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- Leeds City Council Education Department (educational welfare officers, youth workers and teachers)
- Leeds City Council Social Services Department (senior managers, social workers, and residential care staff)
- West Yorkshire Probation Service
- Hawksworth YMCA
- Middleton YWCA
- West Yorkshire Police

Finally, on a personal level, I would like to thank the research consultant to the project and colleagues at Leeds Safe House for their support and encouragement throughout the three years of this research.

Research Consultant:
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INTRODUCTION

"People like me run away for reasons. I mean what's the point if you've got a nice warm home, and you've got no problems at all - you've got no need to run away. It's not very enjoyable, it's not a laughing matter, it's not glamorous or anything. But if you have got problems or things are going wrong and you can't cope, then you run away like I did."

(Young person interviewed as part of the research)

This report is concerned with the issue of young people under 16 who run away or are forced to leave their homes. The phenomenon of young people running away is not a new one. There is historical evidence of street children in London as far back as the 1850s (Frost and Stein, 1989). However, it is only in the last ten years or so that the issue has received much attention in the UK.

Research carried out by The Children's Society using nation-wide missing person statistics for 1986 and 1987 indicated that there were at least 98,000 reported incidents involving missing young people during that year (Newman, 1989). This research also included a study of 532 young people who had used the country's first refuge for young people. More recently a research study by National Children's Home, again using missing person statistics, supported Newman's estimates and went some way towards challenging popular conceptions about running away, in particular the idea that young people run away to the bright lights (Abrahams and Mungall, 1992).

Valuable as these studies have been, they only cover incidents of running away which have been reported by adults and have been officially recorded. It is clear then that they cannot estimate the incidence of running away which goes unreported. Moreover, they provide very little reliable information about the reasons why young people run away from home and what happens to them while they are away. Therefore, there are still large gaps in our knowledge and understanding of the issue of young people running away.

The research findings presented in this report go some way towards filling this information gap. The research in this report was carried out as part of The Children's Society's Leeds Safe House
project, currently one of the few projects in England offering refuge to young people under 16 who run away or are forced to leave where they live.

**Research aims**

The aims of the research were:
1. To estimate the number and characteristics of young people who run away in Leeds
2. To highlight the experiences of these young people.

In fulfilling these aims it was hoped that the research would contribute to a greater understanding of running away and the related issues that affect young people.

**Research methods**

The research was carried out using the following methods:

1. **A survey of young people**
   A survey of 1,234 young people in 12 secondary schools in Leeds was carried out. As far as we know this is the first survey of its kind in the country, gathering first hand information from a large, representative sample of young people aged 14 to 16 by means of a questionnaire. A small supplementary survey (35 young people) was carried out in nine children’s homes in Leeds in order to reach a larger number of young people living in residential care. A similar supplementary survey was attempted for young people regularly absent from school. Unfortunately the response rate for this survey was too low for the results to be valid. Finally, questionnaires were also completed by 80 young people staying at Leeds Safe House (a refuge for young people, usually under 16, who run away or are forced to leave where they live).

2. **In-depth interviews with young people**
   Interviews were carried out with 28 young people with recent experience of running away. Most of the interviews were tape recorded and transcribed word for word, and therefore provide rare descriptive data relating to the issue of running away in young people’s own words.

3. **Interviews with professionals**
   During the early stages of the research, interviews were conducted with a range of 30 professionals (including social services staff,
Introduction

Teachers, educational welfare officers, probation officers, youth workers and police officers) who work with young people in three contrasting areas of Leeds.

The research therefore provides detailed information, in both statistical and descriptive form, about young people's experiences of running away. All the information (with the obvious exception of the interviews with professionals) was collected directly from young people.

Layout of the report

A summary of the key findings of the research follows this introduction. The main body of the report begins by presenting findings on the numbers of young people running away in Leeds, based on the schools survey, and compares these findings with previous research (Chapter 1). The remainder of findings of the schools survey are then presented, covering the characteristics of young people who run away, and their experiences while they are away from home (Chapters 2 to 4). Quotes from the in-depth interviews with young people have been incorporated into these chapters to illustrate key points. Chapter 5 deals with the issue of young people running away from residential care, making use of both the residential care and schools surveys. The remaining two chapters concentrate on the findings of the in-depth interviews with young people. First, the complex issue of why young people run away from where they live is examined (Chapter 6). Second, young people's experiences of adults' responses to their running away are discussed (Chapter 7). Information from the interviews with professionals and from the questionnaires completed at Leeds Safe House has been used at various points throughout the report to supplement the other material. The conclusion draws together the main findings of the research, discusses the policy and practice implications of the findings, and highlights specific areas where further research seems to be particularly needed.

Whilst the research concentrated on one particular city, the experiences of young people in Leeds will be similar to those of young people in any other large city in the UK. The findings presented in this report should be of interest to anyone concerned with the issue of running away, or the welfare of young people in general.
Summary of key findings

All the statistical findings presented in this summary are estimates based on the surveys carried out in schools and residential care. The statistical significance of the findings are discussed, where appropriate, in the main body of the report and further information is provided in the Appendix.

- One in seven young people in Leeds runs away from home, and stays away overnight, before the age of 16 [page 9].

- There are over 2,400 incidents of running away from home overnight each year in Leeds, which is an average of six or seven incidents per day [page 9].

- Over 1000 young people in Leeds run away from home overnight for the first time each year [page 9].

- Young people run away for a wide variety of reasons. For the young people who took part in research interviews some of the main underlying reasons for running away were:
  - Physical violence
  - Emotional abuse and neglect
  - Sexual abuse
  - Power struggles with parents/carers
  - Negative experiences of being taken into care and of the care “system”
  - Bullying in care
  - Peer pressure

  One of the main motivations for young people to run away often seems to be to escape these situations, but there is also evidence of young people being forced to leave home by their parents at ages as young as 13 [pages 44 to 63].

- Females are more likely to run away from home than males - 17% compared to 11% [page 10].
There are large differences in running away rates among young people of different ethnic origins [page 15].

There is a link between running away and truancy [page 18].

Young people who have lived in residential care are more likely to have run away than young people who have never lived in care. However, the findings also suggest that most young people who run from residential care had run away from their family before they ever went into care [page 39].

Most young people who run away do so only once or twice [page 20].

One in nine young runaways had started running away before the age of 11 [page 21].

Many young people (42%) had slept rough the last they time they ran away [page 24].

Very few people who ran away approached professional agencies for help or advice while they were away from home [page 25].

Friends are the main source of support for young people while they are away from home [page 25].

Most young runaways return home of their own accord. In many cases the situation that caused them to run away is not resolved, and they may be punished for having run away. In addition, young people who repeatedly run away often feel that adults involved with them have not listened to the reasons why they ran away, or paid attention to their needs [page 31].
CHAPTER ONE

How many young people run away?

"I've noticed on the streets that there's more young people running away than there have been - and people are getting younger. Perhaps now young people realize when things are wrong. When I was young I didn't realize that some of the things that happened to me were wrong. But when I saw Childline on TV I realized they were wrong."

(Young person, aged 18, who has been running away regularly over a 10 year period)

One of the main aims of the survey was to estimate the number of young people running away in Leeds. This was an important aim: running away is only beginning to be recognized as an important issue in Britain and, despite increased media attention, there is still a tendency to deny the extent of the problem. For example, one head teacher responded to our request to carry out the survey by stating:

"At this school we do not have a problem of children running away from home. I do not think that there would be any useful purpose served in this school participating in the survey."

Following this letter a nearby school serving the same geographical area was selected as an alternative and it was found that 30% of the young people had run away.

Previous research

It was recognized from the outset of the research that there is no clear definition of the term 'running away'. The small amount of previous research in Britain (Newman, 1989; Abrahams and Mungall, 1992) has made use of police statistics on reported missing persons to reach an estimate of the number of young people running away. On this basis Newman estimated that there were 98,000
reported incidents of missing young people in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales each year. Abrahams and Mungall estimated that 43,000 young people under 18 run away every year in England and Scotland, accounting for 102,000 running away incidents. They also estimate that, in the four areas they surveyed, between two and six young people per 1,000 run away from home each year.

These two pieces of research have made an important contribution to knowledge about missing young people. However, their figures are likely to be underestimates because they do not include running away incidents which are not reported to the police. In fact Newman found that only around half of the young people using a refuge in London had been recorded by the police as reported missing. She suggested that one of the reasons for this was poor police recording systems.

Current research

Professionals interviewed in Leeds as part of the current research were consistently of the opinion that many incidents of young people running away from their families go unreported. They put forward several reasons for this:

- In cases where the young person has been mistreated or abused, parent(s) have a vested interest in not involving police or social services.
- The parent(s) may already feel hostility or mistrust towards the police, and as a result be reluctant to involve them.
- The parent(s) may know where the young person is and therefore see no point in reporting the incident.
- The parent(s) may have become used to the young person running away and not bother to report the incident.

It is doubtful, then, whether missing persons statistics accurately describe the incidence of young people running away from home. There is, however, a very high level of reporting of young people running away from residential care as staff have a duty to do this, even in cases where the young person has only been gone a few hours. One further consequence of this is that previous research is
likely to have overestimated the proportion of young runaways who are running from residential care (see Chapter 5).

The schools survey

The schools survey approached the issue in an entirely different manner to the previously mentioned research. The data was gathered directly from young people and, following similar research in the US (eg Brennan et al., 1978), the questionnaire allowed young people to define their own situation, rather than trying to impose a rigid definition of running away. This reflects a theme, which comes up throughout this report, that it is only by listening to young people that we can fully understand the issue of running away.

Young people in schools were asked four general questions about running away:

1. Have any of your friends ever run away?
2. Have you ever run away during the day?
3. Have you ever run away and stayed away overnight?
4. Have you ever wanted to run away?

The results of questions 2 and 3 are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1
Percentage of young people who had run away

![Pie chart showing percentages of young people who ran away](image)

- Never run away: 69%
- Run away overnight: 14%
- Run away during the day: 17%

Altogether, nearly a third of the young people surveyed had run away, and almost half of these young people had stayed away...
How many young people run away?

overnight when they had run away. These are surprisingly high figures, and indicate that running away is a common experience amongst young people, rather than something which only affects a small minority. Further evidence of this is that over half of the young people surveyed (54%) had a friend who had run away, and that almost half of those who had never run away (47%) said that they had wanted to. It is estimated from the survey results that:

- 14% of young people in Leeds run away from home overnight before the age of 16.
- Over 1000 young people in Leeds run away from home overnight for the first time each year.
- There are over 2,400 incidents of running away from home overnight each year in Leeds, which is an average of six or seven incidents per day.

The margins of error for the 14% figure are plus or minus 1.8% at the 95% confidence level. An explanation of how these estimates were reached is included in the Appendix.

Estimates from the schools survey indicate that 12 young people per 1,000 in the 5 to 15 year old age group run away from home for the first time each year. This is considerably higher than Abrahams and Mungall’s estimates of between two and six runaways (not just first time runaways) per 1,000 in the geographical areas they covered.
CHAPTER TWO

Which young people run away?

“When I was five I told my teacher what was going on at home, but she told me to stop lying. My mum’s very middle class, and a lot of other people in the [child sex] ring were middle class, so all the abuse was really hush-hush. The first time I ran away was when I was eight. I slept in a park for four days.”

The design of the survey enables a comparison of running away rates according to gender, family economic background, family constitution, ethnic origin, geographical area and school attendance. This chapter deals with each of these characteristics in turn.

Gender

A key finding of the survey was a significant difference in the running away rates for females and males. 17% of the females surveyed had run away overnight, compared to 11% of the males (see Figure 2). Interestingly, though, a higher percentage of males ran away during the day.

Figure 2. Percentage of females and males running away

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Run away during the day</th>
<th>Run away overnight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
```
Excluding the small number of young people in the survey who had been in care, it is estimated that 61% of young people who run away from home overnight are females. This estimate is backed up by the experience of the Children’s Society’s refuge in Leeds - 61% of young people running from home who were referred to the refuge in 1992 were female. A comparison of the patterns of running away for males and females in the survey is to be found in Chapter 4.

**Family economic background**

Two indicators of family economic background were included in the questionnaire: type of housing, and the number of people in the household with a paid job. Both of these indicators of family economic background need to be viewed with a degree of caution. With the growth in the proportion of people who own their homes and the more recent increase in mortgage debt, property ownership is not as helpful an indicator of affluence as it may have been in the past. Counting the number of people in a household with a paid job does not adequately take into account the large numbers of people who work part-time and have low incomes. The findings in this section must therefore be seen as only tentative indications.

Looking first at type of housing, 73% of the young people’s families lived in owner occupied housing, 25% in properties rented off the council, 1% in other rented properties, and 2% in other kinds of accommodation (including young people in residential care). The rates of running away for the young people living in the two main categories of housing were:

![Figure 3: Percentage of young people running away by type of family housing](image-url)
The rate of running away overnight for young people living in council rented accommodation was twice as high as that for young people whose families owned their housing. Statistically there is clear evidence here of a link between type of housing and the incidence of running away.

As regards family employment situation, only 7% of all young people surveyed lived in families where no one had a paid job. The rate of running away according to family employment situation is shown in the following chart.

Figure 4
Percentage of young people running away by family employment situation

Again there is a relationship between the family’s economic situation (this time in terms of employment) and the incidence of running away from home, with young people from families in which no one has a paid job being more likely to have run away than other young people.

Despite the drawbacks in the indicators used, the survey does therefore provide some evidence of a link between economic disadvantage (measured in terms of housing and employment) and running away. At the same time, it also illustrates that children from better off families do run away, so running away cannot be explained solely in economic terms.

Family constitution

The effect of the make-up of the family on young people’s welfare has been a hotly debated issue in recent years, but previous research on running away (using missing person statistics) has not been able to explore this area. The schools survey therefore represents the first opportunity to explore this issue. Young people were asked to indi-
Which young people run away?

cate who they lived with, and their answers have been translated into four main family types, according to the adults living in the household: lone parent, both parents, parent and step-parent, and ‘other’.

The running away rates for the first three family types are as shown in Figure 5 (the ‘Other’ category only accounted for 17 young people and it would be misleading to include it in the chart).

**Figure 5. Percentage of young people running away by family type**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Type</th>
<th>Run away during the day</th>
<th>Run away overnight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Both parents</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lone parent</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent &amp; step-parent</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The differences in the rates of running away are large and statistically significant. However, caution is needed in interpreting these results. As has already been shown there is evidence of a link between economic status and running away. Economic factors may be relevant here given that, for example, lone parent families are often economically disadvantaged. Looking only at families living in council rented housing, for example, a different picture emerges:

**Figure 6. Percentage of running away by family type for households living in council rented housing**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Type</th>
<th>Run away during the day</th>
<th>Run away overnight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Both parents</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lone parent</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent &amp; step-parent</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The differences between young people living with both parents and those living with lone parents are now minimal. In fact statistical analysis of the above figures indicates that there is insufficient evidence of a significant difference between the rates of running away of the three family types. A detailed analysis of the inter-relationships between family type, housing type, and running away rates indicated that the direct effect of family type on running away rates is weak, while the effect of housing type (a potential indicator of economic differences) is strong. This is due to the small difference between ‘Both parent’ families and ‘Lone parent’ families when economic factors are taken into account. The higher rate of running away in families with a step-parent is even more pronounced in Figure 6 than in Figure 5 and remains an important finding.

Ethnic origin

One consideration in designing the sample was to attempt to include significant numbers of young people from the main ethnic minority groups in Leeds.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic origin of young people in the survey sample</th>
<th>Number of young people in survey sample</th>
<th>Percentage of survey sample</th>
<th>Percentage of population of Leeds aged 10 to 15 years old</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African/Caribbean</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black-other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed origin</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>1071</td>
<td>90.2%</td>
<td>90.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A comparison of the ethnic constitution of the survey with 1991

The housing figures for young people with single parents are slightly unreliable as 12% of this group of young people were not able to define their family housing type (compared to 3% for other young people)

Which young people run away?

Census figures indicate that the sampling method was successful in including fairly representative proportions of different ethnic groups, with young people from African/Caribbean and Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi backgrounds being slightly over-represented in the survey (see Table 1).

Due to the small numbers in some of the categories, analysis of running away rates can only be carried out for three groups in the survey — African/Caribbean, Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi, and White — and even here the results should be treated with caution. The running away rates for the three groups are shown below:

**Figure 7**
Percentage of young people running away by ethnic origin

The rate of running away is far higher than average amongst young people of African/Caribbean origin, and very low amongst young people of Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi origin. The differences between the three groups are so large that, even with the small sub-sample sizes for two of the groups, the results are statistically significant. The results therefore suggest that African/Caribbean young people are over-represented amongst young people who run away from home, and young people of Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi origin are under-represented.

Abrahams and Mungall (1992) found a similar pattern for a sample of young people reported missing in London, and suggested that the explanation of the higher rate of running away amongst African/Caribbean young people was that the African/Caribbean
population lived in economically disadvantaged areas where there were higher rates of running away in general. As shown earlier, the schools survey finds links between the economic status of families and the rate of running away and this could be a partial explanation of the differences between ethnic groups. On the other hand it is also true that the Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi population in Leeds is concentrated in economically disadvantaged areas and the rate of running away for this group is much lower than the average. In fact the 1% of young people of Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi origin who had run away overnight is much lower than the 9% figure for all young people in the comparatively affluent outer Leeds area (see below).

Clearly, differences between rates of running away for young people of different ethnic origin cannot be satisfactorily explained purely by economic circumstances. Other factors must be involved.

Geographical area

As the survey covered only a sample of schools, it cannot provide information about the incidence of running away in specific areas of Leeds. However, comparisons can be made between the rate of running away in the eight inner city schools surveyed and that in the four outer area schools. Again the link with economic disadvantage should be borne in mind - the unemployment rate in the outer Leeds area is considerably lower than in inner Leeds.

This chart illustrates the interesting finding that, whilst the run-

\footnote{Unfortunately the sample is too small to compare the rates of running away amongst the different ethnic groups, taking into account economic differences.}

\footnote{For example, in the 1991 Census the unemployment rates for economically active males aged 16 and over in Leeds were 11% for people of White origin, 22% for people of Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi origin and 26% for people of Black-African/Caribbean origin.}

\footnote{For example, 9.5% of the young people surveyed in inner Leeds lived in families in which nobody had a paid job, compared to 2.8% of the young people in outer Leeds. This does not take into account possible variations in family size, but these are unlikely to explain such a large difference. The information is compatible with data small area statistics on unemployment from the 1981 Census which were gathered during the planning stage of the research.}
The survey sample also allows a slightly more detailed analysis of running away in different areas of the city. The schools were divided into six groups and two schools were selected at random from each group⁶. An analysis of running away rates in these six groups of schools shows a fairly high correlation between the rate of running away overnight and both unemployment and local authority housing rates. However, there is a weaker correlation in the case of overall running away rates (including day-time running). This adds further support to the possibility of different patterns of running away in different areas of the city. This issue is discussed further in Chapter 4.

⁶See the Appendix for details of the sampling method.
School attendance

A question about school attendance was included in the survey for two reasons. First, to examine whether there was a link between truancy and running away. Second, to provide an indication of the possible incidence of running away amongst young people who weren’t in school when the survey was carried out. Young people were asked whether they stayed off school without their parent(s) knowing. As with most of the other questions in the survey (see the Appendix), there was a very high response rate (only 11 young people didn’t answer). The distribution of answers was as follows:

Table 2
Response to the question “Do you stay off school without your parent(s) knowing?”

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>848</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>338</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not answered</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results of this question, combined with information on running away, suggest a strong link between truancy and running away:

Figure 9
Percentage of young people running away linked to truancy

Do you ever stay off school without your parent(s) knowing?
- Never: 6% Run away during the day, 14% Run away overnight
- Sometimes: 28% Run away during the day, 22% Run away overnight
- Often: 67% Run away during the day, 16% Run away overnight
Out of the 37 young people who said they often stayed off school without their parent(s) knowing, 25 had run away overnight. This link may indicate that many of the young people who run away from their homes are also becoming detached from the education system.
CHAPTER THREE

Young people’s experiences of running away

“When I was younger it didn’t even really last more than a few hours, I used to get fed up straight away ... then there was one day when I went to Blackpool and I were missing for three days. Well, once I got into the running away method I did actually run away quite a lot ... I mean I actually got to Blackpool on several occasions, been to Accrington, Darlington, down London about four times. Then I grew out of running away unless I had real problems. This time [ie. this running away incident] it’s been a month now since the last time I stayed at ‘X’ [Children’s Home].”

The questionnaires completed in schools by young people who had run away provide an insight into differing patterns of running away - how long people run away for, where they go, where they sleep, and so on. Unless otherwise stated, the figures in this section relate only to the 174 young people who had run away and stayed away overnight.

Number of times people had run away

Most of the young people in the schools survey who had run away (67%) had done so either once or twice. 15% had run away five times or more. The average number of times a young person had run away was 2.4 times.

There are some very significant differences in the running away experiences of young people who have run away a small number of times compared with those who have run away more often (see Chapter 4).
The age at which young people first run away

"I kept on running away because we had family problems you see. And I kept on running and running each day and being brought back and I was only six or seven years old. And I was running away and I was frightened and getting lost, they were finding me all over the place. I never used to reach the night in those days because I wasn’t very good at it. I’d get caught during the day and I wasn’t very good at staying out all night and they just kept on bringing me backwards and forwards."

Figure 11 shows the ages at which young people in the survey first ran away. The average age is 12.5 years old. However the figure for 15 years of age is unreliable and the true average age is estimated as around 13 years old. It is clear that the chances of running away increase as young people get older, but it is also apparent that some young people run away at a very young age – at least one in nine (11%) of the young people ran away for the first time before they were 11.

The reason for the unreliability of the figure for the number of young people who run away for the first time at 15 is that most of the young people surveyed were some way off their 16th birthday (the average age of the sample was 15.6 years old). An unknown number of young people will have run away for the first time after they were surveyed and before they reached 16.
Length of time away from home

Figure 12 shows the length of time young people were away from home the last time they ran away. Just over half stayed away for one night only. At the other end of the scale, 17% had stayed away for a week or more. The fact that some young people are ‘on the run’ for considerable lengths of time was backed up in the in-depth interviews with young people:

“So I went back to ‘X’ [Children’s Home] and I got woke up at about six in the morning. They said, ‘Get your clothes and come down to the office.’ I thought it was the police come for me. So I went down, sat down. She said, ‘Your mum’s in hospital suffering from a brain haemorrhage.’ So I went to the hospital. My mum had died - she were clinically dead - she were just on the life support machine. She had two funerals, one were the cremation and the other one were scattering her ashes up at her mam’s grave. I ran off after the cremation because I was so upset and I took loads of money with me ’cause my old lady used to have a bureau and it had money for the shopping and that. And I took it all and I went to Cleethorpes and I was on the run for about two months and I daren’t go back because just for what they’d say for not going to the scattering of the ashes. I just didn’t know what to do.”
Running away alone

Just over half of the young people (54%) said that they were on their own the last time they ran away. However, there is a lack of clarity on this issue due to the wording of the question. The question asked was: 'Were you on your own or with somebody else?' The intention of this question was to find out if the young person had run away alone or run away with someone. During the piloting of the questionnaire it seemed that this is what young people understood by the question. However, in hindsight, the question could be interpreted as asking whether the young person was alone during the time they were away, or whether they were with someone (e.g. sleeping at someone's house). The 54% should therefore only be seen as a minimum figure for the number who ran away on their own: the true proportion could be much higher. The findings are not, however, at odds with the information from interviews with young people, from which it is clear that young people often run away with a friend, or in larger groups.

Where young people slept

42% of the young people who had run away overnight had slept rough the last time they ran away, making this the largest category (see Figure 13).
Again, this information is confirmed by the interviews with young people. Most of the young people interviewed had experience of sleeping rough. However, the kinds of places young people find to sleep are often quite out of the way. No one mentioned going to a city centre to sleep, which probably explains why the incidence of young people sleeping out is mostly hidden and very different from the traditional image of homeless adults, as these quotes from four different young people indicate:

“Well, I find somewhere warm first, and if I can’t find somewhere warm I hide and sleep in a ditch or somewhere where there’s bushes and stuff or in a wood - somewhere where I can get warm if I’ve got nowhere to go . . . The first time I slept out I think it was when I was 9, the first time I actually slept out on a night when I was on the run. I ran away, followed a river wharf . . . I kept on walking round because it was freezing and I went into this hut and I slept in there and I got caught - a man came in with a torch and he heard me and he took me into the house and got me a cup of tea and rang the police up and told them.”

“[We spent the night] in a graveyard. There were loads of us, there were lads and lasses so none of us were scared.”

“The first time I ran away I was five, I slept on the school playing field.”

“I used to sleep in this hedge in someone’s back garden . . . in a plastic
The proportion of young people who turn to friends when they run away (40%) is also noteworthy, and consistent with information from the interviews, where friends appear as a major source of support.

**Where people sought help or advice**

The most important finding here is the small number of people who went to an agency for help or advice while on the run.

*Figure 14. Where people went for help/advice*

![Graph showing the percentage of people who sought help from various sources](image)

Two-thirds of the young people said that they didn’t go anywhere for help or advice. It is notable though, that many of the young people who slept at a friend’s or relative’s, did not identify these as people they went to for help or advice. This may be due to the ordering of questions on the questionnaire: the help/advice question came after the question about where the person had slept,
and people may have thought they had already given information on this topic. Despite this possible confusion, it is clear that when young people do seek help or advice they are most likely to go to a friend or relative. Information from the in-depth interviews illustrates the level of support that some young people receive from friends while they are away from home. For example:

"I had everything I wanted really. It just depends how good your friends are to you when you run away, 'cause some of them get you food, some of them supply you with your bed, like my friends did. But, like I say, someone else might not get nought off anyone. Like some of my mates - they're like a brother to me."

For several reasons, it is not that surprising that few young people approach professional agencies for help or advice. First, many young people only stayed away one or two nights when they ran away. Second, young people may fear, with some justification, that if they go to the police or social services they will simply be returned home - if a young person wants to return home they may be more inclined simply to do so, rather than approaching an agency.

The interviews carried out with professionals bear out the fact that young people are unlikely to approach them for help while on the run. Most of the social workers, teachers and education welfare officers interviewed knew of young people they were involved with who had run away, but very rarely had contact with them while they were on the run.

The risks that young people face

The survey questionnaire didn't gather any information on this topic, but the interviews provide some insights into the kind of situations in which young people may find themselves. There must be particular concern in this respect for the 42% of young people who had slept rough the last time they ran away. As for the figures for the whole sample of runaways quoted above, the majority (55%) of young people who slept rough were alone and most (70%) didn't approach anyone for help/advice while they were away.

Again, those who did seek help or advice whilst sleeping rough usually approached a friend. In the interviews there are a number of
examples of young people seeking support from a friend while they were sleeping out. For example:

"Where we live there’s a lot of fields and forest. I went to a friend and he were going to sneak out and sleep out with me, you know, as company. But he didn’t get to. He spoke to me from his window and I can’t remember if he got caught. Well, I didn’t sleep, just might have nodded off for five minutes but I were awake for all of the night, from what I can remember of it."

In most cases, however, young people sleeping rough didn’t even have the support of friends. No one should be in any doubt about the risks that young people in this situation face:

"I went to where I sleep rough and got my glue and sniffed until I was out of my head and then started cutting my arms like I usually do. I can’t remember much else really because I was under the influence of drugs. The next morning I woke up with a man next to me, he had a bottle of vodka and some other bottles and he started trying things on with me so I punched him and kicked him and then ran off."

What also comes across in young people’s descriptions of sleeping out alone is the extreme desperation and isolation they can feel:

"As soon as you step onto the streets it’s like you’re an outsider, you’re looking onto society, you’re not actually involved in it any more … that’s the kind of feeling you get, you become isolated and lonely and you just feel as if no one in the world can help you. It’s one of the worst feelings I’ve ever experienced. You just feel so unloved and uncared for and you feel as if you’ve got a disease and people won’t kind of come near you. I’ve never reached that point before … I’ve wanted to kill myself before but I’ve never actually got that close to doing it. I just thought, ‘Sod it, what’s the point, nobody cares’."

There is also evidence of young people becoming involved in high risk situations in the inner city:

"This pimp who I got into a car with and he tried it on with me so I ran off and the police were watching him. But he picked one lass up before and he stripped her down naked, but she won’t give a statement at all"
because she's scared that it might all come to court and she doesn't want to stand up in court 'cause they might not believe her. He's going to pick all the runaways up."

A sample of 28 young people doesn't give a clear indication of how common incidents of this kind are. However there is considerable cause for concern in the finding from the schools survey that of the estimated 1,000 young people in Leeds who run away overnight for the first time each year, at least 400 will end up sleeping rough.

What did people need while they were away?

This was an open-ended question on the questionnaire. 10% of young people gave no answer at all, and 17% answered that they didn't need anything. The answers given by the remaining 128 young people are listed below. Some people gave more than one answer. Only answers given by three or more people are listed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3</th>
<th>What young people said they needed while they were away from home</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothes</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drink or water</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cigarettes</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen, people tended to concentrate on immediate material needs. Perhaps this reflects the reality of running away for many young people. Young people seem usually to be unprepared for running away - lacking things like food, money and clothes. This suggests that their running away was not planned in advance. Many of the descriptions of running away quoted throughout the report confirm this suggestion that many running away incidents happen on the spur of the moment in response to a particular situation.

It does seem though, that a minority of young people plan their running away in advance, or at least check that a friend will be willing to let them stay, before running away:
"I couldn't stand it any more and, you know; I'd been really upset at school and everything, and my friends had been noticing it. And I'd been saying the previous day that I'd wanted to run away, but they'd been saying, 'We can't take you in.' And then the next day one of my mates said, 'My mum will take you in.' So I went home with her that night."

This confirms the finding in Chapter 6 that while running away is often triggered by a particular incident, there are underlying longer term issues which contribute to the young person deciding to leave.

For any running away incident of more than a day young people will clearly need food and water at least. As young people leaving on the spur of the moment are unlikely to have much money, there seem to be two options open to them to sustain themselves – either to seek the support of friends or to obtain food or the money to buy it:

"You couldn't have no drinks of water 'cause there was nobody's house you can go to to get a drink of water, so you used to have to, like, beg money off your mates to get a 5p ice pop or something because it's got water in it."

The following example is from an interview which wasn't tape recorded:

"X (aged 13) has been involved in prostitution for almost two years. At first there were many things which scared her - mainly getting into strangers' cars - now she feels less scared but doesn't enjoy it and doesn't want to do it. She rarely gets any of the money she has earned directly - her boyfriend will take it and buy her food, etc." [From interview notes]

These kinds of means of survival were fairly unusual amongst the young people interviewed, but they illustrate the damaging situations young people may become involved in when they run away.

Where people went

Over three-quarters (78%) of the young people stayed within Leeds the last time they ran away. The people who went outside Leeds went to the following places:
Table 4. Where young people went outside Leeds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Number of people</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bradford</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other places in Yorkshire</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manchester</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other places in Lancashire</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The North East</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birmingham</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This hardly fits with the image of young people seeking the ‘bright lights’. Seventeen of the 29 young people who responded to the question had gone to other places in Yorkshire. Only seven young people (around 4% of the young people who had run away overnight) had gone to a large city outside the area - Manchester, Birmingham or London.

One ostensible explanation for going to other places within Yorkshire would be that young people were running to people they could stay with, perhaps relatives. However, this doesn’t seem to be the case: 70% of the people who went outside Leeds also slept rough, compared with 35% of those who stayed within Leeds. The interviews with young people provide some clues to the motivations of young people who go outside Leeds. For example:

“I took five quid out of my brother’s money box, which maybe I shouldn’t have done, and I just sort of went. I went down to the station and thought, ‘Where am I going to go?’, sort of thing. So I just looked up and there was a train going to Doncaster so I thought, ‘I’ll just go there.’”

“We used to have arguments, so I just like sort of run off one day. I went to the pictures first, you know - trying to enjoy myself, and then I went to the bus station and I didn’t know where to go. It was either the bus to Bradford or Wetherby, and I didn’t know which one to get on, so I just got on the Wetherby one.”

According to this evidence it seems that young people may often pick somewhere to go completely at random, with the motivation of getting out of their local area, rather than being attracted to somewhere in particular.
What happened in the end?

The most common way for a running away episode to end seems to be for the young person to return home of her/his own accord:

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of time away from home</th>
<th>% of people picked up by the police</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 night</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 to 6 nights</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A week or more</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There also seems to be a connection between the length of an episode and the way in which it ended:

Figure 15. What happened in the end?

According to the findings of the survey, young people who stay away for longer periods are less likely to return home of their own accord, and much more likely to be picked up by the police. A more detailed discussion of differences of this kind is contained in Chapter 4.

No information was gathered in the survey about what happened after the episode ended - eg how parents/carers and agencies responded to the young person running away. However, this topic was covered in detail in interviews with young people, and is discussed in Chapter 7.
CHAPTER FOUR

Patterns of running away among different groups

Differences in running away between females and males

The finding that more females than males run away from home overnight was presented in Chapter 2. Table 6 presents a comparison of the different running away patterns of males and females in the survey:

Table 6
Differences in running away patterns between females and males

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average no. of times run away</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average age first ran away</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last running away episode:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ran away alone</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Away for more than one night</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slept rough</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Went outside Leeds</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The main differences to come out of this comparison are:

- On average males start to run away from home at a younger age than females
- Males are more likely to have slept rough when they run away
- Males are more likely to have gone outside Leeds while they are on the run.

There was insufficient evidence of a statistically significant difference in the average number of times males and females run away, in the
proportion of males and females who ran away alone, and in the proportion who were away for more than one night.

Differences in running away according to ethnic origin

A similar analysis of different patterns of running away could in theory be carried out according to young people's ethnic origin. Chapter 2 presented significant differences in running away rates for young people of different origins, with African/Caribbean young people being more likely to have run away than white young people, and young people of Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi origin much less likely to have run away. Unfortunately the sample size is not sufficient to detect any further differences in patterns of running away between young people of different origins. This is because, whereas for males and females the numbers in each sub-group were both reasonably large (60 and 114 people respectively), the number of young people of non-white origin included in the 174 young people who had run away overnight is only 15. This small sub-group size is inadequate for a statistical analysis of differences to produce any significant findings.

Differences in running away between inner and outer Leeds

The professionals interviewed in the more affluent outer Leeds area were of a fairly consistent opinion that many social problems were more hidden there than in inner city areas. They had the impression that significant numbers of young people did run away in their area but that these young people were often isolated. They also felt that there were young people who, because of their isolation continued to live in intolerable situations rather than running away.

Chapter 2 shows that, whilst running away rates are higher in the inner city areas, there is evidence of a significant level of running away in the outer areas: 16% of young people in inner Leeds had run away overnight, compared to 9% in outer Leeds; for running away during the day the differences were reversed - 19% of young people had run away during the day in outer Leeds, compared to 15% in inner Leeds. The overall running away rate was therefore not that different in the two areas: 31.5% in inner Leeds and 28% in
outer Leeds. These statistics are open to several interpretations. It is possible that many of the incidents of running away in the day are fairly minor, and not any cause for concern. On the other hand, it could be that young people who run away in the day in outer Leeds return home before the night because they are more isolated and have less options of where to go than young people in inner Leeds. This would tie in with the viewpoint of the professionals outlined above. Detailed research in the outer Leeds area would be necessary to clarify this issue fully. However the survey data provides some clues from comparing data for inner and outer Leeds.

Unfortunately, to a certain extent, a comparison of running away patterns in inner and outer Leeds is hampered by the sample size – only 33 of the young people who had run away overnight lived in the outer Leeds area. This makes it unlikely that statistically significant differences will emerge. The main findings are as follows:

- The average age of young people running away is very similar for the two areas
- The average number of times young people had run away is also very similar
- 69% of young people who ran away overnight in outer Leeds only stayed away for one night, compared to 50% of those in inner Leeds
- 49% of young people in outer Leeds slept rough the last time they ran away, compared to 45% in inner Leeds
- 64% of young people in outer Leeds were on their own the last time they ran away, compared to 51% in inner Leeds.

The only statistically significant difference here is that young people in outer Leeds are less likely to stay away for more than one night. However there is some evidence to suggest that, if anything, young people in outer Leeds are more likely to sleep rough, and more likely to be alone, when they run away. None of this evidence therefore contradicts the opinions of professionals working with young people in the outer Leeds area.

**Developing patterns of running away**

Finally in this section we consider whether there is evidence from
the schools survey that there are differences in running away patterns according to the number of times young people have run away. For example, are young people who have run away most often also most likely to have slept rough?

For this analysis the group of young people in the schools survey who had run away overnight has been split into three sub-groups - those who had only run away once (66 young people), those who had run away two or three times (71 young people) and those who had run away four times or more (34 young people):

Table 7
Running away patterns according to the number of times young people had run away

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of times run away</th>
<th>4 times or more</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Once</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/3 times</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average age first ran away

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Last running away episode:</th>
<th>47%</th>
<th>60%</th>
<th>53%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ran away alone</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Away for more than one night</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slept rough</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Went outside Leeds</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The main points of this analysis are:

- Not surprisingly, there is a relationship between the age at which a young person first ran away and the number of times she/he had run away. People who had run away more times had also, on average, started to run away at a younger age
- In terms of the last time the young person ran away, the three significant differences are that young people who had run away more times were more likely to stay away more than one night, more likely to have slept rough, and more likely to have gone outside Leeds.

Analysis did not find evidence of a link between the number of times a young person ran away and family background (i.e. family constitution, housing type, and unemployment).
CHAPTER FIVE

Running away from residential care

The statistical findings presented in Chapters 1 to 4 come from the survey of young people in schools. This survey, as expected, covered only a small number of young people currently living in residential care (only 8 young people out of 1,234, or 0.6%). However, 48 young people (4%) had been in care at some point, and more than half of these young people had run away overnight (not necessarily while they were in care). For this reason, and because running away from care has been such a focus of media attention and previous research, a separate survey was carried out in a representative sample of nine children’s homes in Leeds.

General background

Young people living in residential care are a very small group in the total population of young people. For example, in 1991 in England the rate per 1000 young people aged 0-17 who were in care was 5.5 (i.e. 0.55%) and more than half (58%) of these young people were boarded out in foster homes, rather than in residential care¹. Therefore, however high the running away rate from residential care may prove to be, the number of young people running from care is certainly considerably lower than the number of young people running from home.

This point is emphasized here because there is a potential for confusion about the issue, with the higher proportion of young people in care running away being mistakenly translated into a higher number of young people running away from care. In addition, previous research findings have sometimes been completely misquoted in the press. For example, the following extract is from a national newspaper article.

¹Source: Children in Care in England. Department of Health. 1993
"According to a recent report by the National Children's Home, 100,000 children run away every year ... Although more children run away from care than from home, the report found that 23 per cent ran from their families."

In fact the NCH survey finding was that 70% of young people reported missing had run from their family.

The misunderstandings don't end there. Running away from residential care has rarely been viewed within the context of individual young people's lives. Furthermore various negative stereotypes have been built up about young people living in residential care. For example, the tendency to view young people running away from care as criminally motivated is illustrated in Chapter 7, and a recent survey of young people in care gives an indication of the way in which young people living in care feel stigmatized within the education system (Fletcher, 1993).

One of the results of the focus on the issue of running away from residential care has been to divert attention from the issue of young people running away from their families. Focusing on the small number of young people running from residential care tends to marginalize the whole issue of running away. Blame then tends to become attached to young people in care, to the professionals caring for them, and to the 'care system' in general. Instead, the findings from this research demonstrate that running away is primarily an issue which springs from young people's experience of family life. Failure to recognize this will result in failure to tackle the real issues.

Previous research findings on running away from residential care

Abrahams and Mungall (1992) found the number of reported missing people from residential care in a twelve month period in 1989 and 1990 to be between 260 per 1,000 and 571 per 1,000 depending on area - these figures compare with rates between two and six per 1,000 for young people reported missing by families. This is very strong evidence that rates of running away from care are significantly higher than rates of running away from the family home, but may not in fact accurately reflect the relative rates for the two
groups. As explained in Chapter 1, the differences are likely to be overemphasised by the survey method used in that research because the survey was based on reported missing persons. There is good reason to believe that the likelihood of an incident being reported is much higher for young people in residential care than for young people living with family. Abrahams and Mungall also found that young people running from residential care were more likely to run away repeatedly and, on average, stayed away longer than young people running from home.

Findings of the residential care survey

The residential care survey covered half of the children’s homes in Leeds. The homes were selected in order to obtain a representative sample of young people aged 10 and over in residential care (see the Appendix for details). 35 questionnaires out of a possible 51 were returned - a response rate of 69%. Due to the response rate and the small sample size the findings are only tentative and should be viewed with caution. They are presented here for two reasons. First, this data is extremely rare and provides some useful tentative indicators. Second, when used in conjunction with the schools survey data, the sample size is sufficiently large to enable comparisons to be made between young people running from family and from residential care.

Rates of running away

Out of the 35 young people surveyed in residential care 28 (80%) had run away overnight, and a further 8% had run away during the day only. The margins of error on the 80% figure are plus or minus 10% (due to the small sample size). Nevertheless, this supports previous research findings that there is a far higher rate of running away amongst young people in residential care, than amongst those living with their family.

It is vital that running away from residential care is viewed within the context of young people’s lives, however. For example, of the 28 young people who had run away overnight, 27 had run from residential care at some point, 20 from their family at some point, and eight had also run from foster care. Furthermore, 17 of the 28
young people (61%) said they had first run away from their family. This finding is not conclusive as the sample size is small. It is however supported by monitoring at Leeds Safe House (a refuge for young people in Leeds) which found that, over a two-year period, almost three-quarters of young people from residential care had first run away from their family. The implication of these figures is that, even for young people running from residential care, the roots of running away are most commonly to be found in the period when they lived with their family.

Differences in running away experiences from home and care

The running away experiences of young people from residential care are here contrasted with those of young people running from families. The samples obtained by the two surveys are quite closely comparable with regard to age and gender - the average age for both samples was 14.8 years old, and there was no significant difference in the proportions of males and females covered. The only noticeable difference was a higher representation of African-Caribbean young people (four out of 35) in the care survey. This may be due to their over-representation in the care population.

As well as being more likely to have run away, young people who have lived in care have, on average, run away more times than young people who have run away but have never been in care (see Figure 16 on following page). Figure 16 illustrates the large difference in the average number of running away incidents between young people who had lived in care and those who had not. Over a third (36%) of those who had lived in care had run away ten times or more, but none of those young people in the schools survey who had never been in care had run away this many times. In the middle range - between three and nine running away incidents - the two groups are closer. At the other end of the scale, 43% of those young runaways who had never lived in care had only run away once, compared to 7% of those who had lived in care. These differences are statistically significant.

This doesn't necessarily mean that the young people who had lived in residential care had always, or even mostly, run away from care as it has already been seen that most young people probably start running away from home (see previous page).
A difference was also found between the ages at which young people had first run away. Those who had lived in care had first run away at an average of 11.6 years of age, compared to 12.5 years of age for those who had not lived in care. This difference is statistically significant, although perhaps not large enough to be of any practical significance.

Further major differences are to be seen in the running away experiences of young people running from care and from family. In both surveys, young people were asked a number of questions about the last time they had run away (i.e. the most recent incident). The analysis below compares those who had last run from the family to those who had last run from residential care. Those who last ran away from foster care and other places were a small number and have been excluded from the analysis.

The results shown in Figure 17 are perhaps quite surprising. Young people running from their family appear to be more likely to run away alone and more likely to sleep rough than do young people from residential care. Young people running from residential care, on the other hand, are more likely to travel further afield, to

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Some of the young people in the schools survey had last run away from residential care, and similarly some of the young people in the residential care survey had last run away from their family.
stay away for longer and to be picked up by the police. These differences suggest that young people running from residential care have more support systems while they are on the run than young people running from their families, who are therefore more likely to find themselves in isolated, lonely situations. Evidently, in different ways, both groups of young people can be at considerable risk while running away. The differences in all five aspects of running away experience are statistically significant.

**Figure 17**
Comparison of the running away experiences of young people who had last run away from residential care with those who had last run away from their family.

Further information from the residential care survey

The survey was designed to enable analysis of a number of other issues in relation to young people who run away from residential care. Unfortunately, due to the small sample size, a conclusive analysis is not possible. However two points emerged which raise interesting questions and may be useful for future research into running away from residential care:
1. An analysis was carried out of the relationship between the number of times a young person had run away and three indicators of their experience of living in care -
   • A weak correlation was found between the number of different establishments a young person had lived in and the number of times she/he had run away.\(^3\)
   • Very little evidence was found of a correlation between the age a young person first went into care and the number of times she/he had run away.\(^4\)
   • There was no correlation at all between the length of time a young person had spent in care and the number of times she/he had run away.\(^5\)

It is possible, of course, that a more extensive survey would find stronger links between these variables.

2. Young people were asked their feelings about their current care placement, and (where relevant) the last time they had lived with family and the last time they had lived in foster care. The results for the 28 young people who had run away are shown in Table 8.

*Table 8*

**Feelings about different accommodation amongst young people in residential care who had run away**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Current children’s home</th>
<th>Last time lived with family*</th>
<th>Last foster placement*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I really like(d) it</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was/is OK</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am/was unhappy most of the time</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Three of the young people could not remember living with their family, and only 14 out of the 28 had lived in foster care

Only 2 of the 28 young people (7%) said they were unhappy most of the time in their current residential care placement, com-

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\(^3\)Spearman’s rho = 0.378, significance = 0.025

\(^4\)Spearman’s rho = 0.1645, significance = 0.345

\(^5\)Spearman’s rho = -0.01, significance = 0.955
pared to 10 out of 25 (40%) who had been unhappy most of the time when they last lived with their family, and 6 out of 14 (43%) who had been unhappy most of the time when they last lived in foster care. Thus their current residential care placement did not seem to evoke such strong negative feelings for these young people as did their memory of living with their family or in foster care. Clearly, such a small sample can hardly provide conclusive evidence on this issue. Nevertheless the results are interesting and suggest the need to approach the issue of running away amongst young people in residential care without preconceptions.