away from home as an adolescent has odds 44 percent higher of having health issues that prevent them from doing moderate activities than someone who never ran away from home. They also rate their general health in adulthood lower than non-runaways (Benoit-Bryan, 2011). The reason for this difference in general health rating may stem from the fact that runaway youth do not have reliable access to health care and are at greater risk of some health problems than non-runaway youth. A survey of youth in shelters and on the street found that half of street youth and 36 percent of shelter youth had no regular source of health care. In

addition, the study found that 25 percent of street youth and 18 percent of shelter youth reported having had serious health problems in the past 12 months (Tucker, Edelen, Ellickson, & Klein, 2011). Another study used a convenience sample of 765 visitors to an outpatient clinic in 1985 and found that runaway youth are at greater risk of a number of medical problems and health-compromising behaviors including pneumonia, scabies, depression, prostitution, and drug use (Yates et al., 1991).

Adults who ran away from home are more likely to use cigarettes and marijuana than those who never ran away from home. The likelihood of an individual being a smoker as an adult are over twice as high (2.4 times) for former runaways than for individuals who never ran away from home. Former runaways are 67 percent more likely to use marijuana as an adult than non-runaways. However, alcohol use as an adult is not significantly associated with former runaway status (Benoit-Bryan, 2011). Higher use of cigarettes and marijuana in adulthood by former runaways may stem from higher use during runaway episodes. In a sample of youth in shelters and on the street, the likelihood of substance abuse was higher among runaway youth than non-runaway youth (J. Greene et al., 1995). Another study surveyed adolescents about their drug use and found a correlation between youth who had run away in the past twelve months and the use of alcohol, marijuana, and other illegal substances (Office of Applied Studies, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2004). Among homeless youth who attend school the likelihood of substance abuse is increased by gang membership, partner violence, and truancy. However, among homeless youth who attend school, having a supportive adult in the community other than a parent or guardian reduces the risk of substance abuse (Pollio, Thompson, Tobias, Reid, & Spitznagel, 2006).

The recreational use of prescription drugs is the fastest growing drug problem in the United States, killing more people per year than cocaine and heroin together (CDC 2011). Over one fifth (22%) of runaway and homeless youth in one study reported that they had misused prescription drugs within the past 30 days. Prescription drug misuse among runaway and homeless youth is also strongly associated with increased likelihood of using injection drugs. Injection drug use is a serious concern because it puts youth at significant risk of acquiring and transmitting infections such as HIV and hepatitis C (Al-Tayyib, Rice, Rhoades, & Riggs, 2014).

In terms of sexual health, a number of studies show that runaways engage in commercial sexual exploitation (J. Greene et al., 1999), (Cleverley & Kidd, 2010). In addition, runaways report higher than average levels of pregnancy (J. M. Greene & Ringwalt, 1998). In fact, the odds of pregnancy in the year following a runaway episode are 1.67 times higher for former runaways than non-runaways (L. Thrane & Chen, 2011). High rates of survival sex and pregnancy may indicate that runaways engage in more sexual activities with more sexual partners than non-runaways. Another study with a convenience sample found that runaways are six to twelve times more likely to become infected with HIV than non-runaways (Rotheram-Borus et al., 2003). The effects of these differences can be seen in the longitudinal survey's findings on the correlations between sexually transmitted diseases and former runaway behavior. The study found that former runaways are 53 percent more likely to report having a sexually transmitted disease as an adult than non-runaways (Benoit-Bryan, 2011).

ECONOMIC IMPACTS

The longitudinal study found significant impacts of former runaway behaviors on income and education levels. The annual personal income level of adults who ran away from home as adolescents is \$8,823 lower on average compared to adults who never ran away from home. The odds of having someone in your household who is a recipient of AFDC, public assistance, or welfare are 76 percent higher for adults who ran away as an adolescent compared to individuals who never ran away from home (Benoit-Bryan, 2011). For current runaways, a study by the Federal Youth Services Bureau found that about 40 percent of youth in shelters and on the street were from families receiving public assistance compared to 22 percent of youth in general (J. Greene et al., 1995).

In terms of education levels, the longitudinal study found that the likelihood of not having a high school degree or GED as an adult is 50 percent higher for former runaways than non-runaways. Adults who ran away from home as adolescents have lower education levels on average than adults who never ran away from home (Benoit-Bryan, 2011). It is probable that the lower education levels of former runaways are connected to disruption in schooling during a runaway episode. An analysis of youth in federally funded shelters found that 20 percent of runaway youth, 20 percent of homeless youth under age 16, and 50 percent of homeless youth age 16 or older reported having dropped out of school, having been expelled, or having been suspended (General Accounting Office, 1989).

Another study found that over one quarter of youth interviewed six months after their stay at a runaway or homeless youth shelter exhibited serious problems in school enrollment. These problems include dropping out of school, being expelled or suspended, and being in jail, and thus, unable to attend school (Westat, Inc., 1997). In addition, seven percent of crisis contacts to the National Runaway Safeline in 2014 talked about problems with school (Benoit-Bryan, 2015). Running away from home has a detrimental effect on high school graduation rates. In fact, running away from home once decreases the likelihood that a youth will graduate from high school by 10 percent, and that likelihood drops an additional 8 percent if a youth runs away multiple times (Aratani & Cooper, 2015).

A study commissioned by NRS and conducted by NORC, in which 83 runaway youth were interviewed on the streets or in shelters found that nearly 45 percent of youth attended school, with 70 percent of those attending regularly. This concentration is more common among shelter youth who have a place to stay and because shelters may help facilitate getting to school. Nearly two-thirds of shelter youth attended school, while 28 percent of street youth continued attending school (Pergamit & Ernst, 2010).

JUSTICE SYSTEM IMPACTS

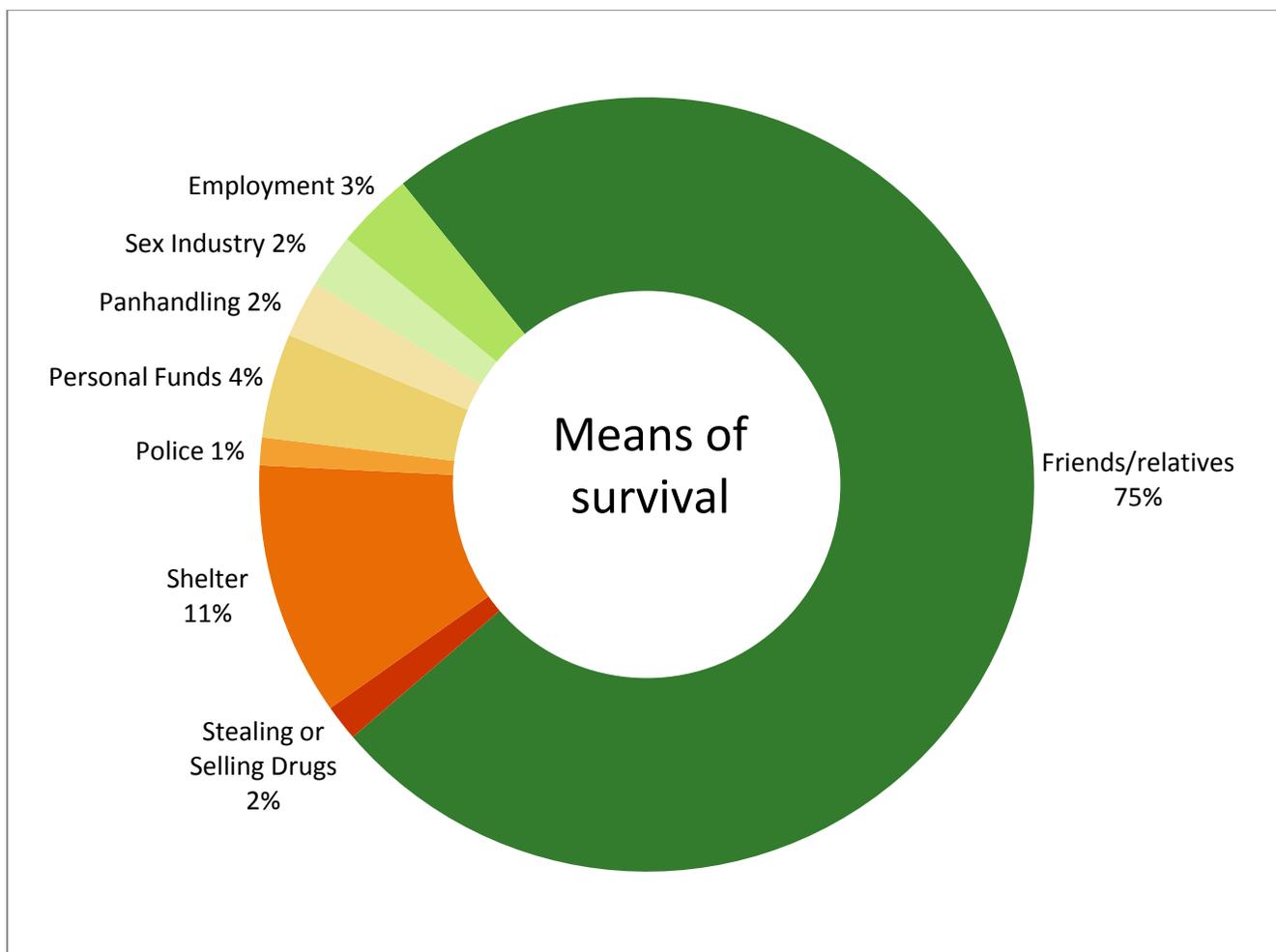
Former runaways have higher arrest rates as adults and are more likely to deal drugs as an adult according to the longitudinal study. The odds of former runaways being arrested as adults are over two and a half times higher than individuals who never ran away from home (Benoit-Bryan, 2011). However, the runaway episode is not the sole contributor to incarceration rates for many youth. Homeless youth who have been physically abused are almost twice as likely to be incarcerated compared to homeless youth without a history of physical abuse (Yoder, Bender, Thompson, Ferguson, & Hafferjee, 2013).

Former runaways are 99 percent more likely to sell drugs as an adult than non-runaways. However, being a former runaway does not increase the rates of crimes committed in adulthood for damaging private property, stealing, buying, holding, or selling stolen property, committing financial fraud, and shooting or stabbing someone (Benoit-Bryan, 2011).

Most studies that look at criminal behavior and runaways are concurrent; they examine reports of criminal behavior while the adolescent is on the street. The NISMART II study found that 11 percent of runaways engaged in criminal activities while on the run (Hammer et al., 2002). An analysis of youth in shelters found that almost 16 percent have committed misdemeanors (Thompson & Pollio, 2006). While a study conducted by the Federal Youth Services Bureau found that 2/3 of shelter youth and 4/5 of street youth had attempted or completed a theft (J. Greene et al., 1995). A longitudinal study using a sample of 360 from the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being also found that delinquent behaviors were higher for former runaways than non-runaways (Tyler, Johnson, & Brownridge, 2008). Youth who have developed street competencies at an early age may use those during a period of crisis such as homelessness, including entry into sex work (Lankenau, Clatts, Welle, Goldsamt, & Gwadz, 2005). In a convenience sample from four U.S. cities, the likelihood of arrest is positively correlated with length of time on the street. Youth on the street for longer periods of time have a higher likelihood of involvement with the juvenile justice system (Ferguson, Bender, Thompson, Xie, & Pollio, 2012).

However, runaways do remain connected to networks of friends and family while on the street. More than half report that friends know where they are, while 26 percent have reported that parents and 25 percent have siblings who know their whereabouts. Over half of youth interviewed had access to a cell phone at least some of the time and over 20 percent had their own cell phones. In addition, youth stay connected through e-mail with over 70 percent of youth reporting access to e-mail via public libraries, shelters, or at friends' homes (Pergamit & Ernst, 2010).

Figure 1: Distribution of Means of Survival for Youth in Crisis in 2014, n=6,634



What can a parent do to prevent their child from running away?

Runaway prevention begins long before problems arise. If a child is talking to his or her parent, it's important for the parent to pay attention to their child, as the child can tell if the parent is more focused on the TV than the conversation. As children mature into adolescence, parents are encouraged to acknowledge and support the adjustment to a new stage in life. This may mean empathizing with the child's experiences and considering situations from his or her viewpoint. Parents should also share their feelings and make clear their expectations from the child. An open environment for sharing feelings encourages children to come to parents sooner if they have problems. In fact, positive parenting¹ leads to a statistically significant decrease in runaway episodes and an increase in school engagement (Tyler et al., 2008). Another study found that youth in dysfunctional families with abuse or neglect will run away earlier and more frequently than youth in stable families (L. E. Thrane, Hoyt, Whitbeck, & Yoder, 2006).

Sometimes actions speak louder than words. Certain behaviors can indicate a child is considering running away. These include:

- Changes in behaviors or patterns (child stops eating/overeats, sleeps all day/not at all, mood swings)
- Rebellious behavior
- Disclosure of intentions to run away
- Accumulation of money and possessions

If parents suspect their child might run away, it's important to confront the situation right away. Expressing concern that the child may run away and offering to listen if the child needs to talk are good first steps. It's important to make clear to the child that the parents don't want the child to run away (National Runaway Safeline, 2011). The National Runaway Safeline (NRS) is also available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, as a resource for parents or children in this difficult situation. NRS can provide safe options for children considering running or already on the street.

¹ Positive Parenting is a composite variable created from three parental constructs: parental monitoring, closeness with primary caregiver, and relationship with primary caregiver – for more information on operationalization of these variables see original study.

Why do youth run away?

The strongest predictors of running away by adolescents include contact with the juvenile justice system, failing at school, and parental alcohol abuse (Van Houten & Golombiewski, 1978). Contacts from or about a youth in crisis to the National Runaway Safeline (NRS) indicate that a number of factors including alcohol and drug use, economics, emotional and verbal abuse, and family dynamics play a role in putting youth at risk of running away from home as shown in Figure 1 below (Benoit-Bryan, 2015).

Family Dynamics

In one study, almost half of the youth interviewed said parent/guardian conflicts were a problem before they left home and landed in a runaway or homeless youth shelter (Westat 1997). **Error! Reference source not found.** Another study, conducted with shelter personnel, suggested that a problematic relationship with a parent or another adult at home led to running away 75 percent of the time (General Accounting Office, 1989). In 2014, 30 percent of kids in crisis who contacted NRS identified family dynamics as a problem for them (See Figure 1 below). The number of youth who identified family dynamics as an issue for them has risen 11 percent over the past three years (Benoit-Bryan, 2015). The most common reason for running away from home given by a non-random sample of youth who are LGBT is rejection by family of the youth's sexual orientation or gender identity (46 percent). In addition, 42 percent of LGBT youth report being forced out of their homes by their parents ((Durso & Gates, 2012).

Throwaway

Nearly half of youth in runaway or homeless youth shelters have been kicked out of the home at least once (Sedlak et al., 2002). According to the Research Triangle Institute, more than half of youth in shelters and on the street were either kicked out or told their parents they were leaving and the parents did nothing to stop them (J. Greene et al., 1995). The number of youth contacting NRS who are throwaways has dropped by 8 percent in the past year, but is still up by 25 percent over the last decade (Benoit-Bryan, 2015).

Abuse

Physical or sexual abuse drives youth onto the street – and in some cases, keeps them there for fear that returning home may mean a return to abuse. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention found 21 percent of runaway / thrown away kids had physical or sexual abuse in their history, or were afraid of suffering abuse if they went home (Hammer et al., 2002). A three-city study found a third of runaway youth suffered sexual abuse before leaving home, and 43 percent were victims of physical abuse (Molnar, Shade, Kral, Booth, & Watters, 1998). A non-random sample of LGBT runaway and homeless youth found that 32 percent of these youth reported that being physically,

sexually, or emotionally abused before leaving home contributed to their decision to run away (Durso & Gates, 2012).

The nationally representative longitudinal study found significant correlations between previous abuse and runaway rates. Verbal abuse, physical abuse, and sexual abuse before the age of 18 are all correlated with higher run away rates. Individuals who were verbally abused are over twice as likely to run away from home at 11.7 percent compared to those who were not verbally abused at 5.3 percent. The likelihood of running away from home is three times higher for respondents who were physically abused as youth at 17.4 percent than those who were not physically abused at 6.3 percent. Children who were sexually abused are over twice as likely to have run away from home at 17 percent as those who were not sexually abused at 7.9 percent (Benoit-Bryan, 2011). Sexual abuse can increase later victimization in girls. Girls who have experienced sexual abuse and are now homeless are more likely to be physically and sexually victimized while on the street than those with no history of sexual abuse (Tyler et al., 2008).

Sixteen percent of individuals who reach out to NRS via a crisis call or online chat report some kind of abuse (physical, sexual, verbal, neglect). Reporting rates of abuse and neglect rose by 6 percent over the past year and 21 percent over the past decade (Benoit-Bryan, 2015) (see Figure 1).

Additional contributors

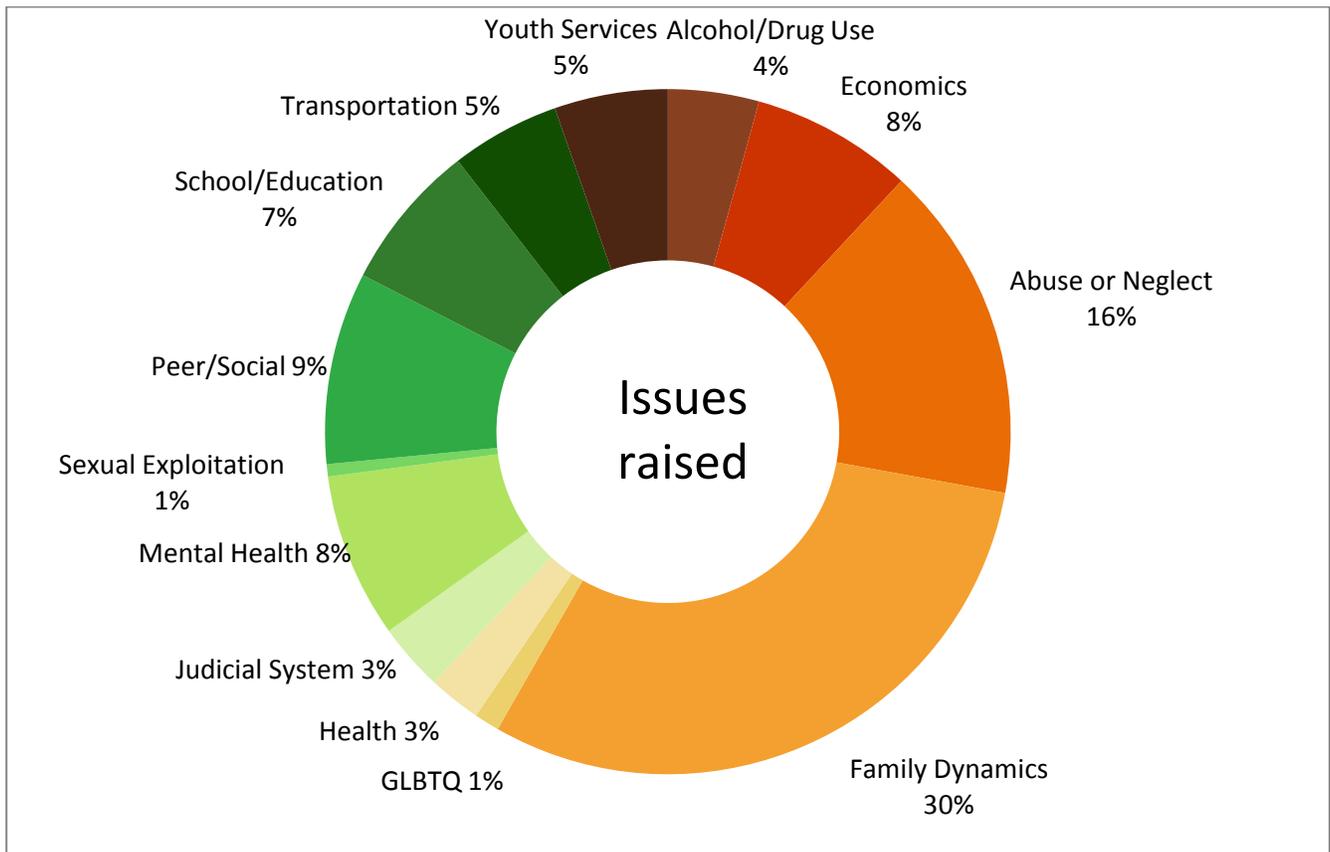
A longitudinal study conducted in 2011 by Tucker et al examined a number of variables to identify the significant predictors of runaway behavior. The research found that substance use, depression, and lack of parental support were all significant predictors of runaway behavior in youth (Tucker et al., 2011). A new study on runaways found that peer groups are important. Runaways are more likely to be on the fringes of their social groups and to associate with peers who engage in deviant behaviors such as smoking, drinking alcohol and truancy (Chen, Adams, & Thrane, 2012).

Bullying may also push youth toward running away from home. Forty-five percent of runaway youth report being bullied (Meltzer, Ford, Bebbington, & Vostanis, 2012). In addition, youth who self-identify as GLBTQ report higher incidences of bullying than their heterosexual peers (Berlan, Corliss, Field, Goodman, & Austin, 2010). However, a smaller proportion, just over 2 percent of youth who use NRS's Home Free program reported bullying to be a significant problem in their lives before they ran away from home. The more commonly identified issue for Home Free users was family conflict with two-thirds (65 percent) of youth reporting this as a significant problem (Benoit-Bryan, 2012b).

Some studies look specifically at predictors of homelessness among young adults. A study by Brakenhoff, Jang, Slesnick, and Snyder found that running away multiple times, having a nontraditional family structure, having parent(s) with health issues that prevent work, or having low educational achievement are all associated with higher levels of youth homelessness(2015). The authors also

found a couple of protective factors that lower a youth’s risk of homelessness – including being Hispanic and having parent(s) who are supportive but permissive in their parenting style. A separate research project found correlations between youth homelessness and mental health. Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a vulnerability which leads to increased levels of homelessness among youth. Data from a convenience sample show high rates of ADHD (60-90%) among homeless youth depending on the diagnostic instrument (Harding, 2015).

Figure 1: Distribution of Issues Raised by Youth in Crisis in 2014, n=39,465



Trends in runaway youth statistics

The National Runaway Safeline (NRS) has analyzed records of crisis contacts including calls to 1-800-RUNAWAY and online chats through 1800RUNAWAY.org for the 11-year period 2004-2014 to obtain these trends, with a maximum trend horizon of 10 years.

A number of important trends emerge through analysis of the past decade of crisis data from NRS. There has been a consistent increase in crisis connections from youth who are contemplating running away from home over the past year (20 percent), three years (54 percent), and decade (57 percent). This increase is mirrored in the fact that more youth are connecting from home than in the past (eight percent increase over last year). **These statistics point to the conclusion that youth are increasingly reaching out for help before the crisis point of running away from home.**

While connections from youth under the age of 13 made up a small proportion of all crisis connections in 2014 at three percent, connections from this very young age group are increasing consistently. At the same time, connections from older youth have decreased over the past year with a drop of 8 percent for 18-year-olds, 13 percent for 19- and 20-year-olds, and 21 percent for 21-year-olds.

NRS has had a fairly consistent increase in connections about abuse and neglect from individuals in crisis. There has been a 6 percent increase over the past year, 19 percent over the past three years, and 21 percent over the last decade in connections about abuse or neglect.

The economic situation of individuals in crisis has improved a bit over the past year. Economic issues were commonly reported by youth in previous years, but reports of this have decreased over the past year by nine percent. In addition, more youth are able to rely upon employment as a means of survival, an increase of four percent over the past year.

NRS has been receiving more connections about youth from youth-serving agencies than in the past: there has been an increase of 4 percent over the past year and 44 percent over the past three years. This increase may be related to NRS' initiatives to cultivate stronger relationships with professionals working with youth through NRS' Runaway Prevention Curriculum and increased community engagement efforts. However, parent connections to NRS have been declining steadily, with a drop of 15 percent over the past year, 27 percent over the past three years and 96 percent over the past decade.

NRS closely monitors the changes occurring among youth in crisis in order to provide the best possible services. **Understanding both who these youth in crisis are, and how the group as a whole is changing, are key to designing programs to keep youth safe and off the streets across the country.**

About the National Runaway Safeline

The National Runaway Safeline (NRS), established in 1971, serves as the federally-designated national communication system for runaway and homeless youth. Annually, NRS, with the support of more than 120 volunteers, makes 250,000 connections to help and hope through hotline, online and offline resources. Through hotline and online services, NRS provides crisis intervention, referrals to local resources, and education and prevention services to youth, families and community members throughout the country 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Over 15,000 youth have been reunited with their families through the NRS Home Free program done in collaboration with Greyhound Lines, Inc. The NRS crisis hotline is 1-800-RUNAWAY. For more information, visit 1800RUNAWAY.org.

Additional research resources available on the 1800RUNAWAY.org website include the [“Why They Run” report](#), the [NORC report on Runaway Youth’s Knowledge and Access to Services](#), the NRS trend report for 2004-2014, [the NRS annual call and crisis chat statistics](#), a list of [third party statistics on runaway youth](#), and a [report on the characteristics of help seeking street and non-street youth](#).

Media interested in additional information or to schedule an interview with an NRS spokesperson, please contact Katy Walsh at Kwalsh@1800RUNAWAY.org, or (773) 289-1727.

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