

BEHAVIORS AND ATTITUDES RELATED TO
YOUTH RUNAWAY BEHAVIORS

by

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Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
The University of Texas at Arlington in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS CRIMINOLOGY AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT ARLINGTON

August 2011

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank Dr. del Carmen for serving as my Master's Thesis Chair. I would also like to thank the professors that have taught me over the course of my master's degree. I cannot explain in words how I have grown as a person through this endeavor. I appreciate all the challenges and bars that were set for me to rise up to.

Lastly, I would like to thank my parents and Amber Harris. As a student, son, and boyfriend I could not have asked for a more understanding and supportive group to help me through this degree.

July 6, 2011

ABSTRACT

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The University of Texas at Arlington, 2011

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The purpose of this study was to examine running away behaviors related to certain attitudes and behaviors during childhood and adolescence. Data for this study was collected from 206 students that filled out a self report questionnaire while attending the University of Texas at Arlington during the Fall semester of 2010 or Spring semester of 2011.

The main point of this research was to examine attitudes and behaviors that caused participants to have runaway thoughts or actually run away. Other variables observed were gender, family structure, and parent's education level. Two logistic regressions were run. Depression was the behavior that was correlated the most with having running away thoughts. Skipping school was found to be correlated the most with running away. Gender was found to not be statistically significant in predicting youth running away. Youth that were part of a blended or single family were found to be more likely to have had runaway behaviors. Lastly, parents of youth that ran away were found to have higher education levels than parents of youth that did not runaway.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Runaway Children

Since the 1980's, the issue of missing children has become a popular media theme that captures the American public's attention (Griffin & Miller, 2008). This is portrayed to the public through newspapers and news reports of children who have been abducted by family members and complete strangers. Through these news reports, numbers are over inflated and create a sense of an epidemic of child victims. Some of the most prolific media examples of "typical" child abduction cases include: Adam Walsch, Amber Hagerman, Megan Kanka, Jessica Lunsford, and Elizabeth Smart (Griffin & Miller, 2008).

Reports have suggested that between 1.5 million children go missing from their homes each year, and all but 150,000 will ultimately return home (Regnery, 1986). These projections of children that go missing are presented by media stories as abductions, and take attention away from the problem of children running away from their homes (Griffin & Miller, 2008). According to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, it is estimated that 1.7 million youth runaway, or are thrown out of their homes each year (Hammar, Finkelhor & Sedlak, 2002). Converted to a different measure, approximately 12% of American youth run away at least once before they reach the age of eighteen (Schaffner, 1998). Although estimates are published about this topic, knowledge of runaways and their experiences after leaving the home is inadequate and a full picture of the problems this population faces is still unknown.

Running away is not a new phenomenon in the United States or in the World; this is a behavior that has been occurring for decades and even centuries (Goldmeir & Dean, 1973). However, with the impact of instant news stories this topic has recently grown to become a significant social issue (Young, Godfrey, Matthews & Adams, 1983). A major obstacle to

overcome before clearly being able to understand the topic of youth runaways is definitions dealing with this topic.

1.2 Definition

The action of running away in many jurisdictions is a status offense (Steinhart, 1996). A *status offense* in the state of Texas is a behavior that is against the law for anyone under the age of 18. It is a behavior that is not illegal after becoming an adult. Examples of other offenses that are status offenses are: truancy, ungovernability, possession of alcohol or tobacco, curfew violations, etc (Steinhart, 1996; McMahon, 1994).

Defining the action of running away presents a more difficult task. In the United States, the action of running away has not had a clear definition. According to the Florida Department of Children and Families, a runaway is “a child who has left a relative placement, non-relative placement, shelter home, foster home, residential group home, any other placement alternative, or their in home placement without permission of the caregiver and who is determined to be missing” (Clark et al., 2008). According to the Department of Justice, a runaway refers to someone under the age of 14 (or older if mentally incompetent) who stays away from home at least overnight without parental permission, or is over the age of 15 and stays away from home for two nights without parental permission (Hammar et al., 2002).

Among the many definitions of a runaway the most common themes are the age of the youth, absence of a parent or guardian’s permission to leave, and a limitation on the amount of time the youth was away from the home (Young et al., 1983). Based on the literature, the definition for the purpose of this study refers to a *runaway* as a youth between the ages of 10 and 18, who spent at least one night away from home without the permission of their parents or a legal guardian (Young et al., 1983). A *habitual run away* is a youth who has run away three or more times before the age of 18 (Young et al., 1983; Greene, Ennet & Ringwalt, 1997). Additionally, for the purpose of this study when referring to *running away behaviors* it is defined

as someone between the ages of 10 and 18 who ran away from their home, or had thoughts about running away from their home.

1.3 Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine running away behaviors related to certain attitudes and behaviors during childhood and adolescence. College students were selected as the sample population to answer questions on the topic of running away during their childhood. The different behaviors possible to select were: running away, having runaway thoughts, and having no experiences with running away behaviors. The students then answered questions related to behaviors and attitudes that they perceived happened during their childhood and adolescence.

The questionnaire that the participants answered was created with questions that literature indicates as possible predictor variables that cause youth to run away from their homes. The reason why these items are possible predictor variables will be addressed in Chapter 2, Literature Review.

By being able to compare perception of attitudes and behaviors during childhood across these different lifestyles, it helps to analyze their effect on youth growing up. Using a quantitative cross sectional design, it is possible to observe different attitudes and behaviors that are correlated with running away behaviors. Findings with these attitudes and behaviors could be used to help parents identify traits in their children that could prevent future run away episodes.

This study adds to the literature on behaviors and attitudes that are correlated with youth running away from home. Additionally, this study introduces the topic of runaway thoughts to the current literature with variables that are correlated with youth experiencing these thoughts. The hypotheses for this study were:

Ho¹: Youth being depressed for long periods of time is going to be the most significant reason for participants having runaway thoughts.

Ha¹: Youth being depressed for long periods of time is not going to be the most significant reason for participants having runaway thoughts.

Ho²: Sexual abuse is going to be the most significant reason that participant's run away from home.

Ha²: Sexual abuse is not going to be the most significant reason that participant's run away from home.

Ho³: Females are significantly more likely to runaway than males.

Ha³: Females are not significantly more likely to runaway than males.

Ho⁴: Blended or single families will be more prevalent among participants that had runaway thoughts or actually ran away.

Ha⁴: Blended or single families will not be more prevalent among participants that had runaway thoughts or actually ran away.

Ho⁵: Youth runaway parents have lower educational levels than youth who did not run away from their homes.

Ha⁵: Youth runaway parents do not have lower educational levels than youth who did not run away from their homes.

This study is beneficial because it examines youth that run away from home through a new approach. By surveying college students, a new sample population is being utilized. Previous studies have been focused on youth runaways in shelters or found on the street (Whitbeck, Hoyt, Yoder, Cauce & Paradise, 2001; McRee, 2008; Whitbeck, Hoyt & Bao, 2000; Yoder, Whitbeck & Hoyt, 2001; Kidd, 2007; Greene et al., 1997; Thrane, Chen, Johnson & Whitbeck, 2008; Harper, Davidson & Hosek, 2008; Slesnick & Prestopnik, 2004). This leaves out a large portion of the population of youths that runaway from their homes. These studies were also structured to focus on youth that runaway for long periods of time. In this study, the design is to find out the thoughts and behaviors that cause youths to runaway or think about running away no matter the time frame that they left their home.

With this cross sectional design including the aspect of runaway thoughts, a new area of study is being added to the literature on runaways. Furthermore, with this design there will be different populations, rather than having a study that just specifically looks at youth runaways. Youth that did not run away, and youth that just had runaway thoughts are also being included in the analysis of what behaviors or attitudes have the most influence on runaway behaviors. By having these two different populations, there will be the possibility to find differences between youth that runaway and do not run away. This study also specifically asks the participants what caused them to flee from their home or to not flee from their home. This specific question looks to help answer why youth run away from home, and what can be done to prevent children from leaving in the future.

The specifics of prior research that lead to this study will be discussed in Chapter 2: Literature Review. This study looks to find if these variables in past studies do have a significant impact on youth running away when a sample of youth that have no running away behaviors, and youth that have running away thoughts are included in the study. The way this study is formatted along with the variables and methods of statistical testing will be explained in Chapter 3: Methodology. The specific findings of this study will be discussed in Chapter 4: Findings. The specific implications of this study will be discussed in Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this Chapter issues that have been described in the literature as vital to the topic of youth runaways will be discussed. The issues that will be discussed are: why youth runaway, family life, substance use, police harassment and arrest, gang membership, and ethnicity. Other topics that will be addressed are a review of the history of the juvenile justice system, and prior research studies that are both local and national in size.

2.1 History

In order to understand the current problem of youth runaways within the juvenile system, the origins need to be understood. The first judicial decision of juveniles being separate from adults in the United States resulted from a decision and practice called *Parens patriae* (Platt, 1977). This concept stated that the state can act as a parent or guardian of a child when parents failed to adequately protect their children (Platt, 1977).

The idea of juvenile courts was created by movements within states, beginning with Illinois in 1899 (Platt 1977; Steinhart, 1996). This movement was started by feminist groups, and called for differences between juvenile and adult sentences. Children were viewed as victims of the culture shock of living in cities and the technological revolution. For nearly thirty years, a movement in Illinois was pursued before the creation of a juvenile system was actually put into practice. As a result of this movement a more therapeutic model of punishments for juvenile offenders was put into practice (Platt, 1977).

Another historical change occurred in the juvenile justice system in 1960, when California and New York were among the first states to acknowledge a difference between status offenders and delinquent children (Steinhart, 1996). Before this change in statute, status offenders were treated the same as children who had committed misdemeanor or felony

offenses. Status offenders were put into detention centers, given fines and punishments, as well as labeled as delinquent youth. During the 1960's and 1970's, juvenile courts across the country reshaped their punishments for status offenders. The major reason for these changes was the creation of the legislation known as the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974. This legislation called for new regulations that ensured protection for status offenders. The legislation was created because states across the country were criticized for excessive punishment being given to status offenders (Steinhart, 1996; McMahon, 1994).

2.2 Research Studies

Delinquency by juveniles has no political or geographic boundaries; this also speaks true for runaway youths (Hildebrand, 1968). The action of running away is an event that has been occurring for decades and even centuries across the world (Goldmeir & Dean, 1973). However, runaway youth are a misunderstood group of "delinquents." The most common reason for the misunderstanding is people cannot wrap their minds around why a youth would run away from home (National Runaway Switchboard, 2010A). In fact, most of the American public denies, ignores, or is ignorant to the fact that there is even a runaway problem in the United States (National Runaway Switchboard, 2010A).

According to the most recent national study, the Second National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children, approximately 1.7 million youth experienced a runaway/ throwaway episode in 1999 (Hammar et al., 2002). While this is a conservative estimate from an outdated study, current projections are somewhere between 1.6 to 2.8 million runaway occurrences annually (National Runaway Switchboard, 2010A). This equates to approximately 6.4% to 7.6% of youths between the ages of 12 to 17 running away from home each year (Harper et al., 2008). According to the National Runaway Switchboard (2010A), one in five youth run away before reaching the age of 18, and half of those run away two or more times.

The runaway population finds that they are free from parental supervision, but find themselves in many situations where they can become victims (Yoder et al., 2001). Most youth that experiment with running away for short periods of time will have little to moderate negative consequences if they utilize runaway and homeless youth services (Kempf-Leonard & Johansson, 2007). The youth that do not utilize these services have the potential to experience many negative consequences of living on the street such as: police harassment, arrests, substance abuse, mental health issues, and physical and sexual victimization (Greene et al., 1997; McGarvey et al., 2010, Yoder et al., 2001).

The National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) is an organization that exists to help runaways, potential runaways, throwaways, and homeless youth (National Runaway Switchboard, 2010C). This agency accepts calls 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and 365 days a year. On average 273 calls are handled daily, which totals to over 100,000 callers a year (National Runaway Switchboard, 2010B). In 2009, 117,602 calls were received and dealt with youth or concerned family members of youth who had runaway (National Runaway Switchboard, 2010B). During these phone calls youths were asked a series of questions and the representative coded the answers and helped the caller in any way that they could (National Runaway Switchboard, 2010A).

Using the answers to these questions the NRS created a report called the Crisis Caller (National Runaway Switchboard, 2010B). In this report it was found that 72% of the crisis callers were female. Among the runaway callers, friends and relatives were the most frequently identified means of survival, to help house and feed the youth. Fifty two percent of the callers had been on the street for one week or less. Forty two percent of the callers at the time of the phone call were runaways, while another 10% percent of the youths were contemplating running away. When asked if the youth had ever previously runaway 47% of the respondents replied no, while 25% of the respondents indicated they had previously runaway (National Runaway Switchboard, 2010B).

During 2009 in Texas, the NRS received 10,512 calls, or approximately 28.8 calls a day (National Runaway Switchboard, 2010B). If these calls in Texas are similar to the national percentage of calls from runaways (42%), then approximately 4,415 of the calls in Texas came from runaway children. If runaways had equally left all 254 counties in Texas, then 17 youths would have runaway from every county in 2009. This may seem like a small figure for runaways, but this is only calculating runaways that called one specific hotline for help. This means that the runaway population for Texas could be much larger than presented by the National Runaway Switchboard.

In May 2010, the NRS released a study on the runaway population. The report's goal was to get a better idea of: the reasons that youth runaway from their homes, what causes them to runaway, and if anybody knows where they are after the runaway has occurred (National Switchboard, 2010B). In the research it was noted that between the years of 2001 to 2009, youth running away for economic reasons has increased 494 percent. The reason that was cited most commonly as the cause of running away was problems with family members (divorce, remarriage, problems with siblings). In this study, it was found that gender was not a key factor in running away. It was found that females are more likely than males to seek help from a shelter or a hotline. However, only 10% of youth reported using or relying on shelters. When asked questions about their families and causes of leaving their homes, it was found that 73% of the respondents indicated they had been living with one or more of their biological parents and more than 70% of the youth described their running away as a spur of the moment decision caused by a significant family conflict. Upon leaving the house, 78% of the youths indicated that they had \$10 or less. When asked how they obtained money, answers varied from: getting a job, friends and family, the sex industry, selling drugs, and the most common answer being panhandling. When asked if anybody knew about the youth's whereabouts the responses indicated that 50% had friends, 26% had parents, and 25% had siblings that knew of

the runaway's whereabouts. Only 13% of the respondents indicated that nobody knew of their location (National Switchboard, 2010B).

This study has some very interesting findings, but also had some major flaws. First, youths were paid \$30 dollars for their participation in the study (National Runaway Switchboard, 2010B). Secondly, the runaway sample size was 40 youths in Chicago, and 43 youths in Los Angeles. This is not a large enough sample size to generalize the findings. Additionally, youths between the ages of 14 and 17 were only interviewed at urban shelters (National Switchboard, 2010B). This leaves unknown information about younger youths and youths in rural shelters which are part of the runaway population.

In a study that was designed to analyze different noticeable character traits between runaway and non runaways, fourteen specific traits were studied (Goldmeir & Dean, 1973). There was no difference between the two populations on 11 of the traits. These traits included: number of children in the family, birth order, and occupations, income level, and employment or unemployment of the parents. The characteristics that were different among the two groups were runaways tended: to be older than non runaways, to be in vocational or non academic programs at school, and be from homes where one of their natural parents was absent. Other findings included that runaways had: poorer grades in school, less interest in school, less warm feelings toward their parents, their parents punished excessively and undeservingly, and there was an unhappy relationship between the runaway and runaway's parents. Finally, when runaways were faced with problems, they were more likely to turn to their peers for help or advice rather than seeking help from an adult authority figure such as a parent, teacher, or school counselor (Goldmeir & Dean, 1973).

2.3 Why Run Away?

One of the many questions that researchers deal with when studying runaway children is: Why does this population of youth decide to leave their homes (Thompson et al., 2003)? Researchers have been looking at this question for decades (Goldmeir & Dean, 1973). During

the 1930's and 40's, many researchers believed that the behavior was a cause of personal conflicts within the youth influenced by different mental problems. One of these views was called the psychoneurotic response which is caused by mental deficiency and poor impulse control in the juvenile. Another prevailing thought at the time was that the act of running away was caused by an Oedipal conflict, which the youth could only fix by physical separation from their parents (Goldmeir & Dean, 1973).

Later research shows that there is a good chance that most children at some point in their childhood contemplate running away after a family conflict occurs (Kempf-Leonard & Johansson, 2007). However, the majority of the children that contemplate the thought of running away never actually flee from their home. It has been thought that youth who run away from their homes have a want and desire for a new lifestyle (Kempf-Leonard & Johansson, 2007). An overview of the many possible reasons that youth run away was presented by Zide and Cherry (1992) who argued that a youth's decision to flee their home falls within four categories: (1) running away for adventure; (2) running away from conflicting, alienating, and dangerous family situations; (3) being thrown out by their families often following an event that lead to school suspension or legal issue; and (4) being throwaway because their families can no longer afford or support the child. Additionally, Brennan et al. (1978) created two different categorizes of runaways. First, there are runaways that are not highly delinquent; this group includes adolescents who maintain non deviant friendships. Then there are the delinquent runaways who are likely to reject their parents and peers. This group reports: low levels of poor self esteem, alienation from their peers at school, doing poorly in school, and having a history of delinquent behavior (Brennan, Huizinga, & Elliott, 1978).

Brennan et al. (1978) also created different types of categories for long term and short term runaways. Short term runaway youths were organized into three different groups. There is the crisis escapist, who runs away spontaneously to avoid problems within the home. A casual hedonist, who runs away for the purpose to find fun and adventure that is lacking in their home

environment. Lastly is the unhappy runner, who suddenly runs away after some thoughts about his or her actions. Normally these actions are illegal and the runaway occurs due to the thoughts of the future consequences that will impend due to those actions. Long term runaways were organized into two different groups. There were the curtailed escapists, who run away after they had created an extensive plan of where they are going and what they are going to do. Also, there were the deliberate or independent runners, who seem to have the adequate skills and means to survive and possibly find happiness once they had run away from home (Brennan et al., 1978). Among these different types and categories of youth that run away is the reoccurring theme of a poor family life or sudden event that results in causing the youth to flee from their home.

Research has shown that many juveniles become runaways as a result of being abused, neglected, or observing violence in their homes (Whitbeck et al., 2001). It is believed that this negative family environment can contribute to delinquent behavior in youths (Israel, 1996). The main argument is that the family is the primary entity in which children observe and learn behaviors that influence their future values, attitudes, and beliefs (Israel, 1996). Running away for these youths holds potential for more freedom but also holds serious consequences. They may be exposed to alcohol and drugs, criminal and sexual victimization, sexually transmitted diseases, arrest, incarceration, and even prostitution (Clark et al., 2008).

Running away from home is a stressful decision for juveniles (Whitbeck et al., 2000). After these youth runaway they have few social resources, low levels of social support, and high levels of daily stress associated with being on their own. After leaving home these juveniles lose the familiar routines of going to school during the week, and the daily routine for being at home with family and friends. Time on the street has its obvious problems, but even time spent in shelters is stressful for youths because they are surrounded by unfamiliar people and uncertain about what they will be eating or where they will be sleeping on a daily basis. Chronic running away may affect other areas in a youth's life as well. First it can effect, interrupt, and even

diminish educational progress and possibilities for a youth. Sports and extracurricular activities that teach youth social and life skills are also limited. Additionally, chronic runaways may have reduced opportunities for making lifelong friendships with adolescents and even adults that can have an overall impact that change or better their lives. The decision to runaway repeatedly may also reduce or eliminate guidance from a parent or guardian (Whitbeck et al., 2000).

The impact of adolescent friends and peers plays a major role in the development of a young person's social and self identity (Harper et al., 2008). Close friendships with adolescent peers of a similar age provide a multitude of necessities such as companionship, emotional support, intimacy, and means of expressing emotions and resolving conflicts. These peers also understand what the youth may be going through and feeling at a given time, as a result of similar situations in their homes. Youths who lack healthy, close, and continual friendships throughout their adolescence and teenage years of life may be at a high risk for negative psychological, mental, and physical health concerns (Harper et al., 2008).

2.4 Family Life

Historically, running away has been viewed as a youth's desire for independence from household rules and parental expectations (Thompson et al., 2003). Findings in a variety of studies have slowly retracted this idea, and have indicated that lack of family support might be the single largest factor associated with youth running away (Slesnick & Prestopnik, 2004). The family environment has also been linked to predicting later outcomes in life related to academic achievement, police contact, and involvement with delinquent peers (Harper et al., 2008). It has been found that in homes of future runaways that the youth is likely to be provided with: limited or poor supervision, limited or no help on school work, little opportunity to discuss personal problems with their caretakers, and little emotional support from their caretakers (Young et al., 1983). Lower support from parents leads to depression in youth and results in reports of more negative life events for their family and themselves (Whitbeck et al., 2000). Additionally, among these runaways parents or guardians have been found to have high rates of drug and alcohol

use, as well as high rates of conviction for various criminal acts (Kidd, 2007). It has been found that a high percentage of these families qualify or are on some form of social assistance (Kidd, 2007). With these findings the relationship between the parent and child has emerged as one of the most important areas for understanding delinquency among adolescence (Booth, Farrell & Varano, 2008).

A large number of runaways experience abuse or victimization at home before they runaway (Russell, 1998; Whitbeck et al., 2001; Baron, 2003; McRee, 2008; McGarvey et al., 2010; Thompson et al., 2003). The most common forms of abuse are: physical, mental, and sexual abuse. In addition to these forms of abuse, there is the potential to witness others being abused. Russell (1998) reported that in her sample 50% of the respondents had witnessed violence in their homes between adults. Of the group that had witnessed violence, one out of four witnessed someone being threatened with a weapon in their home, and one out of eight had witnessed someone being burned, stabbed, shot, or sexually assaulted in their home (Russell, 1998).

To determine the rates of victimization among youths, a study was done in Seattle and the results were combined with the 602 adolescents from the Midwest Homeless and Runaway Project (Whitbeck et al., 2001). Findings revealed that abuse was common among these two samples of runaways. Two thirds of the juveniles reported their caretaker having thrown something at them in anger, 77% of youth reported being pushed, shoved, or grabbed by their caretaker, 69% reported being slapped in the face, 35% reported being beaten with a fist, 23% reported being threatened with a weapon, and 7% reported that they had been injured by their parents with a weapon. Of these juveniles, 64% described their primary caretakers as their mothers, 12% their fathers, and 8% their grandmothers. Approximately 50% of the respondents indicated that their family had been on welfare and 73% reported having received food stamps while living with their caretakers (Whitbeck et al., 2001).

Research findings on physically and sexually abused victims show many future consequences for this population (Baron, 2003). Depression, low self esteem, suicidal thoughts and behaviors, post traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse, and criminal behaviors are found at higher rates for victims of sexual and physical abuse when compared to the general population. Among runaway youths in different studies, reports of physical abuse have ranged widely from as low as 16% to reports as high as 81%. Rates of sexual abuse in studies have widely varied as well, from as low as 5% to as high as 50% (Baron, 2003).

Research shows that youth that live in homes with non related parents are at higher risk of abuse than children living in homes with two natural parents (McRee, 2008). In a study that was designed to look at the risk of physical and sexual abuse of children, data was used from homeless youth and runaway shelters and 40,000 cases were randomly selected from a sample of 87,909 cases. The finding of the study identified that blended households had a greater than expected risk of child abuse, both physically and sexually. Families that had one natural parent, an adult relative, or a single natural parent had lower than expected reports of physical abuse and sexual abuse (McRee, 2008).

In a study of 602 adolescents in four Midwestern states it was found that family environment was a crucial factor in youth running away (Chapple, Johnson & Whitbeck, 2004). It was found that youth that were neglected in the home by their caretakers were 3.25 times more likely to runaway than youth who were given attention and a positive home environment. Another finding was that youth who had been sexually abused in their homes by a family member or friend of the family were 3.12 times more likely to runaway than were youth who had not been sexually abused in their homes. Females were found to be more likely to have been either physically or sexually abused at home when compared to males in the sample (Chapple et al., 2004).

Although violence and physical or sexual abuse can be factors in a youth's decision to run away from their home and family, other factors have been found to be influential and have a

major impact on a youth's decision to runaway (Baron, 2003). These include: parental neglect, parental substance abuse, parental unemployment, changes in family structure, reoccurring arguments, and parental control issues (Baron, 2003). Parental bonding differences have been examined in research and differences have been found between parents of runaway youth and parents who have children that do not run away from their homes (McGarvey et al., 2010). Perceptions of different types of parental bonding styles were studied in a sample of 159 youth males in a juvenile detention center. It was found that running away was significantly and positively related to mothers and fathers not showing affection towards their children (McGarvey et al., 2010).

In another study on parental bonding, youth were studied that were living at homeless shelters. When parents of the youth living at these shelters were contacted by researchers it was found that parents of runaways scored themselves significantly lower on measures of parental monitoring than did other parents whose children had not run away from their homes (Slesnick & Prestopnik, 2004). Additional findings in this study were that adolescents perceived the family environment more negatively and with more problems than did the primary caretakers. Males reported lower protection from their primary caretakers, while females reported overprotection, and more rules enforced by their parents. Lastly, youths reported a more severe overall problem than did the caretakers (Slesnick & Prestopnik, 2004). A major finding of both of these research studies is that runaways experience different types of care from their parents than youth that do not runaway.

In a qualitative study of 26 runaways from a rural New England shelter it was found that most runaways do not runaway because they want to leave their homes (Schaffer, 1998). Among these youth was a common reoccurring theme that teenagers struggle to find ways to care and love their parents in a dysfunctional family environment. With factors such as physical and sexual abuse, authoritarian parenting styles, neglect, abandonment, drug abuse, and other

conflicts in the home, runaways ultimately have to choose between maintaining the family unit or their own personal survival (Schaffer, 1998).

When comparing children who live at home with parents to children who lived in placement programs, foster care programs, or group shelters differences were found in running away rates. Children who were living in placement programs, foster care, or group shelters were found to be more likely to run away from these programs than youths that lived at home (Clark et al., 2008; Schaffner, 1998). In a qualitative study on why youths in these types of programs are more likely to run away than youths who live at home, it was found that many features of the programs can be associated with runaway behaviors. These features are: youth getting changed to multiple different placement centers, living in a group type house, and having limited options of people to talk to when faced with problems or concerns about an issue that is important to them (Clark et al., 2008).

2.5 Substance Use

Abuse and usage of illegal drugs has been a concern of researchers among the juvenile runaway population (Booth et al., 2008; Slesnick & Prestopnik, 2004). Drug and alcohol use among adolescents strongly increases the risk of self destructive behaviors such as suicide and running away (Booth et al., 2008). This is frightening when also considering prior findings that runaways are already more likely to be depressed, to have previously attempted suicide, or have a serious mental health problem when compared to the general population (Yates, MacKenzie, Pennbridge, & Cohen, 1988). Substance use has been implicated as contributing to youth's running away from their homes or placement facilities because of conflicts between the youth and guardians about beating their addiction (Greene et al., 1997). It has been found that the rate of alcohol, marijuana, and illicit drug use is higher among adolescents who run away from their homes when compared to juveniles who had not run away from their homes (Greene et al., 1997).

In a study that compared the rates of substance use among youth who lived on the streets, in shelters, and at homes, it was found that larger proportions of runaway and homeless youth used illegal substances than youths who lived at their homes (Greene et al., 1997). Larger differences between the groups were found in usage rates of the more illicit drugs, with the adolescents who lived on the streets using these drugs the most. The ages that encounter the most drug abuse problems on the streets or in shelters were between 18-21 years old. When comparing substance use between the street youth and the sheltered youth, the street population had the higher usage rates. Over half of the street youth reported using illicit drugs other than marijuana. Only one third of sheltered youth and one quarter of the youth with recent runaway/homeless experiences reported other illicit drug usage higher than that of marijuana. Street youth were more likely than shelter or non-runaway to have tried or regularly used heroin, methamphetamines, and crack cocaine. Street youth were more involved in serious drug use as indicated by the stage of drug involvement they indicated and by the number of times the substance was used. One interesting finding in this study was that youth in households with recent runaway experiences had higher rates of alcohol use than shelter youth (Greene et al., 1997).

2.6 Police Harassment and Arrest

Running away has been shown to increase the likelihood of deviant behavior (Thrane et al., 2008; Chapple et al., 2004). Juveniles living on the streets with no parental or adult supervision are thought to be prone to act out of control. When police arrest records were reviewed; running away several times prior to the age of 15 increased the odds of a future juvenile arrest 3 to 1. A study examined police harassment among runaway youth in the Midwest. A sample of 361 adolescents from eight different Midwestern cities between the ages of 16 to 19 who had not been arrested before running away from home were interviewed twice over the course of a year. It was found that 55% of the respondents reported that they had been arrested after running away from their homes. Police harassment and arrest was reported to

occur more with males than females. Additionally, younger youths reported more harassment and arrests than older youths. It was also found that youth who ran away at an earlier age reported stronger associations with deviant peers (Thrane et al., 2008).

It is possible that these findings of post runaway arrest could be due to the behavioral style learned by these runaways (Thrane et al., 2008). Research shows that a large percent of runaway youths live in dysfunctional homes that are characterized by inadequate discipline and supervision as well as family conflict (Thompson et al., 2003). In this type of situation it is probable that it was learned to be hostile to authority figures, thus increasing chances of having an arrest after leaving the home (Thrane et al., 2008).

Key predictors of juvenile arrest are helpful in understanding arrest patterns. In runaway youth it has been found that there are three key predictors in future arrest: association with criminal (deviant) peers, exposure to street stressors, and experiences with abuse that occurred within the family (Yoder et al., 2001). Increased time on the street was found to be a predictor because this leads to increased exposure to criminal peers, more criminal opportunities, and greater stress such as uncertainty of future meals and shelter. It is thought that the longer a youth lives on the street, the higher their stress levels will become. These youth may resort to criminal activities in order to survive. Techniques that have been reported by youth are selling drugs, stealing food, and participating in survival sex for food to eat and a place to stay. It was found that hunger was the most significant predictor of theft of food or the occurrence of a serious theft (Yoder et al., 2001).

A study was designed that looked at the referral rates of runaways to the court (Kempf-Leonard & Johansson, 2007). In this study it was found that the status offense of runaways resulted in 6,473 (15.2%) youths being referred out of the 42,577 youths in the 7 year time frame studied. Females made up 65.3% of the youths referred. It was found that 76.5% of the juveniles only had one referral for running away, while 23.5% had two or more referrals. Males were significantly more likely when having one runaway charge to commit the future offenses of

theft, assault, burglary, and a drug or weapons violation when compared to females. During the first year after running away, 56.2% of males only had a runaway charge, 32.9% had a runaway and a non-serious charge, and 11% had a runaway and serious charge. In females 72.8% only had a runaway charge, 25.2% had a runaway and a non-serious charge, and 2.1% had a runaway and a serious charge (Kempf-Leonard & Johansson, 2007).

2.7 Gang Membership

Gang membership is an interesting concept with runaways. Upon leaving their homes, runaways leave behind people that help protect them. Gangs offer a sense of family and protection for members (Harper et al., 2008). A study was done to find out if runaway youth join gangs in a Midwestern city and the participants included 69 homeless African Americans. Among the population studied it was found that there were 31 individuals who identified themselves as gang members and 38 individuals who identified themselves as non gang members. When youths were asked about their feelings, gang members reported overall higher levels of negativity in their lives such as depression, anxiety, and loneliness. This can possibly be linked to the relatively high number of stressful situations because of their gang affiliations such as shootings, stabbings, and rival gang retaliation. Gang members also reported significantly greater levels of anti social/violent behavior. Examples included taking part in gang fights and putting graffiti on walls. The youth that identified themselves as gang members also had higher mean levels of lifetime use of marijuana and alcohol when compared to non gang members (Harper et al., 2008).

In another study on runaway youths being involved in gangs it was found that minority youths were overrepresented among gang members (Yoder, Whitbeck & Hoyt, 2003). Runaway youth who were not involved in gangs or gang activity tended to be the older runaway youth. Other findings were that youth who had higher levels of parental monitoring before they ran away were less likely to join gangs. Adolescents who join gangs had reported higher levels of physical abuse from their families compared to adolescence that did not join gangs. Youth gang

members were more likely to have been suspended from school when compared to non youth gang members (Yoder et al., 2003). Research has found that youth that join gangs have lower levels of attachment to parents and teachers as well as lower levels of commitment to school (Booth et al., 2008).

2.8 Differences in Ethnicities

When looking at ethnicity in the criminal justice system there is a disproportional amount of minorities experiencing arrests (Pratt & Lowenkamp, 2002). In a study examining if ethnicity matters in family reunification, 14,419 youths across the United States were sampled (Thompson et al., 2003). In the sample, the average age was 16 years old. Approximately 63% of the sample was female. The majority of the sample (73%) indicated that they were runaways, 12.7% were throwaways, and 14.2% were homeless. Youth reported running away an average of three times. A large amount of the sample (59%) indicated they had used illegal drugs and 15.7% indicated they had sold drugs while they had been on the streets after they had run away from their homes (Thompson et al., 2003).

Differences were found among the different ethnicities. Most Caucasians youths identified themselves as runaways, while a higher percentage of African Americans identified themselves as throwaways (Thompson et al., 2003). Native American youth reported the highest proportion of substance use, selling drugs, and being sexually abused among all the reported ethnicities. African American youth were 1.5 times more likely to return home, and Hispanic youth were nearly twice as likely to return home when compared to Caucasians. Being female increased the odds of returning home, but being older decreased the likelihood of returning home. For each day youths were on the run, they were nearly 10% less likely to return home. Caucasian youth were less likely to return home if they had been emotionally, physically, or sexually abused by either parent. This study shows that there are critical differences among different ethnicities concerning running away and being reunified with their families. However, a limitation of this study was that the data does not include youth who do not seek shelter

services and these youth likely have different opinions and expectations on reunification than runaways that did seek shelter services (Thompson et al., 2003). Although this study explains what factors are correlated with juveniles not returning home it has been found that a majority of youths who run away often returned back to their homes (Chapple et al., 2004).

2.9 National Findings

In 1999, it is estimated that in the United States there were 1,682,900 youths that either runaway or were thrown out of their homes by their parents (Hammar et al., 2002). In order to make that estimate, two different national studies were conducted and compiled into a report called the National Incidence studies of missing, abducted, runaway, and throwaway children or NISMART-2. A household survey of adult caretakers and a household survey of youth were conducted in 1999. A total of 16,111 interviews were completed between the two surveys, with a completion rate of 80% among the adult survey, and 61% among the youth survey. The results of the surveys revealed that juveniles between the ages of 15-17 made up two thirds of the youth that left their homes in 1999 and a large number of youths ran away from facilities such as group homes and detention centers. Only an estimated 21% or 357,600 youth were reported missing to the police or a children's agency for help in locating the child in 1999. The runaway population was estimated to be equally divided between boys and girls. Additionally, there was no disproportional rate of race running away in the estimated population. A larger number of runaways and throwaways occurred during the summer time, compared to other times of the year. Approximately 23% of runaways traveled a distance of 50 miles or more from home, and 9% left the state that they lived in. Most youths left their houses for less than a week, and only 7% were away from their house for more than a month. During the time frame of the study, 99.6% of the runaways had returned home, leaving only .04% that had not returned home. A major limitation of this study was that a child was only counted as a runaway once even if they ran away more than one time in a given year. (Hammar et al., 2002).

In an additional study done by the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, contradicting results were found when looking at gender and race when compared to the NISMART-2 report (Tyler & Bersani, 2008). It was found that females were more likely to run away from their homes when analyzing gender. When looking at race, African Americans and Hispanics were less likely to run away when compared to Caucasian adolescents. Lastly, it was found that youth that engaged in delinquent behavior were more likely to run away from home to escape family or community problems (Tyler & Bersani, 2008).

2.10 Texas Findings

Findings in a Texas county were different when compared to the national findings of runaways. A study looked at the referrals to a juvenile court for runaways and had a sample size of 6,473 juveniles (Kempf- Leonard, & Johansson, 2007). It was found that 65.3% of the sample was female. (Kempf-Leonard, & Johansson, 2007). This is an extremely different finding when compared to the NISMART-2 that found that runaways were equally comprised of males and females (Hammar et al., 2002). In the Texas sample, most of the runaway youth lived with a single parent (Kempf-Leonard, & Johansson, 2007). It was found that if a female was abused it increased her chances of running away 3.4 times. In males, runaway referrals were more likely for Caucasians than any other racial group. This also differs from the national finding. Substance abuse was more common among boys when compared to girls. Findings indicated that substance abuse was a problem among many of the runaway youth in this county, and that additional referrals to the court were more common for boys (Kempf-Leonard, & Johansson, 2007). A limitation of this research is that it is possible that there were clerical errors in the data leading to incorrect data being analyzed (Maxfield, & Babbie, 2008).

2.11 Limitations of Past Studies

Upon review of the literature, it was found that there are many different ways that a runaway youth was operationalized in studies. Different criteria for operationalizing the term runaway was the age of the youth and time the youth spent away from the home. These

variables were not congruent across all studies. With these issues, validity becomes a concern (Maxfield, & Babbie, 2008). Among the many different studies done on this population of youth, different sample sizes were utilized to look for trends among a group that is estimated to be as small as 1.6 million to as large as 2.8 million children a year (National Runaway Switchboard, 2010A). Studies were done that were as small as 26 youths in a qualitative study, and a sample of 69 youths in a quantitative study located in one city (Schaffner, 1998; Harper et al., 2008). When studies are this small it becomes a question if a representative sample size of the population was achieved, and if there was enough statistical power to support the findings (Maxfield, & Babbie, 2008).

In research, findings should never be generalized from one region of the country to another region of the country (Maxfield, & Babbie, 2008). Most of the research on the runaway population occurred in eight Midwestern cities. Relatively few studies looked at cities on the east coast, and few studies looked at cities on the west coast of the United States. Only one study was found that was done specifically in the state of Texas. Three national studies were conducted and they found contradicting findings to each other as well as the localized studies. First, it is not clear if males or females are more likely to run away from home. Secondly, it is not clear if ethnicity or race plays a factor in youth running away from home. Both of these variables have been cited as being a factor in running away and not being a factor in running away. Additionally, most of these studies surveyed youths that live in urban shelters or in the commonly known areas that youth lived at on the streets in urban cities. In these studies, the researchers paid the youth to participate, which could have altered participation in the study (Maxfield, & Babbie, 2008). Furthermore, findings in these studies only indicated the perception of the youths in urban areas. Many populations of youth were left out of analysis by doing this type of study. Youth that live in shelters that were not visited, youth that live in uncommon areas with limited contact with police and the public, and rural areas of the country were left out. Researching runaways with this design may not allow all socioeconomic classes to be

represented. The United States is a country that is populated mostly by rural areas, not urban areas, so a majority of the country has not even been studied when looking at the topic of runaways.

Ages in these studies were also not consistent. Ages ranged from 10 years old to 26 years old. By putting different restrictions on the age of the participants the researchers can cause validity issues with their statistical analysis (Maxfield, & Babbie, 2008). Most of the studies focused on the range of 14-17 years old. This leaves the youngest population (10-13 year olds) out of statistical analysis, with a majority of the literature citing that younger runaways are more likely to be deviant and have additional arrests. Lastly, no study has looked at the differences in attitudes and behaviors across the range of runaway behaviors (non runaway behaviors, runaway thoughts, actually running away) to find out if there is any correlations with a specific attitude or behavior in childhood and a specific resulting action such as running away.

In the next Chapter the Methodology will be discussed on how this study was done. This chapter will highlight the procedures that were taken to get the participants, how the questionnaire was created, ethical consideration that were taken, the reliability of this study, and the statistical test that were used to analyze the data.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Design and Participants

This study utilized exploratory and descriptive research, by using a cross sectional study (Maxwell & Babbie, 2005). A cross sectional study takes a small section of a population and analyzes that section (Maxwell & Babbie, 2005). Quantitative data was created by gathering 206 questionnaires that were filled out by students at the University of Texas at Arlington during the fall of 2010 and spring of 2011. The fall semester was chosen to start the research because this is the time of the year when the most students are enrolled. During the spring semester there were approximately 33,000 students at the University (Fast Facts, 2010). To gather the data, seven classes were pre-selected and asked to participate in the study. These classes consisted of: Introductory to Criminal Justice, Introduction to Forensics, Criminal Investigation, Community Corrections, and Women and Crime. These classes were selected to gain the best possible chance at not only gaining participants that were involved in the Criminal Justice Degree plan, but to also gain students that were outside the degree. Students enrolled in the seven classes and were in attendance the day their class participated in the study was given the opportunity to participate. The questionnaire was only created in one language, English, any potential participants that were not fluent in English could have opted to not participate in the study. No rewards or incentives were promised or implied to the students for their participation in the study, and non participation in the study did not affect the outcome of their grade in the class that they were enrolled in.

3.2 Questionnaire

The items that made up the questionnaire consisted of topics that have been discussed in prior research on runaways. The questionnaire consisted of 48 questions covering perceived

attitudes and behaviors related to the respondent's childhood, as well as questions related to demographics that served as control variables for the study. The complete questionnaire can be observed in Appendix A. The questionnaire consisted of dichotomous, likert, and time frame type questions.

The questionnaire was broken down into five different parts. First: this portion attempted to gain information pertaining to runaway behaviors of the participant. Such as: if they had any runaway thoughts, or if they actually ran away from home, how many times these actions occurred, what time of the year they ran away, and what caused them to run or not run away from their homes. Second: this portion of the questionnaire concentrated on the participants' home life and their experiences during their childhood and adolescence. Types of questions that occurred in this portion were: What type of family structure did you live in? How many siblings did you have? Were you ever sexually abused? Third: this portion of the questions concentrated on the participants' experience in school. Types of questions that were asked in this portion included: Did you ever get suspended from school? Did you ever skip school? What were your grades in middle school and high school? Fourth: this portion concentrated on the individual that was taking the survey and behaviors that they displayed during their childhood and adolescence. Examples of these types of questions included: Were you ever arrested for a crime in middle school or high school? Did you ever experiment with or use drugs in middle school or high school? Were any of your closest friends in middle school or high school arrested for a crime? Fifth: this portion asked questions regarding demographic information that consisted of: gender, race/ethnicity, age, socioeconomic status, field of study, and GPA in college. The questionnaire was self report, and confidentiality was preserved by no identifying marks should be placed on the questionnaire and by ensuring that the researcher was the only person that had access to the questionnaires.

The raw data gained from the questionnaires was analyzed using the statistical program PASW 19.0. The answer choices for each question were transferred into the program

and coded as a number. To gain a better understanding of this, question number one on the questionnaire was: Did you ever think about running away from your home during your childhood or adolescence? The possible answer choices were: Yes or No. In PASW, yes was coded as a one and no was coded as a two. For questions that the respondent did not answer negative one was used so that the answer would not affect the statistical findings. There were a few questions that respondents were asked to skip if the question did not apply to them. For example, if the participant did not run away from home then they would not have answered the second question of how many times did you run away from home? In this case the answer was coded as a number five, not applicable.

3.3 Procedure

Before the study was conducted, the University of Texas at Arlington's Institutional Review Board approved the study and allowed the research to be conducted on the University campus. Seven classes were chosen to participate in the study. These seven classes were listed under criminal justice in the Universities course catalog; however introductory and lower level classes were selected to try and gather data from students that were seeking degrees other than Criminal Justice and Criminology. The lower level and introductory courses served as possible elective classes that students outside the program of criminal justice could sign up to take. The professors for the selected classes were asked for permission to use their class as participants and asked to sign a consent form for documentation of their approval. After the professor gave consent, a date was set up for the researcher to come to the class to explain the study and give the students an opportunity to participate in the study. After the study was explained to the potential subjects they were given a consent form to sign explaining the study they were participating in and that they could opt out of the study at any time. Then the questionnaire was handed out to the participants that agreed to participate in the study. Participants were told not to put any identifying markers on the questionnaire such as their name or student id so that the confidentiality of their answers could be kept by the researcher.

After all the questionnaires were obtained the answer choices chosen by the participants were transferred into PASW for statistical analysis.

3.4 Ethics

The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board before the study was done. Before participants were given the questionnaire their professor signed a consent form, the participant signed a consent form, and the participants were read a short summary of the experiment include the title of the experiment, nature of the experiment, and types of questions that the questionnaire included. Confidentiality of the results was maintained and the subjects of the study were treated in accordance with American Psychological Association standards throughout the study.

3.5 Reliability

This study attempted to add a new population to the literature for juvenile runaways. In prior research, either juvenile runaways or referrals to a juvenile agency were reviewed. This research asked college students to recall their childhood memories, thus a new population was asked about runaway experiences. In prior research, only juvenile's that ran away were asked about their experiences, and most interviews, or surveys were conducted at homeless shelters. Thus research has been limited to a group of juveniles that were only caught in the act of running away. This research asked college students to talk about their experiences if they ran away from home, or if they had any runaway thoughts that they had never acted upon. The addition of runaway thoughts is new to the field of juvenile runaways. Lastly, similar questions were used that had been used in prior research on the questionnaire that was administered.

For reliability of this research a replication of this study is recommended on other college campuses, as well as other research that delves into the topic of runaway thoughts. Additionally, the findings in this research cannot be generalized to all areas of the United States, due to there being different subcultures across the country. This research was conducted in an urban area, and a suburban or rural area could produce different results.

3.6 Statistical Tests Used

In this study multiple tests were utilized to observe a variety of issues related to youth runaway behaviors. Descriptive statistics were used to report the frequencies and percentages of a variety of answers provided by the participants. To fully answer the five hypothesis proposed by this study t-tests were used to see if there was a significant difference between the mean scores of the three different types of running away behaviors on questions that participants answered relating to attitudes and behaviors they held during their childhood and adolescence. The t-test statistic was selected due to the dichotomous answers to the questions of runaway behavior. Youth answered yes or no to running away and yes or no to having runaway thoughts. Based on the significance of this test the attitudes and behaviors were placed in two different logistic regressions.

A logistic regression was constructed to indicate the behaviors and attitudes that were significant predictor of youth running away or having runaway. Additionally, by using a logistic regression it could be observed how much these variables accounted for participants running away or having run away thoughts. In the logistic regression the fifteen variables were transformed from their original form to be coded to no or yes, and disagree or agree. The variables were transformed to be coded this way in order to place all variables on the same scale so that the output of the logistic regression could be accurately interpreted. Other tests that were used to answer hypotheses were a Cramer's V to find out the relationship between two variables, and an odds ratio probability that was run to discover the odds that one group would have something occur to them more than another group.

In the next chapter the findings of this study will be discussed. The results of each of the four hypotheses will be discussed in detail, as well as all of the significant findings.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This study was intended to find out if there were attitudes and behaviors related to youth participating in running away behaviors. The sample for this study was obtained from 206 questionnaires that were filled out by students from seven different introductory and criminal justice classes at the University of Texas at Arlington.

4.2 Demographics

The demographics for the sample are listed below in Table 4.1. When analyzing the demographic data, a majority of the sample (59%) was female. In relation to age, the largest category was 21-23 year olds that made up 35% of the sample. The three largest groups for age encompassed the ages of 18-26; making up 81% of the sample. For race/ethnicity, Caucasian represented the largest group at 38%. When asked about socioeconomic status during childhood and adolescence, middle class represented the largest response, and poor represented the smallest response. When looking at college and the field of study that the participants were involved in Criminology and Criminal Justice was the most prevalent major making up 56% of the sample. When looking at the family situation of the sample presented in Table 4.2, 73% (n=148) lived with both parents, and had one 31% (n=63), or two 30% (n=61) siblings. When looking at birth order, the sample was generally either the oldest child 36% (n=74) or the youngest child 30% (n=62).

Table 4.1 Demographics

Description	Group	N	Percentage
<i>Gender</i> ¹	Male	84	41
	Female	119	59
<i>Age</i>	18-20	52	26
	21-23	70	35
	24-26	42	21
	27-29	17	8
	30-32	10	5
	33 and over	12	6
<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>	Caucasian	77	38
	African American	31	15
	Hispanic	62	34
	Asian/Pacific Island	19	9
	Middle Eastern	3	2
	Other	5	3
<i>Socioeconomic Status</i> ²	Poor	13	7
	Working Class	73	36
	Middle Class	102	51
	Rich	13	7
<i>Field of Study</i>	CRCJ*	114	56
	Sociology	2	1
	Psychology	5	3
	Other	75	37
	More than one major	7	3

*CRCJ stands for Criminology and Criminal Justice

Table 4.2 Family Situation

Description	Group	N	Percentage
<i>Family Structure</i>	Single Parent	33	16
	Both Parents	148	73
	Blended Family	20	10
	Extended Family	2	1
<i>Number of Siblings</i>	0	17	8
	1	63	31
	2	61	30
	3	32	16
	4	15	7

¹ For gender, race/ethnicity, age, and field of study 203 out of 206 participants answered the question.

² For socioeconomic status 201 out of 206 participants answered the question.

Table 4.2- Continued

<i>Number of Siblings</i>	5	8	4
	6 or more	9	4
<i>Birth Order</i>	Only Child	16	8
	Oldest	74	36
	Middle	46	22
	Youngest	62	30
	Other	7	3

4.3 Running Away Behaviors

A large percentage of the sample participated in some type of running away behavior (n=114). In the sample, 114 participants had runaway thoughts; 87 of those were participants that had only runaway thoughts, while the other 27 participants selected they had runaway thoughts and had also runaway. This information is presented in Table 4.3. Participants that had runaway thoughts during their childhood or adolescence made up 55% (n=114) of the sample. The majority of people that had runaway thoughts (83%, n=95) had them between one and five times during their childhood and adolescence. Thirteen percent (n=27) of the sample ran at some point during their childhood. The majority of the sample that ran away (70%, n=19) only ran away once. The other 30% (n=8) ran away between two and four times. Most respondents ran away (57%, n=16) between the ages of 13-16 years old.

Table 4.3 Incidence of Runaway Behaviors

Description	Group	N	Percentage
Youth Ran Away	Yes	27	13
	No	176	87
Times Ran Away	1	19	70
	2-4	8	30
Age At Run Away ³	Under 10	3	11
	11-12	3	11
	13-14	8	29
	15-16	8	29
	17 or older	6	21
Run Away Thoughts	Yes	114	55
	No	92	45

³ One youth indicated he had never runaway but indicated that he ran away between the ages of 13-14

Table 4.3- Continued

Times Thought of Running Away ⁴	1	25	22
	2-5	70	61
	6-9	5	4
	10 or more	14	12

4.4 Behaviors and Attitudes Compared

This study was intended to distinguish if there was a difference between behaviors and attitudes that people held during childhood, and find out if there is a correlation between these behaviors and attitudes with running away or having runaway thoughts. A t-test was run to find out if there was any statistical significance for these behaviors and attitudes. The t-test showed several significant findings at the .01 level, which means that there is a 99% certainty that this significant was not caused by chance. Presented in Table 4.4, when runaways were compared to non runaways the findings were that non runaways were more likely to: select a positive response that their parents were loving and caring, agree that their parent's style of parenting was overly protective, and to think that their parents were role models. Runaways were more likely to have: been physically abused as a child by parents or an extended family member, skipped school, been in a fist fight, participated in a gang, been arrested, had someone in the community that they describe as a role model, described themselves as depressed for long periods of time, described themselves as suicidal, and described themselves as a leader in their group of friends. At the .05 level, which means that there is 95% certainty that this significance was not caused by chance, there were two findings. Non Runaways were more likely to have higher grades in middle and high school, and were less likely to have a parent convicted of a crime.

⁴ Based on the 114 thought that had runaway thoughts

Table 4.4 Means of Runaways compared to Non-Runaways

Trait	Runaway	Non-runaway	Significance
Parents Loving and Caring	1.78	1.47	.000**
Parent's Overly Protective	2.41	2.20	.002**
Closer to Mother	2.19	2.09	.205
Parent's Role Model	1.84	1.66	.003**
Parent's Highest Education	2.96	2.74	.066
Parent's Convicted of Crime	1.33	1.21	.020**
Sexually Abused	1.19	1.22	.564
Physically Abused	1.74	1.33	.000**
CPS	1.07	1.10	.239
Suspended from School	1.44	1.44	.964
Skip School	3.19	2.36	.000**
Fist Fight	2.81	2.05	.000**
Participation in Gang	1.52	1.17	.000**
Arrested	1.48	1.17	.000**
Extra Curricular in MS	2.04	2.03	.883
Extra Curricular in HS	2.04	1.90	.066
Grades in MS and HS	2.04	1.90	.012*
Idol in Community	1.74	1.99	.000**
Suicidal	3.26	3.50	.000**
Depression	2.78	3.09	.000**
Use Drugs	1.56	1.63	.073
Age at First Drug Use	3.23	3.82	.075
Friends Arrested	1.58	1.60	.636
Leader among Friends	1.92	2.34	.000**
GPA in College	3.46	3.35	.124

**Significant at the .01 level

*Significant at the .05 level

When comparing the population of the sample that had runaway thoughts to the population that did not have runaway thoughts there were several significant findings. These findings can be found in Table 4.5. At the .01 level it was found that: People that had no runaway thoughts during their childhood found their parents to be more likely to be loving and caring, described their parents as role models, and were more likely to participate in

extracurricular activities in elementary and middle school. People that had runaway thoughts during their childhood and adolescence were more likely to have been physically abused by a family member or extended family member, have CPS visit their home, get suspended from school, skip school, describe themselves as suicidal, describe themselves as depressed for long periods of time, and use drugs. At the .05 level the findings were: People that did not have runaway thoughts were more likely to be closer to their mother. People that did have runaway thoughts were more likely to have lower grades in middle school and high school and have some of their closest friends arrested.

Table 4.5 Means of Runaway Thoughts compared to Non Runaway Thoughts

Trait	Runaway Thoughts	No Runaway Thoughts	Significance
Parents Loving and Caring	1.61	1.32	.000**
Overly Protective	2.18	2.22	.631
Closer to Mother	2.21	1.97	.016*
Parent's Role Model	1.76	1.57	.008**
Parent's Highest Education	2.81	2.65	.330
Parent's Convicted of Crime	1.23	1.18	.451
Sexually Abused	1.28	1.16	.088
Physically Abused	1.52	1.14	.000**
CPS	1.18	1.03	.000**
Suspended from School	1.59	1.27	.000**
Skip School	2.59	2.13	.000**
Fist Fight	2.02	2.07	.734
Participation in Gang	1.20	1.13	.163
Arrested	1.21	1.12	.115
Participation in Extra Curricular during MS	2.20	1.90	.005**
Participation in Extra Curricular during HS	2.01	1.82	.098
Grades in MS and HS	1.98	1.83	.042*
Idol in Community	2.01	1.97	.646
Suicidal	3.29	3.69	.000**
Depression	2.77	3.40	.000**
Use Drugs	1.56	1.70	.004**
Age at First Drug Use	3.55	3.75	.288

Table 4.5- Continued

Friends Arrested	1.52	1.65	.012*
Leader among Friends	2.42	2.29	.122
GPA in College	3.40	3.33	.646

**Significant at the .01 level

*Significant at the .05 level

When comparing the population that actually ran away during childhood to the population that only had runaway thoughts, findings were significant. These findings can be found in Table 4.6. At the .01 level it was found that: runaways were more likely to skip school, be in a fist fight, participate in a gang, be arrested, use drugs at a younger age, say they had an idol to look up to in the community, and describe themselves as leaders in their groups of friends. At the .05 level it was found that: runaways were more likely to be physical abused and disagree that their parents were overly protective. Participants that had runaway thoughts were more likely to find their parents loving and caring.

Table 4.6 Means of Runaways compared to Runaway thoughts

Trait	Runaway Thoughts	Runaway	Significance
Parents Loving and Caring	1.61	1.78	.030*
Parent's Overly Protective	2.18	2.41	.029*
Closer to Mother	2.21	2.19	.883
Parent's Role Model	1.76	1.84	.363
Parent's Highest Education	2.81	2.96	.372
Parent's Convicted of Crime	1.23	1.33	.229
Sexually Abused	1.28	1.19	.326
Physically Abused	1.52	1.74	.045*
CPS	1.18	1.07	.049
Suspended	1.59	1.44	.196
Skip School	2.59	3.19	.000**
Fist Fight	2.02	2.81	.000**
Participation in Gang	1.20	1.52	.000**
Arrested	1.21	1.48	.001**
Participation in Extra Curricular during MS	2.20	2.04	.173
Participation in Extra Curricular during HS	2.01	2.04	.790
Grades in MS and HS	1.98	2.04	.443

Table 4.6- Continued

Idol in Community	2.01	1.74	.003**
Suicidal	3.29	3.26	.731
Depression	2.77	2.78	.915
Use Drugs	1.56	1.56	.973
Age at First Drug Use	3.55	3.23	.000**
Friends Arrested	1.52	1.58	.298
Leader among Friends	2.42	1.92	.000**
GPA in College	3.40	3.46	.469

**Significant at the .01 level

*Significant at the .05 level

When the participants of these three different categories of runaway behaviors were compared, there were statistically different mean scores on fourteen different variables related to attitudes and behaviors. Based on these findings, two logistic regressions were run to see if there were certain attitudes and behaviors that were most likely correlated with participants having runaway thoughts or actually running away.

4.5 Factors related to Runaway Thoughts

The first hypothesis was: Youth being depressed for long periods of time is going to be the most significant reason for participants having runaway thoughts

A logistic regression was run in order to assess the ability of the following variables in predicting runaway thoughts or no runaway thoughts: gender, parents being overly protective, having a closer relationship with their mother, parents being role models, being physically abused, getting suspended from school, skipping school, getting into fist fights, participating in extracurricular activities in elementary and middle school, having an idol in the community, being depressed for long periods of time, using drugs, closest friends being arrested, being considered a leader among closest friends, and CPS getting called. Runaway thoughts were coded as one and no runaway thoughts were coded as zero. The overall model was significant $\chi^2 (15, N=165) = 35.40, p=.002, \text{Nagelkerke } R^2=.258$.

Table 4.7 includes regression coefficients, standard errors, Wald statistics, odds ratios for the 15 predictor variables placed in the model. According to the Wald criterion, three of the

15 predictors reliably predicted participants having runaway thoughts. Being depressed for long periods of time significantly predicted runaway thoughts $B= 1.426.$, $Wald=11.129$, $p<.05$. A one unit change in depression caused the probability of runaway thoughts to increase 4.163 times, $Exp(B)= 4.163$. Additionally, getting suspended from school significantly predicted runaway thoughts $B= -1.020$, $Wald= 4.669$, $p<.05$. A one unit change in suspension cause the probability of runaway thoughts to decrease .361, $Exp(B)= .361$. Lastly, getting into a fist fight significantly predicted runaway thoughts $B=1.826$, $Wald=3.902$, $p<.05$. A one unit change in fighting caused the probability of runaway thoughts to increase 2.285 times, $Exp(B)=2.285$.

Table 4.7 Logistic Regression of Runaway Thoughts

Description	B	S.E	Wald	Df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Gender	.256	.396	.419	1	.518	1.292
Protective	.122	.370	.108	1	.742	1.129
Mom	-.436	.378	1.328	1	.249	.647
Role	.180	.621	.084	1	.772	1.198
Physical	-1.010	.539	3.519	1	.061	.364
Suspended	-1.020	.472	4.669	1	.031	.361
Skip	-.036	.427	.007	1	.933	.965
Fight	.826	.418	3.902	1	.048	2.285
Idol	.322	.468	.474	1	.491	1.380
Leader	-.479	.392	1.492	1	.222	.619
Depression	1.426	.428	11.129	1	.001	4.163
Middle	-.117	.419	.078	1	.780	.889
CPS	.867	.774	1.256	1	.262	2.380
Drugs	.010	.434	.000	1	.982	1.010
Peer	.133	.416	.102	1	.749	1.143
Constant	.377	1.042	.131	1	.718	1.457

Depression was a significant predictor in the logistic regression of having runaway thoughts. Due to this finding the research hypothesis of depression being a significant predictor of having running away thoughts was supported.

4.6 Factors related to Running Away

The second hypothesis was: Sexual abuse is going to be the most significant reason that participants run away from home. When a t-test was run on the different populations it was found that sexual abuse was not statistically different among any of the populations. Due to this and the low amount of people that reported sexual abuse (9%, $n=19$) this factor was kept out of

the logistic regression. Based on these findings the null hypothesis of sexual abuse is not the most significant reason that participant's run away from home was supported. Even though sexual abuse was kept out of the logistic regression, a test was run to see the most significant predictor of running away from home.

A logistic regression was run to assess ability of the following variables in predicting participants running away from their homes or not running away from their homes: gender, parents being overly protective, having a closer relationship with their mother, parents being role models, being physical abused, getting suspended from school, skipping school, getting into fist fights, participating in extracurricular activities in elementary and middle school, having an idol in the community, being depressed for long periods of time, using drugs, closest friends being arrested, being considered a leader among closest friends, and CPS getting called. Runaway was coded as one and not runaway was coded as zero. The overall model was not significant $\chi^2 (15, N = 186) = 22.87, p = .087, Nagelkerke R^2 = .22$.

Table 4.8 includes all regression coefficients, Wald statistics, and odds ratios for the 15 predictors placed in the model. According to the Wald criterion, one of the 15 predictors reliably predicted participants running away from home. Skipping school significantly predicted running away $B = -1.806, Wald = 4.601, p < .05$. A one unit change in skipping school caused the probability of running away to decrease .164 times, $Exp(B) = .164$. Additionally, being involved in fist fights ($p = .061$) and being consider a leader among friends ($p = .059$) approached significance.

Table 4.8 Logistic Regression of Running Away

Description	B	S.E	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Gender	-.116	.544	.046	1	.831	.890
Protective	-.625	.513	1.484	1	.223	.535
Mom	-.294	.515	.327	1	.567	.745
Role	-.318	.802	.157	1	.692	.728
Physical	-.276	.646	.182	1	.670	.759
Suspended	1.005	.706	2.029	1	.154	2.732
Skip	-1.806	.842	4.601	1	.032	.164
Fight	-1.151	.614	3.512	1	.061	.316
Idol	.979	.867	1.275	1	.259	2.662

Table 4.8-Continued

Leader	1.132	.599	3.573	1	.059	3.102
Depression	-.064	.556	.013	1	.908	.938
Middle	-.381	.549	.482	1	.488	.683
CPS	-.416	.950	.192	1	.662	.660
Drugs	-.088	.555	.025	1	.874	.915
Peers	-.619	.566	1.194	1	.274	.538
Constant	-1.866	1.499	1.550	1	.213	.155

4.7 Gender Differences

The third hypothesis was: Females are significantly more likely to runaway than males. The results of a t-test presented in Table 4.10 showed that there was no statistical difference between males and females on running away from home. In fact, males (1.87) and females (1.87) had the same chance of running away from home, when an odds probability was calculated Males had 1.03 times the odds of running away compared to females. Due to this finding the null hypothesis was supported that: Females are not significantly more likely to runaway than males. A t-test was additionally done on runaway thoughts between males and females. Females (1.46) were more likely to have runaway thoughts than males (1.59), $p=.020$.

Table 4.9 Gender and Runaway Behaviors

Description	Male	Female	Significance
Runaway	1.87	1.87	.946
Runaway Thoughts	1.59	1.46	.020*

*Significant at the .05 level

4.8 Family Structure Differences

The fourth hypothesis: Blended or single families will be more prevalent among participants that had runaway thoughts or actually ran away. Table 4.10 shows the frequencies of family structures between runaway behaviors and not running away behaviors. A Cramer's V test showed that there was no statistical difference, but there was a moderate relationship between family structure and runaway behavior ($p=.106$). The research hypothesis was supported due to youth that had runaway behaviors had 2.42 times the odds of livings in a single family house, and 1.54 times the odds of living in a blended family home. Additionally, in Table 4.11 and 4.12 the frequency of siblings, birth order, socioeconomic status, and place of residence between the three different types of runaway behavior is shown.

Table 4.10 Family Structure in relation to Runaway Behaviors

Description	Runaway Behaviors			
	Runaway		Non Runaway	
	N	Percent	N	Percent
Single Parent	24	21%	9	10
Both Parents	75	66%	73	81
Blended	13	12%	7	8
Extended	1	.09%	1	1

Cramer's V: .174

Table 4.11 Types of Runaway Behavior and Family Situation

Description		Runaway Behavior					
		Runaway		Runaway Thoughts		No Runaway Behaviors	
		N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Siblings	0	3	11%	9	10.3%	5	6
	1	9	33%	27	31.0%	27	30
	2	5	19%	29	33.3%	27	30
	3	7	26%	10	11.5%	15	17
	4	1	3.7%	6	6.9%	8	9
	5	0	0%	5	5.8%	3	3
	6 or more	2	7%	1	1.1%	6	7
Birth Order	Only Child	3	11%	9	10.3%	4	4
	Oldest	8	30%	33	38%	33	36
	Middle	8	30%	22	25%	16	18
	Youngest	7	26%	21	24%	34	37
	Other	1	4%	2	2%	4	4

Table 4.12 Family Situation

Description		Runaway Behavior					
		Runaway		Runaway Thoughts		No Runaway Behaviors	
		N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Socioeconomic Status	Poor	2	8%	7	8%	4	4
	Working Class	10	39%	32	38%	31	34
	Middle Class	12	44%	40	47%	50	54
	Rich	2	8%	6	7%	5	5
Place of Residence	Rural	4	15%	13	15%	15	17
	Suburban	16	62%	54	64%	47	52
	Urban	6	23%	18	21%	28	31

4.9 Educational Differences

The fifth hypothesis: Youth runaway parents have lower education levels than youth who did not run away from their homes. The t-test showed in Table 4.4 revealed that runaway's parents had an educational level of 2.96 while non-runaway's parents had an education level of 2.74. The difference between these two groups showed that runaway's parents had a higher level of education, but this difference was not significant, although it did approach significance at the .05 level with a significance of .066. Due to this finding the null hypothesis was supported that: Runaways parents do not have lower education levels than youth that did not run away from home.

4.10 Why did youth runaway?

One question that is often asked in relation to runaway youth is: why do they run away? For this population their answers can be found in Table 4.13. When looking at the reason that the sample population ran away from home it became apparent that the most prevalent reason was family issues, with 22 out of 27 participants citing this as the reason that they ran away from home. The next most common answer was other with such reasons as: got in an argument with my parents, got mad at my parents, wanted to do my own thing, rebellion, and video games at friends being written in as answers. When looking at the reasons that kept the participants

from running away from home 68% (n=160) answered that their family was what kept them from running away. The next most common answers were fear of the unknown, lack of money, and friends. Answers that were written in as other for not running away included: situation got resolved that made me want to, I was making the situation bigger than what it really was, didn't want to or feel the urge to runaway, was a silly or dumb idea, fear of getting in trouble, punishment from my dad, no curfew or supervision anyway, and going to jail.

Table 4.13 Reason for Runaway Behavior

Description	Group	Yes	No
Reasons for Running Away	Family Issues	22 (81%)	5 (19%)
	Substance Abuse by Parents	2 (7%)	25 (93%)
	Substance Abuse by yourself	1 (4%)	26 (96%)
	Gang Involvement	0 (0.0%)	27 (100.0%)
	Abandonment	2 (7%)	25 (93%)
	Other	5 (19%)	22 (81%)
Reasons for not Running Away ⁵	Family	107 (67%)	52 (33%)
	Fear of Unknown	65 (41%)	94 (59%)
	Lack of Money	50 (31%)	109 (69%)
	Friends	37 (23%)	122 (77%)
	School	34 (21%)	125 (79%)
	Sports	27 (17%)	132 (83%)
	Other	23 (14%)	136 (86%)

In conclusion, there were five hypotheses in this study. Two of the hypotheses were accepted: Youth being depressed was the most significant predictor for participants having runaway thoughts, and Blended or single families were more prevalent among participants that had runaway thoughts or actually ran away. Three of the research questions were rejected: Sexual abuse was not the most significant reason that participant's run away from home, Females were not significantly more likely to runaway than males, and Youth runaway parents did not have lower education levels than youth who did not run away from home.

⁵ One participant that ran away also selected reasons that kept them from running away but were excluded from the table. The youth selected family, fear of the unknown, school, and friends as the reasons they kept them from running away.

In the next chapter, the findings of this study will be discussed. The implications for the field of criminal justice will be examined, as well as suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine running away behaviors related to certain attitudes and behaviors during childhood and adolescence. To accomplish this, college students were selected to answer questions on the topic of running away during their childhood. The different behaviors possible to select were: running away, having runaway thoughts, and having no experiences with running away behaviors. Then the students answered questions related to behaviors and attitudes that they perceived happened during their childhood and adolescence. The expected outcome of this study was to gain insight into what the most important behaviors are that cause youth to run away from home, and what behaviors and attitudes may cause a youth to have runaway thoughts. Other goals of this research was to observe other variables such as gender, types of family structure, or parent's educational level affected youth in their decision to participate in running away behaviors.

5.2 Discussion

In this study, there were significant findings on the relationship between attitudes and behaviors that are correlated with youth running away from home or having runaway thoughts. Other findings included gender not being a factor in running away, but being a factor in having runaway thoughts. Level of education was different for parents' of runaway youth and non runaway youth. Lastly, there is a difference in family structure of youth that have runaway behaviors and youth that don't have runaway behaviors.

One of the findings in this study was that if a participant claimed they had been physically abused by a family member or extended family member during their childhood or adolescence it decreased their chances of having running away thoughts .364 times. For youth

that had a runaway experience, physical abuse was not a significant predictor of why the youth ran from their home. This finding related to physical abuse need to be addressed in future research. In prior research, physical abuse has been cited as a major reason in youth running away from their homes and families. The finding in this study contradicts prior research. One reason that this finding could have taken place is due to college students being the sample population. This is a new population that prior research has not studied. Also, these participants were asked to recall information that happened in their past. This could have affected answer choices, as the implications of behaviors that happened in their past may have been forgotten, forgiven, or even not had the level of importance now as it did back when the participant was in their childhood or adolescence. Additionally, only 41 participants (20%) in this study identified themselves as being physically abused. However, in past research physical abuse was been found to have ranged from 16 to 81 percent of the sample.

The finding that sexual abuse was not a significant factor in youth running away was also startling. This is a factor that has been cited widely in prior research as one of the most important and significant reasons that youth run away from home. The finding of non significance can be related to the population being studied, or the low response rate of the sample. In this study only 19 participants (9%) identified themselves as being sexually abused. However, past studies of sexually abused have ranged from 5 to 50 percent of the samples.

In future research physical and sexual abuse both need to be examined. For years they have been cited as the most common predictors of youth running away from home. In this study they were not the most important predictors of youth running away from home, or even having runaway thoughts.

An interesting finding that stood out in this study was of youth that experienced a runaway episode identifying themselves as leaders among their friends. Future research should explore this finding. Prior research has identified runaways generally as youth that are outsiders, and have several maladaptive or antisocial behaviors (McMahon, 1994). This finding

in this study contradicts prior research. The finding could have happened once again because of the population that is being studied. College students are generally considered to have been leaders and problem solvers during their childhood and adolescence. This could be one of the reasons that youth that ran away were more likely to have identified themselves as leaders among their friends, because they see themselves as independent. Additionally, since this population is college students as Brennan et al. (1978) identified there is a group of runaways that are called deliberate or independent runners who have adequate skills and means to survive and possibly find happiness once they runaway. This study could have happened to find a sample of independent or deliberate runners at the college level.

Depression and being involved in a fist fight were the most significant predictors of youth having running away thoughts. These are predictors that are helpful for agencies and parents because they are observable signs that can be addressed. However, future research should further interpret these variables. Such as: what is the youth depressed about, when were they depressed, and does it matter if the youth won or lost the fist fight that they were in?

Prior studies have not been consistent on if gender is a factor in youth running away from home. Different national and local studies claim that both being male and female increased the chances of running away. This study analyzed gender among youth that attended college. Males and females were found to be equally as likely to run away from home. However, when discussing running away thoughts, females were found to be significantly more likely to have run away thoughts than males ($p=.02$). This is a finding that future research should explore. Why females are more likely to have a runaway thought, but less likely to act upon that thought.

Prior research on runaways shows that this population is more likely to live with single parents. Recent research has also been published that youth that live in blended families are more likely to be abused by their caretakers. Family structure was analyzed as predictor of runaway behaviors. It was found that participants that experienced having runaway thoughts or actually ran away from home were 2.42 times likely to live in a single family home, or 1.54 times

likely to live in a blended family home than to live with both parents. This is a significant finding because divorce rates and blended families are becoming increasingly popular among the American public. This finding should continue to be researched to gain more information on the reasons why youth are more likely to running away from these types of family structures. That way parents can be informed on how to protect their children if they live in a single, or blended family home and look for warning signs that their children may be thinking about running away from home.

Prior research focuses a large amount of attention on the behaviors of parents being a factor in if the youth will run away in the future (Thompson et al., 2003; Kempf-Leonard & Johnson, 2007; Chappel et al., 2004; Slesnick & Prestopnik, 2004; Tyler & Bersani, 2008; Young et al. 1983; McGarvey et al., 2010). Parents that are loving and caring and willing to listen to their children's problems are less likely to have their child go through a runaway episode (McGarvey et al., 2010; Slesnick & Prestopnik 2004). This research looked into parent's education level for youth that ran away from home and compared it to youth that did not run away from home. It was expected to be found that runaway youth's parent(s) would have a lower educational level. However, the opposite was found. Parents of youth that ran away had a higher level of education than parents of youth that did not run away. This finding should be looked into in future research. This finding could have occurred because of the sample of the participants that was used, the study occurring in an urban area, or nature of employment that educated individuals seek.

The most common question dealing with the topic of runaway youth is: why does this population of juveniles' runaway away from home? When looking at this study and prior studies the most common cited reason that participants ran away was due to issues within their families. Oddly enough in this study when participants that did not runaway were asked what kept them from running away during their childhood and adolescence the most common response was their family. This study along with prior research shows that to children, family is

the most important factor in their decision to stay or leave the home. Their family is their identity and they do not want to break that bond or connection unless they see no other way to fix the problems.

5.3 Implications for Agencies

This study is important because the findings have implications for multiple agencies. The findings have implications for juvenile centers, CPS workers, schools, and parents.

This study has implications for juvenile detention centers. With the finding of families being the most cited factor for youth running away and also being the factor cited the most for youth not running away. The best solution for runaways may not be to get picked up off the street by a police officer and detained in a detention center until a family member can come and pick up the youth. A different approach may be for a new agency to be created that deals with runaway youth that works directly with the family. Prior research has shown that most families do not call the police when their child runs away from home. If a new agency is created parents may be more willing to call for help knowing that their child is not going to be arrested. This agency could be used to help find the youth while the runaway is occurring, also the agency could help identify possible trainings or programs that the family can be involved in to help the family environment after the youth is located and returned to the home.

It is a suggestion that if a youth is detained for running away that the family is automatically referred to CPS. If CPS cannot handle this increase in referrals it is suggested that a new agency is created. The point of having a referral to CPS or this new agency would be so an outsider can get a look at the family situation that is occurring in this home and recommendations can be made for the youth or family to attend classes to better the home environment. Potential classes that families could be referred to are: anger management, drug classes for both the parents and youth, parenting classes for the parents, and classes that work with both the parent and youth on understanding how to work with each other. All of these

classes have the potential to make a better home environment for the youth and family members.

Depression was found to be the most significant factor related to youth having running away thoughts. This is important because this can be a possible observable warning sign to parents, school teachers, school counselors, and extracurricular supervisors that a youth is contemplating the thought of running away from home. These different adults in the youth's life need to become better organized at relaying information to each other about events that are happening in the child's life. If these different sets of adults were able to communicate with each other warning signs could be noticed and steps could be taken to help the youth get their emotions or thoughts addressed before a potential run away occurs.

Lastly, with the increase in the American culture of blended families it is recommended that a program, if it has not already been created, can be created on how to construct a successful blended family environment. This class or program is recommended because it is apparent in this study and current research that blended families are the most abusive, and youth run away when changes in the family environment occur.

5.4 Limitations

During this study there were limitations that were encountered. First, the sample size was only 206 participants. Although several studies on youth runaway have been done on smaller populations this is still a small population to compare to a group that is estimated to be approximately between 1.6 million and 2.8 million. Additionally, for the logistic regression it is recommended that between 10 and 30 participants are used per variable being analyzed (Peduzzi, et al., 1996). In this study a logistic regression was run with 11 and 12.4 participants per variable.

Other limitations included the way that the study was organized. When answering the questionnaire, participants had to recall information that happened years in the past. Participants could have recalled events incorrectly or proved false information. As with any self

report questionnaire, certain questions on the questionnaire had the potential to be misinterpreted due to wording or not enough directions being provided.

5.5 Future Research

In youth runaway literature, the idea of runaway thoughts is hardly ever addressed or introduced. This topic is an issue that needs to be further investigated and analyzed in future research. This topic has the potential to further research on youth runaways and unlock the explanation to why some youth chose to runaway away from home while other youth do not runaway.

Other areas of youth running away from home that need to be examined are physical abuse, leadership, gender, family structure, and family education. Physical abuse needs to be reexamined due to contradicting findings between this study and prior studies. Youth leadership is a topic that this research identified as significant that needs to be reexamined in future research to see if it is significant in other populations and geographic regions of the country. Gender needs to continue to be examined by future research among runaways due to findings being unclear. Lastly family structure and parents education should be examined in future research. Family structure has been linked to runaway behaviors and should be continued to be studied due to the trend in the United States towards more blended and single family homes. Parent's education should also be examined to see if other studies find that higher education levels are associated with runaway youths.

Recommendations for future research would be to continue to look at college populations and to look at rural areas of the country. A suggestion for a future research would be to survey youths that have recently runaway and find out what caused them to runaway then survey the same population years later and see if the reasons that influenced their decision to runaway changed or were the same years later.

In conclusion, youth that runaway away from home is a topic that still needs to be researched and is far from being understood. Family is a variable that has been found to be

very influential on youth staying or leaving the home (Slesnick & Prestopnik, 2004). Topics such as: family structure, parental warmth, parental bonding, victimization, criminality, arrests, and substance use have been found to be predictors of a child leaving the home (Young et al., 1984; Whitbeck et al., 2000; Kidd, 2007; Whitbeck et al., 2001; McRee, 2008; Baron, 2003; McGarvey et al., 2010). Research needs to continue to look into this topic because of its significance for youth. Approximately 12% of American youth runaway before they reach the age of eighteen, although 99.6% of them return home, each day they are gone they are 10% less likely to return home (Schaffner, 1998; Hammar et al., 2002; Thompson et al., 2003) The potential harm has already been established and well document on youth runaways and includes: mental, physical and sexual victimization, future police contacts, and hardship such as future places to live and food to eat (Baron, 2003; Chappel et al., 2004; Young et al., 1983; Thrane et al., 2008; Whitbeck et al., 2001; Yoder et al., 2001)). Youth are the future of this country, and any research that can be done to protect their potential future needs to be conducted.

APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE

Please complete the following survey as part of a thesis studying behaviors and attitudes among adolescents that runaway. By completing this survey, you are certifying that you are age **18 or older**. **You may refuse this survey at any time**. **Please, do not include any names or other identifiers** on this paper for the purpose of anonymity and confidentiality. Thank you for your **voluntary** assistance.

Running away is defined as: a youth who spent at least one night away from home without the permission of a parent or a legal guardian.

1. Did you ever think about running away from your home during your childhood or adolescence?
Yes _____ No _____
2. If yes, how many times did you think about running away from your home?
1____ 2-5 ____ 6-9____ 10 or more____
3. Did you ever run away from your home during your childhood or adolescence?
Yes _____ No _____ (If no skip to question 9)
4. If yes, how many times did you runaway from your home?
1____ 2-4____ 5-7____ 8 or more____
5. If you ran away, how old were you the first time you ran away?
Under 10 _____ 11-12____ 13-14____ 15-16 _____ 17 or older _____
6. If you ran away what caused you to run away?
Family Issues_____ Substance Abuse by Parents_____ Substance Abuse by Yourself _____ Gang Involvement_____ Abandonment_____
Other (Please explain)_____
7. What season of the year did you run away?
Spring _____ Summer_____ Fall _____ Winter _____
8. How long did you run away for?
A day _____ Less than a week _____ A week _____ Over a week but less than a month _____
A month _____ Over a month but less than 6 months _____
Over 6 months but less than a year _____ Over a year _____
9. If you didn't runaway (Skip this question if you ran away) what prevented you from running away?
Family_____ Fear of the unknown_____ School _____ Friends_____
Sports/Extracurricular activities _____ Lack of Money_____
Other (please explain) _____
10. What type of family structure did you live in?
Single Parent_____ Both parents _____ Blended Family _____ Foster Care_____
Extended family raised you _____ State Institution_____

11. How many siblings do you have?
0____ 1____ 2____ 3____ 4____ 5____ 6 or more____
12. What is your birth order?
Only child____ Oldest____ Middle____ Youngest____ Other____
13. Would you describe your relationship with your parents as loving and caring?
Strongly Agree____ Agree____ Disagree____ Strongly Disagree____
14. Would you describe your parent's style of parenting as overly protective?
Strongly Agree____ Agree____ Disagree____ Strongly Disagree____
15. Would you describe your relationship to be closer to your mother rather than your father?
Strongly Agree____ Agree____ Disagree____ Strongly Disagree____
16. Would you describe your parents as role models?
Strongly Agree____ Agree____ Disagree____ Strongly Disagree____
17. What is the highest educational level either of your parents received?
High School/GED____ Some college____ Associates Degree____ Bachelors Degree____ Graduate Degree or Above____

Please answer the following questions with 1 being never and 5 being many times.

18. Have either of your parents ever been convicted of a crime?
1____ 2____ 3____ 4____ 5____
19. Were you ever sexually abused as a child by your parents or extended family?
1____ 2____ 3____ 4____ 5____
20. Were you ever physical abused as a child by your parents or extended family?
1____ 2____ 3____ 4____ 5____
21. Did CPS ever visit your home?
1____ 2____ 3____ 4____ 5____
22. Did you ever get suspended from school?
1____ 2____ 3____ 4____ 5____
23. Did you ever skip school?
1____ 2____ 3____ 4____ 5____
24. Have you ever been in a physical altercation that ended in a fist fight?
1____ 2____ 3____ 4____ 5____

25. Did you participate in a gang in middle school or high school?
1___ 2___ 3___ 4___ 5___
26. Were you ever arrested for a crime in middle school or high school?
1___ 2___ 3___ 4___ 5___
27. If yes, when were you arrested the first time?
Before running away___ After running away ___ Before runaway thoughts___ After runaway thoughts___ N/A___
28. During elementary and middle school, would you describe yourself as participating in a high level of sports or extracurricular activities?
Strongly Agree___ Agree___ Disagree___ Strongly Disagree___
29. During high school would you describe yourself as participating in a high level of sports or extracurricular activities?
Strongly Agree___ Agree___ Disagree___ Strongly Disagree___
30. What were you grades in middle school and high school?
A___ B___ C___ D___ F___
31. While in middle school would you say that there was someone in the community such as a parent, teacher, or coach that you looked up to and idolized?
Strongly Agree___ Agree___ Disagree___ Strongly Disagree___
32. Would you describe yourself during your childhood and adolescence as suicidal?
Strongly Agree___ Agree___ Disagree___ Strongly Disagree___
33. Would you describe yourself as ever being depressed for long periods of time during you childhood and adolescence?
Strongly Agree___ Agree___ Disagree___ Strongly Disagree___
34. Did you ever experiment with or use drugs in middle school or high school?
Yes___ No___ (If no skip to question 35)
35. If yes, at what point did you start using drugs?
Before running away___ After running away ___ Before runaway thoughts___ After runaway thoughts___ N/A___
36. What kind of drug did you **experiment** most with? (Please limit to single response)
Alcohol ___ Marijuana ___ Cigarettes___ Cocaine ___ Crack ___
Heroin ___ Ecstasy ___ Meth ___ Mushrooms ___ Other ___
37. What kind of drug did you most heavily **abuse**? (Please limit to single response)
Alcohol ___ Marijuana ___ Cigarettes___ Cocaine ___ Crack ___
Heroin ___ Ecstasy ___ Meth ___ Mushrooms ___ Other ___

38. At what age did you first start using or experimenting with drugs?
 Under 10 ____ 11-12 ____ 13-14 ____ 15-16 ____ 17 or older ____
 Does not apply ____
39. Were any of your closest friends in middle school or high school arrested for a crime?
 Yes ____ No ____
40. In your group of closest friends would you describe yourself as the leader of the group?
 Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly Disagree ____
41. How would you describe your place of residence in your adolescence?
 Rural ____ Suburban ____ Urban ____
42. What is your gender? Male ____ Female ____
43. What race/ethnicity do you identify yourself as:
 Caucasian ____ African American ____ Hispanic ____
 Asian/Pacific Island ____ Middle Eastern ____ Other ____
44. How old are you?
 18-20 ____ 21-23 ____ 24-26 ____ 27-29 ____ 30-32 ____ 33 and over ____
45. How would you describe your socioeconomic status during your childhood and adolescence?
 Poor ____ Working Class ____ Middle Class ____ Rich ____
46. Did you grow up in the United States?
 Yes ____ No ____
47. What is your field of study?
 CRCJ ____ Sociology ____ Psychology ____ Other ____
48. What is your GPA in college?
 Under 2.0 ____ 2.1-2.5 ____ 2.6-3.0 ____ 3.1-3.5 ____ 3.6-4.0 ____

This concludes the survey. Thank you for your voluntary participation.
 If you feel uncomfortable after completing this survey, please talk to the researcher or contact the researcher at 210-392-0326 and they will provide the contact information for the UTA counseling center upon request

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BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Braden Anthony Bozer graduated from Tarleton State University with a Bachelor of Science in the Fall of 2009. He graduated Magna Cum Laude, and as the Department of Social Work, Sociology, and Criminal Justice's Honor Graduate. While at Tarleton State he majored in Criminal Justice and minored in Sociology. Braden is currently employed with Tarrant County Juvenile Services as a Research Assistant.