

RUNAWAY BEHAVIOUR  
AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

DR. PAUL R. WILSON  
Reader in Sociology  
University of Queensland

RUNAWAY BEHAVIOUR  
AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

DR. PAUL R. WILSON  
Reader in Sociology  
University of Queensland

A CONFIDENTIAL REPORT  
TO THE CRIMINOLOGY COUNCIL

PLEASE NOTE : This report is for the Criminology Council only and cannot be reproduced or quoted. The report will serve as the basis for a book-size manuscript to be finished in late 1983. A copy of the manuscript or book will be presented to the Council.

## 1. INTRODUCTION\*

This report summarizes a year-long study of hitherto largely "unseen" runaways along with the usual groups of agency clientele officially labelled as runaways. We defined runaways in the following way: Youth under 16 years who are (a) away from home without parental consent; (b) are defined as runaways by law enforcement or service agencies; or (c) identified by themselves or by relevant significant others as runaways.<sup>1</sup> Subjects in our study meet one or more of these three criteria. This study utilizes the runaways' self-reports and their own perceptions and thus reflects the "real" world of the runaways. It is seen from their own perspective, rather than those of clinicians, researchers or other helping professionals.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This study focussed upon runaways, parents of runaways and a review of agencies that offer services to runaways. We chose our runaways to represent two theoretical groups of runaway youth: the seen and the unseen. Clearly, it would be impossible to select a random representative sample of runaways. Following the methodology of Shellow (1967), we knew that such an approach was necessary if we were to represent in our sample runaways who were not visible to public agencies.<sup>2</sup>

Originally interviews were to be conducted in four urban centres, but on the advice of the Institute of Criminology, we decided to conduct interviews in three centres and include a

---

\* Special thanks are due to the Criminology Council for financing this research. David Biles and John Seymour from the Institute gave valuable advice. Most thanks though should go to Robyn Lincoln who carried out the bulk of the interviews with sensitivity and dedication well beyond her paid service.

parents' sample in one centre.<sup>3</sup> Consequently forty interviews in each of the three urban areas selected (Brisbane, the Gold Coast, and Perth) were conducted giving a total sample of 120 respondents. Each interview was conducted by a trained interviewer using a structured interview format which had been carefully pilot-tested.<sup>4</sup>

It was decided that the majority of interviews would take place at CYSS centres for the following reasons: (1) such centres contained runaways who came from a variety of backgrounds; (2) interviews were seen as non-threatening by the respondents; (3) respondents who used the CYSS centres often spent their nights in a variety of settings including parks, refuges, government institutions and community houses. In all, 56 per cent of all respondents came from CYSS offices; 27 per cent were contacted through private refuges and 17 per cent were located on the streets, in parks and their own homes, usually through recommendations by other runaways.

The sample of parents were located through radio talk-back programs broadcast in Brisbane.<sup>5</sup> Refuges and agencies were visited in each of the target urban areas as well as in Sydney. With the help of the Institute of Criminology Librarian and university libraries, a thorough search of all literature on runaway behaviour has been accomplished. Despite obvious biases in sampling procedure (as there must be in any sample of runaways), we believe that the sample is the most comprehensive of "visible" and "invisible" runaways to date, and that the interviewing has been both sensitive and professional.

### 3. DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE

Our entire sample of runaways is fairly evenly divided among the sexes with 57 per cent being male and 43 per cent female. The majority of runaways are currently between 16 and 17 years of age - this being 52 per cent of the sample. Seventeen per cent of them had first left home at 12 or 13 years and 66 per cent were 14 or 15 years when they first ran away. The remainder were split between younger and older respondents.

The current living situations of runaways are evenly varied. Thirty-seven per cent are currently staying in private refuges, 33 per cent are living in private rental accommodation or are homeless, and 28 per cent are living with their parents at home. Approximately 60 per cent of the entire sample had been homeless at some stage of their runaway careers with periods of homelessness ranging from a few nights to two months. Homelessness is defined here as having no lodgings to spend a night at for two or more consecutive nights.

The majority of respondents and their parents were Australian born. Eighteen per cent had fathers of British or European origin and 10 per cent had mothers of British or European origin. Nationality for subjects, father and mothers being Australian were 93 per cent, 74 per cent and 82 per cent respectively. Aborigines do not, on the surface, manifest themselves in samples of runaways. However, as will be seen later in this report, absconding by Aborigines from juvenile institutions is widespread.

4. CURRENT SITUATION OF RUNAWAYS

Not unexpectedly, most respondents were unemployed. Despite the inevitable bias of locating interviewees through CYSS offices, it is apparent that most young runaways have difficulty in securing and maintaining employment, for only 6 per cent of the total sample were employed and a further 11 per cent were still at school.

In only 35 per cent of the cases were the parents still married and living together. Many respondents also suggested that although their parents were still married there was much marital disharmony. Fifty-three per cent of the runaways' families had been divorced, separated or had remarried. The remarriages accounted for 17 per cent of the total sample.

Forty per cent of the sample had resided with both parents, 33 per cent had lived with one parent and 21 per cent had lived with one parent plus another adult (indicating remarriage or a de facto relationship). Of the total, 60 per cent had lived in their own home, 25 per cent had used accommodation in the private rental market and 15 per cent usually resided in housing commission or other government accommodation. A significant proportion (15 per cent), were defined as "highly mobile" with their parents or guardian moving five or more times during their childhood or adolescence.

Thus the overall picture that is presented of runaway youth is of an unemployed generation, living in disrupted

households, either because of divorce and remarriage, or from constant geographical moves, or both.

#### 5. FAMILY BACKGROUND OF RUNAWAYS

The family background of runaways added to the general picture of the sample. While 10 per cent of the fathers were classified as professionals, the vast majority (57 per cent) worked in semi-skilled or unskilled occupations. Their mothers were predominantly housewives, though 32 per cent had occasional or part-time work. Some indication of the relatively low socio-economic position of the parents of runaways can be seen from an income classification we attempted. Seventeen per cent were surviving on government benefits only, 34 per cent were classed as being on or about the poverty level while a further 34 per cent were said to have an average income. The few (15 per cent) who we classified as above average were usually the foster parents of runaways.

Runaways came from larger than average family sizes, with 50 per cent of respondents having four to six children in their families. Runaways were most often the middle child in this family composition (43 per cent), although 33 per cent were the eldest in the family.

#### 6. COMMUNICATION AND DISCIPLINE WITHIN THE FAMILY

The literature on runaways suggests that disciplinary measures within the family and the quality of communication plays a significant role in influencing the decision of a boy or

a girl to abscond from home.<sup>6</sup> Interestingly we found that almost equal numbers stated that family disciplinary measures were "very strict" (30 per cent) or "very easy" (28 per cent). Most (42 per cent) said that discipline was moderate but on further questioning it was found that discipline for this group was extremely inconsistent. In all three groups (i.e. laissez-faire, strict and moderate), we constantly found spontaneous statements made by our respondents about fathers' drunkenness, unequal treatment between males and females, perceived favouritism for older and younger family members, and considerable anger during the exercising of such discipline.

When asked how well they got on with other family members, 57 per cent indicated the communication was "bad" and stated that this communication often involved yelling or "nagging" as the most preferred way of interacting. Twenty-two per cent said that they just did not communicate on any level with their family while only 21 per cent said they "got on" with their parents and siblings - even here though, comments made by the respondents suggested that communication was far from open and spontaneous.

Thirty per cent of the sample communicated best with their siblings, while 22 per cent related easiest with their mothers. Less than five per cent mentioned their fathers in this context, but a large number (35 per cent) "got on best" with other extended family members, such as grandmothers or aunts, or exclusively with their friends. In most families (47 per cent), there were not activities that were seen as being shared between the runaways and other family members and even amongst



those who responded that they sometimes shared activities (42 per cent), these were usually of a non-intense kind such as going away on annual holidays or watching television. Only 17 per cent of the sample considered there were, no discernible major problems in the family, with the vast majority mentioning divorce or separation (31 per cent), fighting between parents (22 per cent), or financial problems (12 per cent) as major conflict producing agents in family interactions.

Even though we have no control data for a sample of families with children who do not runaway, some salient features emerge about the perceptions of family situations as seen by runaways. Discipline is generally seen as either very strict or very laissez-faire, almost always as being inconsistent and often as grossly unfair. Fathers, of both male and female children, are seen as being remote and disinterested in their children's problems and children rarely see the family as a unit which shares common interests and goals.

## 7. A TYPOLOGY OF RUNAWAYS

For a better understanding of the runaway phenomenon, an attempt was made to classify the sample into categories or types of runaway. Many other studies have attempted to do this, but in the opinion of this investigator, have failed because they overlook the individual actors' perceptions of the world around him or her.<sup>7</sup> This study took note of the runaway's own perception by content analysis of the verbalized reasons for leaving home and the "vocabulary of motives" inherent in these accounts.<sup>8</sup>

(1) The Adventure-Seekers

These are runaways who become bored with their home life and wish to find stimulation and excitement often in places which they defined as exotic. They may or may not be suffering from personal traumas at school, with friends, or within their family. Generally however, the major motive for leaving home is an inner desire to seek independence and self-identity. They are, in short, dissatisfied with their lifestyles and "run" in search of adventure.

Adventure-seekers tend to be males (62 per cent), who leave home between 13 and 15 years of age (69 per cent). They are drawn from all types of socio-economic groups but in comparison with other types are likely to have relatively large numbers of middle-class youth. Surprisingly, a large number (38 per cent), define their families' communication as good. They tend to run away only once (42 per cent), never to return (50 per cent), although they feel no resentment towards their families (81 per cent). It is clear from their case studies that while they sought adventure and a better lifestyle, they often did not find it and were forced into a delinquent or criminal sub-culture or into juvenile institutions. Forty-six per cent had been to juvenile courts.

(2) The Refugees

These are young people who consider that they can no longer endure what they perceive as major problems in their families. These problems press in on the adolescents at a time when they are also going through emotional and troubled times associated with the move from childhood. Often the refugee mentioned alcoholism and/or violence in the family as a major reason for

their departure. However, the more acute and immediate life changes in the family, such as divorce, death or remarriage equally precipitated the departure. Often, too the runaway episode began as a result of a number of traumatic events that occurred over a number of years, climaxing in a change in family composition.

Refugees generally are 14 or 15 years when they leave home (78 per cent), and often stay away for three years or longer (40 per cent). They generally use private refuges and agencies, primarily designed for youthful runaways, well into their adulthood. Family violence was mentioned more frequently in this group than any other (49 per cent), and communication within the family was most likely to be defined as bad (82 per cent). When they "reach the streets", they find jobs impossible to obtain (53 per cent) and, to survive, often engage in criminal acts (26 per cent). A massive 53 per cent of refugees had been taken to court and 21 per cent had been institutionalized. Over 80 per cent of refugees admitted to having taken drugs as an "escape" mechanism from the punishing life they found out on the streets.

### (3) The Escapees

Escapees abscond from institutional settings or foster homes rather than from their parental homes. As well, they can be differentiated from refugees because they deliberately seek a stimulating lifestyle (very much like adventure-seekers), and are unconcerned about the consequences of their runaway behaviour. As a group they are familiar with institutions from an early age, and so see incarceration as inevitable. They have had little or no contact with their natural parents and find it

difficult to relate to others in any emotionally mature way.

Escapees were usually male and aged between 16 and 18 years of age when interviewed. An alarming number (42 per cent) had first left home when they were six to nine years old. They often lived with foster parents (50 per cent), and a significant proportion had widowed parents (18 per cent). Escapees had a history of high family mobility (33 per cent). At least half went interstate when they first ran away and stayed away for over a year (67 per cent). The escapees had long histories of running away as 58 per cent had absconded six or more times. They made extensive use of refuges (67 per cent) and were often resentful of their families or foster parents.

Most of them had been involved in crime (67 per cent). A very large percentage (58) had been charged with relatively serious criminal offences during the time they were last away from home or an institution, and 83 per cent had been through the juvenile court system.

#### (4) The Problem-Solvers

These young people chose to run away from home as a solution to an immediate personal crisis. The act of running away tends to be spontaneous following an argument with parents, a clash with a teacher or fellow pupil at school, or a slight altercation with the law. Unlike refugees there is generally not the long history of family turmoil precipitating the running away event, but rather one incident which is defined by them as major and traumatic. Generally they come from comfortable backgrounds where family interactions are reasonable but genuine and honest patterns of communication

between parents and children are not operating. For a variety of historical reasons, problem-solvers feel they cannot bring themselves to tell their parents about their personal problems. Typical problems which exemplify this pattern include pregnancy, a relationship break-up, or an apprehension for shoplifting.

Most problem-solvers are female (58 per cent) who were around 15 years of age when they first left home (45 per cent). In most instances they came from stable backgrounds where the parents were still married. Although family incomes on the average were adequate, a sizeable minority felt that the family suffered financial difficulty (32 per cent) and this was seen as one reason why the young people did not want to bother their parents with their own difficulties. Unlike the other runaways, problem-solvers did reasonably well at school (over 70 per cent completed junior high school). Their personal problems precipitating the runaway episode involved school (16 per cent), their friends (13 per cent), a pregnancy or what they defined as a major physical or health problem (13 per cent), or unemployment (39 per cent). The problem-solvers usually only ran away once (48 per cent), and stayed for short periods of time, remaining locally or within their state.

Few resorted to crime (19 per cent) or had been institutionalized (13 per cent). Most problem-solvers had returned to their parental homes (68 per cent) where parental responses to their return had usually been positive (63 per cent). A large number (37 per cent) reported that significant and positive changes had been made to family patterns of interaction and communication as a result of the running away

episode.

Though this group had a low involvement in crime (19 per cent), they were more prone than any of the other typologies to police intervention on statutory charges. Many had been through the court (42 per cent) or had been returned home by the police or authorities (36 per cent).

#### 8. CONTACT WITH CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

It should be quite clear from the analysis of runaway typologies that there is a massive involvement of children and young people in our sample who come into contact with the juvenile justice system. Indeed, the most surprising finding of our study was the magnitude of this involvement.

Most of our respondents had left home two or three times (42 per cent) and had stayed away for over one year (50 per cent), for the last time they had left. Most (57 per cent) travelled interstate when they last left home. During their periods away from home only a third had never had contact with the police. However, 34 per cent had been charged with serious offences or with committing multiple crimes. This figure is quite significant given the fact that it relates only to offences committed while the runaways were away from home, and is therefore not connected with previous offences they may have committed while at home. In addition, a further 14 per cent were involved in minor offences (shop-lifting, petty theft), and 11 per cent were charged with statutory offences associated with their running away behaviour.

In all, 52 per cent of our respondents had experienced juvenile court proceedings, and 28 per cent of our total sample had been institutionalized at one time or another. These figures are probably underestimations of the amount of crime actually committed. Sixty-three percent admitted to having used drugs and at least 20 per cent of the entire sample could be classified as regular hard drug users. Many of those who faced court proceedings were there on drug-related charges, but clearly, many who were taking drugs regularly were not picked up by the authorities.

The implications of these figures for the juvenile justice system are quite profound. Firstly, a substantial number (11 per cent) enter the juvenile justice system as a result of simply running away. These are mainly adventure seekers and problem solvers, many of whom would have spontaneously returned home. They are charged with a variety of statutory offences ("needing care and control", "absent without parental consent" etc.), and enter institutions. A much larger number (we estimate between 30 and 50 per cent of our entire sample) commit crimes in order to help cope or "survive" with the conditions they find out on the streets. Most, at one or more stages of their running away episodes are arrested by the police and processed by the courts. Many of these end up in institutions from which they abscond, and the cycle is repeated. The consequences of being caught up in the juvenile justice system are well documented - institutionalization, stigmatization, criminal sub-culture, etc. - and seriously affect the young person's life-chances.<sup>9</sup>

In addition we have many cases of runaways engaging in damaging activities that were substantially dangerous to themselves or others. Heroin addiction was not uncommon among our sample members, as are examples of children and young people who use various combinations of tranquilizers, barbiturates and narcotics ("gutter drugs" in their terms).

While it is difficult to give precise figures our data would suggest that these drugs were used regularly by up to 20 per cent of our entire sample. While it was impossible to collect precise information our interviewer gained the impression that, if medically examined, a substantial proportion of our sample would be classified as in ill health. Certainly the physical appearance of many of our respondents suggested that a toll was extracted by just surviving on the streets. In addition a substantial number of our runaways recounted incidents of hospitalizations for serious road accidents, illnesses and infectious diseases. More research in this area is badly needed.

Many of our sample admitted to engaging in prostitution - approximately 25 per cent of both sexes had one or more contacts of this sort. Some had made prostitution a full-time career and were firmly entrenched in this style of life.<sup>10</sup> Others had attempted to commit suicide and knew of fellow street-dwellers who had successfully taken their own lives. In short, while running away behaviour may be a common phenomenon among young Australians, the consequences of such behaviour are often disastrous, both for the community and for the individual young person.



9. ABORIGINES AND ETHNIC MINORITIES

Although we did not attempt to obtain a sample of Aboriginal runaways, it was evident that they do not manifest themselves on the streets in the same way that European young people do. While there are undoubtedly runaways of Aboriginal descent, they were not evident to our interviewers and clearly used different networks than white Australians. Besides, extended family relations in Aboriginal communities - even those in urban areas - make it unlikely that children and young people would "escape" from punishing circumstances in the same way that our sample has. There are always relatives, even distant ones, who are prepared to "look after their own" and provide a refuge for wandering young people. In addition many Aborigines would not consider using white institutions such as welfare agencies and refuges. This has certainly been the experience in other welfare areas (alcoholism, youth services, etc.), and points to the need to provide specific Aboriginal refuges administered by Aborigines themselves.

We suspect that the same situation applies to those with European or Asian ethnic backgrounds. Only 7 per cent of our sample were migrants, although these new Australians constitute approximately 15 per cent of Australia's population. In some of these cases there was evidence of cultural conflict in the runaway behaviour. Typically, the pattern was for the young person to take exception to the strong and rigid codes of behaviour demanded by the parents and to leave home as a result of these rules. There may well be many more new Australians who run away for this and other reasons, but if they do, their survival strategies out on the streets and their network relations are very different from young people from

an Anglo-Saxon background.

Finally, we return again to Aborigines. Considerable evidence was collected of many cases of young Aborigines who absconded from juvenile institutions in Queensland, Western Australia and New South Wales. Indeed running away behaviour by youthful Aborigines was endemic at certain institutions reflecting, if nothing else, the failure of such institutions to provide a satisfactory environment for their charges. The fact that we did not pick these absconders up in our sample demonstrates again, the likelihood that they use different mechanisms and networks to survive out on the streets. Clearly, both with Aboriginal and ethnic runaways, much more research is needed.

#### 10. REACTION OF PARENTS

Runaways said that their parents had no reaction or just "didn't care" about their welfare or whereabouts in 38 per cent of cases. However, in another 38 per cent of all cases interviewees stated that their parents were sympathetic to their plight and constructively attempted to get them back home. In the remaining cases (24 per cent) the runaways perceived their parents as having mixed reactions to their behaviour - often, they said, the parents cared but for the wrong reasons. When the responses of parents are analyzed, it will be possible to compare both sets of perceptions.

Fifty-two per cent of all respondents had not returned home since last leaving. Twenty-six per cent were taken home by the police or welfare authorities while a further 21 per cent had voluntarily gone home for a variety of reasons. These

reasons included running out of funds, being frightened of the authorities, or because of family illness or family pressure.

And, what do the runaways think of their parents after the event? We found no difference between those who had returned home and those that hadn't. In both groups, 67 per cent said that their family had not changed since they ran away and that "the same problems remained". Despite the pessimistic nature of these responses, it is interesting to note that 47 per cent of the entire sample felt somehow reconciled with their families. They were not resentful and did not feel any hatred towards them. Again, no differences merged between those who returned home and those that did not. However, a significant proportion of our sample (27 per cent) had absolutely no contact with their families and expressed their wish that this situation continue. The remainder (26 per cent) felt deep resentment towards their families. Clearly, the act of running away can either reconcile the young person with his/her family or drive them further away.

#### 11. PERCEPTIONS AND USE OF AGENCIES

Fifty-seven per cent of all runaways used private refuges "often" for food and shelter. Their definition of "often" ranged from staying in a shelter once a week through to residing in a refuge on a full-time basis. Twenty-seven per cent had never used refuges at all, and these appeared to be runaways who were away for short periods or who were supported by friends. The remaining number (16 per cent) used refuges "occasionally" which meant that they would stay overnight at infrequent intervals or would obtain a meal from them when other sources had failed.

Of those who used refuges often, half had positive comments to make about them. The remainder offered criticisms that centre on the organization and control of such refuges. Most criticisms concerned the rigid rules and discipline procedures operating and the lack of input by young people themselves in the day to day running of the homes. Runaways in our sample often mentioned negative aspects of agencies or refuges by using phrases such as : "no room to breathe": "old fashioned": "treat you like kids" and "like being in the army". Our own observations of refuges would confirm that there was much truth in the perceptions of runaways in regard to these matters. Fourteen per cent of the sample said that there were not enough refuges around and a further thirty per cent considered that many agencies did not cater sufficiently for runaways. In other words, they thought that the agencies dealt with multiple welfare problems and were not specifically geared up to provide adequate services for young people who had left home.

## 12. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN URBAN CENTRES

Representatives of all four runaway types came from the three interview locations (Perth, Brisbane and the Gold Coast), but by far the largest group of escapees were found in Brisbane.. The Perth sample tended to contain older respondents (over 16) at the time of the interview, while runaways in Brisbane left home at a much younger age (generally under 14).

Violence was less common among families in our Gold Coast sample, and communication was defined as "good" in a third of the interviewees from that area - a higher proportion than in the two other centres. Part of the reason for this was the fact that one-parent families were more common on the

Gold Coast than elsewhere, thus reducing the propensity for violence.

The runaways in Brisbane and Perth tended to remain away for long periods of time (62 per cent over one year in both centres) and to travel alone (80 per cent). Perth respondents appeared to have had more contact and use of drugs than for other locations. All Perth runaways had used drugs and 17 per cent had been charged with drug-related offences.

The use of private refuges was significantly different between the three centres. Perth runaways had made the greatest use of such agencies while 44 per cent of those on the Gold Coast had never been to a refuge. This situation arises because of the relative absence of such facilities in Queensland.

Regional differences are important in overall policy making in regard to runaways. Such differences point to the very different populations existing in different areas, the varying motives of young people in running away in or to each centre, and the survival strategies adopted in different geographical areas. Clearly policies and practices adopted by agencies and refuges should be geared to the particular group of runaways existing in their areas.

## 12. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

1. Although exact figures are lacking, there is evidence of the growing problem of runaways existing in major urban areas in Australia. Likely causes of this problem include: increasing marital break-down; economic problems confronting both one- and two-parent families creating financial pressures; youthful unemployment; perceived attractiveness of inner-city life; and

relatively easy access for interstate and inter-city travel afforded to young people. While certain States and cities emphasise their attractive features - development boom; night life; opportunity for excitement and so on - it should be recognised that such promotions often "pull" young people towards them with their media promises and images.

In short, runaways, as a class are only a tip of much larger problems existing in the community generally. These problems centre around the struggle by adolescent youth to find meaning and purpose in their lives at a time of quite considerable social, economic and technological change. While more and improved services are badly wanted attention has to be paid to the social conditions responsible for the alienation that so many young people feel towards their parents and society generally.

2. Any policies or programmes designed to reduce or cater for runaways must take as their starting point the varied composition of the runaway populations. All the data collected in this study suggests that while certain problems do exist among runaways, a wide variety of specific groups of young people, with specific problems make up those who are legally or socially defined as runaways. In particular we have identified four distinct and relatively homogenous groups of runaways. The first, the Adventure-Seekers are "pulled" towards areas they define as "exciting" as part of their search for independence and self-identity. The second group, the Refugees, perceive major problems in their family situations. Their running away behaviour can be categorized as a coping mechanism brought about by a punishing environment. The Escapees also cope with

what they perceive as a punishing institutional setting by absconding from a detention centre, juvenile home, or foster home. Finally, Problem-Solvers choose to run away from home as a result of a major problem centering around their family, school or personal relationships.

Each of these groups has distinct motives for running away and has definite patterns for adapting to street life. Agencies and personnel working with such young people must therefore have specific solutions and specific programs for each category of runaways.

3. Based on data from this study, many existing agencies and/or programs are perceived by the runaway as irrelevant to his or her needs and are not as effective as they should be. Some programs do not distinguish between the various runaway types; others do not provide sufficient services for the runaway population such as shelter, organized activities, and individual counselling; still others structure their programs in a rigid and hierarchical way which is seen by the young person as "adult-oriented" programs. The fact that so many young people in our sample slept out in parks or on beaches at night rather than use the formal social welfare refuges would indicate a level of antagonism towards them.

4. Most urban areas do not have enough runaway refuges. The number of young people who sleep on the street or in parks points strongly to this conclusion. What are badly needed are more shelters, more crisis intervention programs to take care of major drug, crime or emotional problems, and a consideration of setting up hostel services for youngsters who travel. In

other countries, hostels and wayside services exist to reduce the hazards of travel and survival away from home.<sup>11</sup> The existing youth hostel programs in this country are sparse; not centered in urban areas; require formal membership and are highly regulated. They also cater for a different population than the shelters we propose.

5. A significant proportion of our sample (11 per cent) mainly consisting of adventure-seekers and problem-solvers, were caught up in the juvenile justice system as a result of being charged with the runaway offences (absent without parental consent, needing care and control). Many others, though not charged with these offences, would come to police attention as a result of their runaway episode. These young people come from groups of runaways that in all probability would have returned home without official intervention. But by charging them with statutory offences, institutionalization, labelling and often the beginnings of a delinquent career occurs.

The argument for decriminalizing runaway behaviour is compelling. If this could be achieved there also seems to be additional benefits. Greater contact with, and use of existing refuges and agencies would follow. At the moment their deviant status constitutes a serious problem for individual runaways. They are afraid of the police, often worried about seeking formal agency help and afraid of others.

6. While runaway behaviour may be widespread amongst Australian youth, the consequences of such behaviour should not be minimized. We have already documented the extensive involvement of most of our sample in crime. Fifty two per cent of our respondents



had experienced juvenile court proceedings and 28 per cent of our total sample had been institutionalized. Many of the offences for which official action had been taken were what we have called "survival" offences - actions and activities engaged in so that the youth could survive. Thus much petty crime such as break and enter offences (from supermarkets, shops, houses, etc.) were simply to obtain food or money to buy food.

Other "survival" mechanisms used by runaways to cope with the punishing environment of street life were more sinister and even more serious. We were amazed at the proportion of our sample (63 per cent) who admitted to having used drugs and worried by the large numbers within this group who were using hard drugs regularly (estimates are difficult, but we suspect that up to twenty per cent used hard drugs on a regular basis). In addition this group, together with a much larger percentage (possibly another 20 per cent of the entire sample) drank alcohol frequently, often to the stage of severe intoxication.

A large number of our respondents (25 per cent) had engaged in prostitution. We were unable to ascertain just how many of these were career prostitutes. Similarly, evidence from our interviews revealed signs of severe depression amongst some runaways. Cases where friends and acquaintances of runaways had committed, or had attempted to commit, suicide were brought to our attention. We simply did not have the resources to follow these cases in detail.

Much more research needs to be done on the involvement of runaways in serious crime, prostitution, drug and alcohol addiction and in suicide. Particular attention should

be paid to the recruitment patterns of runaways into crime or prostitution, the degree of involvement in the drug culture and the documentation of cases where the young person attempts or completes a self-destructive act. Only in this way can we provide a true record of the consequences of runaway behaviour and a set of preventative policy proposals for workers in the area. The current investigators will be approaching the Criminology Council for assistance in this matter at a later date.

NOTES

1. In applying this definition we have carefully taken note of the literature on the methodological problems of defining runaways. See for example D. Miller et al., Runaways - Illegal Aliens in Their Own Land, Praeger, New York, 1980, pp. 17-19. The adapted definition allows us to include many young people who are on the streets, seemingly with their parents consent yet who would be considered runaways by law enforcement officials.
2. R. Shellow et al., Suburban Runaways of the 1960's. Monograph of the Society for Research in Child Development, 1967, 32, pp.1-51.
3. Dr. John Seymour, who supervised the project for the Institute of Criminology, conveyed to us the wishes of the Criminology Council to include a parents' sample.
4. Most interviews were conducted by the research assistant for the project, Ms. Robyn Lincoln, who also pilot-tested the interview schedule. Some interviews were also conducted by the chief investigator (Dr. Paul Wilson). Each interview took longer than originally anticipated (two to three hours) which did not include travelling time. In addition to the completion of the semi-structured interviews, informal conversations with individual runaways and discussions with groups of runaways also took place during interviewing. Categories and responses reported in this report were formed on the basis of information obtained from all these methods.
5. The parents' interview sample is currently being analyzed. We could not use the parents of those runaways interviewed

as this would have broken faith with our runaway interviewees. As well, of course, many parents of our sample were not available for interview.

6. See for example, T. Jackson, The differential Impact of Family Disorganization. In D. Glaser (Ed.), Handbook of Criminology, Chiacgo, Rand McNally, 1974.
7. See for example the clinical model of Levy (1972) or the more eclectic typology of Brennan (1974). E.Z. Levy, 'Some thoughts about patients who run away from residential treatment and the staff they leave behind.' Psychiatric Quarterly, 1972, 46, pp. 1-21. T. Brennan et al., The incidence and nature of runaway behaviour - Final Report. Behavioural Research and Evaluation Corporation, 1975.
8. Chi-square analysis was used to test differences between runaway types. Only those variables which differentiate significantly between groups are used in this report.
9. The best summary on this literature can be found in E. Schur, Radical Non-Intervention, Englewood Cliff, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1973. See also D.E. Suddick, Runaways: A review of the literature. Juvenile Justice, 1973, August, pp. 46-54.
10. There was much evidence of what we have termed "covert prostitution" - the situation where these young girls and even young boys give sexual favours in order to secure accommodation and food.

11. Under innovative programs sponsored by the Canadian government, it became possible for restless youth to be given stipends to spend time travelling across Canada, stopping to work or to learn at selected hostels.