
THE RUNAWAY YOUTH LONGITUDINAL STUDY

A panel study spanning 15 years which examines the characteristics of kids who run away from home and the long term impacts of run away behavior on key outcomes in adulthood.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE RUNAWAY YOUTH LONGITUDINAL STUDY 2011

INTRODUCTION

There are very few research studies to date examining the correlates of run away behavior that have been nationally representative. The studies that are available focus on demographics of runaways or causal correlates of run away behavior. This is the first study to use nationally representative data to examine the consequences of running away as an adolescent on adult outcomes. The goal of this research is twofold, first to identify differences between runaways and non-runaways in terms of demographics and risk factors. The second goal is to understand the association between running away from home as an adolescent and health, economic, and justice system outcomes in adulthood. The results of this study offer compelling evidence that running away from home as an adolescent is correlated with important health, economic and juvenile justice outcomes in adulthood.

DATA SOURCE

The data used in this study are from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), a nationally representative sample of over 15,000 adolescents who were followed in to adulthood with four longitudinal interview points. The study used a clustered school sampling design of adolescents in grades 7-12 during the 1994-1995 school year. The most recent set of interviews occurred in 2008-2009 with a sample aged 24-32. This data set provides the unique ability to track individuals across 15 years and to examine how behaviors and characteristics of adolescence are connected to the outcomes of health, education, and economics for the same individuals in adulthood. In particular, this analysis uses waves three and four of the dataset, conducted when the respondents were adults, to examine the impacts of run away behavior at waves one and two of the study when respondents were adolescents.

METHODOLOGY

This study examines lifetime runaway behavior by asking survey participants in wave three of the study (aged 18-26) whether or not they had ever run away from home. Chi square analysis was used to measure differences in key characteristics between runaways and non-runaways. Multiple linear regression and multiple logistic regression were used to identify and measure the effects of running away from home as an adolescent on health, economic, and juvenile justice variables in adulthood. A number of demographic variables were controlled for in the regression models including gender, race, whether or not the individual was born in the United States, sexual orientation, and age. In addition, covariates were controlled for in order to isolate the effects of running away on the

outcome variables of interest. The covariates of verbal, physical, and sexual abuse before the age of 18, as well as whether or not the individual has ever been in foster care were controlled in all of the regression models. It is important to keep in mind that these results compare individuals up to and at a specific point in time (wave three or four of the survey) and cannot be generalized beyond that point to all of the respondent's adulthood.

FINDINGS

Differences between runaways and non-runaways

DEMOGRAPHICS

- 10% of girls ran away from home before they turned 18 while only 7% of boys ran away.
- Hispanic respondents are more likely to run away from home at 10.8% of respondents compared to non-Hispanic respondents at 8.2%. African American respondents are less likely to run away at 7.5% compared to 8.2% of non-African Americans. American Indian / Native American respondents were more likely to have run away at 12.9% than non-American Indian / Native Americans at 8.4%. Almost 11% of Asian or Pacific Islanders had run away compared to 8.4% of non-Asian or Pacific Islanders.
- Only 6.2% of individuals who were born outside of the United States ran away from home before turning 18, significantly less than the 9.6% of respondents who were born in the United States.
- In terms of sexual orientation, individuals who described themselves as 100% heterosexual had the lowest run away rate at 7.6%. The highest run away rate was reported by bisexuals at 21.7%, almost three times higher than the rate for 100% heterosexuals.

CORRELATES

- Over 30% of respondents who had been in foster care as an adolescent had also run away from home compared to 8.1% of individuals who have no foster care history.
- 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% compared to those who were not verbally abused at 5.3%. The likelihood of running away from home is three times higher for respondents who were physically abused as youth at 17.4% than those who were not physically abused at 6.3%. Children who were sexually abused are over twice as likely to have run away from home at 17% as those who were not sexually abused at 7.9%.

Examining Outcomes

HEALTH IMPACTS

- Running away from home as an adolescent increases the odds of having suicidal thoughts as an adult by 51%. An even stronger relationship is 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.
- Someone who ran away from home as an adolescent has odds 44% 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 lower than non-runaways.
- 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% more likely to use marijuana as an adult than non-runaways. Alcohol use as an adult is not associated with former runaway status.
- Former runaways are 53% more likely to report having a sexually transmitted disease as an adult than non-runaways.

ECONOMIC IMPACTS

- 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% higher for adults who ran away as an adolescent compared to individuals who never ran away from home.
- The likelihood of not having a high school degree or GED at wave four of the study is 50% 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.

JUSTICE SYSTEM IMPACTS

- 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.
- 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.
- Selling drugs as an adult is positively correlated with running away as an adolescent with a 99% increase in odds over adults who never ran away from home.