Surviving as a Runaway: Services for this Population

Noelia Sanchez

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SURVIVING AS A RUNAWAY: SERVICES FOR THIS POPULATION

A Project
Presented to the Faculty of California State University, San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Social Work

by
Noelia Sanchez
June 2011
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ABSTRACT

There are thousands of children who run away from their homes each year for a variety of reasons. These children involved themselves in risky behaviors to survive while on the streets. This has been an ongoing problem that many have tried to alleviate by providing different types of resources throughout the United States. However, there is more that could be done to help our youth stay safe. This population should be of great concern to society because they are part of the future.

This study looked into what runaways have to do to survive while on the streets by interviewing them while they seek out shelter at the SafeHouse of the Desert in Thousand Palms and services through their Transitional Living Program. In addition, it also gets their point of view about the type of services that are available and what other services they might need to stay safe but are not currently being offered.

Different services can utilize this study’s information to make their programs more adequate. Furthermore, it will help to understand runaways more and find out how they can be helped so they can stay safe while on the streets.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Thomas Davis, for his guidance and patience through this process. It is greatly appreciated.

Thank you to the staff from the SafeHouse of the Desert and the Transitional Living Program in the city of Riverside. The work you do every day is admirable and much needed. I am grateful that I had the opportunity to work with both organizations.

Thank you to all of the participants on this research project. It was an honor to learn from all of you and put your words on paper. Stay safe.

Finally, thank you to my cohort. It has been three long years in which we have shared our knowledge, struggles, and laughter. Let's continue our journey to be competent social workers.
DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this project to my mother and father. Thank you for always encouraging me to do my best and supporting me with all of my dreams, besos. To my sister, I could not have done this without you. You are truly an inspiration to me and "I'm the lucky one". To my nice, you encourage me to be a better person, Love you Munchkin. To my brothers, thank you for your love and for always making me laugh. Most of all, thank you God for giving me the strength and guidance.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses a variety of reasons why minors runaway from their home or placement. It breaks down the number of runaways reported each year at the nation, state, and local level. In addition, it discusses the variety of risky behaviors runaways involved themselves in while on the streets. This chapter also covers some of the services available for this population, and notes the significance of the study.

Problem Statement

One of the most vulnerable populations has always been and will most likely always be the adolescence. In the United States there is great pride in the amount of resources, time, and money that is dedicate to children of this country. This dedication is in the hope of keeping children safe and helping them so one day they can become productive members of society. However, it has not been as successful as it was meant to be. The evidence is there every night when thousands of children walk down the streets of most cities without having a safe place to go. These children have ran away from their
homes for a variety of reasons. Some of them are running from unsafe abusive homes, in search of getting some control of their lives or their situation. Other children ran from home looking for an adventure and ended up engaging in risky behaviors. There are also those children who have been kicked out of their homes and who were forced to live on the streets. No matter the reason for which they ended up living on the streets, these children become even more vulnerable because of what they had to do and endure to survive.

This is an ongoing problem, one to which a solution has not been found. Each year there are approximately 2.8 million children in the United States that run away from home (Kim, et al., 2009). California is the leading state with the most runaways. The California Department of Justice reported in 2008 approximately 108,073 runaways. Los Angeles County has the highest runaway reports in California and Riverside County is number two with 6,929 (California Department of Justice, 2008). These children were exposed to a hard life on the streets and they were at an increased risk of a variety of problems, including alcohol and drug use, school truancy and failure, emotional and conduct disorder, criminal behavior, and
victimization. There are a number of services throughout the country that were designed to help this population such as emergency shelters, transitional living programs, and homeless centers. However, for the number of runaways this country has there are not nearly enough services to fulfill the need.

Since running away from home is against the law in California and in most states, youth referral centers are extremely important for this population. The law states that a minor who is refusing to return home may be referred to a Youth Referral Center, such as the SafeHouse in Riverside County, in order to get the help they need without breaking the law (California Department of Justice, 2008). Youth centers are not just a way of keeping runaways out of the streets and in a safe environment, but they are also a way for social workers and other professionals to track down runaways in order to help them. Having access to this population is one of social worker’s main challenges since runaways are usually hiding or constantly moving.

It is important for professionals in different fields such as social workers, educators, legislators, youth advocates, and in the medical field to continue
looking into new ways to alleviate this problem. It is an ongoing battle that is not fought by professionals only, but also by parents, community members, and the youth themselves. If society does not continue to make an effort to better the lives of youth they will continue to live a life style that will lead them to drug addiction, incarceration, exploitation, or death.

**Purpose of the Study**

There are some areas in the United States that have a higher number of runaways than others. New York City and Seattle Washington, are two of the most popular destinations for runaways. However, California is the number one place for adolescents to run to, specifically to San Francisco and Hollywood (Hull, 1994). That is why safe alternatives are needed for the youths who cannot live at home, especially in California. In the county of Riverside there are youth shelters such as the Operation SafeHouse in the city of Riverside, and the SafeHouse of the Desert in the city of Thousand Palms. These shelter homes have been a much needed resource in the county of Riverside. These are just a few of the agencies that are dedicated to keep runaways safe and it would be useful to
their agencies if they knew what runaways are doing to stay safe when they are not using their resources.

Having a variety of resources available for runaways does not mean that the resources will get utilized. In fact, only a small number of runaways use youth centers for a variety of reasons. For example, runaways might have a place to stay such as a relative’s or friend’s home. Other runaways are afraid they will be forced to go back home if they make their whereabouts known by asking for help. Runaways might not know about the services or how to utilize them. In addition, runaways might be struggling with an addiction or a mental health illness. They might also be hiding from the law, social services, or someone dangerous. Interviewing runaways that do use youth centers might help social workers understand how they can help those who do not utilize the services.

The runaway population is complex because of the different issues most runaways encounter once they are on the streets. This research will be conducted in the hope of understanding some of those issues that involve youth. Runaways are more likely to commit some type of crime to obtain money, food, shelter, drugs, or protection. By looking at runaways’ criminal activities and what they
have to do to survive on the streets, social workers might have a better understanding in how to help them stay safe.

Significance of the Project for Social Work

By conducting additional research social workers will have a better understanding of what runaways have to do to survive on the streets and how they manage to stay safe. This study will help youth centers to redirect runaways from high risk activities and into a safe environment. It will give social workers the perspective from the minor’s point of view of what type of services they are willing to participate in, what type of services are available but not accessible, and what type of services are not available but are needed.

This study will also help different agencies that have contact with this population such as the mental health, criminal justice and social services. These agencies might get an insight in how to work productively with runaways. For example, minors who are in a foster care placement have a higher chance or running away (Nesmith, 2006). In addition, they have a higher rate of depression, isolation, foster placement instability,
victimization, incarceration, and long-term homelessness. Youths who are in foster care make up anywhere from 16% to 46% of the runaway population. This is an ongoing problem for the Department of Social Services and other agencies that deal with this vulnerable population.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter reviews some of the related literature and concepts on the research topic of runaways. It gives an insight on studies focused on why children run away from their home. Some of the studies focused on parent child relationships, children with a history of abuse and neglect, and what these children have endured as runaways. In addition, it also focuses on studies that talk about services for runaways and what has worked in the past. Finally, it gives an overview of the theories guiding conceptualization.

Runaways

Researchers have been able to get a better understanding of the different aspects of runaway youths. One of the studies conducted out of Los Angeles University in 2009 was to investigate if positive maternal and paternal relationships are associated with recent problem behaviors from runaway adolescents using an attachment theory conceptual framework (Stein et al., 2009). They found that runaway adolescents who have a
positive relationship with their mothers are less likely to engage in survival sex behaviors compared to adolescents who have positive relationships with their fathers. They also found that runaway adolescents who have a positive relationship with their fathers are less likely to have problems with substance abuse and criminal behaviors. This type of research has provided a better understanding in why runaways chose different survival activities when they are on the streets.

Furthermore, the Los Angeles University study also found that if an adolescent stays away from their home longer, higher risk behavior is reported (Stein et al., 2009). More specifically, they found that females who have been out on the streets longer are in more danger because they become deeply involved with high-risk behaviors. At the same time runaway adolescents that have been on the streets longer are more likely to access services. New runaway adolescents do not know how to access services at first. This is important information that might enlighten social workers in who is more likely to use the services that are offered. There might be other reasons why new runaways do not access services,
but it is still the social worker’s obligation to make sure they are easily available for them too.

A longitudinal study was conducted and it was found that children who have a history of physical and psychological abuse have an increased likelihood of running away, which means, they are at a higher risk of delinquency and victimization (Kim et al., 2009). More specifically, they found that children who suffer from physical abuse are more likely to be involved in violent delinquency. As for children who have a history of sexual abuse, they were found more likely to become victims of theft, violence, or sexual crimes. In addition, adolescents who have been sexually abused are less likely to be involved in youth delinquency, such as, stealing, selling drugs, or violent crimes. This information can be useful when social workers first come into contact with adolescents who are still in the home and have been abused. If social workers can predict such behaviors then they can try to redirect them before minors get to the point of running away.

At the University of Colorado in 2006, a study was conducted regarding why adolescents run away from their homes (Martinez, 2006). They found that teens run away
from their homes to change the situation that they are in and to gain some control of their lives, as well as to search for a less restricted environment. This study proved that adolescents stay safe and survive by learning from their own experiences. This particular study also looked into the mental health illnesses within this population. It states that some of the problems these adolescents disclosed included depression, suicidal behavior, stress, anxiety, bipolar disorder, feelings of anger and rage, conduct disorder, ADHD, and more. It expresses a need for mental health services in different settings such as in detention centers, shelter homes, and other settings that are likely to be used by runaway adolescents.

Previous Studies on Services for Runaways

In 2008, a study from the University of Southern California (USC) was published that looked at interventions influence on homeless youth is mental health, behavioral, social and service-related outcomes (Ferguson & Xie, 2008). This study was conducted on homeless youth from the ages of 18 to 24 in the Los Angeles area. It mentions how this population often
employs high risk behaviors to meet their basic needs. Some of those behaviors include prostitution, pimping, theft, and dealing drugs. In addition, it states that this population has a history of depression, trauma, low self-esteem, self-harm, substance abuse, and physical and sexual abuse. The study took a number of homeless youths from a youth center and had them participate in a social enterprise intervention for over 12 months. Within the first nine months there was a significant improvement in the youths' life satisfaction, family contact, peer support, and depressive symptoms.

Studies such as the USC study are of great importance because it proves that adequate services for this population can improve their quality of life. This research was focused on homeless youths over the age of 18 who had been living on the streets for months or longer. The needs of this population are somewhat different from the needs of runaway youth under the age of 18. However, the core of the problem is still the same. The earlier social workers can intervene and provide adequate services the better outcome they could have with this population.
In 2007, a study was conducted based on implementing a strength based case management model with high risk youth (Arnold et al., 2007). This study categorized youths who have a history of running away from their caregivers as high-risk youths. They stated that there is a lack of effective methods of intervention for youths at risk for negative life outcome. This model focuses on working with the individual on specific areas. Such as their financial issues, family issues, abuse and neglect, developmental differences, access to health services, education, peer relationships, and transportation. They recognize that most services do not work the equally for everyone. Each individual has different needs and different skills. As a result, this study supported the theory that strength based case management can be used successfully when working with runaways.

This study highlights an important ongoing issue with current services that are designed for this population. Most services for youths have specific programs which focused on certain areas only. For example, a youth who needs substance abuse services, assistance with financial issues and family issues, might have to reach out to three different facilities to meet
all his/her needs. In short, the youth or family member might be overwhelmed trying to find the most appropriate service. Therefore, the youth or caregiver might give up on finding the right service that would meet their needs. This study was conducted with youths who have a history of running away from their caregiver, but were in their home at the time of the study. As difficult as getting the appropriate service for this population is, it becomes even more complex when the youth is still on the run.

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

Based on the reviewed literature, a number of theories have been applied when studying different aspects of our runaway population. In the Los Angeles University study attachment theory was used when looking at the parent child relationship. Attachment theory is widely known for its importance in conceptual issues of child development (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). This study and many other that have used the attachment theory help underscore the importance of the relationship between a parent and a child. This particular study predicts certain risky behavior by the runaway based on the type
of relationship they have with their mother or their father.

In a study conducted by Arnold and colleagues, strength based theory was used to determining effective services for runaway youth (Arnold et al., 2007). This study has supported the complexity of the issues surrounding our youth and the importance of focusing on the individual's needs in order to implement appropriate services. Strength based theory will be use for this study for the same reasons. Furthermore, runaways are more likely to use what they know and what they are good at to survive while on the streets.

Summary

Many factors account for the number of runaways in the United States each year. Researchers have conducted the appropriate research and have provided a variety of services to help alleviate this problem. However, this population is constantly increasing and continues to participate in risky behaviors each day. Runaways have always been a vulnerable population who constantly put their lives at risk to have their needs meet. A study looking at what runaways have to do to survive is
important because it can help services providers, policy makers and the public to support and design appropriate services that this population will need to stay safe.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the research methodology used to explore the different activities runaways used in order to stay safe while on the run. It is also used to find out what types of services are being utilized by runaways and what services are needed. Areas covered in this chapter will be focusing in study design, sampling, data collection and instrument, procedure, the process for ensuring the protection of human subjects, and data analysis.

Study Design

The study conducted consist of getting qualitative data by interviewing minors and young adults who have a history of running away as minors. These minors and young adults are seeking shelter at one of the two Safe Houses in Riverside County or their Transitional Living Program. Using a face-to-face interaction with each runaway provides a chance to have a better grasp of their points of view and of their needs. This type of study gives runaways an opportunity to explain their answers which
might not otherwise be clear with a different study method. The qualitative approach is conducted with a smaller sample, but it also provides some freedom that can be used to explore other matters pertaining to the research’s questions that might be significant for this population.

A list of standard questions will be asked to each minor in the hopes of finding out what they have seen other runaway minors due to survive, and to also find out what type of services could be provided for them to stay safe. Most of the questions will be open-ended questions but there will also be some close-ended questions.

Sampling

The researcher will be working closely with the staff from the SafeHouse of the Desert and their Transitional Living Program to have access to any secondary data that might be helpful to the researcher and to have access to runaway minors. The SafeHouse of the Desert will be the children’s advocate while the interviews are conducted. There were a total of eight interviews conducted for this study. Four of the participants were from SafeHouse of the Desert, and four
were from their Transitional Living Program in the city of Riverside. The SafeHouse is for children between the ages of 12 to 18, and their Transitional Living Program is for young adults 18 to 21 years old. The supervisors of the SafeHouse and the Transitional Living Program informed all of the possible participants about this research project. The minors and young adults were informed of who to contact within their programs in case they wished to participate in the research. This process will be repeated until enough interviews are obtained for this research.

There was a standard screening for each minor that was interviewed. For example, they had to be living on the streets for two consecutive nights or more to qualify. Since the area is predominantly caucasian and hispanic in the SafeHouse of the Desert and in Riverside, most of the participants were of those races.

Data Collection and Instruments

The interview questions utilized during the interviews were designed to find out what type of activities runaways engaged in to survive while on the run. (Appendix A). In addition, it looked into the type
of services that were being utilized and that are needed for this population. There were a total of fourteen questions and some of the questions had sub questions. Some of these questions were designed for the participants to report activities they had witnessed other runaways do. This was done with the intention to make them feel less threatened and more willing to answer honestly. The participant’s age, gender and race was asked during the interviews.

The first questions were designed to find out the history of the individual’s running behavior. It asked the age they were the first they ran away, how many times they have ran, where they usually went, how they managed to stay safe and more. The next couple of questions were designed to find out how they, or other runaways, got their needs met; such as food, shelter, money, and protection. The questions were also designed to find out what type of risky activities runaways had involved themselves with to survive. The last couple of questions were designed to find out information in regards to services for runaways. More specifically, what types of services are available, utilized, and needed by this population.
Procedures

Four of the interviews were conducted in the
SafeHouse of the Desert facility, who are the minor’s
advocate. The other four interviews were conducted at the
SafeHouse’s Transitional Living Program facility. The
directors of the facilities were aware of the research
and instructed the supervisors to assist with organizing
the interviews. The program directors and supervisors
were discreet about all of the participant’s involvement.
The time of the interview was scheduled and agreed on by
the researcher, the supervisor, and the minor. The nature
and purpose of the research and the assent form were
explained to the participants. All of the interviews were
recorded with the participant’s agreement. The purpose of
using a portable audio recorded and for seeking their
consent to audio tape the interview was explained to the
participants.

The SafeHouse’s and Transitional Living Program’s
rooms were utilized to conduct the interviews and to
obtain privacy. The SafeHouse and Transitional Living
Program set up a safe and comfortable environment for the
minors to be at ease during the interview. The inform
consent form was explained to each participant and their
advocate. They were asked to sign by writing an "X" on the form and to date it. This form let the interviewee know that they had agreed to participate and to be audio-taped. Each interview lasted approximately 15 to 20 minutes.

Protection of Human Subjects

The purpose and nature of this study was explained to all of the participants. They were notified about the process and of any risks (if any) associated with this study. Each interviewee was made fully aware of the voluntary nature of their participation in this study. To keep confidentiality, the participant’s name was not written or recorded anywhere in the study or in any other form involved in this research. All participants read the informed assent form and signed by placing an "X" on the form instead of using their name. (Appendix B). By signing the forms the participants meant that they gave their consent to be interviewed and audio taped. The SafeHouse, who is the children’s advocate, monitored the process and assured that the minors were truly volunteering for this research. The children’s advocate signed an informed consent form for each individual
participant. (Appendix C). A debriefing statement was given once the interviews were completed. (Appendix D). In the debriefing statements the participants were thanked for their participation. They were provided with additional resources that were available in they needed additional assistance, and they were also informed of the services and support the SafeHouse’s was able to provide for them.

Data Analysis

A qualitative analysis was used for this study. The responses will be sorted into different categories or themes such as; common and uncommon places, people, things, and ideas that were mentioned during the interviews. The next step was to make two categories for common and uncommon themes for the overall messages obtained bt the interviews. The themes were narrowed down as much as possible without losing their meaning.

Summary

A qualitative research approach was used to conduct this study. The study was designed to find out what runaways do to survive while on the run and the services needed by this population. The participants were
recruited from the SafeHouse of the Desert, which is a shelter for runaways, and the SafeHouse's Transitional living Program, which is for young adults who are homeless. There were eight participants for this study. All of the interviews were conducted by using the same questions for each participant. All proper procedures were taken to assure the safety of all participants.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

Chapter four reports and interprets the findings of this study. The data collected was qualitative data. Open coding was used to identify words and responses with differences and similarities from the interviews. The responses were grouped into four different categories such as people, places, things, and ideas that were mentioned during the interviews. Table six represents the common and uncommon themes found from the data collected for this study. There were a total of eight interviews with minors and young adults who have a history of running away.
Presentation of the Findings

Table 1. Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant One</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>17 years</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Two</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>16 years</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Three</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>17 years</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Four</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>14 years</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Five</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>18 years</td>
<td>Caucasian/Asian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Six</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>19 years</td>
<td>Hispanic/Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Seven</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>19 years</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Eight</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>19 years</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Demographics were identified by each participant.
Table 2. People Who were Mentioned during the Interviews by the Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Mentioned by three or more participants</th>
<th>Uncommon Mentioned by two or less participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>Extended Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>Social Worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step-Parents</td>
<td>Probation Officers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend’s Parents</td>
<td>Siblings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Runaways</td>
<td>Significant Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Mothers</td>
<td>Pimp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police Officers</td>
<td>Homeless people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselors</td>
<td>Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peers</td>
<td>Foster Kids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strangers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dangerous People</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gang Members</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug Dealers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table two demonstrates the results of the people that were mentioned during the interviews of all eight participants. The words are not placed in any particular order. The participants were not allowed to use any names during the interviews; therefore, they used descriptive words instead.
Table 3. Places that were Mentioned during the Interviews by the Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Mentioned by three or more participants</th>
<th>Uncommon Mentioned by two or less participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Their home</td>
<td>Parks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend's home</td>
<td>Tennis Court</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelter</td>
<td>Abandon Building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SafeHouse</td>
<td>Internet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grocery Store</td>
<td>High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Streets</td>
<td>Middle School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police Station</td>
<td>Juvenile Hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Shelters</td>
<td>Foster Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Significant Other's Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Poor Neighborhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Group Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Their bedrooms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table three demonstrates the places mentioned during the interviews by all eight participants. The names of the places are not in any particular order.
Table 4. Things that were Mentioned during the Interviews by the Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Mentioned by three or more participants</th>
<th>Uncommon Mentioned by two or less participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drugs</td>
<td>Bag Pack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>Knives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelter</td>
<td>Buses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money</td>
<td>Road Signs for Advertising Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weapons</td>
<td>Medical Insurance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posters</td>
<td>Blades in Shoe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stolen Items</td>
<td>Homemade Knifes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothes</td>
<td>Psychotropic Medications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Condoms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table three demonstrates the results of the people that were mentioned during the interviews of all eight participants. The words are not placed in any particular order.
Table 5. Ideas or Subjects that were Mentioned during the Interviews by the Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Mentioned by three or more participants</th>
<th>Uncommon Mentioned by two or less participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homelessness</td>
<td>Mental Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asking friends for help</td>
<td>Away from home for more than two days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surviving</td>
<td>Running away more than 20 times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking with peers about their issues and services</td>
<td>Increasing the number of shelters for runaways.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stealing</td>
<td>Missing a lot of school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street Smart</td>
<td>Gang Affiliation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td>Running away from their problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploitation</td>
<td>Being on their own</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breaking Laws</td>
<td>Getting Kicked out of their home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networking</td>
<td>Wanting their freedom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough services</td>
<td>Transgender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staying Low/Out of sight</td>
<td>Child Welfare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protection</td>
<td>Criminal history</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic Needs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substance Abuse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going out during the night, staying indoors during the day</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using friends as a source of protection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding people</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table five demonstrates the results of the people that were mentioned during the interviews of all eight
participants. The words are not placed in any particular order.

Table 6. Common and Uncommon Themes Found Throughout the Interviews of All Eight Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Mentioned by three or more participants</th>
<th>Uncommon Mentioned by two or less participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Runaways reach out to their friends for shelter, drugs, protection, and food.</td>
<td>It was found to be uncommon for runaways to sleep on the streets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Runaways try to stay out of sight.</td>
<td>It is uncommon for runaways to use the internet to search for services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Runaways steal to get their needs met.</td>
<td>It was found for runaways to use or need mental health services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Runaways learn to network through word of mouth.</td>
<td>It was uncommon for runaways to participate in prostitution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Runaways have access to professionals, such as; probation officers, social workers, and police officers.</td>
<td>It was uncommon for runaways to believe they will not notice advertisements for services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Runaway’s time on the streets increases with each runaway episode.</td>
<td>It was found to be uncommon for runaways to run away before the age of 11.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Runaways are not likely to use services the first time they run away.</td>
<td>It was uncommon for runaways to stay on the run for more than two consecutive months.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Runaway’s get exposed to dangerous activities.</td>
<td>It was uncommon for runaways to obtain a legal job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Runaways have a history of substance abuse.</td>
<td>It was uncommon for runaways to admit being happier on the run than home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Runaways have little or no family support.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

Chapter five consists of the discussion section which explores themes amongst the findings. It will discuss the runaway’s behaviors while on the run, how they stay safe, and who they are willing to reach out to. This chapter will also talk about the limitations of this study and how it can be improved. Recommendations of the social worker practice and research is also discussed in this chapter. This chapter will end with the conclusion of this study.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrated how resourceful runaways can be when they are fighting to survive while away from their home or placement. When the participants were asked where they went after they ran away, the most common answer was their friend’s home. It is not surprising that most minors run to a place they believe can keep them safe, a place that is familiar to them, and a place that can provide temporary relief from whatever they are running away from. Their friend’s home
can be a place of chaos or serenity. Although, most runaways do not care what the environment they run to is like because they always considered it a better option than their own home.

Even though this study found that most runaways ran to familiar places it is also important to recognize that some minors run to unknown and dangerous places. Some of the participants stated they had slept in parks, abandoned buildings, streets, and other places that can be extremely dangerous. According to the participants those incidents were not common or preferred but they were very real and necessary. If runaways wanted to successfully stay away from their homes for long periods of times, it would make sense for them to run to unfamiliar places that are far from their homes. The simple reasons why runaways do not take those actions are not because they can’t but because they know that eventually they do want to return back home.

The participants talked about the types of activities they do while on the run and the methods they employ to make sure they stay out of sight from authorities or people that might be looking for them. Staying out of sight was important to them and it was
common for them to state that they tried to stay indoors during the day and go out at night. The participants talked about having to constantly be aware of their surroundings almost to a state of paranoia. Participant four reported “you don’t stop anywhere, you go from point A to point B”, which was his way of staying out of sight and to avoid people (Participant 4, personal interview, February 2011). The high levels of anxiety and stress runaways go through can overwhelm them and cause serious consequences to their bodies and minds. This type of lifestyle is likely to increase their substance abuse and mental health issues.

When they were on the streets they considered the police, social workers, probation officers, and other authorities their enemies. They were constantly learning not to trust people and to avoid problems. It was common for participants to explain why they did not relied or trusted authorities or other professionals. In fact it was also common for the participants to talk about their lack of trust towards their family and friends. Throughout the interviews there was a pattern of unhealthy relationships, lack of bond, and trust issues.
With this kind of foundation it will be unlikely for runaways to build healthy relationships as adults.

Criminal behavior by runaways was reported to be a common activity as a method of survival. When the participants were asked, what type of behaviors had they seen other runaways do to survive while on the streets; they all mentioned a variety of criminal activities. It was interesting that when this was asked the participants admitted their own criminal activities. The participants volunteered the information and showed no signs of remorse, regret or shame. This behavior indicates having little or no respect for the law. Their survival was their main concern and it was common for participants to say “you have to do whatever to survive” (Participant 2, personal interview, February 2011). Runaway’s criminal patterns revealed that they found it acceptable to break laws when necessary depending on their situation. The consequences of their criminal patterns will eventually lead these runaways to juvenile hall and prison in their adult life. Their criminal behavior can lead them to having difficulty functioning in society as adults because of their lack of respect for the rules and the law.
One criminal activity that most participants denied seeing other runaways do was prostitution. In fact, only two participants admitted seeing other runaways prostitute and participant eight admitted to participating in this activity herself. She stated, "there is a lot of prostitution going on" "I was actually part of it for a while, I couldn’t handle it, so I quit" (Participant 8, personal interview, February 2011). The participants had no problem sharing that they had been involved in drug sells, assault, theft, and other illegal activities. However, prostitution is still considered a shameful activity even within the runaway population. Due to the stigma around prostitution it is likely that this activity was underreported. Prostitution is one of many dangerous activities runaways participate in order to survive.

The study confirmed that substance abuse was found to be a common trend amongst runaways. Most participants stated that they obtained their drugs from their friends or that they had stolen things to get money for drugs. Some of the participants considered drugs as one of their basic needs. In fact, it was common for the participants to admit that using drugs was one of the main reasons
they ran away from their home or placement. The participants talked about their substance abuse as a social tool, way to party with their friends, forget about their problems, and numb their emotions. It is evident from their behavioral patterns that most runaways have poor coping skills, which is why they used substance abuse as one of their outlets. Substance abuse among adolescents continues to be a dangerous behavior that can lead them to addiction, criminal activities, incarceration, exposure to victimization, or death.

It was uncommon in this study for participants to describe any mental health illnesses. One participant talked about not being able to take her psychotropic medications for her mental health illness while on the run. She talked about the difficulties of being off her medications and having no access for any mental health services as a runaway. The other participants denied having any mental health illness. It was unclear if the participants had any mental health history. There is the possibility that they have not been diagnosed yet and that they were self medicating through their substance abuse.
Adolescents with mental health illnesses run a higher risk or vulnerability and danger while on the run. This population has little to no access to mental health services. Without being on their right state of mind it is highly unlikely for them to be able to return home safely. This population is more likely to become homeless as adults. In fact, the one participant that admitted to having a mental illness is currently 19 years old and she had been homeless for almost two years prior to being accepted to the Independent Living Program. The oppression, hurt, and abuse she had to endure during those two years could give her a lifetime of hopelessness and challenges. She does not have to worry about getting mental health services or shelter for the next year, although, after the year is up her future could become unclear once again.

According to the participants they had little to no support from their families. They described an unhealthy pattern in the relationship between themselves and their parents. They referred to their home life as being a destructive and neglectful environment. It was not clear if their description was the reality or not, but it was their point of view. Through their behavior patterns the
study showed that no matter what the home situation was they still had the desire to be go home. Participant four was the exception to this theory. He was the only participant that was part of the Child Welfare System and was running away from a foster home placement. Participant four had been on the run for approximately two years, since the age of twelve, and was convinced that being on the run was the best choice for him. When asked about his reasons for running away he said "I preferred my freedom" (Participant 4, personal interview, February 2011).

It is important to recognize that runaways come from different backgrounds and are running away for different reasons. Services need flexibility in order to provide adequate aid to fulfill the needs of most runaways. Through the study it was common for the participants to agree that more services were needed. Although, it was also common for participates to not use the services the first couple of times they ran away from their home. There were constant themes throughout the study; of not knowing what types of services were available, where to look for services, and how to access services. Runaways are forced to learn how to network while on the streets
so they can have their needs met without accessing services.

The study shows runaways staying out of sight because of their lack of trust towards authorities, which consequentially makes it less appealing for them to access services. They rather put themselves in dangerous situations rather than get themselves caught and be forced to go back home. Runaways have little to no knowledge about their personal rights. For example, most of the participants learned while at the SafeHouse that if they refused to go home they had the option to be brought to a safe environment such as the SafeHouse. The longer runaways are on the streets, the more they learn through word of mouth about how to get their needs meet. Some of them learn how to use the services that are designed for their population.

Limitations

There were a number of limitations associated with this study. The first limitation was related to the sample size, which was a total of eight participants. It would be beneficial for future studies to increase the study sample size, in order to develop a broader
understanding of how to keep runaways safe while on the streets. Another limitation of the study was that all of the participants were currently participating in services. For future studies it would be valuable to get input from runaways who have not participated in services and still remain on the streets. Further research is suggested.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research

Most of the participants in this study were brought to their current shelters by a police officer, their social worker, their probation office, their counselor, or another types of professional that works closely with this population. This means that runaways that do not have access to professionals are less likely to access services. It is also important to keep in mind that these professionals are also the same people who runaways are constantly hiding from. These circumstances bring up a lot of challenges for professionals working with this population.

Facilities such as the SafeHouse and other similar shelters are very limited. There are simply not enough services available to alleviate the issues within the
runaway population. All of the participants of the study agreed that more services are needed and that they would help other runaways stay safe. Professionals have to educate adolescents about their personal rights and the services that are available in their community before they get to the point of running away from their home. Social workers and other professionals have to involve themselves in the legislation process in order to get the funding, awareness, and services that are needed for this population.

Additional research needs to be conducted to help society, legislators, and other professionals know about what this population needs. Knowledge about how to better assist runaways to stay safe and become productive members of our society is strongly needed. Since runaways are constantly hiding from authorities it would help to find out ways to reach out to this population without making them feel threaten so they can feel comfortable to use the services.

Conclusions
The study shows the complexity of this population and the drastic need to provide services that will help
runaways stay safe. It is clear that runaways have a number of reasons of why they first run away from their home or their placement. It is also understandable that ultimately, runaways are crying for help through their actions, but their true desire is to be home with their family. As professionals, citizens, and human beings it is our responsibility to intervene before runaways expose themselves to victimization and dangerous situations. Runaway are learning destructive behaviors through their actions such as avoidance, mistrust, paranoia, and self harm. Those behaviors will prevent them from being productive members of society. Their criminal activities, substance abuse, mental health issues, and self-harm behavior builds a foundation for a future in homelessness, prison, or dead.
APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
Interview Questions

Ages: _______  Gender: _______  Race: ________________________________

1) How old were you the first time you ran away?
2) How many days were you away from home?
3) Where did you go?
   a) Friend’s House
   b) Abandoned house or building
   c) Drug House
   d) Hotel/Motel
   e) Outdoor Area/ the streets
   f) Other location (please describe)
4) What type of services did you use, if any?
5) How many times have you ran away?
6) What has been the longest time you have been away from home?
7) How have you managed to stay safe?
8) How did you get the following needs met?
   a) Food
   b) Shelter
   c) Money
   d) Protection
   e) Other
9) What have you seen other runaways do to survive (circle the answers that are yes)
   a) Assault and Robbery
   b) Theft/Burglary
   c) Selling drugs
   d) Shoplifting
   e) Prostitution
   f) Other
10) What type of services have you used while on the run?
11) How did you find out about the services you used?
12) Were there any services you tried to get but were not able to, if so, what type of service was it, and why were you not able to get it?
13) Are there any services that might have helped you or other runaways stay safe but were not available?
14) What do you think is a good way to let runaways know about the services that are available?

Developed by Noelia Sanchez
APPENDIX B

ASSENT FOR MINOR
Assent for Minor

My name is Noelia Sanchez and I am a student at Cal State San Bernardino. I am doing a study to figure out how we can help runaways stay safe while they are on the run. We are asking you to take part in the research study because you know what it is like to be a runaway. For this research I will ask you some questions about what you have seen while on the run and how you think we can help other runaways stay safe. Please do not identify the names of other runaways, persons, dates of events, or specific locations during the interview. The interview will be recorded with your permission. We will keep all of your answers private and your name will not be anywhere in the study. You do not have to be in the study. No one will be upset if you decide to stop participating in the study. We do not think that any big problems will happen to you as part of this study, but if you feel that you need to talk to someone after the study we can set it up with a counselor at the SafeHouse. You can ask any questions that you might have about the study, now or later. Know that staff from the SafeHouse is here to support you and protect you.

If you have: Understood what you will be doing for this study, Have had all your questions answered, Have talked with the staff at the SafeHouse and you agree to take part in this research.

Place a check mark here: _______ Date ___________
Advocate’s signature: _______ Date ___________
APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT FOR CHILD'S ADVOCATE
Informed Consent for Child’s Advocate

The minor has been asked to voluntarily participate in a study designed to find out what runaways need to do to survive while on the streets, as well as exploring what type of services this population uses and what type of services are needed but are not available. In this study you will be asked to represent the minor participating in the interview and act as his/her advocate. This study is being conducted by Noelia Sanchez, a Master of Social Work student at California State University of San Bernardino, under the supervision of Dr. Thomas Davis. The study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board of California State University of San Bernardino.

Purpose: This study is being conducted to gather information directly from runaways in hopes of getting a better understanding on how we can help this population stay safer while on the run. As the participant’s advocate, know that you have the right to stop the participation of any minors involved in this study at any time if you believe the participant will be at any risk due to this study.

Description: Minors will be participating in a face-to-face interview with the researcher. The questions that will be asked are in regard to their history as runaways, how they or other runaways have their needs met, what type of services they have utilized while on the run and what type of services they might need but are not available to them. After the interview, they will receive a debriefing statement describing the study and additional information.

Participation: All interviews will be voluntary and they may refuse to answer any questions and to withdraw at any time during this interview without consequences.

Confidentiality: Please be assured that any information you provide will be held in strict confidence by the researcher. Know that the participant’s identification will be kept confidential at all times.

Duration: The interview conducted by the researcher will take 30 to 40 minutes.

Risks: There are no immediate or long-term physical, legal, social or economic risks to participants as a result to this study. However, in case this interview causes any emotional distress to the minors, counseling services will be provided at the Shelter A.

Benefits: The participants will receive a $5.00 Starbucks card which they can keep if they finish the interview or not.

Audio: The interviews will be audio recorded with the permission of the participant. All data will be destroyed upon completing the study.

Contact: If you have any concerns or questions relating to this study, please contact my research supervisor Dr. Thomas Davis at (909) 537-3839.

Results: The findings of this study will be available at the John M. Pfau’s Library at the California State University in San Bernardino, and also at Shelter A for runaways in the county Of Riverside after October 2011.

Signature: By signing below I acknowledge that I have been informed of, and that I understand the nature and purpose of this study, and I will act in the best interest of the participant.

Advocate’s signature: __________ Date __________
APPENDIX D

DEBRIEFING STATEMENT
Debriefing Statement for Minor

Thank you for participating in this study which has been designed to find out what runaways need to do to survive while on the streets. As well as exploring what type of services this population utilizes and what type of services are needed but are not available. The questions you were asked might have brought some unpleasant memories or feelings. If you would like to talk to someone about the memories or feelings this study brought up, now or in the future, you can contact a counselor at the SafeHouse. (The name and number of the appropriate counselor will be provided for each minor who participated in the study). In order to protect you and other runaways please make sure you do not discuss the specific details provided during this interview.

The findings of this study are available at the John M. Pfau's Library at the California State University, San Bernardino after October 2011. If you have any concerns or questions relating to this study, please contact my research supervisor Dr. Thomas Davis at (909) 5373839.

Your involvement is very much appreciated because it will help keep this vulnerable population safer.
REFERENCES


