

Crimes Against Runaway Youth

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“Homeless youth are in survival mode, everything sounds good to them if it can get them a meal or a place to lay their head.”

-Aja Ellington, NN4Y National Youth Advisory Committee Member

The Problem

Homeless juveniles are at risk of falling prey to predatory adults, drugs, and violent crime such as physical and sexual assault while they are living on the street. According to research from The University of Chicago, an estimated 4.2 million young people (ages 13-25) experience homelessness annually.

Those juveniles who have left home or care and are forced to live “on the street” are often victimized and exploited. They are in “survival mode” and may end up living with strangers, living in abandoned buildings, tunnels or on rooftops. Some take part in “survival sex” meaning they trade sex for food, shelter, drugs, or protection. Sometimes, survival sex involves statutory rape. Many young people will eventually become victims of sex or labor trafficking. Research from numerous studies have found trafficking rates among youth and young adults experiencing homelessness ranging from **19% to 40%**.

- Basic needs, such as the lack of a safe place to sleep at night, often play a role in their trafficking experiences.
- Homelessness and trafficking begin early, often well before age 18.
- LGBTQ youth and youth who have been in foster care experience trafficking at higher rates than other youth experiencing homelessness.
- Girls and young women are more likely to experience trafficking, but boys and young men also experience high levels of trafficking.

Youth experiencing homelessness who have also been victims of sex trafficking are more likely to have mental health and substance use issues. Runaways have higher rates of depression, physical and sexual abuse, alcohol and drug problems, delinquency, school problems, and difficulties with peers than juveniles who do not run away. Many runaways have been exposed to high levels of violence, either as victims or as witnesses, resulting in traumatic stress. This exposure overwhelms their ability to cope with what they have experienced. After victimization, child and teen victims often need counseling, advocacy, shelter, safety planning, emotional support, or criminal and civil remedies.

National and State Resources

Victim advocacy professionals are essential to ensuring that youth are protected from further harm. We hope that these resources can provide some guidance in the effort to help our vulnerable children. Let them know that they are not alone.

NATIONAL RUNAWAY SAFELINE

<https://www.1800runaway.org/runaway-statistics/third-party-statistics/>

THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME

<http://victimsofcrime.org/our-programs/other-projects/youth-initiative/underserved-teen-victim-initiative>

THE NATIONAL NETWORK FOR YOUTH

<https://www.nn4youth.org/>

NATIONAL HUMAN TRAFFICKING HOTLINE

<https://humantraffickinghotline.org/>

FAMILY AND YOUTH SERVICES BUREAU

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/fysb/grants/ohio-rhy>

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

<https://compassfamily.org/daybreak-youth-crisis-center/>

COMPASS DAYBREAK YOUTH CRISIS CENTER

<http://youthshelteranswers.org/>

LIGHTHOUSE YOUTH SERVICES

<https://www.lys.org/>

KALEIDOSCOPE YOUTH CENTER

<https://www.kycohoio.org/>