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Runaway Dynamics in Douglas County: Examining First-time and Repeat Runaway Behavior

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This project was initially funded by an Urban Research Grant from the College of Public Affairs and Community Service at the University of Nebraska, Omaha.

CPACS Urban Research Grant Presentation
Feb. 15th 2017 CPACS Commons

Why?

- Juvenile justice reform in Douglas County
- Need for more information on runaway youth



What?

- **Surveys**

- Revision and implementation
- Occurrence, prevalence and risk factors
- One-time vs. repeat runaways

- **Interviews**

- Handling runaway youth

- Intake Office of Juvenile Probation – Heather Briggs & 4 intake officers
- Director of DC Office of Juvenile Probation – Mary Visek
- DC Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI) – Shelly Hug
- Douglas County Sherriff's Office – Deputy Brad Woodward
- OPD detective with Project Harmony – Sergeant Lance Worley
- OPD captain of South East precinct – Capt. Kathy Belcastro
- Youth Emergency Services shelter coordinator (Lori Lines) and outreach coordinator (Shawn Miller)
- H.O.M.E. Program director – Renee Iwan



- Douglas County JDAI Collaborative (8/4/16)
- Nebraska Youth Alternatives to Detention Meeting (10/18/16)
- Nebraska Statewide JDAI Meeting (11/8/16)
- American Society of Criminology Annual Meeting (11/16/16)



- Differences between “runaway” and “homeless” youth definitions (Kim, 2014; OJDDP, 2006)
 - **Runaway:** Youth who have left home without permission
 - **Homeless:** Youth who have been kicked out of their home, abandoned, are doubled up, living in uninhabitable conditions, have no other safe alternative living arrangement



- 6 – 7% of kids run away from home/their placement annually (Sanchez et al., 2006; SAMHSA, 2004; Tyler & Bersani, 2008)
 - High prevalence of running behavior from youth in out-of-home care (Attar-Schwartz, 2013; Moskowitz et al., 2013)
- Reasons for running: argument with parent/family, abuse (current or prior), kicked out, boredom (Edinburgh et al., 2012; Greene, 1995)
- High rates of school problems, depression, physical/sexual abuse, drug/alcohol problems, and problems with peers/parents (Johnson et al., 2005; Thompson & Pillai, 2006; Tyler et al., 2008)
- Most return to their parents/guardians and are gone < 1week (Hammer, Finkelhor, & Sedlack, 2002; Melburn et al., 2007)

Why it matters?

- Being on the run may exacerbate problems that led the youth to run away in the first place (Chen et al., 2007)
- Increases likelihood of engaging in high-risk behavior and being exploited or victimized by others (Kipke et al., 1997; Wagner et al., 2001)
- Running away once decreases the likelihood that a youth will graduate from high school by 10% (Aratani & Cooper, 2015)
 - Running multiple times decreases it by 18%
- Runaways may get entangled in the JJS (Holman & Ziedenberg, 2011)
- Few studies have examined differences between first-time and repeat runaways (Stefanidis et al., 1992; Thompson & Pollio, 2006)
 - Repeat runners tend to experience persistent and more severe problems that often stem from poor family relations



1. What are the demographic profiles of all runaways in Douglas County (DC)?
 - Are there group differences in demographic profiles between first-time and repeat runaways?
2. What are youths' experiences with running away (and are there group differences)?
3. What is the prevalence of risk-factors for runaways (and are there group differences)?
4. What are youth booked for and what are their intake decisions (and are there group differences)?

- Received surveys from DC juvenile probation intake office
- All youth presented to intake office completed the survey
- Intake staff interviewed youth to fill out survey (whenever possible- running against clock on youth/some opt out)
- N = 417 surveys completed from January 1 – July 30, 2016
 - ↳ N = 309 (74%) surveys indicated the respondent had current/past running behavior
 - ↳ N = 250 youth with run behavior (59 kids in there twice)
- Limitation = external validity (i.e. not all runaways taken to intake)



Table 1. Demographic profiles of runaways

| | All (n=250) |
|-------------------------------|-------------|
| Male | 159 (64%) |
| Race/ethnicity | |
| African American | 115 (46%) |
| White (non-Hispanic) | 66 (26%) |
| Hispanic | 59 (24%) |
| Other race/ethnicity | 23 (9%) |
| State Ward (currently) | 40 (16%) |
| Home Placement Type | |
| Biological parents | 149 (60%) |
| Non-relatives/foster/adopted | 27 (11%) |
| Relatives | 25 (10%) |
| Group home | 29 (12%) |
| Shelter | 13 (5%) |
| Other | 7 (3%) |
| Age (mean=16) | |
| 11-13 | 18 (6%) |
| 14 | 27 (11%) |
| 15 | 39 (16%) |
| 16 | 63 (25%) |
| 17 | 84 (34%) |
| 18 | 19 (8%) |

Table 2. Demographic comparisons of first-time vs. repeat runaways

| | First-time (n=70) | Repeat (n=180) |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| Male | 76% | 59%** |
| Race/ethnicity | | |
| African American | 41% | 48% |
| White (non-Hispanic) | 20% | 26% |
| Hispanic | 31% | 21%* |
| Other race/ethnicity | 7% | 8% |
| State Ward (currently) | 16% | 16% |
| Home Placement Type | | |
| Biological parents | 63% | 58% |
| Non-relatives/foster/adopted | 11% | 11% |
| Relatives | 11% | 9% |
| Group home | 6% | 14%* |
| Shelter | 6% | 5% |
| Other | 3% | 3% |
| Age | | |
| 11-13 | 7% | 7% |
| 14 | 7% | 12% |
| 15 | 14% | 16% |
| 16 | 21% | 27% |
| 17 | 39% | 32% |
| 18 | 11% | 6% |

χ^2 ** p < .01; * p < .05.

Table 3. Area of residence

| | Total (n=250) |
|---|---------------|
| North O (68104, 68110, 68111) | 104 (42%) |
| South O (68107, 68108, 68117) | 35 (14%) |
| Millard, Ralston, West O, Boys Town (68130, 68135, 68136, 68137, 68144, 68022, 68114, 68116, 68154, 68127, 68010) | 50 (20%) |
| Northwest O (68122, 68134, 68164) | 19 (8%) |
| Central O (68102, 68106, 68105, 68131, 68132) | 23 (9%) |
| Out of county (Bellevue, Lincoln, Columbus, Council Bluffs, MO, CO, TX) | 16 (6%) |

Note: There were no significant differences in intake decision based on youths' area of residence

Table 4. Description of run variables

| | First-time (n=70) | Repeat (n=180) |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|
| # of times run away | | |
| 1 | 70 (100%) | -- |
| 2 | -- | 48 (27%) |
| 3 to 4 | -- | 53 (29%) |
| 5 to 8 | -- | 42 (23%) |
| More than 8 | -- | 37 (21%) |
| Time gone when ran | | |
| Less than 1 day | 13 (19%) | 20 (11%) [†] |
| 1 to 2 days | 28 (40%) | 39 (21%) ^{**} |
| 3 to 4 days | 7 (10%) | 28 (16%) |
| 5 to 7 days | 5 (7%) | 20 (11%) |
| More than 1 week | 17 (24%) | 73 (41%) [*] |
| Leave Douglas County | | |
| Yes | 9 (13%) | 42 (23%) ^{**} |
| Missing/refused | 23 (33%) | 1 (.6%) |
| Stayed with: | | |
| Immediate family | 2 (3%) | 9 (5%) |
| Extended family | 3 (3%) | 23 (13%) [*] |
| Youth friends | 30 (43%) | 125 (70%) ^{**} |
| Adult friends | 13 (19%) | 50 (28%) |
| Significant other | 3 (4%) | 16 (9%) |
| Other (e.g., on own) | 11 (16%) | 26 (14%) |

 χ^2 ** p < .01; * p < .05, † p < .10

Table 5. Description of run variables (continued)

| | First-time (n=70) | Repeat (n=180) |
|---|-------------------|-------------------------|
| Have contact w/ anyone when gone | | |
| Yes | 38 (54%) | 162 (90%) [†] |
| No | 7 (10%) | 12 (7%) |
| Missing/refused to answer | 25 (36%) | 6 (3%) ^{**} |
| If yes- who? | | |
| Parents | 12 (17%) | 71 (61%) ^{**} |
| Siblings | 4 (6%) | 11 (6%) |
| Extended family | 4 (6%) | 34 (19%) ^{**} |
| Friends | 35 (50%) | 137 (76%) ^{**} |

X² ** p < .01; * p < .05, † p < .10

Table 6. Comparisons of risk factors for first-time vs. repeat runaways

| | First-time (n=70) | Repeat (n=180) |
|---|----------------------|-------------------|
| Risk factors (co-occurring issues) | | |
| Past sexual abuse | 3 (4%) | 14 (8%) |
| Past physical abuse | 7 (10%) | 24 (13%) |
| Home/family change (death, divorce) | 13 (19%) | 45 (25%) |
| Conflict (fighting) at home | 16 (23%) | 71 (39%)** |
| Drug/alcohol use | 31 (44%) | 103 (57%)* |
| Depression/suicidal thoughts | 6 (9%) | 41 (23%)** |
| Diagnosed mental/emotional issue | 12 (17%) | 44 (24%) |
| Truancy | 22 (31%) | 84 (47%)* |
| Suspension/expulsion from school | 28 (40%) | 100 (56%)* |
| Warrants/trouble with law | 31 (44%) | 100 (56%)† |
| Need someone to talk to/trust | 32 (46%) | 80 (44%) |

χ^2 ** p < .01; * p < .05, † p < .10



Table 7. Comparisons of booking reason and intake decision for first-time vs. repeat runaways

| | First-time (n=70) | Repeat (n=180) [†] | All (n=250) |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|-------------|
| Reason for booking | | | |
| Unlawful absence (UA) | 38 (54%) | 122 (51%) | 160 (52%) |
| New law violation | 20 (29%) | 70 (29%) | 90 (29%) |
| Failure to appear (FTA) | 5 (7%) | 23 (10%) | 28 (9%) |
| New law violation & UA | 4 (7%) | 18 (8%) | 22 (7%) |
| New law violation & FTA | 1 (1%) | 3 (1%) | 4 (1%) |
| UA & FTA | 2 (3%) | 3 (1%) | 5 (1%) |
| Intake decision | | | |
| Detain, Secure | 31 (44%) | 120 (50%) | 151 (49%) |
| Detain, Staff-Secure | 5 (7%) | 30 (13%) | 35 (11%) |
| Release with Restrictions | 12 (17%) | 58 (24%) | 70 (23%) |
| Release without Restrictions | 22 (31%) | 31 (13%)** | 53 (17%) |
| Number of incidents | 70 | 239 | 309 |

χ^2 ** p < .01; * p < .05.


[†]59 youth in the repeat group were surveyed >1 time (if they were taken to intake office >1 over study period)

Table 8. Crosstabulation of intake decision and reason at intake (row % shown)

| | Detain, Secure (n= 151) | Detain, Staff- Secure (n= 35) | Release w/ Restrictions (n= 70) | Release No Restrictions (n= 53) | Total (n= 309) |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Unlawful absence | 47% | 18% | 23% | 13% | 52% |
| New law | 14% | 2% | 27% | 22% | 29% |
| Failure to appear | 29% | 11% | 29% | 32% | 9% |
| New law & UA | 91% | 4.5% | -- | 4.5% | 7% |
| New law & FTA | 25% | 25% | 25% | 25% | 1% |
| UA & FTA | 60% | -- | 20% | 20% | 2% |
| Total (n= 309) | 49% | 11% | 23% | 17% | |

$\chi^2 = 39.96, df=15, p<.001$

- 74% of youth taken to DC probation intake report having run before
- 60% of youth who run are living with biological parents
- Majority are from North Omaha (42%)
 - but there were no significant differences in intake decision based on youths' area of residence
- 40% of runaways return home within 2 days
 - **BUT** 36% report being away from home over 1 week
- Most youth have contact with someone when running (80%)
- Peers are CRITICAL
 - 62% reported staying with friends
 - 69% report having contact with friends when on the run

- Most youth do NOT report running for safety or abuse concerns (6.5% report running because of **current** physical abuse)
 - **HOWEVER-** youth have several other co-occurring issues
 - 54% currently using **drugs/alcohol**
 - 52% report **warrants/trouble with the law** (current or past)
 - 45% report currently **needing someone to talk to/trust**
 - 42% have current **truancy** issues
 - 18% report current **suspension/expulsion** from school (51% anytime)
 - 35% report **conflict/fighting at home** that lead them to runaway
 - 19% report current **depression and/or suicidal thoughts**
- 

- Demographic profiles of first-time and repeat runaways somewhat similar
 - Males, African Americans & Hispanics over-represented
 - Majority run from home with their biological parents (only 11% run from home w/ nonrelatives)
 - Mean age for both is 16 years old
- However, there are some differences between groups:
 - Significantly more girls in repeat group (41% vs. 24%)
 - Hispanics overrepresented more in first-time group (31% vs. 21%)
 - Significantly more repeat runaways come from a group home (14% vs. 6%)
- Repeat runaways report significantly more conflict at home, depression, drug/alcohol use, problems at school, and trouble with the law
- Policies need to be responsive to the unique needs of this population—particularly how the JJS responds

LB675 (2016) attempted to make changes in NE statutes to ensure that kids are detained in secure lockup facilities in only 2 instances:

1. when risk to public safety or risk to self is “seriously threatened”
 2. when there is a risk of flight from the jurisdiction (i.e., to ensure presence in court)
- Detention not to be used just to punish or to scare kids straight
 - This bill was very contentious and raised a lot of debate about the actual definition of detain and serious threat to safety
 - LB675 died on the floor

LB8 (2017)- deals only with youth already on probation

- attempts to bring in graduated responses to negative behaviors of youth on probation in conjunction with supervision and treatment

- Policies need to be responsive to the unique needs of this population — particularly how the JJS responds
 - **Timely and direct interventions** for runaways is important to protect them from the risks of being on the run (Walsh & Donaldson, 2010)
 - **Make youth aware of local services** - few appear to know of, and access, support services on their own (Pergamit & Ernst, 2010)
- **Address the family/parental needs** through comprehensive methods that involve both youth and their families (IFP)
- **Reduce detainment** of runaway youth (e.g., JDAI, OYS)
 - This exacerbates problems that led youth to run in the first place and has several collateral consequences (e.g., increases their likelihood of recidivism & ending up in the adult corrections system, decreases youths' odds of graduating H.S., increases justice-system costs)

- GRACA funding for summer 2017
- Finish entering surveys from Aug. - Dec. and analyze data to look at all the RQs addressed here
- Technical report for the DC Office of Juvenile Probation
- Present findings at the Academy of Criminal Justice Science (ACJS) annual meeting in Feb. 2018
- Present findings at the UNO Student Research and Creative Activity Fair in March 2018 (GRACA requirement)
- Submit at least two scholarly manuscripts for publication



Thank you!

Questions?

Special thanks to the Juvenile Probation **Intake Officers**—who helped fill out these surveys- making this information accessible. And thanks to **Heather Briggs** and **Shelly Hug** for answering many questions throughout the data collection process.

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