

REDES SOCIALES JUVENILES: SU INFLUENCIA EN LOS COMPORTAMIENTOS DE FUGA

YOUTH'S SOCIAL NETWORKS: INFLUENCE ON THEIR RUNNING AWAY BEHAVIOURS

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RECIBIDO: 10/12/07; ACEPTADO: 23/3/08

RESUMEN

La mayor parte de las investigaciones que se interesan en el estudio de los adolescentes de la calle, están orientadas a dos tipos de preocupaciones: la identificación de circunstancias que condujeron a los jóvenes 'a la calle' y la observación de condiciones de vida de dicha situación. Si bien el examen de factores de tipo familiar y personal ha contribuido mucho a la comprensión del fenómeno de la fuga, el papel de las redes sociales, ha sido explorado menos. Este artículo tiene como objetivo determinar si algunas características estructurales de las redes sociales, en las que participan los jóvenes en dificultad, pueden tener una influencia significativa sobre el comportamiento de fuga. Los análisis demuestran que los factores que contribuyen a la fuga no proceden exclusivamente de situaciones adversas, sobre las cuales los jóvenes no tienen mayor control, sino que también son producto de dinámicas sociales en las que ellos participan. Nuestros resultados identifican varias características de las redes sociales que son asociadas con la fuga, particularmente el nivel de diversidad y la presencia de adultos significativos en las redes. Dichos resultados pueden ser interpretados de dos modos: un enfoque psicosocial pone énfasis en la influencia de la red sobre el comportamiento de los jóvenes y un enfoque estructural concibe las redes sociales como un depósito de recursos, accesibles y útiles para aquellos que se fugan, pudiendo así modificar la experiencia de la fuga.

ABSTRACT

Most research on homeless adolescents focuses on two areas: the circumstances that lead the adolescent to life on the street and the living conditions on the street that confront the adolescent. While the study of personal and family issues has greatly clarified the phenomenon of the adolescent runaway, the influence of the social network has been given much less attention. This study will try to determine whether the structural characteristics

of the troubled adolescent's social networks significantly influence the decision to runaway. Our analysis reveals that certain characteristics of the network do indeed influence flight behavior. The article shows that the factors contributing to flight derive not just from adversarial situations over which adolescents have little control, but are, rather, also the result of social dynamics in which they freely participate. Our analysis also shows that some factors related to the composition of social networks, specifically the degree of internal diversity and the presence within them of adults significant to the adolescent, are factors associated with flight. This result can be interpreted using two different approaches to the social network: a psycho-social approach that emphasizes the network's influence on the adolescent's behavior and a sociological approach that sees the network as a resource whose availability and utility to the runaway can modify the nature of the flight experience.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Redes sociales, Capital social, Fuga, Jóvenes de la calle, Adolescente
KEYWORDS: Social Networks, Social Capital, Runaway, Homeless, Teenager

INTRODUCTION

Most research related to adolescent runaways focuses on two concerns. The first aims at identifying what in the adolescent's past might have contributed to becoming homeless—specifically, the situations, events, or contexts that qualify as potential “risk factors” of homelessness (Wolfe *et al.*, 1999; Whitbeck *et al.*, 1997; Powers and Jaklitsch, 1993). The second concern is with the observation of the actual conditions of life on the street, with emphasis on the difficulties and risks that confront the homeless adolescent (McCarthy and Hagan, 1992; Whitbeck *et al.*, 2000). These difficulties and dangers often include health risks or threats to physical well-being: infectious diseases, suicide, violence; or the adoption of undesirable behaviors such as criminality and drug abuse. In contrast, the research presented here tries to understand how the social network of adolescents troubled by family and personal issues may influence the adolescent's propensity to flee. While the examination of personal and family problems has shed much light on the phenomenon of the runaway, the role of the social network has been explored to a much lesser degree. Our study aims to examine adolescent flight in relation to social networks by focusing on the experiences of a group of adolescent runaways troubled by personal and family issues over a period of two years. In order to better understand the role of the social network and with a view towards prevention of the behavior, we will consider factors already known to contribute to the phenomenon. The literature suggests that in order to better understand why some adolescents flee, we should consider not just factors operative before the flight decision but also factors associated with life in the street.

This article aims to identify whether some structural characteristics of the social networks that troubled adolescents may be involved with can significantly influence the propensity to flee. The analysis takes into account other aspects seen as influencing the behavior of adolescent runaways (risk factors). The study focuses on three groups of adolescents under the care of the Youth Centres of Quebec: the first group never ran away; the second ran away for a certain time but then stopped and the third group can be

considered as recidivist since the members of the group persisted in runaway behavior throughout the period of observation¹.

THE RISK FACTORS

One of the most important areas in the study of adolescent homelessness is the nature of the factors that drive the adolescent to flight. Two of the most important of these factors are the adolescent's family situation and the adolescent's own behavioral problems (Robert, Pauzé and Fournier, 2005; Robert, Fournier and Pauzé, 2004). The families of homeless adolescents seem to be more marked by intra-family conflicts than those of non-homeless adolescents. This results in a lack of care, emotional support, and affection between family members (Wolfe, Toro and McCaskill, 1999; Whitbeck, Hoyt and Yoder 1999). Parenting practices also seem to be deficient in terms of the support and supervision provided (Whitbeck, Hoyt and Ackley, 1997; Schweitzer and Hier, 1994). As well, it appears that a higher percentage of homeless adolescents have suffered negative experiences during childhood, including separation from parents, new family configurations, and placement in foster homes (Craig and Hodson, 1998; Kufeldt and Nimmo, 1987. Research consistently shows a high rate of abuse among those adolescents (Wolfe, Toro and McCaskill, 1999; Janus *et al.*, 1995; Whitbeck and Simons, 1990; Powers, Eckenrode and Jaklitsch, 1990). Most scientific studies have also underlined the high degree of drug abuse and behavioral problems among homeless adolescents before they adopted running away and itinerant behaviours. A final element that should be mentioned is the manner in which adolescents relate to other relevant social spheres, especially the school and peer groups. The homeless adolescents have often suffered repeated academic failure and have been suspended or expelled from school (Caputo *et al.*, 1994 ; Powers and Jaklitsch, 1993). Those adolescents subject to repeated episodes of homelessness are as a group most likely to abandon education and become embedded in the sub-culture of the street (Smart *et al.*, 1994 ; Caputo *et al.*, 1994). According to the literature, they suffer some problems establishing stable bonds with peer groups within the school environment as well as in their immediate social spheres (Simons and Whitbeck, 1991). Associated with a deficient family environment, which deprives them of some forms of social support provided by adults, this difficulty forming bonds leads them to connect with peers of similar age and situation (Bao, Whitbeck and Hoyt 2000). In other respects, the experience of having been homeless also exacerbates pre-existing risk factors such as drug-taking and criminal behavior (Hoyt and Bao, 2000; Bao, Whitbeck and Hoyt, 2000).

¹ Centres jeunesse are public establishments in each region of Québec (Canada) in charge of providing specialized help to young people and their families experiencing major difficulties, and to young mothers who have severe problems adapting. More specifically, these public organizations are responsible for enforcing three laws that aim to protect youth against abuse (physical and sexual) and negligence. They also intervene with minors who have carried out criminal acts, or who have difficulties or behaviour troubles such as delinquency, running away, suicide threats, etc. The young people targeted by this research project are in the last category. Centres jeunesse may offer this help following young peoples' or their parents' request. This help is made up of several different types of interventions, including rehabilitation or psychosocial intervention. The young people the Centres jeunesse take on may continue to live in their environment or may be housed in a more protected setting, according to the evaluation of their situation and their needs.

SOCIAL NETWORKS

The existing literature on homeless adolescents has not carefully examined the support provided by the adolescent's social network. In a study by Ennet, Bailey and Ferderman (1999), one quarter of the participants were unable to identify a single person with whom they shared some activities or spent time with. These adolescents displayed more high-risk behaviors than others-including drug use and multiple sexual partners. The study also showed that some of the homeless adolescents maintained contact with their families. Surprisingly, it seems that maintaining family contacts while living on the street does not reduce the most common types of its associated high-risk behaviors (particularly the consumption of drugs and alcohol). These results are partly confirmed by the work of Unger (1998) and his colleagues, which emphasizes that the presence of social support for the homeless adolescent has no effect on high risk behavior (particularly the consumption of drugs). These two studies suggest that the social networks of the homeless adolescent have an ambiguous role in relation to the survival strategies they develop. For example, the support given by the social network of homeless youths contributes to their emotional well-being (Unger et al., 1998), but does not appear to actually solve any of the problems that he or she is confronted with (Hagen and McCarthy, 1998).

The precise effects of the social networks on the behaviors of these adolescents are difficult to grasp because the networks are usually heterogenous-consisting of people from different social groups (Snijders and Baerveldt, 2003; Haynie, 2002; Engels and ter Bogt, 2001; Barone et al., 1998). This fact leads to the conclusion that the heterogeneity of the adolescent's social network can produce multiple, contradictory influences with regard to behaviors (resulting in encouragement or discouragement of high-risk behavior). However, in the case of delinquent behaviors, a significant number of criminological studies have shown that adolescents who adopt this type of behavior are more likely to have delinquent peers within their network (Haynie, 2001).

The authors who postulate heterogeneity in the social networks of adolescents thus suggest two inherent limitations in the criminological studies that emphasize the influence of the social network: one concerns the methodological approach and the other focuses on the very idea of a social network. In terms of the methodology, because the studies often examine the effects of the social network only at discrete points in time, we cannot be certain of the role the network has over the long term, nor of its role in facilitating or inhibiting flight behavior. On the conceptual level, in these studies the idea of social network pertains exclusively to the psycho-social influence that the members of the network can exert on behavior patterns. In general, we conceive of the social network as a medium for the transmission of models or norms that adolescents voluntarily adopt (a selection mechanism by the members of the network) or under a comparative pressure placed upon them in the expression of these models by the members of their network (the socialization mechanism created by the members of the network).

However, there is a sociological approach in which the social network refers to something altogether different. Rather than accentuating social networks as norms and values likely to influence behavior, we might think of social networks as pools of resources that are available to those who participate (Montgomery, 1992; Lin, 1999). In particular, this approach is based on empirical and conceptual work developed by Granovetter (1973), who demonstrated the advantages for individuals participating in social networks with

certain characteristics, such as the presence of weak ties². Using Granovetter's hypothesis, many works have picked up on, systematized and widened this concept to show that the value of the resources that can be tapped through social networks depends on the array of social status, these networks make accessible (Lin, 2001; Erikson, 2004). Since social networks serve as a means to convey resources, the access they can give to high social status potentially provides resources of higher value than the access to social status which have resources of lesser value. (For instance, when looking for a job, contact with an employer can be more beneficial than with the unemployed.) The ability to access these resources (an ability that constitutes individuals' social capital) is what allows individuals to implement actions that will help them achieve their various objectives.

In terms of runaways, we can presume that in addition to exercising a normative influence through the values and norms they convey, social networks also exercise an influence through the resources they provide either to facilitate or discourage running away. These resources can be physical (shelter, for example), informational (where to find shelter), or any other type of support for a runaway (for example, offering solutions to problems or difficult situations). We can, therefore, hypothesize that it will be easier for an adolescent to decide to runaway or to persist in living as a runaway if he knows people who are able to provide him with the means to do so.

Similarly, access to resources that keep youth from running away or from not running away again can play an important role in whether young people fall into a life in the street or whether they curtail the time they spend there. We might think of useful resources for social integration according to a predominant model, such as a job, references to helping organizations, etc.

THE POPULATION STUDIED

The general objective of this research is to examine the influence of social networks on runaway adolescents in the context of their different experiences while taking into account other factors also recognized as relevant. The research design was developed in order to allow for a comparison between groups of adolescents who had adopted different behaviors in relation to flight, thus allowing for the identification of those factors.

The studies are based on a comparison of the experiences of 246 runaway adolescents under the care of four Quebec Youth Centres, in Montreal, Quebec City, the Eastern Townships, and the North Shore³. The sample consists of 71% males ranging in ages between 12 and 18 years old with an average of 15.4. These adolescents were encountered on two occasions. The first observation (T1) allowed for the collection of information regarding the general situation of the adolescent and his family over the course of the year that preceded the adolescent's supervision by a youth centre. The second observation (T2) then targeted the adolescent's experiences of the first 12 months of supervision by the centre.

² One can define weak ties as social bonds which have little emotional commitment, such as relationships with work colleagues, acquaintances, etc. On the other hand, strong ties imply a significant emotional commitment such as family, marital, or friendship bonds. This latter category generally connect individuals who are in the same social groups whereas weak ties can connect individuals who have different social status, an employer and employee, for example, (Lin, 1999).

³ The data derive from a longitudinal study directed by Professor Robert Pauzé of the University of Sherbrooke. The sampling method is described in the research report conducted by him and his collaborators (Pauzé et al., 2000).

In terms of the types of runaway behaviors, it is possible to identify three distinct groups of adolescents. The first group consists of those that had never been runaways (63%). The second group (16%) claimed to have already runaway at least once by the time of the first meeting (T1), but to have not repeated the experience between the first meeting (T1), and the second one (T2). For this group, the observations made at T2 therefore correspond to a time when they had not adopted runaway behaviors. Finally, the members of the last group had runaway at least once by the time of the first meeting and had done so again during the second period of observation. This last group of recidivist runaways represented 21% of the sample. The first instance of measurement (T1) relates to the adolescent's situation of the 12 months preceding the intervention of the youth centres, whereas the second instance of measurement relates to the 12 months following the intervention.

THE DATA

During the two meetings, two sets of information had been gathered in relation to these adolescents. The first set relates to the behaviors and situations that have been identified by much of the research as being related to the flight tendency (Wolfe *et al.*, 1999; Whitbeck *et al.*, 1999; Janus *et al.*, 1995; Whitbeck and Simons, 1990; Powers *et al.*, 1990; Craig and Hodson, 1998; Kufeldt and Nimmo, 1987). The second set tries to identify structural characteristics of the social networks in which the adolescents find themselves.

On the behavioral level, three factors have been considered: academic performance, as measured by the number of school years that had to be repeated, regular alcohol consumption, and the use of hard drugs. The degrees of habitual drug use by adolescents were identified using the Substance Abuse Severity Indicator (Pauzé *et al.* 2000), which is used to derive descriptive information about the types of substances consumed, the frequency of their consumption, the age of first consumption, etc. The family situation is evaluated by means of three indicators. The first indicator relates to the family dynamic as defined by the *Family Assessment Device* (Epstein *et al.*, 1983). This instrument measures several dimensions of the family dynamic (the resolution of problems, the ability to communicate, the definition of roles, the expression of emotion, the investment of emotion, and the control of behaviors). These dimensions suggest either a well-functioning family (where there is mutual acceptance), or a dysfunctional family (where the relationships are marked by much negative emotion). A rating equal to or greater than 2.17 indicates a dysfunctional family dynamic. The second indicator identifies the presence of parental violence within the family environment. The measurement is facilitated by the use of scales for both verbal aggression: shouting, swearing, threatening, insulting, ridiculing, and physical aggression: shaking, striking, throwing to the ground (see *Conflict Tactics Scales*, Straus, 1979). The higher the rating, the more significant the level of violence. Generally, a rating equal to or greater than 3 indicates the presence of physical or verbal violence directed at the adolescent. Finally, we have considered the effects of any placement in a substitute environment that may have occurred in the course of the adolescent's life. With the exception of academic performance and the substitute environment, all of the data related to these indicators was collected during these two sets of interviews. In addition to observing the characteristics of the family dynamic, information was also collected regarding the family structure (intact,

single-parent, reconstituted). Finally, information regarding the socio-professional status and education levels of the parent was also gathered, but only at T1⁴.

The second set of data consists of indicators that attempt to define the structure of the adolescent's social network. This data relates to the presence of people in the adolescent's social network who adopt certain behaviors: consuming drugs or alcohol, committing crimes, quitting school. The objective here is to evaluate the degree to which the adolescents are in contact with people displaying behaviors that can be associated with a certain type of (social) marginality (Ennett *et al.*, 1999). Another indicator measures the presence of friends in the social network who are older than 18, this being an element reflecting the influence of adults, an influence that can be positive or negative depending on the nature of the relationship and the type of behavior displayed by the adult (Tavecchio *et al.*, 1999). A more global measurement of this same indicator is performed in considering the total number of adults in the network-whether they are friends or not. Finally, there are two indicators that target the network in its entirety, its size, being the total number of people in the network, and its diversity. Its diversity is measured by the presence in the network of people who are defined by seven different categories: the immediate family, the extended family, companions from school or work, friends, companions from leisure activities, teachers, and youth centre workers. The diversity index relates to the number of categories represented in the network of the adolescent. The underlying assumption of this measurement is that the more diversified the network, the greater will be the diversity of resources available to the adolescent connected to that network (Degeenne and Forsé, 1999; Lévesque and White, 2001). All the information relative to the network structure has been gathered during the two collection sessions with the adolescents.

THE RESULTS

Bivariate Analyses

Table 1 shows the descriptive data of all the indicators used in the analysis model as well as the results derived from the bivariate analysis. On the level of behavioral characteristics, the recidivist adolescent runaways are proportionately more numerous in having adopted high-risk behaviors such as regular consumption of alcohol and hard drugs). Also, the regular consumption of alcohol remained stable during the two observations of the two other groups of adolescents while it was clearly more widespread during the second observation of the recidivist runaways. Pertaining to the use of hard drugs, it remains consistently high (greater than 60%) during the observations of the recidivists, while it tends to diminish for the other two groups during the second observation. In terms of the consumption of these substances, the comparison between the two observations reveals a definite deterioration in the situation for the recidivist runaways while for the other groups the situation seems to improve. In terms of academic performance, within the three groups, a similar proportion (43%) did not have to repeat a grade. But 17% of the recidivists had to repeat more than two grades compared to only 10% of those who were runaways only at T1 and to only 2% of those who had never been runaways. The trend is consistent: the number of school years repeated is positively and significantly related to the profile of the runaway.

⁴ Hereafter, the term "parent" refers to the person considered by the adolescent to be the most significant parental figure.

The results regarding the characteristics of family experiences are also as expected. More than two-thirds of the recidivists have, in the past, been the object of an officially supervised placement compared to 30% of those who had never fled. Similarly, compared with the other adolescents, a greater proportion of recidivist runaways experience a dysfunctional family dynamic as well as parental violence. These tendencies were apparent during the two observations. However, the family dynamic appears to improve by the second observation for almost all the groups, with the exception of non-runaways. This improvement in the family situation by T2 is possibly attributable to the intervention of the youth centres.

The correlation between the family context and the flight behavior does not, however, appear to be associated with the structural characteristics of the family. Hence, it appears that the adolescents from single-parent, reconstituted, and intact families do not display different patterns of flight behavior. In the same way, the level of education as well as the professional status of the parent do not allow the identification of any significant tendencies that can be associated with any of the groups. In fact, for this sample, the negative family behaviors that were taken into account are not significantly related to the socio-economic status of the parents. The only relationship that might be identified pertains to the family dynamic, which is even more dysfunctional when the parent is not working-but it is quite a weak relationship.

Table 1 : Behavioral characteristics, characteristics of situation, families and network characteristics of adolescents.

	Recidivist runaways	Runaways at T1 only	Never ran away	N
	%	%	%	
CHARACTERISTICS OF BEHAVIOR AND SITUATION				
Consumption of alcohol T1 (regular) **	46,2	30,0	23,2	230
Consumption of alcohol T2 (regular) ****	59,6	29,4	28,6	226
Consumption of hard drugs T1 (presence) ***	61,5	52,5	32,6	230
Consumption of hard drugs T2 (presence) ****	63,5	35,3	21,4	226
Number of academic years repeated T1 **				
more than two	17,3	10,0	1,9	246
two	17,3	20,0	14,9	
one	23,1	27,5	39,6	
none	42,3	42,5	43,5	
Placement of the child T1 (yes) ****	67,3	57,5	29,9	246
Family dynamic ado T1 (dysfunctional) ****	69,2	52,5	34,6	245
Family dynamic ado T2 (dysfunctional) **	63,5	35,3	36,4	226
Parental violence T1 (significant level) ****	80,8	67,5	42,2	246

		Recidivist runaways	Runaways at T1 only	Never ran away	N	(Cont.)
		%	%	%		
Parental violence T2 (significant level) ****		61,5	32,4	30,7	226	
FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS						
Type of family T1	single-parent	46,2	51,3	44,4	244	
	reconstituted	28,8	20,5	22,2		
	intact	25,0	28,2	33,3		
Parent's level of education T1	university	14,6	11,8	15,0	162	
	CEGEP + university certif.	8,3	35,3	25,0		
	secondary	43,8	35,3	36,3		
	primary	33,3	17,6	23,8		
Parent's professional status T1	at home	10,4	14,7	3,8	162	
	on social assistance	25,0	17,6	21,3		
	actively looking for work	64,6	67,6	75,0		
CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SOCIAL NETWORK						
Presence of persons consuming drugs / alcohol T1 (yes) ***		76,9	70,0	49,4	246	
Presence of persons consuming drugs / alcohol T2 (yes)		79,2	65,5	58,3	149	
Presence of persons committing offences T1 (yes) *		44,2	35,0	24,7	246	
Presence of persons committing offences T2 (yes) **		33,3	10,3	9,7	149	
Presence of friends older than 18 T1 (yes)		38,5	47,5	31,2	246	
Presence of friends older than 18 T2 (yes) *		45,8	75,9	51,4	149	
Presence of friends that have quit school T1 (yes) *		44,2	40,0	24,7	246	
Presence of friends that have quit school T2 (yes)		52,1	58,6	36,1	149	
Number of adults in the network T1 (average)		5,5	4,7	5,8	246	
Number of adults in the network T2 (average)		6,8	6,6	6,7	246	
Size of network T1 (average number of people)		11,0	11,0	11,6	246	
Size of network T2 (average number of people)		10,7	9,8	10,3	246	
Diversity of network T1 (average number of categories)		4,4	3,9	4,1	246	
Diversity of network T2 (average number of categories)		4,0	4,3	4,3	246	

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$, **** $p < 0.000$

Among the seven indicators of the network structural characteristics that were measured during the two observations, only four presented significant differences, depending on the groups of adolescents. Hence, the size of the network, its diversity, and the number of adults within it do not differ significantly from one group to another. On the contrary, in the first observation the proportion of adolescents whose social network includes people displaying high-risk behaviors (regular consumption of alcohol, hard drugs), committing crimes or quitting school is clearly higher for the recidivist runaways than for the other groups. This means that from the inception, the recidivist runaways' social networks are characterized by attributes of deviancy. The presence of delinquent behaviors by members of the recidivist runaways' social networks persists at the second observation. The results also show that in the period of time between the two observations, the composition of the adolescents' social networks evolved appreciably. A larger proportion of non-runaways socialize with people who regularly consume drugs and alcohol at the second observation, whereas there is no marked change for the other groups. At the second observation, in all three groups, the proportion of adolescents socializing with persons that had committed offenses had collapsed. In this area, the difference between the recidivists and the other groups has increased at the second observation. Effectively, at this point, the proportion of recidivists connected to people who have committed offenses is three times greater than observed in other groups. The number of friends who had quit school was greater in the second observation, which is explainable, at least in part, by the fact that one year "leaked out" between the two points of observation and that some of the people could have quit or completed school. This information does not necessarily indicate a change regarding the composition of the network.

Finally, the proportion of adolescents who have friends older than 18 years increases in all groups between the two observations. This evolution is probably linked in part to the increase in age that occurred between the two observations. Nevertheless, this evolution is strongly associated with the flight behavior of one group of adolescents. In effect, it is apparent that the presence of friends over the age of 18 years is a characteristic of the non-recidivist runaways' network in the second observation while it is not the case at the time of the first observation. Put another way, the presence of friends who are older than 18 years appears to be significant for the group of runaways at T1 only during a period in which these adolescents did not run away. This fact supports the hypothesis of a possible positive effect of the presence of older friends upon flight behavior. In effect, this presence seems to be significant for those adolescents who have not been recidivist and it appears only during a non-runaway period. This hypothesis is examined more thoroughly in the multivariate analysis which follows

To summarize, the bivariate analysis highlights tendencies already mentioned, especially, on the one hand, the correlation between the propensity to flee and the adoption of certain high-risk behaviors and on the other, the propensity to flee and the presence of adverse family characteristics. They show that the behaviors of the adolescents in our sample are not significantly different from those observed in many other studies of adolescent runaways. These analyses tend to show that certain characteristics of the social network are associated with flight behavior. Some questions, however, remain

unanswered. For example, can the presence of drug-takers within the network be said to have a specific influence if we take into account the fact that the adolescents already take drugs? Also, does the presence of friends who have quit school have an influence that is significant beyond its effect on the academic performance of the adolescent? These investigations focus on the interactions that may exist between the behavior of individuals and the characteristics of the networks in which they participate. For example, the consumption of hard drugs could probably help to establish contacts with other drugtakers (the selection effect) which might or might not exercise an influence on the adolescent (the socialization effect). Thus, we are speaking here of the psychosocial influence of the network upon behaviors. The interactions between members of the network can be more complex and the influence of the latter ones can be felt on several aspects of behavior. The multivariate analysis will allow us to appreciate the many areas of influence that are exerted by the members of the social networks of the adolescents that are part of our study.

The Multivariate Analyses

Table 2 shows the results of a multinomial logistic regression analysis that allows us to simultaneously identify the influence of the list of factors presented earlier on the propensity to become part of one of the three groups of adolescents. The group that has never runaway forms the comparison group for the interpretation of the results. The analyses allow for the identification of factors that contribute significantly in distinguishing the adolescents in the two groups of runaways from those that have never displayed the behavior. The results disclose tendencies very different from those identified by the bivariate analysis.

To begin with, let us look at the influences affecting a group of runaways at the first point of observation only (T1). When we simultaneously consider the range of factors, only three appear to significantly influence the propensity to become part of the group of runaways defined at T1 only (compared with the group of non-runaways) and therefore to adopt a runaway behavior that does not persist over time. The fact of having been subjected to an institutional or foster placement in the past is positively associated with the propensity to runaway (or = 7.06). It may be recalled that for this group of adolescents, these two events occurred before being taken into the care of the youth centres. The available information does not enable us to establish the direction of causality linking these two events. In effect, the placement can appear after the flight and become a consequence of it, or the placement can act as the incident which provokes the flight. Even if the direction of the relationship is not established, one fact remains - that compared to the non-runaway group of adolescents, those that have been subjected to placement have a greater chance of attempting to runaway. The two other factors associated with the T1 runaways refer only to their social network.

The number of adults that are a part of the adolescents' social networks defined at T1 has a slightly negative impact on the propensity to flee (or = 0.73). At the same time, the presence of friends in the social network who are older than 18 years at T2 is positively associated with being a runaway at T1 only (or = 8.17). It should be noted that while the presence of adult friends is significant at T2, it is not at T1. We recall that for this group of adolescents the situation at T2 corresponds to a period during which they were not

Table 2 : Results of multinomial regression model.

	Runaways T1 only ¹		Recidivist runaways ¹	
	B	Odd Ratio	B	Odd Ratio
Intercept	7,9914		9,8545	
CHARACTERISTICS OF BEHAVIOR AND SITUATION				
Age	-0,5647	0,5685	-0,9764	0,3767
Sex (masculine)	0,6397	1,8959	-2,0522	0,1285
Consumption of alcohol T1 (rerular)	0,9409	2,5623	1,9491	7,0224
Consumption of alcohol T2 (regular)	-0,9729	0,3780	2,0492	7,7620
Consumption of hard drugs T1 (present)	-0,0990	0,9057	2,5232 *	12,4690
Consumption of hard drugs T2 (present)	0,1397	1,1499	0,1951	1,2154
Number of academic years repeated T1				
more than two ²	2,3269	10,2458	5,3312 *	206,6901
two ²	-0,3137	0,7307	2,1793	8,8402
one ²	-1,7232	0,1785	-0,6844	0,5044
Placement at T1 (yes)	1,9547 *	7,0618	1,4711	4,3539
Family dynamic ado T1 (dysfunctional)	-0,3554	0,7009	2,0254 *	7,5795
Family dynamic ado T2 (dysfunctional)	-0,1816	0,8340	0,2911	1,3380
Parental violence T1 (significant)	0,8076	2,2425	3,1555 **	23,4649
Parental viloence T2 (significant)	-0,8487	0,4280	0,9947	2,7040
FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS				
Type of family T1				
single-parent ³	-0,4239	0,6545	-1,0372	0,3544
reconstituted ³	-0,5874	0,5558	0,0567	1,0584
Parent's level of education				
university ⁴	0,8638	2,3722	-1,7705	0,1702
CEGEP + university cert. ⁴	0,3220	1,3798	-3,8448 *	0,0214
secondary ⁴	0,0485	1,0497	-0,8075	0,4460
Parent's professional status				
at home ⁵	1,7546	5,7810	1,1758	3,2407
social assistance ⁵	-0,6121	0,5422	-0,3027	0,7388

	Runaways T1 only ¹		Recidivist runaways ¹		(Cont.)
	B	Odd Ratio	B	Odd Ratio	
CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SOCIAL NETWORK					
Presence of persons consuming drugs / alcohol T1 (yes)	0,6887	1,9911	0,8265	2,2852	
Presence of persons consuming drugs / alcohol T2 (yes)	0,3119	1,3660	2,2728 *	9,7066	
Presence of persons committing offences T1 (yes) *	-1,4505	0,2345	-1,1559	0,3148	
Presence of persons committing offences T2 (yes) **	0,7441	2,1046	2,6216 *	13,7575	
Presence of friends older than 18 T1 (yes)	-0,2427	0,7845	-1,4248	0,2406	
Presence of friends older than 18 T2 (yes) *	2,1009 *	8,1736	-0,0954	0,9090	
Presence of friends that have quit school T1 (yes) *	0,8357	2,3064	1,6409	5,1599	
Presence of friends that have quit school T2 (yes)	0,3428	1,4089	-0,2097	0,8109	
Number of adults in the network T1 (average)	-0,3114 *	0,7324	0,0479	1,0490	
Number of adults in the network T2 (average)	0,0794	1,0827	0,0437	1,0447	
Size of network T1 (average number of people)	0,0683	1,0707	-0,0968	0,9078	
Size of network T2 (average number of people)	-0,2055	0,8142	0,0328	1,0333	
Diversity of network T1 (average number of categories)	-0,1610	0,8513	0,3403	1,4054	
Diversity of network T2 (average number of categories)	0,1385	1,1485	-0,9946 *	0,3699	
N	142				
Degree of liberty	70				
Chi-square ⁶	136,8780 ***				

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.000

¹ : The reference category is « never been a runaway ».

² : The reference category is « none ».

³ : The reference category is « intact ».

⁴ : the reference category is « primary ».

⁵ : The reference category is « actively looking for work ».

⁶ : The model predicts 75 % of/from the collection of observations (85 % for recidivist runaways, 83 % for the non-runaways and 36 % for the runaways at T1 only).

runaways. So it seems that, as suggested earlier, the presence of adults as well as adult friends in the social network contributes to the reduction of the propensity to flee. However, other analyses show that between the two points of observation there has been no increase in the number of adolescent runaways of this type that socialize with adult friends. We may suggest hypothetically, that the significant influence of this factor at T2 is possibly due

to the transformation of the relationship between the adolescent and his adult friends or to the fact that the adult friends are not the same ones or a combination of those two scenarios. The available data however, does not allow us to test these hypotheses. Also, it must be specified that the regression model does not allow us to perfectly explain the behaviors of the runaways at T1 only. In effect, the model allows us to properly classify 36% of them-compared to nearly 85% of the adolescents from the two other groups. This situation shows a greater complexity in the situation and behaviors of those adolescents, a situation that remains difficult to comprehend using the factors considered in the analytical model, while the last one accounts very well for the behaviors of recidivist runaway. These results once again emphasize the profound heterogeneity of adolescent runaways (Robert, Pauzé and Fournier, 2005 ; Schaffner, 1998; Farrow *et al.*, 1992).

The analytical model allows us to predict the behavior of recidivist runaways much more precisely. The results allow us to isolate the influence of a larger number of factors (8) over their trajectories and define their tendencies more clearly. In the sphere of behaviors, as could be expected, the consumption of hard drugs at T1 strongly exacerbates the propensity to recidivate (or = 12.47). Also, the repeated academic failures, indicated by the fact of having failed more than two academic years, are associated with having runaway repeatedly (or = 206). On the other hand, the regular consumption of alcohol does not constitute a significant factor for this group or the other. In the area of family characteristics, the presence of a dysfunctional family dynamic as perceived by the adolescents at T1 as well as situations of parental violence again at T1, are two elements that increase the probability that the runaway behavior will persist (or = 7.58 and 23.46). Curiously, being subjected to placement does not significantly influence the situation of this group of runaways. And yet it is among the members of this group that we find the highest proportion of adolescents who have been placed in substitute environments (67%). The fact that this experience does not appear to have a significant influence on their flight behavior may indicate that its relevance fluctuates according to the basic situation the adolescents find themselves in. For the recidivist runaways, this experience is not a determining factor in the progression of their experiences, especially in light of the other aspects of their situation.

These results support the hypotheses relating to the heterogeneity of adolescent runaways and their flight behavior histories. They focus attention on the likelihood that the experiences of the runaway are not mechanistically determined by any situation or event in particular. They incline our analysis towards the conception that the experiences of the runaways are strongly colored by conjunctions of events, situations, and personal actions put into play by the adolescents themselves and the people in their social networks.

Only one family characteristic significantly influences the behaviors of recidivist runaways: the lower the level of education of the parent, the higher the probability the adolescent will join the ranks of recidivist runaways. It is necessary to clarify that the level of education of the parent has a specific effect in conjunction with his or her professional status but also on the nature of the family, which leads to the belief that the powerful influence of this factor goes beyond that of the structure of the family and the social status of the parents.

Finally, certain characteristics of content and structure of the social network exert an influence on the propensity of adolescents to be part of the group of recidivist runaways.

At first, the presence within the network at T2 of people who consume drugs and alcohol increases the probability of being a recidivist runaway (or = 9.71). The same tendency is apparent when the network at T2 includes persons who have committed offenses. The fact of being involved with persons who have adopted these behaviors therefore constitutes a situation that tends to accentuate the propensity to persist in flight behavior. It must be noted that more advanced analyses show that the presence of a single person who adopts the behaviors in question is sufficient to exert an influence, influence which does not seem to increase with numbers. This illustrates the fact that the social network may exert an influence even if that influence is not reinforced by multiple relationships. In fact, the multiplicity of similar relations very often amounts to a form of redundancy of exchange (for example, of information conveyed) and does not necessarily increase the quantity of resources exchanged (Burt, 1992; Degenne and Forsé, 1999).

In terms of the structure of the network, there is a negative relationship between the diversity of the networks at T2 and the probability of being in the group of recidivists (or = .37). The diversity of the network, measured here by the fact of access to persons whose social status is diverse, seems therefore to constitute a resource that allows for the reduction of flight behavior. These results are consistent with both the theories and empirical analyses of networks which have shown that, particularly in relation to persons of a lower social status, the diversified network can, at least potentially, constitute a resource more significant than the network that is more homogenous (Campbell *et al.*, 1986; Lin, 1999; Lévesque and White, 2001).

DISCUSSION

Several of the results of this study isolate tendencies that are already known, in particular those that relate to factors traditionally taken into account to analyse the behaviors associated with flight (for example, the consumption of intoxicants, academic and family difficulties, etc.). Among these elements, the influence of the adolescents' social networks is certainly the most important. As we have seen, our analyses enable us to identify the specific contribution of the social networks upon the flight behavior while taking into account other factors also known to influence these behaviors. The analyses thus emphasize the dynamic effects between the behaviors adopted by the adolescents and the characteristics of their social networks.

In relation to the recidivist runaways, we observe simultaneously a significant relation between the consumption of hard drugs, the presence within the network of people who take drugs, and the propensity to run away. These two factors that help to explain the flight response may well reinforce each other: drug consumption probably facilitates the integration into networks consisting of drug takers (the selection effect), while participation in such networks may influence the consumption of drugs (the socialization effect). What is remarkable, however, is that this influence is felt not just in the consumption of drugs but also beyond it, in the persistence of flight behavior. While the influence of the network (comprised of, among others, drug takers) on the adolescents' consumption of drugs can be explained in psychosocial terms, such an explanation is less persuasive when we need to understand the direct influence of the network on the persistence of adolescent flight behavior. By which mechanism can the network keep the adolescent in this situation? The same problem presents itself in relation to results that suggest the importance of people

within the adolescent recidivists' network who commit offences. As others have indicated (Brannigan and Caputo, 1993) the fact that recidivist runaways are very much in contact with people who have committed offences can be interpreted in terms of a greater degree of integration within a marginalizing network. The influence of the network is here, as well, of a psycho-social nature and asserts itself through the influence of norms that are conveyed and also help to modify the behaviors.

One of the results of our analyses allows us to form an hypothesis more sociological than psychosocial on the influence of the network on the persistence of flight behavior. In effect, we see that less diversity in the networks increases the chances of persisting in a flight behavior: the recidivist adolescents' networks display less diversity. If we consider that if, in a general sense, network diversity contributes to a diversity of resources (De-gegne and Forsé, 1999), it is probable that the persistence of flight behavior depends on this diversity of resources to which the recidivist runaways have no access because their network is formed mainly of runaways who share similar experiences. What is therefore central to the understanding of the influences of the network upon flight behavior are the availability or non-availability of resources within the network (Montgomery, 1992). This sociological approach also allows us to interpret another research result. In effect, the reduction in the propensity to run away is associated with the presence of adults within the networks. These people can be thought of as possessing resources that can facilitate some types of social integration.

Two important methodological limitations of this study can affect the potential for generalizing to the larger population of adolescent runaways. To begin with, our sample is comprised of adolescents who were placed in the care of youth centres. Our sample therefore suffers bias from criteria deriving from the decision-making processes associated with the choice of clients at the youth centres. However, the importance of this limitation must be considered in the light of certain studies which demonstrate that the clients of the youth centres form a group (already?) at risk of homelessness. In effect, 50% to 75% of homeless adolescents had already had contacts with the child protection system during their lifetimes (Powers, Eckenrode et Jaklisch, 1990). Secondly, it must be clarified that the period of observation from which the data of our study derive is relatively short and that these data describe a limited reality at two discrete points in the lives of the adolescents. Taking into account the great variability and instability of situations experienced by the adolescents, it is possible that a slightly different picture could emerge from the analysis of richer data regarding their experiences, especially if the data derived from longer periods of observation and if it took into account the mechanisms of transition that are at work during the adolescents' experiences.

CONCLUSION

This article has intended to show the influence of social networks on the behaviors of runaway adolescents. The study compares three groups of adolescents who have either closely skirted the runaway's trajectory or actually experienced the life of the runaway to a greater or lesser degree. The study allows us to identify the specific influences of the social networks while also integrating into the analysis well known factors related to flight, such as negative family and personal experiences. The analyses suggest a specific influence of social networks on the flight behavior of adolescents. The analyses lead to the conclusion

that the simple observation of the factors or antecedents that *lead to flight* are not sufficient to understand the essence of the flight dynamic. The adolescent runaways do not only flee as a reaction to adverse situations, our analysis reveals that flight is also the result of dynamic social relations in which the adolescents actively participate. Extending well beyond the family, these social relations provide resources that can influence the adolescent's experience of flight. However, the influence of the social network is not a simple one. The results suggest that the social networks can as easily increase the propensity to flee as decrease it. The results therefore highlight the fact that the studies which ascribe a great importance to the simple presence of connections as a tool for the integration of the adolescents appear to be insufficient. If these connections can contribute to an emancipation, they can also lead to the deepening of marginality.

This situation invites the development of more precise research protocols in order to reveal the network's mechanisms and resources at work in these two dynamics. More specifically, the results of this study lead to two lines of inquiry: the first refers to the necessity of more precisely identifying network resources that contribute to the development of patterns of marginalization and (re?) integration. These resources must be identified within the framework of the experiences of adolescents taking into account the totality of their situation, including the nature of contexts (familial, academic, etc.) in which they live, the behaviors they have adopted, and the strategies they use to manage their life trajectories. The other line of inquiry relates to the access to network's resources that influence life trajectories. Therefore, the question that can be asked is how these resources are created and how the adolescents develop and use their social networks.

Even in this context of uncertainty with regard to modalities for creating and using embedded resources in social networks, in terms of prevention, these conclusions emphasize the importance of maintaining or creating social diversity in the networks youth participate in. Often, interventions that target youth in difficulty have the effect of shutting these young people into social networks that are made up of other youth in the same situation or of professionals who specialize in helping this population. This situation can result in restricting contact with individuals who are outside the social arena these young people occupy, thus restricting the possibilities for accessing resources that could be useful, even essential, to young people's social re-insertion, and which can be found, at least in part, outside this social space. The issue then is in the capacity to intervene in an individualized and adapted way with targeted groups without excluding them from other social spaces. Though this challenge for interventions is not specific to the situation of youth in difficulty (we also see it in other sectors, such as the fight against poverty (Lévesque, 2005), it may have a particular importance in the youth context because of their greater vulnerability and the heavier, even definitive, consequences of insertion into fringes that break with dominant social connections.

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