

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Civilian

Impact of Family Abuse on Running Away, Deviance, and Street Victimization Among Homeless Rural and Urban Youth

Thrane, L. E., Hoyt, D. R., Whitbeck, L. B., & Yoder, K. A. (2006). Impact of family abuse on running away, deviance, and street victimization among homeless rural and urban youth. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 30(10), 1117-1128.
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SUMMARY: Many demographic and familial risk factors are related to adolescent runaway behaviors. By interviewing 602 adolescents living on the street, the study examined the relations among family abuse, community size, runaway behaviors, and street victimization. Results showed that adolescent runaway behaviors are linked to family abuse and community size prior to the first time adolescents run away.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Destructive familial relations (e.g., neglect and sexual abuse) decreased the age at first runaway.
- Neglect and sexual abuse prior to first runaway were also positively associated with adolescents' street victimization.
- Rural adolescents were more likely to use deviant subsistence strategies (i.e., relying upon various sexual and non-sexual means to get money, food, shelter, etc.), and they tended to remain in abusive homes longer than urban adolescents.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Educate military parents on effective parenting practices and good parenting styles
- Work closely with military youth who may be at risk of running away and provide them with support needed

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide workshops for military parents that aim to prevent family abuse and adolescent runaway
- Offer support groups for military adolescents who had been abused or neglected

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Raise awareness of the detrimental effects of child abuse and neglect for military youth
- Encourage training for professionals who work with adolescents on the street regarding how to help them avoid street victimization

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METHODS

- Participants were selected from Missouri, Nebraska, Iowa, and Kansas based on convenience.
- Data were collected through individual interviews, and measures included age at first runaway, deviant subsistence strategies, street victimization, and history of abuse and neglect prior to first runaway.
- Participants were divided into rural and urban groups based on the community size they used to live in before the first runaway.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 602 adolescents who were homeless; 60% of them were female.
- The average ages of the female and male participants were 16 years and 16.6 years, respectively (age range = 12-22 years).
- Most of the participants were White (61%), followed by Black (24%), Latino (3%), Native American (3%), and other (9%).

LIMITATIONS

- All measures were solely based on interviewing the adolescents, so the results may be biased by adolescents' own perspectives.
- A convenient sample was used in the study; without random selection, the sample may not represent the general targeted population.
- The cross-sectional design of the study does not allow examination of the causal relationships among family abuse, adolescent runaway, and street victimization.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Conduct longitudinal studies to examine the causal relationship between family abuse and adolescent runaway behaviors
- Investigate strategies and design parent education programs to prevent adolescent runaway behaviors
- Randomly select adolescent runaways with a diverse background so that the sample may better represent the general targeted population

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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