

Research Digest: Youth Risk Factors

Tyler, K. A., Whitbeck, L. B., Hoyt, D., & Cauce, A. M. (2004). Risk factors for sexual victimization among male and female homeless and runaway youth. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 19*, 503-520.

Risk factors associated with the sexual victimization of runaway and homeless youth include: deviant subsistence strategies (e.g., robbing, conning), affiliating with deviant peers, and using alcohol or drugs (Tyler, Hoyt, Whitbeck, & Cauce, 2001). Tyler, Whitbeck, Hoyt, and Cauce (2004) hypothesized that (a) homeless youth engaging in deviant subsistence strategies, associating with deviant peers, having high rates of drug use, and engaging in survival sex are more likely to be sexually victimized by both friends/acquaintances and strangers; (b) youth with well-kept physical appearances are more likely to be at risk for sexual victimization by a friend/acquaintance or stranger; and (c) gay, lesbian, and bisexual (GLB) youth are more likely to be sexually victimized by both friends/acquaintances and strangers than non-GLB youth.

Risk factors were examined among 372 homeless and runaway youth. Participants were between the ages of 13 and 21, and over half of the participants (54.6%) were male, 22% identified as GLB, and 48% self-identified as white. Results indicated that for females, running from home for the first time at an earlier age was associated with sexual victimization by both a stranger and friend/acquaintance. However, engaging in deviant subsistence strategies, survival sex, and grooming predicted being sexually victimized by a friend/acquaintance. For males, survival sex and grooming predicted stranger sexual victimization, whereas sexual orientation was associated with sexual victimization by a friend/acquaintance. Overall, 35% of the sample had been sexually victimized. Many homeless youth have limited resources and will continue to be exposed to dangerous environments that will increase their risk of being sexually victimized unless efforts are made to get them off the streets.

This Research Digest is a product of the Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools. The research presented is a sample of state-of-the-art research conducted in the area of youth risk by faculty at UNL. For more information on the Center, please contact Holly Sexton at hsexton1@unl.edu