

## Factors Enables to the Life of Runaways Children

\*Kalpana Singh \*\*S. K. Srivastava

### Abstract

*Children are sensitive they need friendly environment to grow up, mostly children run away from home due to different factors like negligence, physical abuse without knowing the problem they have to face after running. Runaways are some of the most vulnerable children in society faced many difficulties outside the home. They run away from home without knowing that outside environment is very cruel for them. Home is considering a best place where child grow up and feel safe but what cause them to leave their home. The purpose of the study is to describe what are the main causes which lead a child to leave home and how they survive there life while running away. An N.G.O was approached situated at Allahabad (Uttar Pradesh) city for collecting the data. This N.G.O works for children those who are in need care and protection. 100 children were observed and interviewed on semi structured interview.*

**Key words-**Runaways children, Risk, street life, Drug abuse

*\*Ph.D student in Psychology, Gurukul Kangri University, Haridwar*

*\*\*Professor of Psychology, Gurukul Kangri University, Haridwar*

### Introduction

Everyday across the country children are leaving home for a future of danger and uncertainly on the street. For most time away from home is short and mostly uneventful. The most common reasons that children and young people give for running away from home are arguments and conflict with parents or step parents, neglect and rejection, experiences of emotional or physical abuse or to seek respite from parents' personal problems such as alcohol/drug dependency or mental health problems.

Ellen Switzer (1992) gives four category of reason for a teen's need to run away: physical abuse, sexual abuse, family problems and other substance abuse. Newly homeless youth are those who have recently left their homes, while chronically homeless youth are those who have been out of home for extended periods of time or have had several homeless episodes (Milburn et al., 2006). When teens decide to run away from home they may be leaving a life of abuse and neglect only to replace

it with one of exploitation and victimization. The longer they stay away, the more likely they will become involved with groups of people who engage in criminal behavior to support themselves (Simmons & Whitlock 1991).

As homeless children often suffer from poor health, lack of sleep, violence which mostly results in a variety of health problems. These children are afflicted with physical as well as mental problems, mostly divided into different categories; nutritional deficiencies, sexual health, victimization but the most common is depression and nutritional deficiencies, as there is a lack of access to clean water and food that is a major reason of health problems. Other include respiratory, skin ailment as well as these runaways are badly affected by sexual health problems most common is genitourinary disorder.

Neglected children are attempting to find what is missing from their lives- love and support and when they decide to runaway from home they may be leaving a life of abuse and neglect only to replace it with one of exploitation and victimization on street.

Kids who consistently use running away to gain power in the family have a chronic problem. Realize that chronic running away is just another form of power struggle, manipulation, or acting out; it's just very high risk acting out. They may threaten their parents by saying, "If you make me do that, I'll run away." They know parents worry; for many, it's one of their greatest fears. Some parents may engage in bargaining and over-negotiating with their kids over this when they shouldn't because they're afraid. They're running away because that is their main problem-solving skill. They're trying to avoid any type of accountability.

#### **Review Of Literature**

Benoit-Bryan, 2011 found significant correlations between previous abuse and runaway rates in his correlational study. Verbal abuse, physical abuse, and sexual abuse before the age of 18 are all correlated with higher run away rates. Individuals who were verbally abused are over twice as likely to run away from home at 11.7% compared to those who were not verbally abused at 5.3%. The likelihood of running away from home is three times higher for respondents who were physically abused as youth at 17.4% than those who were not physically abused at 6.3%. Children who were sexually abused are over twice as likely to have run away from home at 17% as those who were not sexually abused at 7.9%.

Whitbeck et al.(2000) found in his study that after running away children 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 13 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).

**Greene, ennet and ringwalt 1997**, estimates of the prevalence of substance use by runaway and homeless youth between the ages of 12 and 21 in various settings were compared with each other and with estimates for youth in the general population. Four surveys were used: (1) a nationally representative survey of runaway and homeless youth residing in federally and non-federally funded shelters; (2) a multicity survey of street youth; (3) a nationally representative household survey of youth with and without recent runaway and homeless experiences; and (4) a nationally representative household survey of youth whose previous runaway/homeless status was unknown. Results revealed that for almost every substance, substance use prevalence was highest among street youth. Shelter youth and household youth with recent runaway/homeless experiences reported similar rates. In the household surveys, substance use rates were lowest and were generally comparable.

Jeanne et.al (1999) examines the interrelationship among childhood victimization, running away, and delinquency, and whether running away serves to mediate or moderate this relationship. Data are from a prospective cohorts design study in which documented cases of childhood abuse and

neglect were compared to matched controls, and followed-up and interviewed between 1989 and 1995. Results indicate that being abused or neglected in childhood increases the likelihood that a youth will run away from home, both childhood victimization and running away increase the risk of juvenile arrest, and chronic runaways were at greater risk of arrest as juveniles. Furthermore, running away does not mediate the relationship between childhood victimization and delinquency, because running away increases the risk of juvenile arrest for both childhood victims and non victims. The effect of running away is stronger for non-abused and non neglected youths than for abused and neglected children.

### Methodology

#### Sample

For this study a total of 100 children were recruited age group 10 to 17 year (boys). Participants were observed and interviewed individually on semi structured interview. The main objective of the study is to understand the magnitude of the problem as well as the attitudes and causes/factors leading to children running away from homes. An N.G.O of children was approached for sample selection, located at Allahabad city. Following are the research questions that guided the study:

- 1- What are the reasons of leaving home.
- 2- What are the methods of survival outside the home.
- 3- What kind of risk faced whilst away from home.
- 4- Drug abuse outside the home.

#### Reason of leaving home-

The most cited reason that youth become homeless, however it is lack of supportive and functional family (Rotherm Borus 1996) family stressors increasing the risk of adolescent homelessness may include death of family member divorce and separation.

**Table 2: showing age group of children and frequency of leaving home.**

<i>Reason of runaways</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<b>Abused by parents</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Conflict in family</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Poverty</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Problem in school (madarsa)</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Loss of mother/father</b>	<b>10</b>

In this study the most contributing factor of leaving home is abusive behavior of parents and due to this 42% abused children stepped out from home (beaten and badly scolded by parents, also included alcoholic father), 15% children suffer conflict in family and dispute of mother and father. 15% children left their home in search of job, in this study it was seen that some children got enticed by other and sometime family situation forced them to go for job. 20% children left their home due to abused and corporal punishment in madarsa and school. 10% children run away from home due to loss of mother and father especially mother.

**Age Group and Frequency of Leaving Home**  
**Table 2: showing age group of children and frequency of leaving home**

<i>Age</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>No. of leaving home</i>
<b>10-11</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>1st tiem</b>
<b>12-13</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>2 times</b>
<b>14-15</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>3 times</b>
<b>16-17</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>More than3 times</b>

Table 2 indicate that 27% runaways children are 10 to 11 year of age group, 45% children falls in the category of 12 to 13 year of age group, 18% children lies in 14 to 15 year of age group while only 10% of runaways children are 14 to 15 year of age group.

Further the table shows that 14-15 year age group of children run three times from home and 16-17 year age group of boys left their home more than three time

**Education****Table 3: Education status of children.**

<i>Class</i>	<i>% of children</i>
<b>4th-5th</b>	<b>22%</b>
<b>6th-7th</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>8th-9th</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>Dropout</b>	<b>38%</b>
<b>Madarsa</b>	<b>10%</b>

Table 3 indicate that 22% children studying in 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> class, 20% runaways children are studying in 6<sup>th</sup> and class 7<sup>th</sup>, 10% children are studying in 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> class, 10% children are taking religious education on madarsa and while 38% children are dropouts due to various reason like poverty, irregular studies and corporal punishment at school mainly in villages of rural area. school and madarsa environment also play a role in form of pressure of studies or punishment by teacher and irregular teaching system specially in rural areas.

**Method of survival on street**

Runaways children developed different strategies for survival in the street and at other places. They work at different places and sometimes indulge in bad activities.

**Table 4 Methods of survival on street.**

<i>Method od survival</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<b>Selling water bottles</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Selling Tabacco (Gutka)</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Working at dhabas</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Working at garage and other places</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Stealing</b>	<b>10</b>

There is now substantial evidence of the risks which children face while away from home. Table 4 shows that for survival 20% children selling water bottles and 20% gutka at railway station and in train, 35% children are working on dhabas and restaurants, rest 25%

children are working at other places like garage and some children broom the floor of railway station and get involve in begging and stealing.

**Risk of childrens whilst away from home.**

The term 'running away' encapsulates a wide variety of experiences. Some young people only ever run away once, stay a single night with relatives and then return home. Other young people run away repeatedly and/or stay away from home for periods of one month or more .Sleeping in unsafe places, remain hungry for long time. Children who slept outside while they were away were far more likely to resort to crime in order to survive. However, runaways are more likely to come to the attention of the police because they are in danger rather than for committing an offence.

Table 5

<i>Risk</i>	<i>% of children</i>
<b>Involve in crime</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>Drug abuse</b>	<b>75%</b>
<b>Abused by other people</b>	<b>15%</b>

Table denote that 10% of children who left their home due to many reasons get involved in some type of criminal activity like pick pocketing and stealing, 75% of children become drug addicted and rest 15% children abused by the outside world.

**Drug Abuse**

<i>Drug Abuse</i>	<i>% of children</i>
<b>Tabacco</b>	<b>40%</b>
<b>Fluid</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>Tablets</b>	<b>10%</b>

Table indicate that 40% of children who runaways from home take tobacoo in different form like gutaka, paan masala, 20% intoxicate fluid, thinner and sulotion. They spread this on clothes and inhale. 10% takes tables in form of intoxication which is easily available on small shops.

## Discussion

Runaway children are some of the most exploited members of the society. The danger of living on the street is a poor choice for a child in an abusive situation to have to make but thousands choose the street every year. In this study it was found that a majority of children left their home due to abuse or punishment by their parents. Springer (2001) suggests that the most common reason for running away from home is to escape physical abuse or negative family environment. VanHouten and Golemiewski also point out that a majority of runaways say they left home because of family problems, including parental alcohol abuse. Conflict in family, loss of parents, poverty and problem in school are other problem that leads to child to leave his home. Family stressors increasing the risk of adolescent homelessness may include death of a family member, divorce or separation, or loss of a job (Rotheram-Borus). School and madarsa corporal punishment is also a important factor that child left his home, inability of the child to resist pressure both at home and school leaves him with no option other than running away from home.

Study reveals that children first time left their home at age of 10 to 11 year. Majority of 12-13 year of age children left their home second time and 14 to 15 year age group of children left their home by third time. Further study reveals that in runaways children 38% of children dropouts. Sikdar and Mukherjee specified 20 reasons for school dropouts and categorized them into eight Groups 6 More generally, reasons of school dropouts can be classified in to some broad categories like school-centric, school-centric and parent-centric among others, poverty is one of the main determinants of school dropout. Family economic circumstances are important to meet the hidden and upfront costs of schooling, failure of which leads to many temporary as well as permanent dropouts of children.

The 'India Human Development Report 2011' prepared by Institute of Applied Manpower Research released and said 19% of the children in the age group of 6 to 17 year are still out of school in the country.

For survival, runaways children get involve in different activities. Majority of children are working in dhabas and small hotels, they are working on garage and clean the floor of station and train. Sometime they become habitual of doing these kind of work because by this they earn money and left their home. Here no one is going to observed their activities and they become master of their own. In Running for Their Lives (1995) Welsh states that running away is an event that is often preceded by years of conflict and abuse; and running away exposes the youth to additional risks of abuse on the streets. Then, because there are few legitimate types of employment available for the runaway, they may engage in socially illegitimate economic activities such as prostitution, robbery, the drug trade and other forms of hustling.

The study indicate that Runaways children experience number of problem including sleeping at railway station and on street at rough places. The danger of living on street is a poor choice for a child in an abusive situation to have to make but thousand choose the street everyday. They were badly treated by strangers on the street, shopkeeper and dhaba malik take advantage on them by taking cheap labour from them the irony of runaways is how they become victim of prostitution, crime like (pick pocket, murder) drugs and Aids in an attempt to escape a life of abuse. A range of risky experience while running away including sleeping rough, staying overnight with strangers, stealing, and begging for survival. "For some youth, running away is a way of coping with the maltreatment inflicted on them in their current living situation. An increasing

number of studies show a high incidence of maltreatment among samples of runaways and that youth leave home because they have been physically or sexually abused, or "pushed out" by their families."(Kurtz, Kurtz & Jarvis, 1991 )

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). Runaways living on the street jeopardize themselves by using drugs. Illegal drugs are very accessible to those on the street, who tend to use them both as social lubricants and to self-medicate.

### References

- Benoit-Bryan, J. (2012). Key Statistics from the National Runaway Switchboard's Home Free Program. National Runaway Switchboard.
- Clark, H. B., Crosland, K. A., Geller, D., Cripe, M., Kenney, T., Neff, B., & Dunlap, G. (2008). A functional approach to reducing runaway behavior and stabilizing placements for adolescents in foster care. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 18, 429-441. Ennett,
- Greene, J.M., Ennett, E.T. & Ringwalt, C.L. (1997). Substance use among runaway and homeless youth in three national samples. *American Journal of Public Health*, 87(2), 229-235.
- Isreal, R. L. (1996). A descriptive study of contributing and precipitating factors as associated with juvenile delinquency. Retrieved from ProQuest dissertations and Thesis Database UMI No. ATT 1382246.
- Jeanne G., Kaufman and Widom, C.S (1999) Childhood Victimization, Running Away, and Delinquency *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, November, 36(4), 347-370.
- Kempf-Leonard, K., & Johansson, P. (2007). Gender and runaways: Risk factors, delinquency, and juvenile justice experiences. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, 5, 308-327.
- Kurtz P.D., Jarvis, S.V., Kurtz G.L Problems of Homeless Youths: Empirical findings and human services issues (b)(1991).
- Milburn N.G., Ayala G, Rice E, Batterham P, RotheramBorus, M.J. (2006). Discrimination and exiting homelessness among homeless adolescents. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 12, 658 – 672.
- Peterson, P. L., Baer, J. S., Wells, E.A., Ginzler, J.A.& Garrett, S.(2006). Short-term effects of a brief motivational intervention to reduce alcohol and drug risk among homeless adolescents. *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors*, 20, 254 – 264.
- Rotheram-Borus, M. J., Mahler, K.A.,Koopman, C.,&Langabeer, K.(1996 Sexual abuse \histor and associated multiple risk behaviorin adolescent runaways. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 66, 390-400
- S. T., Federman, E. B., Bailey, S. L., Ringwalt, C. L., & Hubbard, M. L. (1999). HIV-risk behaviors associated with homelessness characteristics in youth. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 25, 344 - 353.
- Simons, R., Wu, C., Conger, R., & Lorenz, F. (1994). Two routes to delinquency: Differences between early and late starters in the impact of parenting and deviant peers. *Criminology*, 32 (2), 247 –275.

- Springer, D.W.(2001). Runaway adolescents:  
Today's Huckleberry Finn crisis. *Brief  
Treatment and Crisis Intervention*, 1,  
131–151.
- Welsh et al., 1995. — L. A. Welsh, F. X.  
Archambault, M. D. Janus, and S. W.  
Brown. *Running for their lives:  
Physical and sexual abuse of runaway  
adolescents*. New York, NY: Garland  
Publishing.
- Whitbeck LB, Hoyt DR, Ackley KA (1997).  
Abusive family backgrounds and later  
victimization among runaway and  
homeless adolescents. *Journal of  
Research on Adolescence* 7:375–392.

