STILL RUNNING 3

Early findings from our third national survey of young runaways, 2011

Gwyther Rees

The Children's Society

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Acknowledgements

The Children's Society would like to thank the schools and young people who agreed to take part in the survey that made this report possible. The author would like to thank Jim Wade, Senior Research Fellow, Social Policy Research Unit, University of York, who provided valuable advice throughout the course of the research, and colleagues within The Children's Society for their feedback on draft versions of the report.

Foreword

Children run away from all backgrounds and communities, in response to situations where they are in danger, unhappy or simply do not know where to get help.

In 1999, The Children's Society produced the first UK study into the problem of running away. We had been working with young runaways for many years, yet we were still shocked by what we found - 100,000 children running away or forced to leave home in the UK. Still Running 3 is the third set of findings from this long-term study and shows that little has improved for children who run away.

This report confirms that the scale of running away has not changed since our first study into this issue. It provides new insights into the causes of running away, as well as some of the consequences, and indicates that family change and conflict play a significant part in children's decisions to run. Poor family relationships and neglectful parenting are leaving children feeling isolated with nowhere to turn. In addition, there are particularly vulnerable groups of children who are more likely to run away such as disabled children, children with learning difficulties and children in care.

While they are away from home, many children remain hidden from professionals, with only three in ten children reported missing to the police. A quarter of child runaways are forced to leave home, and the majority of children do not seek help, either because they do not know where to get help from, or because they are worried about the consequences.

As a result, young runaways are placing themselves in risky situations - one quarter will be at significant risk of being hurt or harmed, sleep rough or beg and steal to survive. Children who run away are in as much danger as ever.

Never has the need for a national safety net of help for young runaways been greater. Government and local authorities cannot ignore this powerful new evidence; urgent action must be taken to protect children who run away. We will continue to campaign to Make Runaways Safe until every child who runs away is kept safe.

Bob Reitemeier
Chief Executive
The Children's Society

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Introduction

Background

In 1999, The Children's Society[i] published *Still Running* – the first comprehensive study of the issue of children under the age of 16 running away in the UK (Safe on the Streets Research Team, 1999). The research estimated that 77,000 children ran away for the first time each year in the UK and that there were 129,000 incidents per year. It shed light on the reasons that young people ran away, often linked to family problems and issues, and the substantial risks that they faced while away from home.

This study was undertaken more than a decade after The Children's Society had established the first refuge for young runaways in the UK and had successfully campaigned for legal provision to be made for such refuges[ii] to provide a safety net for children who ran away.

After the publication of *Still Running*, there was a great deal of policy, practice and media attention on the issue of running away. In the early 2000s the Government's Social Exclusion Unit published a consultation report on young runaways. This was followed by guidance for local authorities and a programme of funding for 20 pilot projects to develop models of working with young runaways.

Six years later in 2005, The Children's Society and the University of York, undertook a second survey in England – *Still Running 2* – to update the findings of the previous research. This second study showed that very little had changed in terms of the numbers of young people who ran away or their experiences while away from home (Rees & Lee, 2005). The study also generated new findings – for example, highlighting that most young people who ran away were not reported missing to the police by their parents.

In the years since the publication of *Still Running 2*, further attention has been paid to the issue of young people running away. The Children's Society, with the support of the (then) Department for Children, Schools and Families, conducted a survey of local authorities and police forces (Evans et al, 2007) which demonstrated that there had been patchy implementation of government guidance on this issue. This report also highlighted the fact that, in some local areas, young people who had run away were staying in police stations overnight due to the lack of available emergency accommodation for them. In 2008, the government published a Young Runaways Action Plan (HM Government, 2008), updated its guidance, and introduced an indicator on runaways as part of a set of national indicators.

Despite this activity, the current position of young runaways in the UK is unclear. In 2010 the refuge for young people in London closed down, leaving only five registered refuge bed spaces for young people who run away in the whole of the UK. This is the lowest number since the original refuge was opened by The Children's Society in London in 1985.

The government has committed to publishing a Missing Persons strategy in Autumn 2011. The strategy will set out the government's vision and strategic direction for safeguarding children, young people and adults that go missing. It is expected to set out the roles and responsibilities of central government, local agencies and the voluntary sector through local strategic objectives for how this strategy should be implemented.

It is within this context that The Children's Society decided to conduct a further survey about young people running away from home, to update previous findings and provide new insights into the factors associated with running away. The early findings from this survey are presented in this report.

The current study

Aims

The main aims of the current survey were:

1. To provide up-to-date findings on rates and experiences of running away comparable with the two previous surveys conducted in 1999 and 2005

2. To provide new insights into the links between running away and other aspects of children's lives, through the exploration of issues not covered in previous surveys, such as family change and subjective well-being.

The questionnaire

The survey questionnaire included the following sections which provided the data discussed in this report:

- Characteristics of young people – age, gender, etc.

- Overall subjective well-being

- School – feelings about school, achievement and aspirations

- Friendships

- Type of home and family structure

- Relationships with family or other carers

- Experiences of running away

Further details and examples of the questions asked under each of the above headings are provided in relevant places throughout the report.

The section on running away mainly consists of questions from the previous two *Still Running* studies conducted in 1999 and 2005, in order to facilitate comparisons between the new survey and these earlier surveys.

Sampling and data collection

The survey was conducted for The Children's Society by Dubit between April and October 2011, in a representative sample of 85 mainstream secondary schools in England. The final sample used for this report consisted of 7,349 young people aged 14 to 16. Details of the sampling strategy, ethics and survey administration are provided in the appendix.

Data cleaning, analysis and presentation of results

Data cleaning and screening was conducted using PASW (formerly SPSS) and Microsoft Access. Statistical analysis was conducted in PASW. Further details of data cleaning and analysis are provided in the appendix. Throughout this report, all findings which are referred to as statistically significant refer to a p-value of less than 0.01 (99% confidence). Findings which are referred to as marginally significant refer to a p-value of between 0.01 and 0.049 (95% confidence).

This report

Purpose, scope and structure

This is the first report on the new survey, which has only recently been completed, and the intention is to provide a brief early view of some of the key findings. In the first half of 2012 we will be publishing more detailed findings on a number of aspects covered in the survey – such as the link between family relationships and running away. A full technical report on the survey will also be published at that time.

The structure of the report is as follows:

- Chapter 2 presents updated findings on the scale of running away and characteristics of young people who run away.

- Chapter 3, similarly, presents updated findings regarding young people's experiences whilst away from home.

- Chapter 4 presents a set of findings on the home and family backgrounds of young people who run away. It explores a number of new areas including the link between family change and running away, and the link between aspects of the quality of family relationships and running away.

- Chapter 5 also presents findings on topics not covered in previous surveys. It looks at the links between young people's friendships, their school connections, their overall subjective well-being and running away.

- Chapter 6 draws together the key points from Chapters 2 to 5 and considers some of the implications of the findings.

Notes on terminology

Throughout this report, in line with our previous published research, unless otherwise stated, the term 'running away' is used to refer to young people who indicated that they had either run away or been forced to leave home, and had stayed away overnight on at least one occasion.

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Numbers and characteristics of young people running away

In this chapter we present updated estimates of the rates and numbers of young people running away in England. We also look at the characteristics of young people who run away and at geographical variations in running away rates.

The scale of the issue

Proportions of young people who run away

The survey questionnaire for the current study asked four key questions which can be used to estimate running away rates.

- First, young people were asked whether they had ever run away or been forced to leave home.

- Then, young people who answered 'yes' to the above were asked to say how many times they had run away or been forced to leave in total.

- They were also asked how many times they had run away in the last 12 months.

- Finally they were asked to indicate how long they had been away for on the most recent occasion they had run away. Response options to this last question included *'just during the day'*.

On the basis of the above questions, key rates of overnight running away in the latest survey are estimated[iii] as follows:

- At least 8.9% had run away overnight on at least one occasion. We will refer to this throughout the report as the 'lifetime' running away rate.

- At least 6.2% had run away overnight in the last 12 months. We will refer to this throughout the report as the 'past year' running away rate.

These rates are likely to be under-estimates because of the age of the young people surveyed[iv] and because there is a known link between truancy and running away meaning that young people absent from school on the day the survey was undertaken may well have had higher running away rates than those present.

A comparison of these updated estimates of running away rates with those from the previous two *Still Running* surveys is shown in Table 1:

- The lifetime rate of overnight running away is lower in the current survey than in the two previous surveys.

- On the other hand there is no statistically significant difference in rates of overnight running away in the last 12 months between the current survey and the 2005 survey.

Table 1: Rates of overnight running away in the three surveys

	1999	2005	2011
Run away overnight (life time)	10.1%	10.2%	8.9%
Run away overnight (last year)	not asked	6.5%	6.2%
Median age of young people	15y 1m	15y 4m	15y 3m

In summary, our latest survey presents a mixed picture. There is some encouraging evidence of a possible decline in lifetime running away rates (down by over 1% in the current survey). On the other hand, there is no evidence of a reduction in running away rates over the last 12 months amongst young people aged 14 to 15.

Estimates of numbers of young people running away

It is not possible to estimate precisely the number of young people running away in England per year from this type of snapshot survey. This is because we do not know the timing of running away incidents for those young people who run away on more than one occasion[v]. However we can try to draw some reasonable conclusions from the available data.

The most robust estimate can be generated using young people's responses to the question about running away in the last 12 months. Based on the new survey estimate of 6.2% of young people aged 14 and 15 running away overnight in the last 12 months, and an estimated 1.2 million young people aged 14 and 15 in England[vi], it can be estimated that around 74,000 young people in this age range in England run away overnight annually on at least one occasion.

In addition, as will be shown later, substantial numbers of children and young people under the age of 14 run away each year. Even conservatively estimating 10,000 young people under the age of 14 running away overnight each year would give a total estimate of at least 84,000 runaways per year in England, which is consistent with previous rough estimates[vii] of 100,000 runaways per year in the UK.

Number of running away incidents

So far we have discussed the prevalence of running away amongst young people either over their lifetime or during the past year. It is known from previous research that many young people run away on numerous occasions before the age of 16.

In the current survey, just over a third (36%) of young people who had run away had done so only once, while at least[viii] 55% had run away more than once. Around 22% had run away on more than three occasions. These patterns are broadly comparable with those from *Still Running 2.*

Of the young people who had run away during the last 12 months, around two-fifths (42%) had done so more than once during this period. Of course not all of the second incidents during the year mentioned above would necessarily have involved being away overnight, but on the other hand some young people would have run away more than twice during the period of a year. Thus, based on the estimate of 74,000 young people aged 14 and 15 in England running away annually, it seems reasonable to suggest that there would be over 100,000 running away incidents involving young people aged 14 and 15 in England over the course of a 12 month period.

Geographical variations in running away rates

The previous surveys have found surprisingly little evidence of systematic variations in running away rates across geographical areas. *Still Running* reported some evidence of variations in running away rates across the four countries of the UK with lower rates in Wales (8.5%) and Northern Ireland (9%) than in Scotland and England (both around 10%). However these

differences were not statistically significant. *Still Running 1* and *Still Running 2* both also found slightly higher rates of running away in areas of greater population density and lower economic prosperity but again the differences were not statistically significant.

The current survey broadly confirms these findings. In this survey, running away rates were slightly higher in areas of low population density – for example, lifetime running away rates were around 8.3% in large cities compared to around 9.3 % in less densely populated areas. However these differences were not large enough to be statistically significant. Similarly there was no significant evidence of variations in running away rates at a school level, based on the percentage of children within the school who were entitled to free school meals, although there was a slightly higher rate of running away in schools with higher rates of free school meals entitlement.

So, there are consistent findings, across the three surveys of a lack of evidence of systematic variation in running away rates in different types of geographical area, on the basis of measures of population density and economic prosperity. This indicates that running away amongst young people is likely to be a significant issue in all types of geographical area.

Characteristics of young people who run away

Finally in this chapter we look at variations in running away rates for different sub-groups of the population of young people, comparing the findings with those of previous surveys.

Age

Previous studies have found evidence of children first running away at ages from eight years old upwards. In the current survey, over a third (36%) of young people who had run away had first done so before the age of 13[ix]. This will be a slight over-estimate of the total proportion as some young people surveyed will first run away between the date of the survey and their sixteenth birthday. In comparison, *Still Running 2* found that 30% of young people who had run away had first done so before the age of 13. However, bearing in mind the sample sizes and some potential unreliability in young people's recollection of the timing of past events, the picture appears to be relatively comparable across the two surveys.

Gender

Previous research has typically found higher lifetime running away rates among females than males. In the initial *Still Running* survey, the lifetime

running away rates were 11.5% for females and 8.5% for males. In *Still Running 2,* the rates were 12% for females and 8% for males. In the current survey, lifetime running away rates were around 10% for females and around 8% for males. This is a smaller difference than previous studies but is still statistically significant.

Previous research has also found that males who do run away are likely to run away more often than females. There is also some evidence of this pattern in the current survey but the difference was only marginally significant[x].

Ethnicity

Previous research has indicated some variations in running away rates by ethnic group with the lowest rates amongst young people of Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin. This pattern is evident in the current survey also. Lifetime running away rates were lowest amongst young people of Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin (around 4%) and higher amongst young people of mixed ethnic origin (13%) than amongst young people of Black – African/Caribbean origin (9%) and white origin (9%).

Disabled young people

In the current survey the lifetime overnight running away rate for the young people who defined themselves as disabled (just under 160 young people) was 19%. This was significantly higher than for other young people in the sample. This finding is consistent with previous studies. The *Still Running 2* survey in 2005, using a slightly different question format found that around 20% of disabled young people had run away overnight.

Difficulties with learning

We also asked young people whether they would say that they had 'difficulties with learning'. This is a self-definition and should not be taken to equate to a category of 'learning difficulties'. In the current survey, 18% of the 600 young people who defined themselves in this way had run away overnight at some point in their lives. Again this is statistically higher than average and consistent with earlier findings (which used different question wordings).

Summary

In summary, the findings on the scale of running away paint a mixed picture. There is some potentially positive evidence of a lower rate of

lifetime running away than in the previous two surveys (down from around 10% to around 9%). On the other hand, there is no evidence of change in the other key indicator – the proportion of young people who had run away in the past year.

The findings on variations in running away rates for different groups are broadly consistent with previous findings, with some significant variations according to gender and ethnicity, and higher than average rates of running away amongst disabled young people and young people who have difficulties with learning. The analysis also confirms previous findings of a lack of evidence of systematic variation in running away rates across different geographical areas.

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Experiences of young people whilst away from home

The term 'running away' encapsulates a wide variety of experiences. Some young people only ever run away once, stay a single night with relatives and then return home. Other young people run away repeatedly and/or stay away from home for periods of one month or more. In this section we explore findings from the current survey about experiences of young people while away from home and compare them with previous findings[xi].

The survey questionnaire asked young people a number of questions about their experiences[xii] of running away, as follows:

- How long young people were away for

- Where they slept (if away overnight)

- Whether they were hurt or harmed while away

- Whether they did specified things to survive while away

- Whether they were reported as missing to the police

- Whether they asked anyone for help while away, and if so who.

With the exception of the topic on help-seeking, the format and wording of these questions was the same as for *Still Running 2.* However, in the current survey, where relevant, young people were offered an additional response option – *'prefer not to say'* – in addition to *'not sure'*. This step was taken to promote young people's choice as to which information they wished to share. It does, however, mean that comparisons with the previous study can only be approximate.

We use the above questions to create three composite indicators of running away experience – one related to 'harm/risk' and two related to 'visibility'.

Lengths of time away from home

In the current survey almost two-fifths (38%) of young people had only stayed away for one night on the only or most recent occasion they had run away. At the other end of the scale, 16% had stayed away for more than four weeks.

The comparable finding from *Still Running 2* was that just over half (52%) of young people had only stayed away for one night. However in the current survey, an additional 12% of young people selected the *'Prefer not to say'* option which was not available in the earlier survey. This introduces some imprecision into the comparisons between surveys here. Previous research studies have demonstrated some of the risks which young people face while away from home when they run away – ranging from verbal and physical abuse to involvement in crime and drugs.

Risks of running away

The following is a summary of some of the key findings in this respect from the current survey relating to harm and risky experiences:

- Around one in nine (11%) young people said that they had been hurt or harmed while away from home on the only or most recent occasion.

- One in six (18%) young people said that they had slept rough or stayed with someone they just met for at least some of the time they were away. It was most common for young people to stay with friends (45%) followed by relatives (36%).

- Almost one in eight (12%) of young people said that they had stolen in order to survive while away and one in eleven (9%) said that they had begged. In addition, one in nine said that they had done 'other things' in order to survive. For ethical reasons it was not possible to ask young people for further details about this. There was substantial overlap in risky survival strategies and in total around one in five (20%) of young people had resorted to at least one of these three survival strategies while away.

There was also significant overlap between these different experiences – i.e. being hurt or harmed, sleeping rough or with someone just met, and risky survival strategies. *Still Running 2* introduced a composite indicator and calculated that the proportion of young people who had experienced at least one of these things while away from home was around 25%. We followed the same procedure with the 2011 survey. In total just over a quarter

(26%) of young people in the 2011 survey who had run away overnight had either:

a) been hurt or harmed *and/or*

b) had slept rough or with someone they had just met *and/or*

c) had stolen or begged in order to survive

Referring back to the estimate of 74,000 young people in the 14 to 15 age group who run away overnight each year in England, this suggests that more than 18,000 young people are either hurt or harmed while away and/or have at least one of the risky experiences listed above.

Visibility of young people who run away

Given the risks that young people face while away from home, the potential for young people to get help and support is of critical importance for their safety. Here we look at findings from the survey on help-seeking by young people and police missing person reports.

Help-seeking

Previous research (e.g. *Still Running 2*) has suggested that most young people who run away do not seek help from professional agencies while away, although they may rely on family, friends and other informal sources of support. Interview-based research with young people (e.g. Rees et al, 2009) has shed light on some of the obstacles to young people not seeking help which include lack of awareness of helping services in the local area, concerns about issues of trust and confidentiality, and concerns about being immediately returned home.

In the current survey we attempted to improve on previous survey questions about this topic by asking an initial question about whether the young people had sought any help and then, if so, providing a list of potential sources of help derived from previous studies. Hence the new findings are not directly comparable with previous studies.

In total, a quarter (25%) of young people who responded to this question said that they had sought help while away and the remaining 75% said that they had not. These percentages exclude 7% of young people who did not wish to answer the question.

For young people who answered 'yes', the people and places where they sought help are shown in Table 2. The table shows the number of young people who selected each option, the proportion that this constitutes of

those who said that they had sought help, and also for wider reference the proportion that this constitutes of all young people who had run away overnight. The three most common sources of help were friends, relatives and friend's parents. The most common professionals to seek support from were social services and school staff. In total, bearing in mind that some young people had selected more than one response, only around 5% of all those who had run away overnight said that they had approached a professional source of help. Although not directly comparable, this finding is consistent with previous research which has also suggested very low levels of help-seeking from professional sources.

Table 2: Help-seeking while away (most recent occasion)

Where/who sought help from (more than one response possible)	Number	% of those who sought help	% of all young people running away
Friend	87	60%	15%
Relative	63	43%	11%
Friend's parent	44	30%	8%
Social services	16	11%	3%
Teacher / school staff	14	10%	2%
Counsellor, advice worker or other agency	13	9%	2%
Police	10	7%	2%
Doctor	8	6%	1%
A neighbour	7	5%	1%
Telephone helpline	7	5%	1%
Connexions	4	3%	<1%
Hospital / A&E	3	2%	<1%
Someone else	18	12%	3%

Whether reported missing to the police

Not all young people who run away overnight are reported as missing to the police by their parents. In fact, previous research has suggested that the majority of young people who run away may not be. *Still Running 2* found

that only 19% of young people who had run away said that they had been reported as missing to the police by their parents, with a further 13% being unsure and the remaining 68% saying that they had not been. Whilst perhaps surprising, these findings are not inconsistent with evidence from projects working with young people who run away, who have also found that many of the young people they worked with had not been reported to the police by their parents (Rees et al, 2005). There may be a number of reasons why parents do not report their children missing including that parents may know where their child is and feel that they are safe at that location; a preference not to get involved with the police and the fact that a significant proportion of 'young runaways' have actually been told to leave home by their parents.

This is an important issue because many of the specialist services that have been developed to work with young people who have run away have relied on police missing person reports as a primary or sole referral source. To the extent that young people who run away are not reported missing, these types of services will not be accessible to many young people.

In the current survey we replicated the question asked in 2005 about young people's knowledge of reporting to the police. The findings are almost identical to those from 2005. Around one in six (17%) young people said that they definitely were reported missing and further 13% were unsure. The remaining 70% said that they had not been reported as missing.

Visibility of young people who run away

As discussed above, one of the important insights from interviews with young people about running away is that, as well as often not seeking help, many young people actively seek to avoid adults whilst they are away from home. Bearing this in mind the issue of visibility of runaways to potential helping agencies is an important one.

Two of the more common routes through which young people may come into contact with professional agencies are through missing person reports and through help-seeking, so it is helpful to consider what the findings in the above two sections indicate about the proportions of young people who run away who may become known to professional agencies through one of these routes.

Including 'not sure' responses it may be that as much as 30% of young people who run away are reported as missing to the police by their parents. In addition, it would seem that at least 5% of runaways choose to seek help from agencies whilst away. However, there is some overlap between these two groups, and in total just under a third (31%) of young people who run away fall into this combined category of either possibly having been

reported as missing or having chosen to seek help from professional agencies. This still means that a substantial majority of young people who run away would appear not to be visible to agencies through either of these routes.

A larger proportion of runaways were visible to informal sources of support while running away. The total proportion of young people who either slept at a relatives while away or sought help from a relative, friend's parent or neighbour was around 45%.

Links between running away histories and experiences

We can use some of the key indicators described above to explore the links between young people's running away histories and their experiences on the most recent occasion that they were away.

Young people who had run away more than once tended to have started running away at younger ages than young people who had only run away once – being at least twice as likely to have first run away under the age of 13.

Some other findings for young people who had run away once and more than once are shown in Figure 1. Young people who had run away more than once were much more likely to have been harmed or had a risky experience while away and were also significantly less likely to be visible to informal sources of support. There was no significant difference in terms of visibility to agencies.

Figure 1: The link between running away histories and experiences
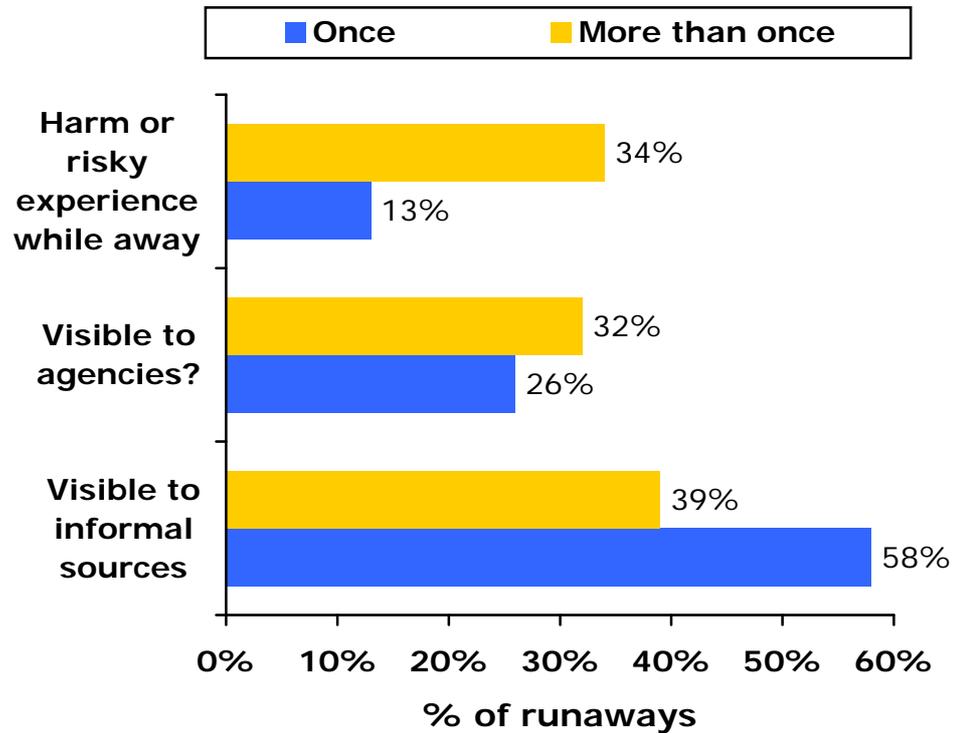
Summary

As with the findings in Chapter 2, the results presented in this chapter are broadly consistent with those of the previous two surveys.

Overall, around a quarter of young people who had run away had either been harmed and/or had risky experiences while away. This is the same proportion as in the 2005 survey – there is no sign that running away is becoming a less risky experience for young people.

Most young people said that they were not reported to the police as missing or otherwise visible to professional agencies while away. They are more likely to be visible to adults within their community, and the majority will rely to some extent on their friends, who are the most common source of support while they are away.

The majority of young people who run away do so on more than one occasion. These repeat runaways are likely to start running away at a younger age and are more likely to be at risk while away from home. The new findings also suggest that this group are less likely to be visible to informal sources of adult support while away from home.

4

The home backgrounds of young people who run away

Previous *Still Running* surveys have found variations in running away rates for young people living in different types of homes and different family structures. However this work has been limited by the level of information which has been available on young people's home and family backgrounds. In the current survey we set out to explore this issue in more detail, by asking a number of additional questions, particularly on family structure, family change and family relationships. As a result the survey offers the potential for a much more comprehensive understanding of the links between home backgrounds and running away. The findings in this chapter represent a first step in analysing this new data[xiii].

The majority of the chapter covers running away rates amongst young people living with their family. However, before presenting these findings we focus initially on children who were not currently living with family at the time of the survey.

Young people not living with family

There is consistent evidence that young people not living with their family of origin are significantly more likely than average to have run away. The main focus has been on 'looked after' young people living in residential and foster care.

The first two *Still Running* surveys reported lifetime overnight running away rates amongst small sub-samples of young people in residential and foster care of 45% and 30% respectively. In the current survey the corresponding proportion was just over half (52%) of the 90 children in the survey who

currently lived in residential or foster care. Given the small sample sizes this level of variation between the three surveys is not particularly surprising. What seems clear is that lifetime running away rates for this sub-group of children are much higher than average.

This broad finding is consistent with other research (e.g. Wade & Biehal, 1998). It should be noted that not all these young people had run away from the place they were currently living, some having run away from their family. Additionally, the high rates of running away from substitute care should not necessarily be seen as a reflection on the quality of care currently being provided, as 'looked after' young people generally have had significant negative experiences before being looked after and this may include an established pattern of running away which began within the family environment.

In addition, in the current survey, young people were able to indicate that they lived in 'another type of home' – i.e. not with family, in foster care or in residential care. This category might include, for example, young people who are living with friends and others within the community. Sixty six young people selected this category and the rate of lifetime running away amongst this small group was 47%. Again, current housing was not necessarily the same as the place that the young person had run away from and, in fact, young people's current accommodation status may be the result of running away from family settings.

Young people not living with family (i.e. in residential care, foster care or other types of home), compared to those who were living with family, were also significantly more likely to have run away on more than one occasion.

Family structure

Among young people living with family, there is substantial evidence of differences in running away rates for young people living in different family forms. Both previous surveys found lifetime running away rates among young people currently living with a lone parent almost twice as high as for young people living with both birth parents. Rates among young people living in stepfamilies were higher again. These are running away rates at any point in the past and do not necessarily mean that young people ran away on the first or more recent occasions from this particularly family form. A study which looked at histories of running away from family amongst young people, using in-depth qualitative interviews (Rees & Rutherford, 2001) illustrated that often young people currently living in lone parent or step-families originally ran away from their family of origin around the time when their birth parents were separating. So the higher lifetime running

away rates amongst young people not currently living with both birth parents are, at least in part, indicative of past experiences of family change.

A second complicating factor is that the family and caring arrangements of young people in the UK are becoming increasingly diverse and complex. For example, when birth parents separate, many young people do not live constantly with one birth parent but share their time between two family homes.

To take account of these factors and explore this issue in more depth, we included a number of additional questions in the current survey. First, young people were asked to indicate whether they lived in one or two homes. They were then asked to indicate which people they lived with (in each home where relevant). Second, irrespective of whether they lived in one or two homes, young people were asked if, in the last 12 months, there had been changes in the adults they lived with and also whether they had moved house. These additions enable us to paint a more complex picture of the links between family structure and running away.

The large majority of young people (86%) lived in one home – of which 75% lived with both birth parents, 16% with a lone parent, 7% with a parent and step-parent and around 1% in other family forms (e.g. with grandparents). The remaining one in seven young people lived in two homes. Most of these young people (84%) lived in split-parent families - with one of their birth parents in each home (along with potentially other people such as a step-parent). The remainder lived in 'other arrangements' such as a first home containing one or both birth parents and a second home contained no birth parents but one or more extended family members.

Table 3 presents an overview of young people's current family arrangements and running away rates. Throughout this chapter we focus on past year running rates as these are more likely to be directly connected with current family structure and recent family change. Rates of running away were significantly lower for young people currently living with both birth parents than for young people living with lone parents, in stepfamilies and in two homes.

Table 3: Family structure and running away

Family structure[xiv]	% running away in past year
One home - both birth parents	3.0%
One home - lone parent	5.5%
One home - parent and step-parent	8.5%
Two homes – split parents	10.0%

However, as the next section will show, this type of analysis of 'static' family forms present a partial and somewhat misleading picture of the links between family structure and running away.

Recent changes in family structure

In the survey questionnaire, following the questions about current family structure, young people were asked *'Were you living with the same adults this time last year'*. Around one in ten young people responded that they had experienced some changes in the past 12 months. Although not precise, this question provides an approximate indicator of family structural change. Young people who said that there had been some changes in relation to which adults they lived with had running away rates over three times higher than young people who had not experienced a change as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Changes in family structure and running away

Living with same adults as this time last year	Past year
Yes, the same adults	4.0%
No, there have been some changes	14.4%

Given the evidence of a substantial association between family change and running away, the next step was to examine jointly the association of both recent changes and current structure on running away rates (see Table 5). Statistical analysis of the data presented in this table indicates that:

- Although running away rates in lone parent families were slightly higher than in families with both birth parents, the differences were not statistically significant once family change was taken into account.

- There were significantly higher rates of recent running away for young people currently living in a step-family or in two homes.

Table 5: Family structure, recent changes in family structure and running away

Family structure[xv]	% Run away in past year
No changes over last year	
One home - both birth parents	2.9%
One home - lone parent	4.3%
One home - parent and step-parent	5.9%
Two homes – split parents	9.0%
Changes over last year	
One home - both birth parents	8.3%
One home - lone parent	9.3%
One home - parent and step-parent	20.9%
Two homes – split parents	19.2%

These statistics indicate that both static and dynamic family factors have a part to play in understanding variations in running away rates.

It should be noted again here, that in relation to the figures on young people who had experienced recent family change, we do not know whether this running away occurred before, during or after the family change. For example, some of this running away could have taken place over the past year in families with both birth parents prior to a separation.

Family economic status

Previous studies have found a relationship between indicators of family economic status and running away rates. In both *Still Running* and *Still Running 2*, running away rates were significantly higher than average for young people living in families where no adults had a paid job and for young people who were entitled to free school meals.

These findings are supported by the current survey. Young people living in family where no adults had a paid job and those in receipt of free school meals had higher than average past year running away rates (between 8% and 9% in both cases).

There are limitations to these types of self-report indicators of family economic status. First, they only distinguish between the minority of young people living in adverse household economic circumstances and the majority. So, for example, the above findings do not indicate a link between likelihood of running away and greater family affluence amongst the large majority of families where someone is in paid work. Second, they are indicators at the household level and there may be wide variation in individual experiences of poverty amongst young people living, for example, in families where no adult has a paid job.

Further analysis is needed to explore the combined analysis of family change, family structure and family economic status in relation to running away rates. Some preliminary results looking at economic indicators and family change suggest that, once experience of recent family change is taken into account, running away rates are still slightly higher for young people who live in a household where no adults have a paid job and/or who are entitled to free school meals, but not significantly so. These general conclusions on the limited influence of family economic factors support those from *Still Running* which also found that economic factors had a relatively weak association with running away rates once family structure was taken into account.

Family relationships

The fourth and final topic discussed in this chapter is the quality of young people's relationships within the family. The survey questionnaire included 25 questions about family relationships covering four broad topics – general measures of the quality of family relationships, levels of family conflict, levels of perceived parental control and levels of parental monitoring. These four topics are all common aspects of research into parent-child relationships, particularly in relation to young people in this age group. There is a huge amount of potential in this data to provide important new insights into the family contexts of running away. This section presents some initial analysis on two aspects of family relationships – the quality of parent-child relationships (which will be referred to as 'warmth' for brevity) and the level of family conflict.

The 'family warmth' measure used here consists of three items – *'If I am upset or unhappy, my parents spend time listening to me'*, *'My parents and I do fun things together'*, *'If I have a problem, my parents will help me'*.

The 'family conflict' measure also consists of three items – *'My family gets along well together'*, *'There are a lot of arguments in my family'*, *'Members of my family talk nicely to one another'*.

For each of these items in the two measures, young people were asked to respond on a five-point scale from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. For both measures, young people's answers were added together to create a score from 0 to 12. Both measures had good statistical properties[xvi]. Two simplified measures were then created relating to high/low warmth[xvii] and high/low conflict[xviii]. Using these measures, 13% of young people were categorised as living in low warmth family environments and 29% in high conflict environments. Not surprisingly there was an association between young people's answers on these two topics. Young people who reported higher warmth were also more likely to report lower conflict, and vice versa[xix].

These two simple measures prove to be quite strongly associated with recent running away incidents. Using each of these measures, a poorer quality family environment was associated with running away rates around six times greater than in higher quality environments.

The two factors put together had an even stronger association with recent running away as shown in Figure 2. Almost a quarter (23%) of those young people living in low warmth-high conflict environments had run away in the past 12 months, compared to slightly less than 2% of those living in high warmth-low conflict environments.

Figure 2: Proportion of young people living in low and high warmth and conflict family environments who had run away overnight in the last 12 months

> High warmth - Low conflict
> **2%**

> Low warmth – Low conflict
> **6%**

> High warmth – High conflict
> **7%**

> Low warmth - High conflict
> **23%**
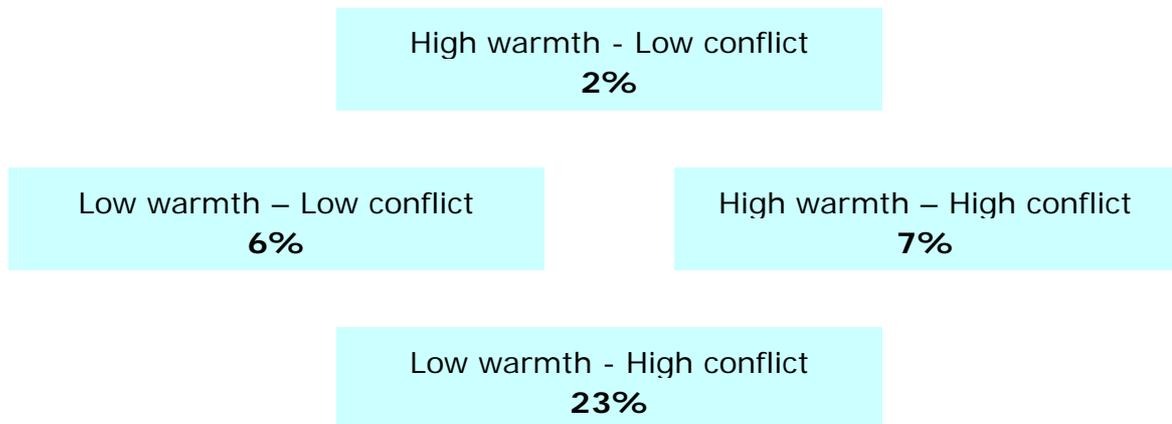
It is important to acknowledge here that, because the measures of young people's perception of family relationships related to the time when they completed the survey, while their running away had occurred in the recent past, it can not be assumed that the quality of family relationships caused the running away. It is also possible that young people's running away could have caused a strain on family relationships, or that the different factors are mutually reinforcing. Irrespective of this, the above findings demonstrate more fully than previous research the strength of connections between running away and quality of family relationships.

Summary

This chapter has presented a number of new findings on the relative associations of various family factors with running away rates. A summary of the key points covered in the chapter is as follows.

The findings tend to support previous studies which have found substantial variation in running away rates according to family structure. However, the more complex picture of family structure presented in this chapter suggests that the differences in running away rates for young people living in different family structures have been over-estimated because other factors have not been taken into account.

One of the new insights in this chapter is the strong association between recent family change and likelihood of young people running away. Young people who had experienced a change in relation to which adults they lived with were three times as likely as other young people to have run away in

the past 12 months. Taking family change into account reduces the association between family structure and likelihood of running away.

There is evidence of some association between family poverty indicators and increased likelihood of running away. However these associations are relatively weak once other family factors are taken into account.

Overall, experience of recent family change emerges from this analysis as the most important of the structural factors examined here in terms of its association with running away rates. This finding has important practice and policy implications which will be discussed in the concluding chapter of the report.

The chapter also summarises new evidence on the links between running away and the quality of family relationships. It is perhaps not surprising that there is an association between low warmth or high conflict family environments and increased likelihood of running away. However the strength of the associations is notable, with young people living in either of these contexts being six times more likely to have recently run away than other young people. When these two factors co-occur – that is low warmth-high conflict environments – running away rates are higher still. This analysis only represents an initial exploration of these issues and further work is needed to understand the timing and causal links at work here.

5

The wider context

In this chapter we summarise an initial analysis of previously unexplored topics regarding the associations between running away and other aspects of young people's lives.

Previous surveys have found a strong link between running away and a range of other problems and issues. For example, *Still Running 2* found that:

- Young people who said that they had been in trouble with the police were four times as likely to have run away as those who had not.

- Similarly, young people who saw themselves as having problems with alcohol and with drugs were more than four times as likely to have run away as those who did not.

- Young people who had run away were much more likely also to say that they often felt depressed.

- A third of young people who said that they had problems with school attendance had run away.

In the current survey we took a slightly different focus, drawing on questions developed and tested through The Children's Society's research programme on children's subjective well-being.

Internationally, there is a developing interest in the concept of subjective well-being and there is also a growing body of evidence on children's subjective well-being. This has included specific exploration which has demonstrated associations between subjective well-being and a range of problems and issues in young people's lives including offending behaviour, likelihood of victimisation, risk-taking behaviours and eating disorders (see review in Proctor et al, 2008). However, we have not found any literature specifically exploring links between subjective well-being and running away.

Additionally, most of the above evidence is from the US and there has been little exploration of these issues in the UK. So the results presented in this chapter are important for understanding the wider context of running away and can also contribute to the wider interest in the value of measuring children's subjective well-being.

Before we go on to summarise the evidence we have gathered under each of these four areas, it is important to clarify the nature of the associations we are exploring here. The data gathered on subjective well-being was young people's current assessment of their lives at the time of completing the survey. The data gathered on running away is retrospective. Therefore we can not explore through this survey the extent to which well-being is an explanatory factor for running away incidents. This would require a longitudinal study. Instead, any evidence of associations between recent and previous running away and subjective well-being can be seen as important in understanding the extent to which running away may be a potential indicator of well-being in the short-term and the longer term.

Friendships and running away

Recent UK research on children's subjective well-being has demonstrated that there are two dimensions to children's evaluations of their friendships – positive and negative (Goswami, 2011). Positive evaluations of friendships are based on young people's responses to statements such as '*My friends will help me if I need it'.* Negative evaluations are based on responses to statements such as '*My friends are mean to me'.* While there is an association between these two aspects of friendships – that is, in general, young people with higher positive evaluations tend also to have lower negative evaluations – this is not always the case.

In the survey we asked young people to respond to 10 statements regarding their feelings about their friendships, both positive and negative. There were significant differences in young people's responses to these questions, depending on whether they had run away in the last 12 months or not. For example:

- 13% of young people who had run away in the last 12 months disagreed that '*My friends will help me if I need it'* compared to 4% of young people who had not run away during this period.

- 14% of young people who had run away in the last 12 months disagreed that '*I feel safe when I am with my friends'* compared to 5% of young people who had not.

- 28% of young people who had run away in the last 12 months agreed that *'My friends and I have lots of arguments'* compared to 13% of young people who had not run away during this period.

- 16% of young people who had run away in the last 12 months agreed that '*I wish I had different friends'* compared to 7% of young people who had not.

Overall, for all 10 questions asked, young people who had run away in the past 12 months reported significantly poorer quality friendships than young people who had not.

These findings are particularly important because, as shown in Chapter 3, friends are the most important source of potential support for young people who run away.

School

We asked three questions regarding young people's feelings about school – '*I look forward to going to school', 'School is interesting'* and '*I like being in school'.* Young people's answers to these questions were significantly associated with likelihood of recent running away:

- Young people who had run away in the last 12 months were significantly less likely to agree (25%) that '*School is interesting'* compared to young people who had not run away in this period (43% agreed).

- 46% of past year runaways disagreed with the statement '*I like being in school'* compared to 22% of non-runaways.

- 55% of past year runaways disagreed with the statement '*I look forward to going to school'* compared to 32% of non-runaways.

Overall more than half of the young people who had run away in the past 12 months had a negative evaluation of school compared to just under a third of young people who had not.

We also asked young people how well they felt they were doing at school and what they hoped to do when they left school:

- Almost two-fifths (39%) of young people who had run away in the last 12 months felt that they were not doing very well or not doing at all well at school, compared to 15% of other young people.

- Young people who had recently run away were significantly less likely (38%) than young people who had not run away (54%) to hope that they would go to university.

Thus young people who had recently run away were significantly less well connected with school than average, felt they were doing less well at school, and had lower aspirations of continuing into higher education.

Overall subjective well-being

Finally, we asked young people to respond to a set of five statements about their overall subjective well-being, such as *'My life is going well'.* This set of statements forms a valid measure of children's overall subjective well-being or their assessment of the quality of their life (see Rees et al, 2010 for further details). There were strong and signficant links between recent running away and low current subjective well-being. For example:

- Around a quarter (25%) of young people who had run away in the past year disagreed that '*My life is going well'*, compared to 6% of young people who had not run away in this period.

- Almost half (48%) of young people who had recently run away agreed that *'I wish I had a different kind of life'* compared to 19% of those who had not.

Looking specifically at the proportions of young people who had low well-being (scores of below 50% on the above measure), almost four times as many (44%) young people who had run away in the last 12 months had low well-being as those who had not run away (12%). Amongst runaways, young people with low well-being were also significantly more likely to have run away repeatedly.

Summary

Overall the material in this chapter paints a consistently negative picture of the quality of life of young people who have recently run away. These young people had poorer quality relationships with friends than average and were at risk of being socially isolated. They also had poorer connections with school. Overall they were much more likely to be unhappy with their life as a whole.

We plan to do further research on these issues and to explore the connections between them and running away experiences. This will include

exploring the potential protective role of positive friendships and school connections for young people who are at risk of running away.

6

Conclusions

This report has presented initial findings from the third survey on young people running away in England undertaken in 2011, which follows similar surveys conducted in 1999 (UK wide) and 2005. The report has provided an updated picture of the scale and nature of running away amongst young people and has also outlined some new findings about the connections between running away and young people's experiences within and outside the home. This concluding chapter summarises the key findings presented in Chapters 2 to 5 and draws out some of the implications of these findings.

Key findings

Chapter 2 presented updated findings on rates and characteristics of young people who run away. The picture in this chapter is primarily one of stability rather than change. There is some encouraging evidence of a possible modest reduction (from around 10% to around 9%) in the proportion of young people who run away overnight at some point in their lives. On the other hand there is no evidence of reduction in recent running away rates among young people aged 14 and 15. The evidence in the latest survey suggests that over 70,000 young people aged 14 and 15 run away overnight each year in England and that there are likely to be at least 100,000 runaway incidents involving young people in this age group each year.

The proportion of young people who run away before the age of 13 and the proportion of young people who run away repeatedly (more than three times) are comparable to those found in previous surveys.

Chapter 3 goes on to present updated findings on young people's experiences of running away. As with the preceding chapter, the findings presented here indicate continuity rather than change in the nature of young

people's experiences. Two key aspects of the running away experience are highlighted in this chapter.

First, there is now substantial evidence of the risks which young people face while away from home. Around one in nine young people who had run away said that they had been hurt or harmed while away from home. A larger group of young people (around a quarter of all runaways) had had a range of risky experiences while away including sleeping rough, staying overnight with a person they had just met, stealing, begging and other risky survival strategies. This proportion is unchanged since our previous survey in 2005.

Second, new estimates are presented on the visibility of young people who run away to professional agencies and to informal sources of support. Very few young people who run away (around one in twenty) approach agencies for help while away from home. Additionally, confirming the findings of previous research, only a minority are reported missing to the police by their parents. Even making some fairly generous assumptions, these findings suggest that only a third of young people who run away are visible to agencies through either of these two routes while they are away from home.

A larger proportion of young people are visible to informal sources of support. The findings suggest that at least 45% of young people who run away are known to adults (including relatives, parents of friends and neighbours) while away from home and a larger proportion are known to friends who appear to be the most common source of support. These findings on the relative visibility of young runaways to formal and informal sources of support carry important messages which are discussed below.

It is known that family factors are by far the most important determinant of running away. Chapter 4 explores the home context underpinning running away, including new findings on links between running away and family change and quality of family relationships.

Young people who are not living with family (i.e. in residential care, foster care and other non-family settings) are a particularly high risk group for running away and for running away repeatedly.

Turning to young people living with their family, the findings highlight for the first time that recent experiences of family change are a key factor associated with increased risk of running away. Moreover these dynamic aspects of family life appear to be more important than static aspects such as family structure or family economic status. The chapter also presents analysis of the links between recent running away and young people's views on the quality of their family relationships focusing on two topics – warmth and conflict. The analysis indicates that warmth and conflict are independently associated with likelihood of recent running away. Moreover, these factors appear to combine so that young people living in family

environments characterised by a combination of low warmth and high conflict are particularly likely to have run away. The snapshot nature of the survey means that it not possible to explore the timing and causal links between the issues covered in this chapter and there would be considerable value in a longitudinal study in order to explore these issues further.

Chapter 5 looks at links between running away and the wider context of these young people's lives. Previous surveys have already demonstrated associations between the likelihood of running away and a range of other problems and issues in young people's lives such as substance use, offending and truancy. The current survey took a different approach, utilising recently developed measures of young people's subjective well-being in relation to friendships, school and life as a whole. This approach provides new insights into the potential role of positive friendships and school experiences in relation to running away. Young people who reported more positive experiences in these two respects were less likely to run away and to do so repeatedly. These broad initial findings require further exploration in order to identify potential risk and protective factors outside the family context in relation to running away.

The chapter also shows a strong association between recent running away and low levels of subjective well-being. Young people who had run away in the past year were almost four times as likely to report low subjective well-being as young people who had not.

Overall the material presented in Chapters 4 and 5 substantially expands our understanding of the contexts within which running away takes place. In summary, young people who run away are more likely to have experienced recent family change, are likely to be experiencing poor quality family relationships or to be living away from their family, and are likely to have relatively weak connections with friends and school. These very broad initial findings open up a new area of enquiry in relation to running away which could explore the cumulative impact of these factors and clarify the timing and causal links involved.

Discussion

The findings of this report highlight five key themes.

1. **Broadly speaking there is little evidence of improving trends in relation to running away and more needs to be done to tackle the issue**

The current survey does provide some positive messages in terms of the apparent reductions in the rate of lifetime running away (down from around 10% to around 9%). However, the rate of running away in the past 12 months (which is likely to be a more reliable indicator) is unchanged since 2005. On this basis there are well over 70,000 young people in the 14 to 15 year old age group in England alone who run away each year.

In other respects there is also little evidence of improvement:

- The average number of running away incidents per person has not decreased.

- The levels of risk and harm experienced by young people who run away are remarkably similar to those found in 2005.

- There is also no evidence of an increase in the proportion of young runaways who are reported missing to the police or who seek help from professional agencies whilst away from home.

All in all, then, the survey paints a picture of stability rather than change in rates, numbers, risks and visibility. Given the evidence from this and other research on the risks and negative outcomes associated with running away, this picture suggest that much more needs to be done both in terms of policy and practice to tackle the issue of young people running away.

2. **There is a need for focused family interventions to reduce running away**

Previous research has highlighted the strong links between family experiences and running away. This has firmly identified running away as a response to family difficulties (in contrast to the earlier tendency in US research to seek individual psychological explanations for running away behaviour). The current survey significantly adds to our understanding of the associations between family factors and running away. In particular it suggests the need for targeted support for young people who are experiencing family change, and are living in high conflict and/or low warmth family environments. Where more than one of these factors co-exist, the likelihood of running away is very much higher than average. A preventative strategy around running away needs to address these key dimensions of young people's experience of families.

3. Running away should be seen as a trigger for early intervention

The research has also significantly strengthened the case for running away to be seen as a trigger for an early intervention in young people's lives. For the first time, this survey has demonstrated that a previous history of running away is associated with significantly lower than average current levels of well-being. This is important because it indicates that running away is not just a temporary issue – young people who run away repeatedly are young people who have ongoing negative experiences in their families, with their friends, at school and in their lives in general. Previous research has shown that these types of findings hold true even for young people who may only have ever run away once or twice and did not stay away overnight. It is important therefore that professionals view any incident of running away, however time-limited, as an indicator of potential longer-term problems and a legitimate trigger for early intervention.

4. There is a need to improve support, and routes to support, for young people while they are away from home.

The research reinforces previous findings on the risks of harm faced by young people who run away combined with low levels of visibility of these young people to professional agencies. There are a few different implications of this.

First there is a need to reduce some of the known barriers to young people accessing help directly from professional agencies identified in previous research. These include lack of knowledge and lack of confidence in professionals to help.

Second, it is clear that many young people choose to rely on informal support networks – including, for example, extended family, friends and their parents, neighbours. This suggests the potential for these people to help young people gain access to help and there may be a need for more public awareness of running away issues and the ways in which help can be provided.

Third, this survey backs up previous findings about the substantial proportion of young people who sleep rough and stay in other risky situations, such as with people they have just met, while away from home. There are huge risks in these situations and there remains a pressing need to ensure that adequate levels of emergency accommodation are available for young people in local areas to reduce these risks.

Finally, the research once again demonstrates that most young runaways are not reported missing to the police. It is therefore vital that services

intended to help runaways are not based solely or primarily on referrals of young people reported missing.

5. **It will be important to improve efforts to monitor the situation and measure change at a national and local level.**

    Finally, building on the above points, the research also highlights the need to continue to monitor the situation of young people who run away and to try to measure improvements in this situation as a result of policy and practice initiatives. While regular national surveys of the kind conducted here are helpful in monitoring broad trends this should not be a substitute for the responsibility for local authorities and other agencies to monitor the situation within their area. To date, there has been a lack of available local data and an over-reliance on police missing person statistics. This survey reinforces once again the message that numbers of police missing person reports are in no way an adequate indicator of the scale of running away nationally or locally as most young people who run away are not reported as missing to the police. It should be possible for local authorities to make use of some of the indicators established through our three national surveys, within existing surveys they conduct of young people in their area, to monitor levels and experiences of running away. In addition to questions about the incidence of running away, such monitoring should also include measures of repeat running away and of help-seeking by young people who run away as these could act as key indicators of progress and success in tackling the issue of running away at a local level.

Appendix: Survey methods

Sampling

The sample was drawn on a quota basis by the survey agency, Dubit, from their representative panel of schools, to reflect the make-up of schools in England in terms of region, area type (urban/rural), mixed/single gender and socio-economic variables. Where it was not possible to fill the quota from schools within the panel, additional schools were contacted as necessary to complete the sample. The constitution of the final sample was checked and was broadly representative of the national picture. Full details of sample composition will be provided in the technical report for this project. Weighting was applied to correct for some variations between the sample and the national picture (see below). In smaller schools the entire year group from the school was invited to participate. In larger schools (year groups of 150 pupils or more) a sample of class groups were selected to participate in the research, with the aim of achieving on average the participation of 70 young people per school. Weighting was applied at the school level to take account of variation in this respect (see below). Schools were asked not to select class groups which were linked to academic ability. In schools participating during the April to July period, the survey covered young people in year 10 (aged 14 and 15). For the schools participating in September to October, the survey covered the same cohort of young people who were now in year 11 (aged 15 to 16). The final sample used for this report consisted of 7,349 young people aged 14 to 16 in 85 mainstream secondary schools.

Survey administration

Information was provided to teachers administering the survey which included the purpose of the survey and ethical guidelines. The ethical approach followed broadly the same principles as the previous two *Still Running* surveys, and was approved through The Children's Society's internal ethical review process and by the research consultant. All data was gathered anonymously – the questionnaire did not contain any information which could be uniquely linked to individual young people – and confidentiality was guaranteed. The questionnaire was completed online in either ICT or PSHE classes or in some cases in registration / tutor period (depending on the schools preference) in schools and consisted entirely of closed response (tick box questions) so there was no possibility of receiving text-based responses which could lead to concerns or the need to breach

confidentiality. The importance of informed consent of young people was emphasised in the guidelines. It was recommended that schools ensured that all young people were aware that participation was voluntary and made arrangements to give young people who did not wish to take part an alternative task to undertake while the survey was being conducted. In addition, the information provided on the survey questionnaire emphasised to young people that they could choose not to answer any questions, and a response option of 'Prefer not to say' was provided for all questions which might be considered sensitive in order to facilitate young people exercising this choice.

Data cleaning, analysis and reporting

Following the receipt of the raw data; initial coding, screening and cleaning of the data was conducted using PASW (formerly SPSS) and Microsoft Access, for more detailed assessment of individual responses. This initial stage included resolution of queries with the survey administration agency and identification of cases which should potentially be removed from the data set due to unusual patterns or inconsistencies in responses. Detailed decisions about criteria for removal were discussed with the research consultant to ensure logic and consistency. A small number of cases, less than 1% of the total data set, were removed through this process.

The resulting cleaned data set was then compared with statistics on all mainstream schools in England to assess representativeness. In broad terms the sample was found to be reasonably representative, but there were slight under-representations or over-representations in relation to single-sex schools, some government regions and the balance between rural and urban areas. Appropriate weights were calculated at the school level to correct for these factors. Additional weighting was also calculated to take into account variations in the numbers of young people participating in each school.

All statistical analysis was conducted in PASW. Bivariate statistical tests used were the chi-square and Fisher's exact test, where relevant, for nominal by nominal analysis, and non-parametric tests (Mann-Whitney and Kruskal-Wallis) in a few instances for ordinal by nominal analysis. Reliability analysis was also used to calculate Cronbach alpha statistics, for the short scales discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. Unless otherwise stated, all findings in the report which are referred to as statistically significant refer to a p-value of less than 0.01 (99% confidence). Findings which are referred to as marginally significant refer to a p-value of between 0.01 and 0.049 (95% confidence).

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Notes

i This work was undertaken in partnership with the University of York, Aberlour Childcare Trust in Scotland and Extern in Northern Ireland, and was funded by the Millennium Children's Promise appeal.

ii Section 51 of The Children Act 1989 made such legal provision for England and Wales and similar legislation was passed in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

iii These statistics are weighted estimates (see appendix). Confidence intervals for these estimates have not yet been calculated but, given the sample design, would be expected to be at least 1% in either direction. A full technical report on the survey will be published in early 2012. In addition, it should be noted that in the current survey young people who had run away were offered a 'prefer not to say' option in response to how long they had been away on the most recent occasion. This response was not offered as an option in previous surveys. Young people selecting this option were treated as 'missing data' when calculating running away rates which is likely to mean that the above figures are a slight under-estimate.

iv The lifetime running away rate is very likely to be an under-estimate of that for all under-16-year-olds because the median age of young people surveyed was 15 years and three months. Some young people surveyed will run away for the first time between their current age and their sixteenth birthday.

v If, hypothetically, all young people who ran away repeatedly did so within a single calendar year, then the total number of young runaways per year would be much lower than if, hypothetically, these incidents were spread evenly over a number of calendar years. It is not practical, in a survey questionnaire to ask young people who have run away on a number of occasions to recall and list the time frames for each running away incident.

vi ONS (2011) *Mid-2010 Population Estimates: England; estimated resident population by single year of age and sex.*

vii This figure originated from estimates in *Still Running* in 1999 that 77,000 young people ran away for the first time in the UK each year and that there were 129,000 running away incidents.

viii The remaining 9% of young people selected the 'Prefer not to say' option in response to this question.

ix It should be borne in mind that this is the proportion of young people who had run away overnight on the most recent occasion. This does not necessarily mean that they ran away overnight on earlier occasions.

x This may be attributable to the smaller sample size of the current survey.

Further information

You can download a copy of this report at:
www.childrenssociety.org.uk/research

To find out more about what you can do to help create a national safety net for children who run away, please visit our campaign website at:
www.makerunawayssafe.org.uk

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