

Overall Runaway Statistics: One in seven kids between the ages of 10 and 18 will run away at some point. And there are 1 million to 3 million runaway and homeless kids living on the streets in the United States. In 1999, an estimated 1,682,900 youth had a runaway episode. Of these youth, 37 percent were missing from their caretakers (628,900) and 21 percent (357,600) were reported to authorities for purposes of locating them. Youth ages 15-17 made up two-thirds of the youth with runaway episodes during the study year.

Of the total runaway youth, an estimated 1,190,900 (71 percent) could have been endangered during their runaway episode by virtue of factors such as substance dependency, use of hard drugs, sexual or physical abuse, presence in a place where criminal activity was occurring, or because of their extremely young age (13 years old or younger). Most runaway youth (68 percent) were older teens, ages 15-17. At these ages, youth are often more independent, tend to resist parental authority, are more likely to become involved in activities that bring them into conflict with their caretakers, and are often viewed by their caretakers as being capable of living on their own. All these things may increase the likelihood of runaway episodes. A somewhat larger number of runaway episodes occurred during summer, a time when young people are more mobile and less constrained by weather and school activities.

Approximately 23 percent of runaways traveled a distance of 50 miles or more from home, and 9 percent left the State in the course of an episode. Most runaway youth were gone less than 1 week (77 percent), and only 7 percent were away more than 1 month.

More about Missing or Runaway Teens

Runaways have sometimes been referred to as the *voluntary missing*, to distinguish them from abducted and lost children. However, this term misstates the nature and complexity of the problem. It is generally recognized that children who leave home prematurely often do so as a result of intense family conflict or even physical, sexual, or psychological abuse. Children may leave to protect themselves or because they are no longer wanted in the home. The term *voluntary* does not properly apply to such situations.

An estimated 38,600 runaways were at risk of sexual endangerment or exploitation by one or more of the following characteristics or behaviors during the episode: the youth was sexually assaulted, there was an attempted sexual assault of the youth, the youth was in the company of someone known to be sexually abusive, or the youth engaged in sexual activity in exchange for money, drugs, food, or shelter during the episode.

Endangered Runaway Teens and the circumstances

Child had been physically or sexually abused at home in the year prior to the episode or was afraid of abuse upon return 350,400 - 21%

Child was substance dependent 317,800 - 19%

Child was 13 years old or younger 305,300 - 18%

Child was in the company of someone known to be abusing drugs 302,100 - 18%

Child was using hard drugs 292,000 - 17%

Child spent time in a place where criminal activity was known to occur 256,900 - 12%

Child engaged in criminal activity during the course of the episode 197,400 - 11%

Child was with a violent person 125,400 - 7%

Child had previously attempted suicide 70,500 - 4%

Child was physically assaulted or someone attempted to physically assault child during the course of the episode 69,100 - 4%

Child was with a sexually exploitative person 27,300 - 2% (Estimate based on too few sample cases to be reliable. Other studies have shown this figure to be substantially higher.)

Child had a serious mental illness or developmental disability at the time of the episode 24,300 - 1% (Estimate based on too few sample cases to be reliable.)

Child was sexually assaulted or someone attempted to sexually assault child during the course of the episode 14,900 - 1% (Estimate based on too few sample cases to be reliable. Other studies have shown this figure to be substantially higher.)

Child's whereabouts were unknown to the caretaker for at least 30 days (and the episode was unresolved or no information was available) 7,300 - <1% (Estimate based on too few sample cases to be reliable.)

Child engaged in sexual activity in exchange for money, drugs, food, or shelter during the episode 1700- <1% (Estimate based on too few sample cases to be reliable. Other studies have shown this figure to be substantially higher.)