

Chapter 2

Running Away from Substitute Care

This chapter evaluates the possible reasons why young people are placed in substitute care such as foster care, the prevalence of eloping from substitute care, and the duration of eloping from these out-of-home settings. In this chapter, the institutional conditions of substitute care and the demographic, social, psychological, and behavioral conditions that may increase at the probability that young people will elope from substitute care settings. This chapter discusses organizational issues such as the differences in social service agencies' classification of elopement and the resources available to agencies in locating and returning youth who have gone absent without leave. This chapter discusses the role of emergency runaway shelters for youth who have eloped from substitute care. The conditions that increase the risk that youth will elope from substitute care are also presented. Such factors as placement instability or disruption, substitute care neglect and abuse, demographic characteristics of the youth in substitute care, peer influence, and family issues are discussed. This chapter also analyzes the impact of frequent elopement from out-of-home placement settings on the youth's future social, educational, and employment status. This chapter also discusses interventions to improve substitute care.

Substitute care, also known as out-of-home care, involves the placement of youth in different living arrangements (Sigrid 2004; Crosland and Dunlap 2014). Youth in substitute care may be placed in foster care, family or relative foster care, group homes, residential settings, and emergency shelters (Crosland and Dunlap 2014; Slesnick et al. 2009; Nebbitt et al. 2007). Children and adolescents are placed in substitute care for a variety of reasons. Their parents may be unable to care for them because of parental death, poverty, incarceration, or other circumstances (Crosland and Dunlap 2014). In addition, youth are placed in substitute care because they are victims of abuse, neglect, or lack of supervision. A court order will remove a child from her or his home and the child then becomes a ward of the state. Child welfare or social service then places the child in substitute care based on the best needs of the child.

Children and adolescents run away from both home and substitute care settings such as group homes and foster care (Johnson 2010). Running away from substitute care is referred to as elopement or going absent without leave (AWOL). According to

the Administration for Children's Services (1992), running away is an event in which a child who is under the care of a state-licensed social service agency voluntarily or involuntarily goes missing without the permission of the designated caregiver.

Disagreement exists among child welfare organizational officials about when a child in substitute care is classified as a runaway (Crosland and Dunlap 2014). Agencies and group facilities vary in their reporting of runaways. Some organizations report a child as a runaway once she or he disappears from placement without consent. In contrast, other organizations only report a child as a runaway if she or he has gone missing without permission for a minimum time period, e.g., a 24 h time period.

Once a child goes missing from placement without permission, the staff of child welfare organizations and the police attempt to find and bring back the child who has eloped (Crosland and Dunlap 2014). Child welfare organizations must use more resources and effort to successfully locate and return the runaway. The agencies must meet substantial reporting requirements within specified time periods such as within 24 h. The police use resources to try to find the runaway and must comply with paperwork related to their activities.

Schools face a loss of money when a child goes missing from substitute care and does not go to school (Crosland and Dunlap 2014). Schools can lose funding due to reduced school attendance.

Prevalence of Running Away from Substitute Care

Data on the prevalence of running away from substitute care are usually derived from investigators collecting surveys of homeless young people. In addition, researchers determine the prevalence of running away from substitute care by analyzing the discharge data from emergency homeless shelters and other organizations (Crosland and Dunlap 2014).

Many foster youth run away from their placements. The US Department of Health and Human Services found that in the USA approximately 8000 of 424,000 young people in foster care ran away from placements in 2009. According to various researchers (Sedlak et al. 2002; Biehal and Wade 2000; Crosland and Dunlap 2014), youth in substitute care constitute a large part of the runaway youth population. Sedlak et al. (2002) showed that youth in foster care are about two times as likely to run away (2.4 %) as young people in the same age range in the community (0.9 %).

According to the Runaway Youth Longitudinal Study 2011, 30 % of the youth who had been in foster care also had a history of running away from home (Benoit-Bryan 2011; Johnson 2010). In contrast, 8.1 % of those interviewed in the investigation who had not been in foster care had run away from home previously (Benoit-Bryan 2011).

Other research has shown high rates of elopement among young people in substitute care. In Courtney et al.'s (2014) analysis, between 46 and 52 % of 17-year-olds in foster care in three states, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Iowa, had run away from placement.

A significant percentage of young people in substitute care frequently run away from placement more than once (Courtney et al. 2014; Wade and Biehal 1998). For

example, in one self-report, a 16-year-old girl stated that, for a period of 5 years and 5 months, she had run away three times from a group home, which is a locked facility (Mishriki 2001–2013).

According to Courtney et al. (2014), almost 67 % who eloped from placement did so more than one time. The authors found that a substantial percentage (36 %) had eloped from substitute care on three or more occasions.

Foster Care Young People in Runaway Shelters

Children and adolescents who reside in runaway emergency shelters may have eloped from foster care placements (Crosland and Dunlap 2014). In the USA, Bass (1992a, b) evaluated 170 runaway shelters and discovered that more than 25 % of the young people had come from a foster or group home facility. In addition, the author showed that 38 % of the individuals had been in a foster care setting during the year before they eloped.

According to another study that analyzed 2000 young people in 18 states, 18 % of children and adolescents from shelters had run away from foster care (Kurtz et al. 1991a). In an investigation of young people at a shelter in Seattle, MacLean et al. (1999) stated that 18 % of the shelter youth had indicated that they had run away from care. In addition, another study of young people from shelters and streets in four states in the Midwest showed that 13 % of them had run away from foster care (Whitbeck et al. 1997a, b).

In Canada, one investigation of 689 homeless young people demonstrated showed that 43 % of the individuals had contact with child protect services (Raising the Roof 2009). Moreover, 68 % of the study participants had originated directly from three types of settings: foster care, group facilities, or centers for youth.

Duration of Elopement Episodes

Many children and adolescents run away from placement for a short time period. For example, one investigation showed that almost 50 % of runaway incidents were less than 1-week duration (Courtney et al. 2005). Other youth elope for longer periods. Courtney et al. (2005) discovered that nearly 25 % of elopement episodes were of 5-week duration or longer.

Why Youth Run Away from Substitute Care

Foster care has been called a “national disgrace,” and this dysfunctional foster care system produces a high rate of running away from these settings (Crosland and Dunlap 2014). Youth in these settings may be abused and/or go missing and in some cases die. In addition, Carpenter et al. (2001) found that high-risk sexual activities and increased rates of pregnancy are linked to being in placement settings. Substitute

caregivers also may remove youth from their placement settings. For example, in one self-report, a runaway girl reportedly was placed in a foster home and was kicked out by her foster parents after a short stay because she would go out all night with her friends (Mishriki 2001–2013).

Young people in substitute care settings may suffer from neglect as well. In one self-report, a runaway boy indicated that he had been placed in a foster home and the foster parent, a lady, did not do anything except give him \$250 a month, which was half of her monthly government check for being a foster parent (Mishriki 2001–2013). The youth claimed that the foster parent told him that he was on his own.

Demographic Factors

One investigation of youth running away from substitute care showed that girls had a higher probability than boys of running away from out-of-home placements (Courtney et al. 2005). Girls may have a higher probability of accessing shelter and hotline services (Crosland and Dunlap 2014). According to the National Runaway Switchboard (2008), 75 % of individuals calling in response to a crisis were females.

Age may be a factor in running away from substitute care. According to Courtney et al. (2005), a majority of the youth (90 %) who ran away from their placement were in the 12–18 years age group. However, according to the National Runaway Switchboard (2008), children under 12 years of age constitute the fastest growing age group who called crisis switchboards. Between 2000 and 2007, crisis calls by this age group increased by 172 %.

Older youth may elope from placement for longer periods than their younger counterparts (Courtney et al. 2005). In Courtney et al.'s (2005) analysis, 12 % of 12-year-old runaways eloped from placement for more than 5 weeks compared to nearly 38 % of 18-year-old runaways who eloped from care for the same period.

Placement Disruptions or Instability

Disruptions or instability in substitute care placements can increase the probability that youth will run away (Courtney et al. 2005; Yoder et al. 1998). For example, according to Courtney et al. (2005), young people who have a history of placement instability are more likely to run away.

Victims of Abuse, Neglect, Abandonment, and Family Conflict/Dysfunction

Because youth in foster care often have been removed from their families because of abuse, neglect, abandonment, and various forms of family conflict and dysfunction, they are likely to present challenges to foster care staff, causing them to experience

placement instability or disruptions (Williams et al. 2001; Aarons et al. 2010; Keil and Price 2006; Crosland and Dunlap 2014).

Youth in substitute care who have been victims of sexual, physical, and mental/emotional abuse; abandonment; and neglect have an increased probability of running away (Crosland and Dunlap 2014; Thompson et al. 2004; Yoder et al. 1998). Studies reveal that girls are more likely to be sexually abused than boys, which support the findings that girls tend to run away more than boys.

According to one self-report, a runaway girl who had abusive caregivers, her mother and an aunt, and an uncaring father, wrote that she was “bounced” among five placement settings (Mishriki 2001–2013). While on the streets, she got involved in drugs and was later arrested by the police.

In another case, K., a female runaway/homeless adolescent, had been in a variety of psychiatric and child welfare agency placements, including a group home (Williams et al. 2001). K. had suffered from abuse and neglect. She reportedly had been sexually and physically abused and neglected by her mother who was a drug addict. K. later was often truant from school, engaged in self-harm behaviors to deal with her emotional problems, and attempted suicide several times. Her dysfunctional history may have contributed to her intense psychosocial difficulties and multiple placements in substitute care.

Children who live at home typically are running away from their parents. In contrast, children and adolescents in foster care are eloping from their foster care settings to be with their friends, girlfriends or boyfriends, biological parents, and other family member (Crosland and Dunlap 2014; Pergamit and Ernst 2010; Biehal and Wade 2000; Johnson 2010). Foster youth run away from foster care to return to settings that are familiar to them (Crosland and Dunlap 2014). Young people who elope from foster care may seek the comfort and security of being with their friends and family and as a way to achieve a feeling of normalcy in their lives (Courtney et al. 2005). Youth may realize that their biological families are not “normal” or “healthy.” Nevertheless, the youth will elope from foster care settings to be with their unhealthy families because the families give them a sense of normalcy or having a “real home.”

Young people also elope from foster care so that they can obtain other desired goods and services. For example, they may want to “hang out” with their friends and eat their favorite foods that they cannot do in foster care (Clark et al. 2008; Crosland and Dunlap 2014).

Children and adolescents in substitute care may elope from their placement because they are suffering different forms of abuse and neglect in the setting. In one self-report, an 8-year-old boy wrote that he eloped from his orphanage because he and other residents would frequently get beat up (Mishriki 2001–2013).

Youth in substitute care may run away to avoid overcrowded settings and the lack of privacy (Johnson 2010). Young people may elope from placements in order to protest the poor services provided at these facilities (Johnson 2010).

Children and adolescent in substitute care may elope to seeking protection against bullying, assaults, and sexual harassment by other residents (Johnson 2010). Youth also may elope from placements to flee caregiver abuse (Johnson 2010).

Young people run away from substitute care because they do not like their caregivers or their placement setting (Crosland and Dunlap 2014; Pergamit and Ernst 2010). Angenent et al. (1991), in an investigation of foster care in the Netherlands, showed that young people who eloped from foster care were more likely to indicate that their caregivers were authoritarian and cold toward compared to young people who did not run away.

Substitute care staff in group settings who are trained in providing youth with appropriate skills in social development, education, and employment and who use effective interactional strategies have a greater chance of forming positive bonds with youth than staff who do not have such training (Willner et al. 1977). As a result of these effective bonds, youth may have a lower probability of running away from group settings.

In one investigation, Willner et al. (1977) measured youth assessments of caregiver relationships and discovered that youth were more likely to favorably rate caregivers who exhibited such behaviors as having a calm demeanor, being helpful, having a joking relationship with them, offering effective feedback, and being fair. Caregivers who engage in these types of preferred behaviors may be better able to gain compliance from youth. Young people also may have a higher probability of accepting the guidelines of staff. As a consequence, youth may have a lower chance of running away from substitute care (Willner et al. 1977; Crosland and Dunlap 2014).

The quality of educational programs and services provided to foster youth may affect their likelihood of running away. Youth in placement settings may not have individualized educational plans or actually obtain educational services. For example, White et al. (1990) discovered that 39 % of young people in placement settings had received individualized education plans. However, only 16 % of these individuals obtained these educational services. However, research is lacking on whether the lack of educational programs and services in foster care settings are linked to running away episodes.

The educational performance of youth in foster care is often low. For example, investigations reveal that a large percentage of foster care youth function below their grade level (Crosland and Dunlap 2014; Fanshel et al. 1990; Pasztor et al. 1986). Low educational attainment may contribute to elopement episodes. However, research is needed to investigate the link between educational attainment and running away frequency.

Youth who elope from placements in the first months of placement may be at increased risk of running away in the future (Crosland and Dunlap 2014; Courtney et al. 2005; Kaplan 2004). In Courtney et al.'s (2005) analysis, foster youth were more likely to run away from foster care settings within the first couple of months of being placed.

In one self-report, an 8-year-old boy reportedly eloped from his orphanage and returned the next day after being sexually abused by a male adult who took him to his residence for the night (Mishriki 2001–2013).

According to various investigations, young people in emergency runaway shelters often have run away from foster care settings (Crosland and Dunlap 2014; Kurtz et al. 1991a; Bass 1992a, b). Based on a sample of 2000 young people in 18 states, Kurtz et al. (1991a) discovered that 18 % of children and adolescents from

shelters had run away from foster care. Based on analysis of four states in the Midwest, Whitbeck et al. (1997a, b)) discovered that 13 % of the young people in shelters and on the streets had eloped from a foster care setting. According to Bass's (1992a, b) research on 170 runaway shelters, more than a quarter of the young people had been previously in a foster care or group setting. The author reported that, some time during the year before their elopement, 38 % of the children and adolescents had been in a foster care setting. In an investigation of young people at a shelter in Seattle, according to MacLean et al. (1999), 18 % of the shelter youth had indicated that they had run away from foster care. In addition, another study of young people from shelters and streets in four states in the Midwest showed that 13 % of them had run away from foster care.

First Time of Running Away from Substitute Care

Youth who elope for the first time are at risk for future running away episodes. According to Ross (2001), the first episode of running away from substitute care increases the risk of future running away incidents.

History of Running Away

Young people who have a history of running away have a high probability of running away in the future (Thompson et al. 2004; Yoder et al. 1998).

Use of Alcohol and Other Drugs

Young people who smoke cigarettes and consume alcohol and other drugs are at increased risk of running away (Thompson et al. 2004; Yoder et al. 1998; Courtney et al. 2005; Crosland and Dunlap 2014; Williams et al. 2001). Substance addiction increases the likelihood that young people will run away or experience other forms of placement instability than those who are not addicted to substances (Williams et al. 2001). For example, in one self-report, T., a female adolescent, reportedly had great difficulties in coping with her addiction to alcohol and other drugs (Williams et al. 2001). T., who was 19 at the time, had been living on and off the streets since the age of 13. She had been a frequent resident of the different runaway shelters in her community. T. distrusted people and her distrust of people may have contributed to her placement instability.

Youth who use substances may run away to be with their substance-using friends and to obtain access to cigarettes, alcohol, and other drugs. In addition, youth who use alcohol and other drugs may be more likely to be performing poorly in school,

which increases their probability of running away. Use of alcohol and other drugs among young people is also linked to juvenile delinquency and arrests, which increase the likelihood that they will run away.

Having Mental Health Diagnoses

Young people who have been diagnosed with mental disorders may have a higher probability of running away of substitute care. Based on an analysis of children who ran away from out-of-home settings, Courtney et al. (2005) showed that youth who had mental health diagnoses had an increased likelihood of eloping.

Offending History Increases Risk of Running Away from Residential and Foster Care

Youth who have a history of committing offenses may have a higher probability of running away from substitute care.

Type of Placement

The type of foster care setting may affect whether a child runs away from that setting. According to Courtney et al. (2005), youth were less likely to run away from foster care if they resided with a relative. In addition, they were less likely to run away from foster care if they lived in a foster care setting with a sibling.

According to Witherup et al. (2006), young people who have obtained termination of parental rights are living with a relative in a long-term custody arrangement or who are placed in “home-type” settings have a lower probability of running away from foster care and have more stable placements than those in group facility settings.

In their analysis, Courtney et al. (2005) discovered that young people were more likely to run away from residential-type placement settings. Researchers should analyze which factors increase the likelihood that youth will elope from these types of facilities.

Access to Education

While in foster care placement settings, young people may have problems accessing the appropriate educational programs and services based on their educational needs (Crosland and Dunlap 2014).

Consequences of Running Away

Running away can have major adverse consequences for the youth. Youth who elope may face more restrictive placement settings when they are returned to foster care (Crosland and Dunlap 2014). Children and adolescents who run away may decrease their bonding with conventional adults (Kaplan 2004). For example, running away also increases the probability that young people will engage in delinquent and gang activities and get arrested (Crosland and Dunlap 2014).

Youth who run away often participate in risky survival strategies while on their own, including engaging in criminal activities such as petty theft (Crosland and Dunlap 2014; Biehal and Wade 2000). In an investigation of runaways from foster care, Biehal and Wade (2000) discovered that almost 50 % of more than 200 young people had participated in delinquent activities and had been charged with crimes. The authors showed that some of the individuals had a history of criminal behavior before they had been placed. Their criminal activities increased when they were placed in group foster care settings with other juveniles who had criminal histories.

While on the streets, runaways may be kidnapped and forced or tricked into human trafficking and engage in survival sex and prostitution in order to make money, and they risk acquiring sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDS (Family & Youth Service Bureau, National Clearinghouse on Families & Youth n.d.; International Labour Organization n.d.; UNHCR n.d.; Morewitz 2016; Crosland and Dunlap 2014). These runaway youth face sexual violence victimization, which also increases their risk for STIs. According to Booth et al. (1999), both foster care youth and runaways are significantly more likely to be infected with HIV than young people who do not run away.

While on their own on the streets, runaway youth including those who participate in human trafficking, survival sex, and prostitution, face sexual violence victimization and exploitation and other crimes, such as kidnapping, robbery, stalking, and death threats (Crosland and Dunlap 2014; Kaplan 2004; Biehal and Wade 2000; Morewitz 2003, 2008, 2016; UNHCR n.d.; International Labour Organization n.d.). Runaways are vulnerable to sexual and financial exploitation and abuse by pimps and human traffickers who offer the youth money, shelter, and alcohol and other drugs (Crosland and Dunlap 2014; Farmer and Pollock 1998).

Runaways on the streets are likely to use and abuse alcohol and other drugs. Runaway young people may continue their substance use and abuse patterns that they develop prior to running away or they may use and abuse substance for the first time. Runaways who use and abuse substances are at increased risks for criminal victimization.

Running away from placement settings also can lead to the runaway youth having problems interacting with others. In addition, frequent elopement from placement settings is associated with having difficulties in attending school, getting good grades, and completing their education (Crosland and Dunlap 2014). Youth in foster care already face difficulties accessing the appropriate educational opportunities based on their educational needs, and elopement episodes may worsen their

educational opportunities (Crosland and Dunlap 2014). As a result, runaway young people may be less likely to acquire the academic skills necessary to acquire employment in the future. However, more research is needed to evaluate the impact of frequent elopement on the social and educational outcomes of runaways.

Youth who exit the foster care system often have poor employment outcomes. For example, according to Courtney et al. (2014), only 46 % of young adults were currently working and they had an average annual income of \$13,989. Frequent elopement from placement settings may limit youth's future employment opportunities. More studies are needed to analyze the employment patterns of youth who frequently elope from placement settings.

Placement Outcomes and Interventions

Foster care settings can address organizational problems such as staff abuse, authoritarian staff, inflexible rules, overcrowding, and the lack of educational programs and services. Strategies that seek to eliminate or reduce these problems can help to reduce the rate at which youth elope from placement.

One major concern is that foster care officials must ensure child safety while at the same time allowing independence for the youth under their care (Crosland and Dunlap 2014). Allowing independence can endanger the foster care youth by exposing them to harmful influences in the world outside of the foster care system.

Foster care placements that seek to expand the child's social capital in terms of social skills, attitudes, and cognitive functioning may reduce elopement episodes and improve other social, education, and employment outcomes (Crosland and Dunlap 2014).

Engaging the parents of runaways through family therapy may be useful in decreasing the rate of running away among youth in the general population (Crosland and Dunlap 2014; Slesnick & Prestopnik 2004). However, family therapy may not be helpful for youth in foster care since they are not residing with their biological parents (Crosland and Dunlap 2014).

Clark et al. (2008) suggest that customizing interventions by assessing a young person's motivation for running away can be helpful in reducing the number of placements and increasing placement stability.

Despite the organizational difficulties facing substitute care settings and the social problems facing the juveniles in these setting, placements can produce successful outcomes. Juvenile residents may improve their education attainment and employment potential. For example, one female runaway indicated that she went back to school and achieved a higher grade level after being placed in a group home (Mishriki 2001–2013).



<http://www.springer.com/978-3-319-30861-6>

Runaway and Homeless Youth
New Research and Clinical Perspectives
Morewitz, S.J.
2016, XIX, 273 p., Hardcover
ISBN: 978-3-319-30861-6