

Homeless Youth and Young Adult Texting Project

2016 Summary Report

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Summary of Findings

Stressors, Protective Factors, and Substance Use among Homeless Youth & Young Adults

Introduction

This report summarizes findings from the “Stressors, Protective Factors and Substance Use among Homeless Youth and Young Adult Project” which was funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (DA036806). One hundred fifty youth (N = 77 females; 51%) were interviewed in shelters and on the streets from July 2014 to October 2015 in Omaha and Lincoln, Nebraska. Selection criteria required participants to be between the ages of 16 and 22 and meet the definition of runaway or homeless. *Runaway* refers to youth under age 18 who have spent the previous night away from home without the permission of parents or guardians. *Homeless* youth included those who lack *permanent* housing such as having spent the previous night with a stranger, in a shelter or public place, on the street, staying with friends (e.g. couch surfing), or staying in a transitional living facility.

Four part-time interviewers conducted the interviews (two in each city). All interviewers had completed the Collaborative Institutional Review Board (IRB) Training Initiative course for the protection of human subjects in research. Interviewers approached shelter residents and located other eligible respondents in areas of the cities where homeless youth congregate. They varied the times of the day that they went to these locations, on both weekdays and weekends. This sampling protocol was conducted repeatedly over the course of the study. Interviewers obtained informed consent from respondents and told them that their responses would remain confidential and that participation was voluntary. The majority of interviews were conducted in shelter conference rooms with fewer conducted at a public library and outside in a park if weather permitted. The structured interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes and all participants received a \$20 gift card for completing the baseline interview.

Upon completing the structured interview, participants were given a disposable cell phone (activated for 30 days) and told that starting the following day they would receive 11 texts per day sent via an automated system over the next 30 days. After 30 days, interviewers contacted participants and set up a time to conduct a 20 minute in-person follow-up interview. Respondents were compensated \$50 for responding to every text (or prorated to the number of texts they answered) and received a \$10 gift card if they responded to 85% or more of the texts. Finally respondents were given a \$10 gift card for completing the follow-up interview. Referrals for shelter, counseling services, and food services were offered to all youth at the time of the interview. The IRB at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln approved this study.

Part 1: Adolescent Demographic Characteristics

A total of 150 homeless youth completed the interview. Of the 150, 77 (51%) were female, 71 (47%) were male, and 2% transgender. A total of 33 youth (22%) indicated that they were non-heterosexual. Ages of respondents (see Table 1) ranged from 16 to 22 years, with a mean age of 19.4 years. Approximately 41% of the sample was White (non-Hispanic), just over one quarter (26.0%) were Black or African American and almost 19% of youth reported being bi-racial or multi-racial (see Table 2).

Table 1: Respondent Age

Total Sample (N=150)		
	N	%
16	8	5.3
17	7	4.7
18	28	18.7
19	40	26.7
20	24	16.0
21	26	17.3
22	17	11.3

Table 2: Race/Ethnicity of Respondent

Total Sample (N=150)		
	N	%
White (non-Hispanic)	62	41.3
Black or African American	39	26.0
Hispanic or Latino	15	10.0
American Indian/Alaskan Native	6	4.0
Bi-racial	20	13.3
Multi-racial	8	5.3

The majority of youth in our sample have spent some time in foster care. Approximately 62% had been in at least one foster home. Of these, 15% of youth had been in six or more different foster care homes prior to their interview (see Table 3). Some of the Ns in the following tables are less than 150 due to missing data.

Table 3: Number of Different Times in a Foster Home

Total Sample (N=147)		
	N	%
None	56	38.1
One	33	22.4
Two	18	12.2
Three to Five	18	12.2
Six or more	22	15.0

Part 2: Runaway Histories

Youth were asked about the age at which they first ran away or left home, frequency of running, and total length of time away from home. The average age at which youth first ran away or left home was 14.8 years. However, almost 31% of youth were 13 years of age or younger when they ran away for the first time (see Table 4). Overall, youth reported running away between one and 35 times with an average of 4.9 times (results not shown).

Table 4: Age at First Run

Total Sample (N=147)		
	N	%
12 and under	30	20.4
13	15	10.2
14	11	7.5
15	18	12.2
16	26	17.7
17	21	14.3
18	14	9.5
19	8	5.4
20	3	2.0
21	1	0.7

In terms of the total amount of time youth have spent away from home, just over one-quarter (27.4%) have been away from home for six months or less. Conversely, 21.9% of youth have been away from home for more than four years (see Table 5). The total average amount of time away from home for this sample was 31.5 months (approximately 2 1/2 years).

Table 5: Total Amount of Time Spent Away from Home

Total Sample (N=146)		
	N	%
6 months or less	40	27.4
7-12 months	23	15.8
13-24 months	26	17.8
25-36 months	13	8.9
37-48 months	12	8.2
49-60 months	13	8.9
61 months or more	19	13.0

Reasons for youth running away varied considerably (see Table 6). The most frequent reason for running away was family conflict (34.4%) followed by youth’s own choice (12.3%) and some form of abuse (11.5%). 8.2% of youth reported being kicked out of their family home.

Table 6: Reason for Running Away from Home

Total Sample (N=122)		
	N	%
Family Conflict	42	34.4
Youth Initiated/Choice	15	12.3
Physical /Sexual/Verbal Abuse	14	11.5
Foster Care	11	9.0
Kicked Out	10	8.2
Legal/Criminal Issues	7	5.7
Other Reasons	5	4.1
Parent Substance Use/Mental Health	5	4.1
Group Home	4	3.3
Partner	3	2.5
Neglect	3	2.5
Youth Mental Health	2	1.6
Witness to Domestic Violence	1	0.8

Youth were also asked about where they had slept the night prior to their interview (see Table 7). The most frequent place youth reported spending the previous night was in a transitional living facility (27.6%) and couch surfing at a friends (25.5%). Eleven percent spent the previous night at a youth shelter, 9% at an adult shelter, and 6% slept in their car or outside.

Table 7: Where Youth Spent Previous Night

Total Sample (N=145)		
	N	%
Transitional Living	40	27.6
Friends (Couch Surfing)	37	25.5
Youth Shelter	16	11.0
Adult Shelter	13	9.0
Family	12	8.3
Maternity Group Home	6	4.1
Outside	5	3.4
Car	4	2.8
Someone's House	4	2.8
Partner	3	2.1
Domestic Violence Shelter	3	2.1
Other	2	1.4

Part 3: Finding Necessities and Service Utilization

Youth reported having trouble finding a number of necessities (see Table 8). Though 55.8% of youth have never had trouble finding food, 9% report this as a daily issue. Almost one-quarter (23.8%) of youth reported not having enough money is a daily struggle while 10% say that finding shelter and basic necessities are daily strains.

Table 8: How Often Youth Have Trouble Finding Necessities (N=147)

How often have you had trouble	Never	1-2 days a week	3-4 days a week	5-6 days a week	Every day
Food	82 (55.8%)	39 (26.5%)	14 (9.5%)	3 (2.0%)	9 (6.1%)
Shelter	77 (52.4%)	34 (23.1%)	14 (9.5%)	7 (4.8%)	15 (10.2%)
Money for something	32 (21.8%)	39 (26.5%)	26 (17.7%)	15 (10.2%)	35 (23.8%)
Clothing / basic essentials	65 (44.2%)	32 (21.8%)	27 (18.4%)	8 (5.4%)	15 (10.2%)

Part 3: Finding Necessities and Service Utilization

Continued

Current Use of Services

Current service use by youth is reported in Table 9. Results show that 39.5% of youth are currently using youth shelter services, and 22.4% are using adult shelter services. A total of 34.7% of youth are currently using street outreach programs, and 38.1% of youth were utilizing transitional living services. Finally, 6% of young people are using maternity services and almost one-third (30.6%) are using additional services beyond those listed here. See Table 10 below for other services youth are currently utilizing.

Table 9: Current Use of Services (N= 147)

Are you currently using:	Youth Shelter	Adult Shelter	Street Outreach	Transitional Living	Maternity Services	Other
Yes	58 (39.5%)	33 (22.4%)	51 (34.7%)	56 (38.1%)	9 (6.1%)	45 (30.6%)
No	89 (60.5%)	114 (77.6%)	96 (65.3%)	91 (61.9%)	138 (93.9%)	102 (69.4%)

Other Services Used

Other service programs youth are utilizing are shown below in Table 10.

Table 10: Additional Services Used by Youth

	Total Sample (N=50)	
	N	%
Food Services	15	30.0
Life Skills Training	5	10.0
Addiction / Mental Health Services	5	10.0
Medicaid/WIC	5	10.0
Clothing Services	4	8.0
Job Placement	4	8.0
Family Services	3	6.0
Apartment Search	3	6.0
Church	3	6.0
Independent Living	2	4.0
Maternity	1	2.0

Youth were also asked about how often they used various services (see Table 11). Almost one-half of youth reported that they had never stayed in a shelter (48.3%), compared to one in five (20.4%) who stay in a shelter daily. Almost one-third (32.7%) of the young people never used food services, while 18.4% report using food services daily.

Forty four percent of youth have never used counseling services while 42.9% have never used street outreach services. Though 29.3% and 38.8% of youth have never been tested for STDs/STIs and HIV, respectively, 45.6% and 38.8% of young people report having these tests a few times per year, respectively.

Table 11: How Often Youth Use Services (N=147)

How often do you:	Never	A few times per year	Once per month	A few times per month	1-2 times per week	Every day
Stay at a Shelter	71 (48.3%)	34 (23.1%)	2 (1.4%)	5 (3.4%)	5 (3.4%)	30 (20.4%)
Use Food/Meal Programs	48 (32.7%)	21 (14.3%)	9 (6.1%)	23 (15.6%)	19 (12.9%)	27 (18.4%)
Use Counseling Services	65 (44.2%)	25 (17.0%)	12 (8.2%)	23 (15.6%)	19 (12.9%)	3 (2.0%)
Use Street Outreach	63 (42.9%)	13 (8.8%)	8 (5.4%)	23 (15.6%)	21 (14.3%)	19 (12.9%)
Get tested for STDs/STIs	43 (29.3%)	67 (45.6%)	29 (19.7%)	6 (4.1%)	1 (.7%)	1 (.7%)
Get tested for HIV	57 (38.8%)	57 (38.8%)	26 (17.7%)	5 (3.4%)	2 (1.4%)	0 (0.0%)

Part 4: Family History

Youth were asked a number of questions related to their family life before they ran away. Table 12 shows results for parent or caretaker substance misuse as reported by the youth. Almost one-third of youth (32.7%) thought that their parent or caretaker had a drinking problem, while 32% have argued or fought with them while their parent or caretaker was drinking.

We see a similar trend for drug use. That is, while one-third believe that their parent or caretaker had a drug problem (33.3%), over one-quarter (26.5%) argued or fought with their parent or caretaker while they were high. These results highlight the significant substance abuse problems that are found in many of the homes of these young people and parental substance misuse is one of many reasons for why youth decide to leave their family home.

Table 12: Parent / Caretaker Substance Misuse (N= 147)

Have you ever:	Thought they had a drinking problem	Encouraged them to stop drinking	Argued or fought with them when they were drinking	Thought they had a drug problem	Encouraged them to stop using drugs	Argued or fought with them when they were high
Yes	48 (32.7%)	47 (32.0%)	47 (32.0%)	49 (33.3%)	41 (27.9%)	39 (26.5%)
No	99 (67.3%)	100 (68.0%)	100 (68.0%)	98 (66.7%)	106 (72.1%)	108 (73.5%)

Emotional Abuse

In addition to substance misuse, many young people have been subjected to emotional abuse by their parent or caretaker (see Table 13). Overall, only 2.7% of youth reported that they have never experienced any type of emotional abuse (results not shown).

Table 13: Emotional Abuse by Parent or Caretaker (N=146)

How often your parent or caretaker:	Never	Once	Twice	3-5 times	6-10 times	11-20 times	20+ times
Shouted, yelled, or screamed at you	8 (5.5%)	4 (2.7%)	4 (2.7%)	13 (8.9%)	10 (6.8%)	14 (9.6%)	93 (63.7%)
Cursed or swore at you	8 (5.5%)	4 (2.7%)	2 (1.4%)	17 (11.6%)	15 (10.3%)	5 (3.4%)	95 (65.1%)
Said they would send you away or kick you out	24 (16.4%)	8 (5.5%)	15 (10.3%)	16 (11.0%)	24 (16.4%)	6 (4.1%)	53 (36.3%)
Called you dumb, lazy, or some other name	28 (19.2%)	7 (4.8%)	10 (6.8%)	15 (10.3%)	13 (8.9%)	16 (11.0%)	57 (39.0%)

Table 13 shows that 63.7% of youth reported that their parent or caretaker shouted, yelled, or screamed at them on more than 20 occasions while 65.1% reported that they have been cursed or sworn at by their parent or caretaker more than 20 times. Over 83% have had their parent or caretaker threaten to kick them out or send them away on at least one occasion while just over 80% of youth have been called dumb or lazy by their parent or caretaker at least once.

Sexual Abuse

Reports of sexual abuse perpetrated by any adult or someone at least 5 years older than the youth is reported in Table 14. Almost one-third of youth (32.2%) have ever been asked to do something sexual at least one time and 20.1% have been forced to touch an adult sexually. Additionally, 29.5% have been touched sexually by an adult and 25.3% have had an adult penetrate their body on at least one occasion. Moreover, 13.7% of youth have been penetrated sexually by an adult three or more times.

Table 14: Sexual Abuse by an Adult (N=144-146)

How often did any adult:	Never	Once	Twice	3-5 times	6-10 times	11-20 times	20+ times
Ask you to do something sexual	99 (67.8%)	8 (5.5%)	13 (8.9%)	8 (5.5%)	7 (4.8%)	4 (2.7%)	7 (4.8%)
Had you watch them do something sexual	113 (77.4%)	12 (8.2%)	3 (2.1%)	6 (4.1%)	5 (3.4%)	3 (2.1%)	4 (2.7%)
Had you do something sexual to yourself	131 (89.7%)	4 (2.7%)	2 (1.4%)	3 (2.1%)	2 (1.4%)	1 (.7%)	3 (2.1%)
Have you touch them sexually	115 (79.9%)	6 (4.2%)	3 (2.1%)	5 (3.5%)	4 (2.8%)	2 (1.4%)	9 (6.3%)
Have you show your "private parts" in person or for a camera	120 (82.8%)	5 (3.4%)	4 (2.8%)	5 (3.4%)	2 (1.4%)	4 (2.8%)	5 (3.4%)
Touched you sexually like on your butt, thigh, breast or genitals	103 (70.5%)	7 (4.8%)	7 (4.8%)	8 (5.5%)	7 (4.8%)	1 (.7%)	13 (8.9%)
Put or tried to put anything or any part of their body into you sexually	109 (74.7%)	9 (6.2%)	8 (5.5%)	5 (3.4%)	5 (3.4%)	2 (1.4%)	8 (5.5%)

Part 4: Family History Continued

Physical Abuse

Results for physical abuse reveal that 84.1% of all youth have experienced some form of physical abuse from their parent or caretaker on at least one occasion (results not shown). Table 15 shows that 16.4% of youth have been hit or kicked by a parent/caretaker more than 20 times and almost 10% have been thrown or knocked down 20 times or more. If you look at these results cumulatively, we see that about 50% of youth have been hit with a fist or kicked hard at least once by their parent or caretaker while just under one-half of youth (48.6%) had been thrown or knocked down at least one time by these same individuals. Finally, 22.6% of youth have been threatened with a knife or gun and 8.2% have been assaulted with a knife or gun at the hands of a parent or caretaker at least one or more times.

Table 15: Physical Abuse by Parent or Caretaker (N=145-146)

How often did your parent or caretaker:	Never	Once	Twice	3-5 times	6-10 times	11-20 times	20+ times
Shook You	97 (66.4%)	7 (4.8%)	10 (6.8%)	12 (8.2%)	7 (4.8%)	1 (.7%)	12 (8.2%)
Hit you on the bottom with a hard object	37 (25.3%)	5 (3.4%)	13 (8.9%)	14 (9.6%)	15 (10.3%)	11 (7.5%)	51 (34.9%)
Hit you with a fist or kicked you hard	74 (50.7%)	7 (4.8%)	7 (4.8%)	16 (11.0%)	14 (9.6%)	4 (2.7%)	24 (16.4%)
Grabbed you around the neck and choked you	98 (67.1%)	7 (4.8%)	15 (10.3%)	10 (6.8%)	3 (2.1%)	3 (2.1%)	10 (6.8%)
Beat you up by hitting you over and over as hard as they could	95 (65.1%)	8 (5.5%)	6 (4.1%)	10 (6.8%)	7 (4.8%)	6 (4.1%)	14 (9.6%)
Burned or scalded you on purpose	131 (89.7)	4 (2.7%)	3 (2.1%)	3 (2.1%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (.7%)	4 (2.7%)
Hit you somewhere else on your body with a hard object	75 (51.4%)	3 (2.1%)	13 (8.9%)	14 (9.6%)	7 (4.8%)	6 (4.1%)	28 (19.2%)
Pinched you	105 (71.9%)	5 (3.4%)	5 (3.4%)	11 (7.5%)	3 (2.1%)	4 (2.7%)	13 (8.9%)
Threw or knocked you down	75 (51.4%)	13 (8.9%)	12 (8.2%)	14 (9.6%)	10 (6.8%)	8 (5.5%)	14 (9.6%)
Slapped you on face, head, ears	56 (38.6%)	9 (6.2%)	15 (10.3%)	17 (11.7%)	12 (8.2%)	4 (2.8%)	32 (22.1%)
Threatened you with a knife / gun	113 (77.4%)	10 (6.8%)	6 (4.1%)	5 (3.4%)	5 (3.4%)	1 (.7%)	6 (4.1%)
Assaulted you with a knife / gun	134 (91.8%)	4 (2.7%)	1 (.7%)	4 (2.7%)	2 (1.4%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (.7%)

Part 5: Life on the Street

Youth were asked about their experiences since being on the street. These questions include occurrences of bullying and physical and sexual victimization as well as participation in trading sex.

Bullying

Youth were asked about their bullying experiences at school, at a shelter, and on the street. Two-thirds of youth (66.7%) reported that they had never been bullied at school, but among the third that had, most had experienced bullying many times (21.8%). The majority of youth reported never been bullied at a shelter (83.0%), but 8.2% reported that they had been bullied at a shelter many times. In terms of on the street, 35.4% of all youth reported this happening to them one or more times (see Table 16). Overall, 47.3% of youth reported that they had been bullied since leaving home (results not shown).

Table 16: Bullying Since Leaving Home (N=147)

How often has this happened:	Been bullied at school	Been bullied at a shelter	Been bullied on the street
Never	98 (66.7%)	122 (83.0%)	95 (64.6%)
Once	5 (3.4%)	8 (5.4%)	10 (6.8%)
A few times	12 (8.2%)	5 (3.4%)	21 (14.3%)
Many times	32 (21.8%)	12 (8.2%)	21 (14.3%)

Physical Victimization

Homeless youth generally experience high rates of victimization on the street. As shown in Table 17 (see following page), almost 82% of youth have had something stolen from them at least once; 38.8% have been beaten up at least once; and 42.2% of youth have been robbed on at least one occasion. More specifically, 25.2% of youth have been threatened with a weapon once or a few times and 17.7% have been threatened on multiple occasions. Additionally, 23.1% of youth have been assaulted with a weapon at least one time. Of these, 10.9% were assaulted once; 5.4% a few times, and almost 7% had been assaulted with a weapon many times. Moreover, almost 28% of youth had been forced to break the law by someone, and 8.2% reported that this has happened multiple times. Overall, 85% of all study youth experienced at least one of these six forms of physical victimization since being on the street (results not shown).

Part 5: Life on the Street Continued

Table 17: Physical Victimization on the Street (N=147)

How often has this happened:	Had something stolen	Been beaten up	Been robbed	Been threatened with weapon	Been assaulted with weapon	Been forced to break the law by someone
Never	27 (18.4%)	90 (61.2%)	85 (57.8%)	84 (57.1%)	113 (76.9%)	106 (72.1%)
Once	20 (13.6%)	19 (12.9%)	15 (10.2%)	12 (8.2%)	16 (10.9%)	17 (11.6%)
A few times	42 (28.6%)	20 (13.6%)	21 (14.3%)	25 (17.0%)	8 (5.4%)	12 (8.2%)
Many times	58 (39.5%)	18 (12.2%)	26 (17.7%)	26 (17.7%)	10 (6.8%)	12 (8.2%)

Sexual Victimization

Sexual victimization experiences of youth since being on the street are presented in Table 18. Almost 15% of youth had been asked to touch someone sexually when they didn't want to at least a few times and about 30% had been touched sexually by someone when they didn't want to be on at least one occasion. Almost 20% of youth reported that they had been forced to do something sexual and 6.2% reported that this had happened to them many times. Nearly 20% of youth have been sexually assaulted or raped since being on the street. Of these youth, 9% reported that it has happened one time, 4% experienced this a few times and almost 7% have had this happen to them many times.

Table 18: Sexual Victimization on the Street (N=147)

How often has this happened:	Been asked to touch someone sexually when you didn't want to	Been touched sexually when you didn't want to	Been forced to do something sexual	Been sexually assaulted and/or raped
Never	115 (78.2%)	102 (69.9%)	118 (80.8%)	117 (80.1%)
Once	12 (8.2%)	18 (12.3%)	9 (6.2%)	13 (8.9%)
A few times	14 (9.5%)	15 (10.3%)	10 (6.8%)	6 (4.1%)
Many times	6 (4.1%)	11 (7.5%)	9 (6.2%)	10 (6.8%)

Trading Sex

Trading sex or survival sex is the act of exchanging sex for some specific item that youth deem necessary for survival such as food, shelter, money, or drugs. Trading sex is often done as a last resort. Overall, 24 youth (16.3%) reported trading sex in exchange for something they needed (results not shown).

The percentage of youth who reported trading sex for food, shelter, money or drugs is shown in Table 19. Results show that 6.8% of youth have traded sex for food at least once, 10.2% have traded sex for shelter at least once, 11.6% have traded sex for money at least once, and 4.8% of youth reported trading sex for drugs on at least one occasion.

Table 19: How Often Youth Have Traded Sex (N=147)

How often have you traded sex for:	Never	1-2 days a week	3-4 days a week	5-6 days a week	Every day
Food	137 (93.2%)	1 (.7%)	5 (3.4%)	4 (2.7%)	0 (0.0%)
Shelter	132 (89.8%)	6 (4.1%)	2 (1.4%)	7 (4.8%)	0 (0.0%)
Money	130 (88.4%)	4 (2.7%)	8 (5.4%)	5 (3.4%)	0 (0.0%)
Drugs	140 (95.2%)	1 (.7%)	1 (.7%)	5 (3.4%)	0 (0.0%)

Part 6: Substance Use

Youth were also queried about their use of different substances for varying time periods. Rates for lifetime, past year, past six months, past three months, and past month were obtained from all youth. Young people were also asked about their experiences with binge drinking, defined as consuming 5 or more drinks if you are male; 4 or more drinks if you are female, within a single sitting, as well as their use of substances with their close friends.

Lifetime Substance Use

Overall, only 14% of youth report that they have never consumed any alcohol within their lifetime and 57.3% report that they have never used any illicit drugs within this same time frame (results not shown).

Table 20 (see following page) provides detailed results of the frequency of substance use within the youth’s lifetime. Most youth have tried beer (73.5%) or hard liquor (79.6%) at least once, and about half (49%) have tried wine on at least one occasion. Additionally, 81% of youth have used marijuana at least once, and 36.1% report using it on a daily basis making marijuana the most frequently used daily drug among this sample.

In terms of illicit drug use, 23.1% of youth reported using ecstasy at least once and 18.4% reported using methamphetamine at least one time. Additionally, 19% reported cocaine use, 15.6% reported amphetamine use, and 23.1% of youth have used hallucinogens at least one time in their life. Illicit drugs used least often by these youth included heroin (3.4%) and barbiturates (8.8%).

Part 6: Substance Use Continued

Table 20: Lifetime Substance Use (N=147)

How often have you used:	Never	A few times	Monthly	Weekly	Daily
Beer	39 (26.5%)	68 (46.3%)	13 (8.8%)	15 (10.2%)	12 (8.2%)
Wine	75 (51.0%)	50 (34.0%)	11 (7.5%)	5 (3.4%)	6 (4.1%)
Hard liquor	30 (20.4%)	54 (36.7%)	24 (16.3%)	22 (15.0%)	17 (11.6%)
Marijuana	28 (19.0%)	35 (23.8%)	9 (6.1%)	22 (15.0%)	53 (36.1%)
Methamphetamine	120 (81.6%)	13 (8.8%)	2 (1.4%)	2 (1.4%)	10 (6.8%)
Amphetamines	124 (84.4%)	14 (9.5%)	1 (0.7%)	1 (0.7%)	7 (4.8%)
Cocaine	119 (81.0%)	25 (17.0%)	1 (0.7%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (1.4%)
Heroin	142 (96.6%)	4 (2.7%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.7%)
Hallucinogens	113 (76.9%)	20 (13.6%)	8 (5.4%)	2 (1.4%)	4 (2.7%)
Barbiturates	134 (91.2%)	5 (3.4%)	4 (2.7%)	2 (1.4%)	2 (1.4%)
Inhalants	132 (89.8%)	10 (6.8%)	2 (1.4%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (2.0%)
Ecstasy	113 (76.9%)	19 (12.9%)	6 (4.1%)	3 (2.0%)	6 (4.1%)

Friends' Substance Use

Youth were also queried about their friends' substance use for the past six months, the past three months, and the past month. Sixty-two youth (42.2%) reported getting drunk with their friends in the past six months and 67 youth (44.7%) reported using drugs with their friends in the past six months (results now shown).

Pressure from Friends to Use Substances

Youth were first asked how many of their close friends drank alcohol and used drugs in the past six months (see first two columns of Table 21). Almost 16% of youth reported that none of their close friends drank alcohol; alternatively 15.1% said that all of their close friends drank alcohol within the past six months. While 19.8% of youth reported that none of their close friends used drugs, 18.5% stated that most of them do so while 15.1% reported that all of their close friends have used drugs within the past six months.

Columns 3 and 4 in Table 21 focus on whether study youth have been pressured to drink alcohol or pressured to use drugs by their close friends. Between 65 and 68% of youth reported that none of their close friends have pressured them to use alcohol or drugs within the past six months. Meanwhile, less than 6% of youth said that all of their close friends pressured them into drinking alcohol or using drugs within the past six months.

Table 21: Friends' Substance Use and Pressure to Use Drugs for Past Six Months (N=146-147)

How many of your close friends:	Drank alcohol	Used marijuana, coke, heroin, or other drugs	Have ever pressured you to drink alcohol	Have ever pressured you to try drugs
None	23 (15.8%)	29 (19.8%)	96 (65.3%)	100 (68.0%)
A couple	44 (30.0%)	28 (19.2%)	21 (14.3%)	20 (13.6%)
A few	25 (17.1%)	21 (14.4%)	12 (8.2%)	14 (9.5%)
About half of them	16 (11.0%)	19 (13.0%)	7 (4.8%)	3 (2.1%)
Most of them	16 (11.0%)	27 (18.5%)	3 (2.0%)	4 (2.7%)
All of them	22 (15.1%)	22 (15.1%)	8 (5.4%)	6 (4.1%)

Part 7: Protective Factors

Though these young people experience numerous risks both prior to and after leaving home, we also highlight the protective factors that youth have, which may serve to reduce some of the negative effects of earlier risks. For example, youth were queried about the number of positive role models that they had in their life. On average, we find that youth reported having approximately 13 positive role models that they can rely on when needed (results not shown). A list of role models that youth rely on appears on the following page (see Table 22).

Part 7: Protective Factors Continued

Table 22: Positive Role Models (N= 147)

How many of the following do you have that you can rely on:	Caseworker	Pastor	Mentor	Teacher or School Official	Friends from Home	Family from Home
None	91 (61.9%)	104 (70.7%)	74 (50.3%)	94 (63.9%)	46 (31.3%)	35 (23.8%)
One	34 (23.1%)	23 (15.6%)	36 (24.5%)	20 (13.6%)	17 (11.6%)	21 (14.3%)
Two	11 (7.5%)	13 (8.8%)	17 (11.6%)	15 (10.2%)	24 (16.3%)	23 (15.6%)
Three or more	11 (7.5%)	7 (4.8%)	20 (13.6%)	18 (12.3%)	60 (40.8%)	68 (46.3%)

The positive role models that youth listed are shown in Table 22. About 38% of youth reported having one or more caseworkers that they can rely on for help. A minority of youth (29.3%) said they have at least one pastor that they can rely on when needed. Of these, almost 5% said they have three or more pastors to rely on. Encouragingly one-half of all youth (49.7%) have a mentor that they can rely on, and of these, about 12% have two mentors and almost 14% of youth report three or more mentors. Some youth also reported that a teacher or school official is important to them and someone that they can rely on in time of need. In fact, just over one-third of youth (36.1%) reported having such a person in their life whereas 10% reported having two teachers and 12% of youth said that they have three or more teachers that they can rely on for support. Results also show that the majority of youth have support from friends and family from home. Specifically, 40.8% of youth have three or more friends from home that they can rely on and 16.3% of youth reported having support from two friends from home. Almost one-half of youth (46.3%) reported that they have three or more family members from home that they can rely on when needed.

Youth were also given the opportunity to report other positive role models that they have in their life beyond those listed in Table 22. A total of 49 youth reported at least one additional positive role model that they could rely on in addition to those listed in Table 22. Other positive role models youth listed included a partner (31.7%), friends from the streets (23.3%), shelter staff (18.3%), extended family members (8.3%) and then fewer youth listed a therapist, church/God, probation officer, and other (see Table 23). Though 49 youth reported having additional positive role models, the number in Table 23 is N = 60 because some youth listed more than one additional role model.

Table 23: Other Positive Role Models for Youth

Total Sample (N=60)		
	N	%
Partner	19	31.7
Friends from the Street	14	23.3
Shelter Staff	11	18.3
Family	5	8.3
Therapist	4	6.7
Church or God	3	5.0
Probation Officer	2	3.3
Other	2	3.3

Part 8: Policy Implications

The findings from this research project have several policy implications for those who work with at-risk youth and young adults. Many young people come from family backgrounds characterized by high rates of family conflict and abuse as well as high exposure to parents and caretakers who have substance abuse issues. While many youth have fled their homes due to conflict and abuse, others have been kicked out and cannot return home. The early histories of some of these youth, which are marked by numerous transitions, will likely have negative effects on several areas of their life including physical health, mental health, schooling, future employment opportunities, and relationships. Additionally, many of these young people have experienced high rates of victimization and many use marijuana on a daily basis to cope with their current situation. While numerous youth reported that most of their close friends have not pressured them to drink alcohol or use drugs, the vast majority of youth stated that many of their friends, however, are substance users. We also found that many youth are aware of services offered by various agencies and many young people use services such as food programs, shelter, street outreach, and transitional living. However, during our interviewing process, we spoke with some youth who were not aware of any services available to young people like themselves. This lack of knowledge suggests there is still a need to fill in terms of not only making services more accessible but also to consider creative ways of how we can “spread the word” to these youth who may in fact be the ones who are in most need of these services.

Programs are needed to help rebuild youths' self-esteem and teach them about healthy coping styles. Our results show that many youth have positive role models in their lives (e.g., pastor, teacher) and these are individuals we want homeless youth to continue to foster relationships with. This is also one area that can be targeted to enhance youths' self-esteem and keep them in touch with positive individuals that they know they can rely on when needed. When positive role models are available to these youth when needed, this helps to rebuild youths' trust in adults.

Programs also need to be tailored to meet the needs of youth from very diverse backgrounds. Homeless youth are a heterogeneous group of young people in terms of race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, sex, and their early family experiences, all of which affects their current life course trajectory. The goal must be to provide youth with the tools and resources necessary to develop into healthy young adults, which may include increasing their self-esteem, helping them deal with trust issues, and learning to develop healthy coping styles to manage stress. This is not an easy task given that many youth currently use maladaptive coping strategies, which will further put them at risk for harmful outcomes. In developing programs, we have to remember that trust does not come easy to these young people who have been victimized by family members, partners, and close friends. Our use of cell phones with these youth demonstrated that this is a cost effective way for youth to stay in touch with positive role models, family and friends from home, and is a creative way to reintegrate some of these youth back into mainstream society. Youth told us stories of "feeling important" while carrying a cell phone and felt cared for when we (i.e., the interviewers) "checked up on them" to see how their day was going. In other words, these young people crave supportive networks and we strongly believe that this is crucial to their well-being and helping them transition off of the streets.

We wish to extend our sincere gratitude to all of the agencies in Nebraska that made this study possible. They work diligently to help these young people in need and they are truly doing great work. We would also like to thank all of the young people who agreed to participate in our study and share their life experiences with us. They gave their time to answer our survey questions and pilot the use of text messaging as a form of data collection. We hope the experience of sharing part of their lives with a supportive interviewer and frequent contact during data collection was beneficial to them. Finally, we would like to thank the interviewers who consistently worked hard to set up appointments and meet with youth to conduct the interviews. We hope those involved with homeless and runaway youth and young adults will find this report and related publications on the following pages useful in their mission to help these young people achieve success.

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People's City Mission – Lincoln, NE

The BAY— Lincoln, NE

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