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Runaway and Throwaway Children

Causes and Risk


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The Goals

- Address issues that lead to runaway incidents
- Prevent abuse/exploitation
 - Prior to and during the runaway episode
- Redirect these children from future delinquent conduct
 - Alternatives to running away
- Get these children back into their tribal community
- Prosecute those who exploit high risk victims


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What is a Runaway?

- A runaway incident occurs when a child leaves home without permission and stays away overnight
- Or a child 14 years old or younger (or older and mentally incompetent) who is away from home chooses not to return when supposed to and stays away overnight
- Or a child 15 years old or older who is away from home chooses not to return and stays away two nights


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What is a Throwaway?

- A throwaway incident occurs when a child is asked or told to leave home by a parent or other household adult
- No adequate alternative care is arranged for the child by a household adult
- A child who is away from home is prevented from returning home by a parent or other household adult, and no adequate alternative care is arranged for the child by a household adult


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Throwaways

- Around 47% of street runaways and shelter runaways reported being told to leave or stay away from home by a parent or caregiver
- 41% of runaways living on the streets reported parents or caregivers who knew they were running away, but did nothing to stop them

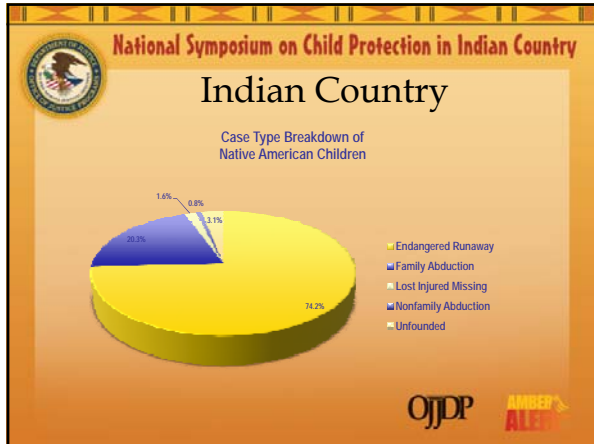
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A Victimless Event

- Runaways are sometimes referred to as *voluntary missing*, to distinguish them from abducted and lost children
- This term misstates the nature and complexity of the problem
- Children run away as a result of intense family conflict, physical, sexual or emotional abuse
- They may leave to protect themselves or because they are no longer wanted in the home
- The term *voluntary* does not properly apply to such situations

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The Native American Dilemma



- Considerable evidence shows that running away is a common problem among tribal communities
- Runaways from tribal communities are at risk of a host of short and long-term negative outcomes regarding their physical and emotional well-being
- Native American children typically leave their homes and support systems for urban areas
- They are less likely to have positive resources to run to


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Under Reporting



- The fact is there is no comprehensive data of the rate of victimization of Native American children, or the rate at which they runaway or are thrown away
- No federal or Native American agency/organization systematically collects this information
- Data on crime in Indian Country suffers from under reporting to tribal authorities and thus under reporting to federal authorities


 

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Why Do They Run?



- Lack of communication in the home
- What the child believes are overly restrictive rules
- Sexual abuse by a household member
 - Not being believed when making an outcry
- Physical abuse by a household member
- Step-parent conflict
- Drug and alcohol use by parents
- Poverty - Hopelessness
- Substance abuse and or criminal activity by the teen and his or her peers

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Family Violence and Runaways

- Family-related variables consistently have been shown to be factors in the absence or presence of criminality among adolescents, to include running away from home
- American Indian and Alaska Native women suffer from the highest rates of domestic violence, according to a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report


 

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CDC Report on Family Violence



- In the largest-ever survey of its kind, 39 percent of Native women said they were victims of intimate-partner violence
- This was by far the highest rate among women of all racial and ethnic groups
- The survey also showed that nearly 19 percent of Native men were victims of intimate-partner violence
- This was the second-highest rate, behind African-American men


 

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Substance Abuse in the Home



- Individuals from substance-abusing family environments have been found to suffer from low self-esteem, depression, anger and a variety of acting-out behaviors
- An investigation of the differences between incarcerated juveniles from substance-abusing families and those from non-substance-abusing families indicates significant differences in family violence, abuse, runaway behavior and self-reported substance abuse


 

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Children in Placement



- A greater percentage of Native Americans run from placement than all other ethnic groups(1)
- Native Americans are twice as likely to run away from placement shelters or foster homes
- Native American boys are five times more likely to run away from placement than whites
- Native American children are more likely to be placed with households or shelters outside their race


 

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Reduction of Runaways from Placement



- Compared with other placement types, placement in kinship care was associated with a significant reduction in the likelihood of running away from care
- Placement with Native American families of the same tribe also reduced the likelihood, although not to the extent of kinship care


 

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The Threat to Runaways and Throwaways



- Runaways/throwaways often find themselves in the company of violent, sexually exploiting or drug-abusing travel companions or suffer an actual or attempted assault while away from home
- Internet and Social Network “luring” is increasingly a causative factor in runaway episodes


 

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The Risks of Running Away



- The risks young people encountered included involvement in
 - Criminal activity
 - Substance abuse
 - Sleeping on the streets
 - Sexual exploitation, including prostitution
 - Physical assault and other forms of victimization


 

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Risks (cont.)



- Although many runaways go to friends or relatives, nearly one-third of this group slept on the streets at some point during the runaway episode
- Two-thirds of those who were considered runaways engaged in criminal activity while they were away


 

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Risks (cont.)



- Suicide
 - As many as 50% of runaways reported attempting or contemplating suicide


 

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Complex Issues

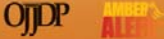
- Certain crimes against the runaway are believed to be seriously underreported because of:
 - Embarrassment
 - Shame
 - Fear of prosecution
- The NISMART study found that
 - More than 4% of runaways were physically assaulted while away
 - Were sexually assaulted or someone attempted to sexually assault them
 - Engaged in sexual activity in exchange for money, drugs, food or shelter during the episode


 

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Victimization

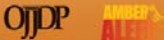
- Of the total runaway/throwaway youth, an estimated 71 percent are thought to have been endangered during their runaway/throwaway episode
- Factors include: substance dependency, use of hard drugs, sexual or physical abuse, presence in a place where criminal activity was occurring or because of their extremely young age (13 years old or younger)




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Victimization

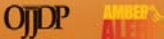
- 21% had been physically or sexually abused at home in the year prior to the episode or was afraid of abuse upon return
- 19% were substance dependent
- 18% were 13 years old or younger
- 18% were in the company of someone known to be abusing drugs
- 17% were using hard drugs themselves
- 12% spent time in a place where criminal activity was known to occur
- 11% engaged in criminal activity during the course of the episode
- 7% were with a violent person




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New York Times Report



- Using court records to compile a database of over one hundred convicted pimps, the New York Times conducted interviews with more than two dozen convicted and still incarcerated pimps
- They described the complicated roles they played as father figure, landlord, boss and boyfriend to the girls who worked for them
- They said they went after girls with low self-esteem, prior sexual experience and a lack of options




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In their own words...



- *"With the young girls, you promise them heaven, they'll follow you to hell"*
- *"It all depends on her being so love-drunk off of me that she will do anything for me"*
- When recruiting, some pimps said they prowled homeless shelters, bus stations and shopping malls or posted in newspaper advertisements as photographers and talent scouts
- Others said they worked Internet chat rooms and phone-sex lines


 

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In their own words...(cont.)



- *"I'll look for a younger female with a backpack,"* said Mr. Thurman, describing how he used to drive near schools after hours
- *"I'm thinking she's leaving home, she's leaving for a reason, she had a fight with her parents or she just wants to leave home"*


 

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Runaways and Exploitation



- *"Runaways are especially attractive recruits because most are already engaging in survival sex for a place to stay,"* said Evelyn Diaz, who is serving a nine-year sentence in a federal prison in Connecticut for three counts of sex trafficking of minors
- *"Some become very loyal to you since you take them under your wing,"* she wrote


 

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Profit Factor



- While most pimps say they prefer adult women because teenage runaways involve more legal risks, they add that juveniles fetch higher prices from clients and are far easier to manipulate
- New York Times Report, October 26, 2009

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Solutions

Community Approaches to Addressing the Problem

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Unique Challenges

- A history of cultural intervention
- Jurisdictional complexities
 - No centralized source of reporting
- Lack of understanding of Indian Child Welfare Law outside tribal lands
 - Often seen as a delinquency matter
- Long term implications of victimization within the community is magnified
- Lack of resources and specialization
- Limits to infrastructure


 

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Response Teams



- Some tribes have implemented Multi Disciplinary Teams (MDT) or Child Protection Teams (CPD)
- These teams are made up of Law Enforcement, Social Services, Schools, Indian Health, Judicial, elders, etc.
- They are responsible for
 - Prevention
 - Intervention
 - Investigation
 - Recovery
 - Aftercare


 

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Process



- Development of the *High Risk Victim Model*
 - Defining High Risk Victims
 - Improving identification efforts
 - Community involvement
- Creation and implementation of an Investigative and Intervention Protocol
- Identification of "stakeholders"
- Information sharing among agencies
 - Tribal, Federal, State and Local

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Intervention Strategies

- Target "At Risk" and "High Risk" children, i.e.
 - Children with multiple runaways
 - Children who have been detained for engaging in prostitution or other crimes
 - Children who are in runaway status and information is developed that they may be involved in prostitution or other criminal activity
 - Children with repeated reports of sexual abuse and exploitation


 

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Limits to the Strategy



- Educating local officials
- Ability to communicate across jurisdictional boundaries
- Reporting, tracking and analyzing data
- Effective follow-up
 - Law Enforcement
 - Family Services
 - Juvenile Justice
 - Courts
 - Health Care
 - Cultural


 

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The Dallas PD Model



- The program flags any juvenile in the city who runs away from home four or more times in a given year
- If one of those children is picked up by the police anywhere in the country, the child is directed back to the High Risk Victims Unit, which immediately begins investigating the juvenile's background
- The unit attempts to determine the root causes of the runaway episode

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The DPD Model

- Timing is critical
- If the girls are arrested for prostitution, they are at their least cooperative
- The unit instead targets minor offenses as truancy or picks them up as high-risk victims, speaking to them when their guard is down
- Only later, as trust builds, do officers and social workers move into discussions of prostitution

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The DPD Model

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Results

- Repeat runaways are not put in juvenile detention but in a special city shelter for up to a month, receiving counseling
- Three quarters of the girls who get treatment do not return to prostitution
- Over a five year period, the Dallas District Attorney's Office indicted and convicted or won guilty pleas from over 90 percent of the pimps arrested

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Results (Cont.)

- In virtually all of those cases, the children involved in the prostitution testified against their pimps
- Over half of those convictions started as cases involving girls who were picked up by the police not for prostitution but simply as repeat runaways
- This approach reduces both victimization and repeat runaways

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Arizona Pilot Project

- Participating Tribal Communities
 - Ask Chin Indian Community
 - Ft. McDowell Yavapai Nation
 - Gila River Indian Community
 - Pascua Yaqui Tribe
 - Salt River Indian Community
 - San Carlos Apache Nation
 - Tohono O’Odham Nation
 - Yavapai Apache

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Arizona Pilot Project (cont.)

- State, Federal and Local Partners
 - U.S. Attorney’s Office Phoenix
 - Immigration Customs Enforcement
 - U.S. Customs and Border Protection
 - Federal Bureau of Investigations
 - Arizona Department of Public Safety
 - Pinal County District Attorney’s Office
 - Pinal County Sheriff’s Department
 - Maricopa County Sheriff’s Department
 - Phoenix Police Department
 - Maricopa Police Department

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The Process

- Define and agree on who is a “High Risk” Child
- Develop information sharing capability
- Establish process for notifications
- Develop response protocol
- Interview process
- Investigation
- Prosecution
- Case Review
- Aftercare


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Who Qualifies as High Risk?



- Develop Definition of "High Risk"
 - Repeat runaway
 - Repeat throwaway
 - Involved in criminal activity
 - Victim of exploitation
 - Victim of abuse or neglect at home


 

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Information Sharing


- Process to flag repeat runaways and throwaways
- Alerts law enforcement in the event the juvenile is contacted outside the tribal community
- Provides notification to social services, shelters, etc.
- Shares information among participants on know predators, facilitators and threats within the community


 

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Notifications



- Process by which tribal authorities are notified when a flagged juvenile is contacted outside their community
- When juvenile tribal member is contacted as the victim of abuse or exploitation in or outside the tribal community
- When juvenile tribal member is contacted while engaged in specified delinquent behavior
 - Prostitution, gangs, pan handling, etc.


 

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Response



- Common protocols for response are developed among participating agencies
- Tribal agencies will follow-up on notifications by local, state or federal agencies
- Follow up is to assist or compliment responsible, but does not supersede


 

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Interviews



- All "High Risk" juveniles are provided with a comprehensive recovery interview
- Interviews are conducted by specially trained personnel familiar with the characteristics of high risk victims
- Investigative leads, prevention tactics and information important to the community are shared, while protecting the rights of the juvenile


 

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Investigation

- As the case dictates, participating agencies will work to identify and eliminate criminal activity that is a contributing factor to, or result of the runaway - throwaway episode
 - Physical or sexual abuse
 - Failure to provide care
 - Exploitation
 - Trafficking
 - Gang activity


 

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Prosecution

- As appropriate, completed investigations will be forwarded to the responsible tribal, federal or local prosecutor for consideration

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Case Review

- Multi-disciplinary teams from each community will review High Risk cases to insure a coordinated response and follow through
- Review panels are generally made up of
 - Social Services
 - Law Enforcement
 - Health Services
 - Education
 - Courts
 - Community programs
 - Others as needed


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After Care


- Program participants are tracked following entry to the program
- After-care involves legal and court ordered processes as well as prevention programs and alternatives
- Community centered and culturally based practices are encouraged


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Cultural Practices



- One of the strengths of American Indian culture is a strong belief in family relationships and the extended family
- Successful Programs
 - Kinship Placement
 - Cultural Immersion
 - Mentoring
 - Community service

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The Pay Off

- A comprehensive approach that addresses the underlying causes, locates and returns at risk children and aggressively prosecutes those that prey on them pays dividends
- The time, resources and effort spent on prevention and recovery practices will pay for itself if children are
 - Deterred from running or being discarded
 - Kept within their community
 - Protected from victimization

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References

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7. Measuring Intimate Partner Violence Victimization and Perpetration: A Compendium of Assessment Tools (CDC 2006)