

# Neglect & Abuse Histories among Homeless Young Adults

Summary Report to Participating Agencies

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# Summary of Findings from the Homeless Young Adult Project

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## Introduction

This report summarizes findings from the Homeless Young Adult Project (HYAP), which is funded by the National Institute of Mental Health (KO1 MH064897). Over a period of approximately one year (from April of 2004 through June of 2005), homeless young adults and a matched sample of housed young adults were interviewed in three Midwestern cities including Des Moines, Iowa, and Omaha and Lincoln, Nebraska. The homeless young adults were contacted and interviewed directly on the streets or in drop-in centers located in each of the three cities. The matched sample of housed young adults came from referrals obtained from the homeless young adults in the study.

Interviews were completed by experienced interviewers who have worked on past projects dealing with at-risk youth, and have served in agencies and shelters that support homeless young people. In addition, all interviewers had completed the Collaborative Institutional Review Board (IRB) Training Initiative course for the protection of human subjects in research.

After screening participants for eligibility in the study (age restrictions, being homeless), interviewers obtained informed consent from the young adults prior to participation in the study. Respondents were told that the purpose of the study was to gain a better understanding about the life experiences of young adults like themselves and that the information gained from the study would help us learn which services would best help young adults who do not have a regular place to live. At the beginning of the interview, young adults were told about the confidentiality of the study, that their participation was completely voluntary, and that they had the right to refuse to answer any question or end the interview at any time. The interviews lasted approximately one hour and all participants received a modest reimbursement for their involvement. Referrals and services (e.g., shelter, counseling services, food services, etc.) were offered to the young adults at the time of the interview.

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## Part 1: Adolescent Demographic Characteristics

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A total of 199 young adults completed the initial interview (144 homeless and 55 housed). Participants comprising the housed sample were obtained via peer nominations from the homeless youth in the study. Of the 199, 85 (42.7%) were female and 114 (57.3%) were male. A total of 33 youth (17%) indicated that they were non-heterosexual. Ages of respondents ranged from 19 to 26 years, with a median age of 21 years. The sample was predominantly comprised of white (non-Hispanic) young adults (77.8%). The racial/ethnic origins of the sample are detailed in Table 1. The majority of youth (64%) had completed at least high school or high school equivalency. However, almost 6% had less than a 9th grade education and another 30% did not make it through high school (see Table 2).

**Table 1: Race/Ethnicity of Respondent**

|                           | Total Sample<br>(N=198) |      |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|------|
|                           | N                       | %    |
| White (non-Hispanic)      | 154                     | 77.8 |
| Black or African American | 22                      | 11.1 |
| Hispanic or Latino        | 6                       | 3.0  |
| American Indian           | 4                       | 2.0  |
| Asian                     | 2                       | 1.0  |
| Bi-racial/multi-racial    | 10                      | 5.0  |

**Table 2: Education of Respondent**

|                                | Total Sample<br>(N=199) |      |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------|------|
|                                | N                       | %    |
| Less than the 9th grade        | 11                      | 5.5  |
| 9th-10th grade                 | 30                      | 15.1 |
| 11th grade                     | 30                      | 15.1 |
| 12th grade                     | 74                      | 37.2 |
| GED                            | 29                      | 14.6 |
| Associates degree/some college | 25                      | 12.6 |

## Part 2: Parenting Characteristics and Family Problems

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Many respondents reported that they grew up in families living in extremely impoverished situations. More than one-half (54%) of youth reported that their family income was less than \$5,000 (see Table 3). At the other extreme, 16% of respondents indicated family incomes of \$40,000 or greater. In terms of their caretakers education, approximately 19% did not complete high school but 28% had a college education (see Table 4).

**Table 3: Caretaker Income (in dollars)**

|                        | Total Sample<br>(N=196) |      |
|------------------------|-------------------------|------|
|                        | N                       | %    |
| Welfare or not working | 63                      | 32.1 |
| 1 to 4,999             | 43                      | 21.9 |
| 5,000 to 9,999         | 14                      | 7.1  |
| 10,000 to 14,999       | 17                      | 8.7  |
| 15,000 to 19,999       | 10                      | 5.1  |
| 20,000 to 24,999       | 10                      | 5.1  |
| 25,000 to 39,999       | 7                       | 3.6  |
| 40,000 to 59,999       | 18                      | 9.2  |
| 60,000 to 100,000+     | 14                      | 7.1  |

**Table 4: Caretaker Education**

|                                   | Total Sample<br>(N=199) |      |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|------|
|                                   | N                       | %    |
| Less than a high school degree    | 37                      | 18.6 |
| Completed high school/GED         | 72                      | 36.2 |
| Some college                      | 21                      | 10.6 |
| Completed college/graduate degree | 56                      | 28.1 |
| Don't know/Refused                | 13                      | 6.5  |

Participants were asked to report on the general parenting behaviors of their primary childhood caretaker when they were approximately 13 years of age. A series of nine questions pertaining to supervisory behaviors (e.g., knowing where the respondent was after school, expectations on checking in when arriving home late, knowing who the respondent was with, etc.) were combined to form an overall mean assessment of general monitoring behaviors. The results indicated that, on average, youth reported being monitored “sometimes” or “most of the time.” Similarly, 13 questions pertaining to the respondent-caretaker relationship (e.g., caretaker understood when you told them things, caretaker made you feel wanted, etc.) were combined to form a mean scale of caretaker warmth and supportiveness. Overall, this scale indicated that respondents were somewhat neutral. That is, they did not agree nor disagree with these statements about closeness to their main caretaker.

In terms of youth’s experiences with caretaker neglect (see Table 5), almost one-third (32%) reported that their caretaker was too drunk or high on drugs to take care of them and almost one-half of youth (49%) said that their caretaker was unable to show or tell them that they were loved. Overall, 77% of respondents indicated ever experiencing neglect.

**Table 5: Respondent Reports of Caretaker Neglect**

|   | <b>Males<br/>N=114<br/>(percent)</b> | <b>Females<br/>N=85<br/>(percent)</b> | <b>Total<br/>N=199<br/>(percent)</b> |
|---|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Left you home alone when someone should have been with you      | 74 (64.9)                            | 55 (64.7)                             | 129 (64.8)                           |
| Wasn’t able to show or tell you that they loved you             | 51 (44.7)                            | 45 (53.6)                             | 96 (48.5)                            |
| Wasn’t able to give you the food that you needed                | 32 (28.3)                            | 37 (43.5)                             | 69 (34.8)                            |
| Didn’t take you to the doctor or hospital when you needed to go | 29 (25.4)                            | 27 (31.8)                             | 56 (28.1)                            |
| Was drunk or high on drugs and couldn’t take care of you        | 34 (29.8)                            | 29 (34.1)                             | 63 (31.7)                            |

Many of the respondents also suffered from physical abuse. When asked outright if they had ever been physically abused, 53% of all respondents indicated that they had. Looking at Table 6, however, we see that the rates for certain types of physical and emotional abuse are much higher than this. Numerous males and females (64%) have been called dumb and lazy and 78% have been sworn or cursed at. About 14% of all respondents have been choked and over one-quarter have been punched or kicked. The column on the far right of Table 6 indicates that the prevalence of different types of physical and emotional abuse are similar for males and females. In fact, the only significant difference is that males are more likely to be sworn and cursed at (85%) compared to females (68%).

Close to one-third (30%) have been thrown or knocked down by a caretaker. Moreover, almost 60% of youth reported that their caretaker threatened to send them away or kick them out of the house. Although the numbers involving weapons is much smaller than some of the other items, 9% of youth reported being threatened with a knife or gun by a caretaker. The most frequently occurring form of physical or emotional abuse included being shouted, yelled or screamed at by a caretaker, reported by almost 92% of all youth (see Table 6).

**Table 6: Comparison of Male and Female on Caretaker Physical Abuse**

|  | <b>Males<br/>N=114<br/>(percent)</b> | <b>Females<br/>N=85<br/>(percent)</b> | <b>Total<br/>N=199<br/>(percent)</b> | <b>Comparison<br/>of males and<br/>females</b> |
|--|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| Shook you  | 25 (21.9)                            | 23 (27.1)                             | 48 (24.1)                            | .700 ns  |
| Hit you on the bottom with a belt, stick or other hard object                  | 71 (62.3)                            | 52 (61.2)                             | 123 (61.8)                           | .025 ns  |
| Shouted, yelled, or screamed at you  | 106 (93.0)                           | 76 (89.4)                             | 182 (91.5)                           | .795 ns  |
| Hit you with a fist or kicked you hard   | 31 (27.2)                            | 20 (23.5)                             | 51 (25.6)                            | .343 ns  |
| Grabbed you around the neck and choked you                                     | 16 (14.0)                            | 11 (12.9)                             | 27 (13.6)                            | .050 ns  |
| Cursed or swore at you   | 97 (85.1)                            | 58 (68.2)                             | 155 (77.9)                           | 8.030**  |
| Beat you up by hitting you over and over as hard as they could                 | 22 (19.3)                            | 14 (16.5)                             | 36 (18.1)                            | .263 ns  |
| Said they would send you away or kick you out of the house                     | 66 (57.9)                            | 51 (60.0)                             | 117 (58.8)                           | .089 ns  |
| Burned or scalded you on purpose   | 5 (4.4)                              | 3 (3.5)                               | 8 (4.0)                              | .093 ns  |
| Hit you on the body besides the bottom with a belt, stick or other hard object | 31 (27.2)                            | 28 (32.9)                             | 59 (29.6)                            | .771 ns  |
| Pinched you  | 26 (22.8)                            | 15 (17.6)                             | 41 (20.6)                            | .793 ns  |
| Threw or knocked you down  | 36 (31.6)                            | 24 (28.2)                             | 60 (30.2)                            | .258 ns  |
| Called you dumb/lazy or some other name  | 77 (67.5)                            | 50 (58.8)                             | 127 (63.8)                           | 1.604 ns                                       |
| Slapped you on the face, head or ears  | 56 (49.1)                            | 43 (50.6)                             | 99 (49.7)                            | .042 ns  |
| Threatened you with a knife or gun   | 8 (7.1)                              | 9 (10.6)                              | 17 (8.6)                             | .761 ns  |
| Assaulted you with a knife or gun  | 1 (0.9)                              | 1 (1.2)                               | 2 (1.0)                              | .044 ns  |

Note: \* $p \leq .05$ ; \*\* $p \leq .01$ ; ns=no significant difference between males and females.

In addition to physical abuse, numerous respondents also experienced sexual abuse. When asked directly if they had ever experienced this, one-third reported that they had. Table 7 shows the results for caretaker sexual abuse comparing males and females. Females were significantly more likely to have been asked to do something sexual (47% vs. 31%), more likely to have been touched sexually (44% vs. 26%), and three times more likely to have had someone try to put something into them sexually (33% vs. 12%) compared to males. For the total sample, being asked to do something sexual was the most commonly reported form of sexual abuse (38%) followed closely by being touched sexually (34%) (see Table 7).

**Table 7: Comparison of Male and Female on Caretaker Sexual Abuse**

|  | <b>Males<br/>N=114<br/>(percent)</b> | <b>Females<br/>N=85<br/>(percent)</b> | <b>Total<br/>N=199<br/>(percent)</b> | <b>Comparison<br/>of males and<br/>females</b> |
|--|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| Asked you to do something sexual   | 35 (30.7)                            | 40 (47.1)                             | 75 (37.7)                            | 5.548*   |
| Had you watch them do something sexual                                   | 18 (15.9)                            | 20 (23.5)                             | 38 (19.2)                            | 1.807 ns                                       |
| Had you do something sexual to yourself                                  | 8 (7.1)                              | 11 (12.9)                             | 19 (9.6)                             | 1.921 ns                                       |
| Had you touch them sexually  | 25 (21.9)                            | 25 (29.4)                             | 50 (25.1)                            | 1.449 ns                                       |
| Had you show your “private parts” for a camera                           | 11 (9.7)                             | 16 (18.8)                             | 27 (13.6)                            | 3.403 ns                                       |
| Touched you sexually like on your butt, thigh, breast or genitals        | 30 (26.3)                            | 37 (43.5)                             | 67 (33.7)                            | 6.461**  |
| Put or tried to put anything or any part of their body into you sexually | 13 (11.5)                            | 28 (33.3)                             | 41 (20.8)                            | 13.931**                                       |

*Note: \*p ≤ .05; \*\*p ≤ .01; ns=no significant difference between males and females.*

## **Part 3: Run Away Histories**

A number of questions were asked of both homeless and housed youth in order to assess the frequency and patterns of runaway behaviors. Homeless young adults were asked about their age at first run, reasons for running, frequency of running, and where they stayed the night prior to their interview. The housed group were asked if they had ever run away, frequency of running, and length of time spent on the street.



## Reasons for Running Away

Although the average age at which currently homeless youth ran away or left home for the first time was 14 years of age, 18% had run away prior to age 12. The average number of times homeless youth reported running was four, but almost one-half reported running only one time. When asked why they ran away from home, the majority of homeless youth said it was due to family problems (e.g., arguments with mom, not getting along). The second most frequently cited response was abuse. Other reasons included being kicked out, removed by an official, peer or gang influence, or left due to pregnancy or work.

The majority of homeless young people (40%) reported spending the previous night with a friend, whereas 35% stayed in a shelter/mission. Fewer youth stayed with relatives (8%) or in a park/camping (5%). Other places youth spent the previous night included in a vehicle, under a bridge, or at a stranger's place.

## Housed Young Adult Run Away Histories

Many of the matched group of youth also reported past run away behaviors; almost 54% reported previously running from home. In addition, many had also run away numerous times. This suggests that the “currently housed” peers the homeless young adults nominated were not that different in terms of their run away histories. What differentiated them for the moment was their housing status indicating that homelessness is a situation that is very fluid, easily changeable, and not easily defined.

# Part 4: Victimization, Subsistence Strategies and Peers on the Street

**Table 8: Comparison of Male and Female Physical Victimization on the Street**

|   | <b>Males<br/>N=114<br/>(percent)</b> | <b>Females<br/>N=85<br/>(percent)</b> | <b>Total<br/>N=199<br/>(percent)</b> | <b>Comparison<br/>of males and<br/>females</b> |
|---|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| Had something stolen from you           | 101 (88.6)                           | 78 (91.8)                             | 179 (89.9)                           | .541 ns  |
| Been beaten up                          | 57 (50.0)                            | 42 (50.0)                             | 99 (50.0)                            | .000 ns  |
| Been robbed                             | 48 (42.1)                            | 33 (38.8)                             | 81 (40.7)                            | .217 ns  |
| Been threatened with a weapon           | 69 (60.5)                            | 40 (47.6)                             | 109 (55.1)                           | 3.256 ns                                       |
| Been assaulted with a weapon            | 36 (31.6)                            | 25 (29.8)                             | 61 (30.8)                            | .075 ns  |
| Been forced to break the law by someone | 19 (16.7)                            | 13 (15.5)                             | 32 (16.2)                            | .051 ns  |

Note: \* $p \leq .05$ ; \*\* $p \leq .01$ ; ns=no significant difference between males and females.

Homeless and housed youth were asked about some of their experiences on the street as they relate to being a victim of a crime (see Table 8). Almost 90% of youth have had something stolen from them, 55% have been threatened with a weapon, 50% have been beaten up, and 41% have been robbed. Additionally, 31% have been assaulted with a weapon and 16% have been forced to break the law by someone. Overall, 94% of all youth experienced at least one of these forms of victimization since being on the street. The types of victimization that males and females experienced did not significantly differ (see Table 8).

### Sexual Victimization

Many young people, especially young women, experienced some form of sexual victimization since being on their own (see Table 9). Females were significantly more likely to experience each form of sexual victimization compared to males. That is, 29% of females have been asked to touch someone sexually compared to 13% of males. Additionally, 48% of females have been touched sexually when they didn't want to compared to only 17% of males. One-quarter of young women have been forced to do something sexual and almost one-half (43%) have been sexually assaulted or raped since being on the street.

**Table 9: Comparison of Male and Female Sexual Victimization on the Street**

|  | <b>Males<br/>N=114<br/>(percent)</b> | <b>Females<br/>N=85<br/>(percent)</b> | <b>Total<br/>N=199<br/>(percent)</b> | <b>Comparison<br/>of males and<br/>females</b> |
|--|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| Been asked to touch someone sexually when you didn't want to | 15 (13.3)                            | 25 (29.4)                             | 40 (20.2)                            | 7.836**  |
| Been touched sexually when you didn't want to                | 19 (16.8)                            | 41 (48.2)                             | 60 (30.3)                            | 22.676**                                       |
| Been forced to do something sexual                           | 10 (8.8)                             | 22 (25.9)                             | 32 (16.2)                            | 10.387**                                       |
| Been sexually assaulted and/or raped                         | 8 (7.1)                              | 36 (42.9)                             | 44 (22.3)                            | 35.555**                                       |

*Note: \*p ≤ .05; \*\*p ≤ .01; ns=no significant difference between males and females.*

### Deviant Subsistence Strategies

In addition to being victims themselves, many youth also engaged in victimizing behaviors while out on the street. These activities are often done for survival purposes. Youth were asked how often they engaged in 14 different types of behaviors. For simplicity, the results have been summarized to include “have done the activity at least once” or “have

never done the activity” (see Table 10). One of the most frequently observed behaviors was selling drugs, reported by 42% of all respondents (47% of males and 34% of females). Almost 40% of youth admitted to stealing food, 34% have taken things from a store worth between \$10 and \$50, 32% have sold something that they have stolen, and 32% reported beating someone up so badly that they needed bandages or a doctor. Females were significantly more likely to have stolen clothes and engaged in prostitution compared to males. In contrast, males were significantly more likely to have broken into a locked car to steal a stereo, beaten someone up to the point of them needing medical attention, and using a weapon in a fight compared to females (see Table 10).

**Table 10: Comparison of Male and Female Deviant Subsistence Strategies**

|  | <b>Males<br/>N=114<br/>(percent)</b> | <b>Females<br/>N=85<br/>(percent)</b> | <b>Total<br/>N=199<br/>(percent)</b> | <b>Comparison<br/>of males and<br/>females</b> |
|--|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| Stolen clothes from stores   | 30 (26.3)                            | 41 (48.8)                             | 71 (35.9)                            | 10.639**                                       |
| Stolen food  | 47 (41.2)                            | 31 (36.9)                             | 78 (39.4)                            | .379 ns  |
| Taken things worth \$10-\$50 from a store  | 38 (33.3)                            | 29 (34.5)                             | 67 (33.8)                            | .031 ns  |
| Sold something you stole   | 39 (34.2)                            | 24 (28.6)                             | 63 (31.8)                            | .709 ns  |
| Broken into a house, store, school and taken money or things like stereo equipment           | 22 (19.3)                            | 9 (10.7)                              | 31 (15.7)                            | 2.699 ns                                       |
| Broken into a locked car to get CDs, stereo, etc.  | 34 (29.8)                            | 5 (6.0)                               | 39 (19.7)                            | 17.425**                                       |
| Used credit or banking cards without owner’s permission or passed bad checks                 | 22 (19.3)                            | 19 (22.4)                             | 41 (20.6)                            | .278 ns  |
| Stolen something from a store, person, or house that didn’t belong to you worth \$50 or more | 29 (25.4)                            | 17 (20.2)                             | 46 (23.2)                            | .733 ns  |
| Beaten someone up so badly they probably needed bandages or a doctor                         | 47 (41.2)                            | 16 (18.8)                             | 63 (31.7)                            | 11.297**                                       |
| Used a knife or other weapon in a fight  | 28 (24.6)                            | 10 (11.8)                             | 38 (19.1)                            | 5.161*   |
| Attacked someone with the idea of seriously hurting or killing them                          | 30 (26.3)                            | 21 (25.0)                             | 51 (25.8)                            | .044 ns  |
| Forced yourself on someone sexually  | 3 (2.6)                              | 5 (5.9)                               | 8 (4.0)                              | 1.334 ns                                       |
| Sold drugs   | 54 (47.4)                            | 29 (34.1)                             | 83 (41.7)                            | 3.517 ns                                       |
| Engaged in prostitution  | 1 (0.9)                              | 6 (7.1)                               | 7 (3.5)                              | 5.483*   |

Note: \* $p \leq .05$ ; \*\* $p \leq .01$ ; ns=no significant difference between males and females.

## Deviant Peers

All youth were asked questions about whether or not any of their close friends had engaged in the following behaviors (see Table 11). The majority of these youth's friends have engaged in delinquent activities. For example, 82% of youth reported having a close friend that has stolen something from a store, 51% said a close friend has robbed someone, and 56% reported having a close friend that beat someone up bad enough that they required medical attention. Other delinquent activities in which friends engaged included conning (61%), selling drugs (69%), threatening someone with a weapon (52%), and assaulting someone with a weapon (38%). Finally, almost one-third of youth (30%) reported having a close friend that has traded sex and 9% had a close friend that has sexually assaulted someone.

Overall, one-third (33%) of youth had friends who engaged in seven or more types of delinquent acts. The average number of deviant acts their friends engaged in was four.

**Table 11: Reports of Deviant Peers**

|   | <b>Total Sample<br/>(N = 199)</b> |          |
|---|-----------------------------------|----------|
|   | <b>N</b>                          | <b>%</b> |
| Stolen from a store   | 163                               | 82.3     |
| Robbed someone  | 100                               | 50.8     |
| Beaten someone up requiring medical attention                       | 111                               | 55.8     |
| Sexually assaulted someone  | 18                                | 9.1      |
| Conned someone  | 121                               | 60.8     |
| Sold drugs  | 138                               | 69.3     |
| Threatened someone with a weapon                                    | 103                               | 52.0     |
| Assaulted someone with a weapon                                     | 74                                | 37.6     |
| Traded sex for money, drugs or something else they wanted or needed | 59                                | 29.8     |

## Victimization Perpetrated by Close Friends

Respondents in the study were asked if they had ever been victimized by their close friends or pressured to do things that they did not want to (see Table 12). Surprisingly, many respondents have been victimized by their close friends. For example, 52% of youth reported that a close friend has stolen from them and 10% have been beaten up by a friend. One-quarter of youth have been pressured to drink by a friend and 26% have been pressured to use drugs. Thirteen percent of respondents reported being pressured to have sex by a close friend and 5% have been sexually assaulted by a friend.

The results in this section indicate that not only have these youth experienced high rates of victimization while on the street, but many of them have also been victimized by close friends, who are people we typically depend upon in time of need. This suggests that at least some youth have little protection out on the street and often times are unable to trust their friends. This has serious implications because many of these young people already lack trust due to their experiences of abuse in their family of origin. If they cannot trust their close friends, who can they trust?

**Table 12: Youth Reports of Being Victimized by Close Friends**

|                            | Total Sample<br>(N=199) |      |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|------|
|                            | N                       | %    |
| Stolen from you            | 104                     | 52.3 |
| Beat you up                | 20                      | 10.1 |
| Sexually assaulted you     | 10                      | 5.1  |
| Pressured you to drink     | 50                      | 25.3 |
| Pressured you to use drugs | 52                      | 26.1 |
| Pressured you to have sex  | 25                      | 12.6 |

## Part 5: Sexual Behavior

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Many youth in this study reported engaging in early, risky sexual behaviors. A total of 94% of youth have had voluntary vaginal sex. Over one-half (53%) of those who were sexually active had sex for the first time at age 15 or younger (the average age of first intercourse was 15 years). The average number of different sexual partners in the past 12 months was 3, although about 10% of youth reported having at least 6 or more sexual partners during this time frame. Approximately one-quarter of the sample reported 15 or more sexual partners in their lifetime. The average number of lifetime sexual partners was 18.

Very few of the sexually active youth (19%) reported always using condoms during vaginal sex in the previous 12 months. Another 18% reported using condoms often, and 10% reported using them about half of the time. Nearly half of the respondents reported never or only seldom using a condom during intercourse in the last 12 months. Only 27% of youth had used a condom the last time they had vaginal sex. Eighteen percent of the sexually active youth reported ever having a sexually transmitted disease (STD). Twice as many females reported having an STD compared to males (27% vs. 12%, respectively).

### Trading Sex

Respondents were asked about their exposure to trading sex. A total of 66 youth (34%) reported that they had friends who traded sex and 34% of youth themselves indicated that they had been directly propositioned to trade sex. Overall, 12% of the sample reported having traded sex. The majority of these youth had done so only a few times.

Youth were also asked if they had ever been coerced into trading sex. Only one youth said that their partner ever made them do sexual favors for money or drugs and two youth reported that their partners made them do sexual favors for other items.

Finally, 87 youth (44%) indicated that they had done things for survival even when they did not want to. In terms of what they did, 21% of youth indicated that they had stolen or robbed someone, 11% had sold drugs, 10% engaged in prostitution or stripping, 7% had lied or conned someone, and 3% had used violence as protection. Other less frequently engaged in behaviors included panhandling, staying in an abusive relationship, living in a shelter, sleeping outside, staying under a bridge, riding in a stolen car, staying in an abandoned building, or staying at a place that made them uncomfortable even when they did not want to. Responses add up to more than 100% because some respondents listed more than one behavior.

## Part 6: Self Mutilation

**Table 13: Reports of Self Mutilation**

| <b>Have you ever intentionally<br/>(i.e., on purpose)...</b>   | <b>Males<br/>N=114<br/>(percent)</b> | <b>Females<br/>N=85<br/>(percent)</b> | <b>Total<br/>N=199<br/>(percent)</b> | <b>Comparison<br/>of males and<br/>females</b> |
|--|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| Cut your wrists, arms, or other area(s) of your body (without intent to kill yourself)                   | 34 (29.8)                            | 38 (44.7)                             | 72 (36.2)                            | 4.670*   |
| Burned yourself with a cigarette   | 22 (19.3)                            | 12 (14.1)                             | 34 (17.1)                            | .923 ns  |
| Burned yourself with a lighter or match  | 30 (26.3)                            | 18 (21.2)                             | 48 (24.1)                            | .703 ns  |
| Carved words into your skin  | 28 (24.6)                            | 23 (27.1)                             | 51 (25.6)                            | .159 ns  |
| Carved pictures, designs, etc. into your skin  | 26 (22.8)                            | 15 (17.6)                             | 41 (20.6)                            | .793 ns  |
| Severely scratched yourself, to the extent that scarring or bleeding occurred                            | 20 (17.5)                            | 24 (28.2)                             | 44 (22.1)                            | 3.232 ns                                       |
| Bit yourself, to the extent that you broke the skin  | 10 (8.8)                             | 4 (4.7)                               | 14 (7.0)                             | 1.231 ns                                       |
| Rubbed sandpaper on your body  | 4 (3.5)                              | 2 (2.4)                               | 6 (3.0)                              | .222 ns  |
| Dripped acid onto your skin  | 3 (2.6)                              | 1 (1.2)                               | 4 (2.0)                              | .523 ns  |
| Used bleach, comet, or cleaner to scrub your skin  | 3 (2.6)                              | 1 (1.2)                               | 4 (2.0)                              | .523 ns  |
| Stuck sharp objects (e.g., needles.) into your skin (not including tattoos, piercing, needles for drugs) | 11 (9.6)                             | 17 (20.0)                             | 28 (14.1)                            | 4.315*   |
| Rubbed glass into your skin  | 4 (3.5)                              | 11 (12.9)                             | 15 (7.5)                             | 6.216**  |
| Broken your own bones  | 5 (4.4)                              | 1 (1.2)                               | 6 (3.0)                              | 1.715 ns                                       |
| Banged your head against something, to the extent that you caused a bruise to appear                     | 23 (20.2)                            | 18 (21.2)                             | 41 (20.6)                            | .030 ns  |
| Punched yourself to the extent that you caused a bruise to appear  | 9 (7.9)                              | 11 (12.9)                             | 20 (10.1)                            | 1.372 ns                                       |
| Prevented wounds from healing  | 13 (11.4)                            | 14 (16.5)                             | 27 (13.6)                            | 1.066 ns                                       |

Note: \* $p \leq .05$ ; \*\* $p \leq .01$ ; ns=no significant difference between males and females.

The Deliberate Self-Harm Inventory was used to assess self-mutilation among respondents in the current study. Youth were asked “Have you ever intentionally (i.e., on purpose)” followed by a list of 16 questions (see Table 13). There were few significant differences between males and females in terms of which types of self-mutilative behavior they engaged in. Although items such as “rubbing sandpaper on your body,” “dripping acid onto your skin,” “using bleach or comet to scrub your skin,” and “breaking your own bones” were reported by only two to three percent of respondents, other types of self injury were more common. For example, over one-third of the sample (36%) have cut their wrists, arms, or other areas of their body, 17% have burned themselves with a cigarette, 24% have burned themselves with a lighter or match on purpose, 22% have severely scratched themselves to the extent of scarring or bleeding, and 7% have bit themselves to the extent that they broke the skin. Fourteen percent of youth have stuck sharp objects into their skin, whereas 26% have carved words in their skin and 21% have carved pictures or designs into their skin. Finally, 7.5% of youth have rubbed glass into their skin, 10% have punched themselves, and 21% have banged their head against something causing a bruise to appear.

Although both males and females cut their wrists or arms (36% total) females were significantly more likely to do this compared to males (45% vs. 30%, respectively). Females were also significantly more likely than males to stick sharp objects into their skin (20% vs. 10%) and more likely to rub glass into their skin (13% of females vs. 3.5% of males). Although the actual number of self-injurious behaviors that youth engaged in ranged from 1 to 13, the majority engaged in 1 to 3 *different* self-injurious acts. There was no significant difference between males and females in the total number of different self-injurious behaviors engaged in.

The age at which youth began intentionally hurting themselves ranged from ages 3 to 24 with an average age of onset of 14 years. Although the majority of youth reported injuring themselves once (21%), 13% said they did this twice, 8% reporting doing it 3 times, and 11% said they did it 4 or 5 times. The average number of times that youth have hurt themselves was 41 times (median = 5). The average age that youth had *last* intentionally hurt themselves was 17.8 years. Although the *number of years* that youth have been intentionally hurting themselves was close to four, 34% reported doing it for five or more years. Finally, 31% of those who engaged in self-mutilation said that the behavior resulted in hospitalization or injury severe enough to require medical attention.

## Suicide

Many young people in the study come from troubled and/or abusive family backgrounds and many more also experience dangers and risks associated with life on the streets. As such, many may feel desperate and, as a result, contemplate suicide. The current study found that 58% of all youth (n=116) had ever thought about suicide. The number of times they thought about it ranged from one to well over 100 times (median = 7).



Over one-third of respondents (38%) reported that they had attempted suicide. The methods used included pills/toxic liquids (35% of youth), slitting wrists (24% of youth), hanging (20% of youth) and gun/knife (15% of youth). Other less frequently cited means of attempting suicide included overdosing on drugs, jumping off of a bridge or in front of a car, and suffocating oneself. Many youth reported more than one method of attempting suicide. The number of times that youth attempted suicide ranged from one to 100 times with the average being approximately four times. There was no significant difference between males and females in terms of suicide thoughts or suicide attempts.

## **Part 7: Substance Use and Other Mental Health**

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*Depression.* The short form of the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CESD-10) was used to assess depressive symptoms among respondents. This scale measures severity of depressive symptoms but is not meant to be used as a diagnostic tool for a depressive disorder. According to the cut-off used for this scale, approximately 64% of respondents in the current study are suffering from depressive symptoms.

*Trauma.* In order to assess the level of post-traumatic stress that these young people were experiencing, they were administered the Impact of Event Scale which is designed to assess current distress for any specific life event. Respondents were asked questions about whether they thought about a stressful event in the past seven days, if they tried to remove it from their memory, if they had dreams about it, if they couldn't stop thinking about it, etc. The scale, which had a potential range of 0 to 75, was scored as follows: 0 to 25 is considered in the mild range, 26-43 is considered in the moderate range, and 44 and over is considered being in the severe range. Although 39% of the sample fell in the mild range, 17% fell in the moderate range and 44% fell in the severe range suggesting that not only are many young people experiencing stressful life events but that many of them are having difficulties coping.

*Substance Use.* Though the majority of youth have used alcohol at some point, it is also interesting to note that 21% reported never drinking beer, 65% reported never drinking wine, and 36% said they never drank hard liquor. Forty-three percent of young people, however, engaged in binge drinking (which refers to having five or more drinks at one time) at least once in the past month. Moreover, 60% of youth have smoked marijuana and 25% report doing so on a daily basis.

Many young people have also used illicit drugs: 24% have used crack, 18% have used cocaine, 17% have used hallucinogens, and 14% have used amphetamines. Fewer youth reported using ecstasy (9%), barbiturates (8%), opiates (8%) and inhalants (2%). Finally, 13% (or 26 youth) reported ever injecting drugs. When asked if they had ever shared needles while injecting drugs, six youth reported that they had.

## Part 8: Social Networks

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Youth were asked to give the initials of two people that they currently see a lot or spend most of their time with. The use of initials provided greater anonymity. Not all youth were able to provide information for two people and therefore their responses are limited to data for only one person (12% of youth) or no one (5% of youth). The majority of youth (83%), however, reported on two people.

According to Table 14, almost one-third (32%) of youth reported having sex with person 1, 60% said they got drunk with person 1, and 50% have used drugs with this person. Some youth were also pressured to use drugs with person 1 (8.5%), pressured to have sex with person 1 (5%), and one youth was pressured to trade sex by person 1. The percents for person 2 are also listed below (see Table 14).

**Table 14: Reports of Homeless Youth's Social Networks**

|  | <b>Person One</b> | <b>Person Two</b> |
|--|-------------------|-------------------|
|  | <b>N=189</b>      | <b>N=166</b>      |
|  | <b>(percent)</b>  | <b>(percent)</b>  |
| Have you ever had sex with _____                                       | 61 (32.3)         | 22 (13.3)         |
| Have you ever got drunk with _____                                     | 113 (60.1)        | 86 (51.8)         |
| Have you ever used drugs with _____                                    | 95 (50.3)         | 71 (43.0)         |
| Has _____ ever pressured you to use drugs                              | 16 (8.5)          | 14 (8.4)          |
| Has _____ ever pressured you to have sex                               | 9 (4.8)           | 9 (5.4)           |
| Has _____ ever pressured you to trade sex for money, drugs, or shelter | 1 (0.5)           | 0 (0.0)           |

## Social Network Characteristics

The majority of respondents have known person 1 and 2 for one or more years (70% and 69%, respectively). The majority of youth see person 1 on a regular basis (63% had seen person 1 every day and 20% had seen person 1 2-3 times per week). Results were similar for person 2. In terms of closeness, 61% of youth reported being very close to person 1 and 52% were very close to person 2. When asked how often they argue with their social network members, only five percent of youth reported always arguing with person 1 and person 2.

Youth were also asked a set of questions regarding social support and their network members. First, they were asked which of the people they listed (limited to two members) could they go to if they needed help with getting food or money. Thirteen percent of youth said neither person and 31% said they could go to either person in their network. When asked who they would go to if they needed advice about something personal, 10% said no one whereas 67% said one of their network members. Furthermore, 10% of youth reported having no one to turn to when it came to needing help with someone that was bothering them or hassling them. Finally, when asked which of these persons cared about them or made them feel good, 7% reported no one. On the other hand, 27% of youth reported having 2 people that met this need. Even though the majority of youth appear to have their needs met by their network members, approximately 10% of youth have no one in their network that they can turn to for social support.

In summary, even though youth list friends with whom they spend a lot of their time and with whom they can count on in times of need, it is important to recognize that many respondents also acknowledged that some of these same people also have pressured them to use drugs and have sex.

## **Part 9: Social Activities**

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Youth were asked how often they participated in a variety of activities that people their age typically engage in on a regular basis such as going to a movie, going on vacation, playing sports, going on a date, and so forth. Although some youth engaged in these activities on a fairly regular basis, others have not participated in such events for more than one year. That is, 19% of youth reported that the last time they went to a movie was more than 1 year ago and another 27% said it was last year. Thirty-eight percent of respondents had not played sports, 44% had not participated in an organized youth group, 67% had not gone on a vacation, 24% had not been on a date, and 25% have not felt in love for at least a year or more. Many youth, however, reported having a hobby; 42% worked on a hobby last week and 17% had done so in the past month. The majority of youth (79%) had read the newspaper in the last week.

## Part 10: Policy Implications

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Research has demonstrated a strong link between early abuse and numerous short and long-term effects including running away, depression, PTSD, suicide attempts, inappropriate sexual behavior, prostitution, promiscuity, and re-victimization to name a few. In addition, these young people have spent time on the street where they are further exposed to potential offenders. Research shows that those who have been abused and re-victimized in adolescence are at the highest risk for re-victimization in their young adult years. Unfortunately, that means the current sample, with all of its risk factors, is at extremely high risk for re-victimization as they age. Unless we develop programs that directly meet the needs of these individuals, many will be at risk for a lifetime of violence, mental health problems, and possibly long-term homelessness.

The findings from this research project have several policy implications for those who work with homeless and runaway youth. Many of these young people come from family backgrounds characterized by high rates of abuse, neglect, and poor parenting, which are associated with numerous mental health problems. These problems are already apparent in the high rates of depressive symptoms and PTSD found among youth. Additionally, high rates of victimization were reported among both males and females and this is another likely consequence of early maltreatment.

Programs are needed to build youths' self-esteem, teach them about healthy relationships, and to develop healthy coping styles. Without such programs, many of these young people are at risk for entering violent relationships where they will sustain further abuse. Additionally, without such programs, some youth will continue to turn to substance use and self-mutilation as a way of coping with their negative experiences (e.g., early abuse). Healthy and realistic coping styles are needed to break the chain of violence so that these young people are not destined for long-term abuse.

Many young people admitted to engaging in delinquent activities and other high risk behaviors (e.g., selling drugs, stripping, prostitution) even when they did not want to because at the time, they felt they had no other available options to support themselves. Many have dropped out of school, work at minimum paying jobs, and are unable to completely support themselves through legitimate means. As a result, they will turn to delinquent activities to make money. Even though these strategies are viewed as maladaptive to the general population, they are viewed as functional by street youth. Youth need programs that will help them earn their high school diploma and gain additional training so that they can secure decent paying jobs. Without such programs, youth will continue to turn to illegal means to support themselves.

Programs need to be tailored to meet the needs of different youth. This will vary depending on early exposure to violence and abuse, the length of time they have been on the street, the types of risks they have experienced since leaving home, and the types of mental health problems that they are currently experiencing (e.g., depression, PTSD, substance abuse, self-mutilation, etc). 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 deal with stress. This is not an easy task given that many youth currently use maladaptive coping strategies, which further puts 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. This will be a slow process but with time, resources, and the willingness of agencies such as those involved in this project, it can be done.

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## Related Publications on Homeless/Runaway Youth

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- Tyler, Kimberly A. and Katherine A. Johnson. (2004). "Victims and Offenders: Accounts of Paybacks, Invulnerability, and Financial Gain among Homeless Youth." *Deviant Behavior*, 25:427-449.
- Tyler, Kimberly A. and Les B. Whitbeck. (2004). "Lost Childhoods: Risk and Resiliency among Runaway and Homeless Adolescents." In *Intervention with Children & Adolescents: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*, (pp.378-397) Paula Allen-Meares and Mark W. Fraser (Eds). Boston, MA: Person Education.
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Tyler, Kimberly A., Dan R. Hoyt, Les B. Whitbeck, and Ana Mari Cauce. (2001). "The Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse on Later Sexual Victimization among Runaway Youth." *The Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 11:151-176.

Tyler, Kimberly A., Les B. Whitbeck, Dan R. Hoyt, and Kevin A. Yoder. (2000). "Predictors of Self-Reported Sexually Transmitted Diseases among Homeless and Runaway Adolescents." *The Journal of Sex Research*, 37:369-377.

Tyler, Kimberly A., Dan R. Hoyt, and Les B. Whitbeck. (2000). "The Effects of Early Sexual Abuse on Later Sexual Victimization among Female Homeless and Runway Adolescents." *The Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 15:235-250.

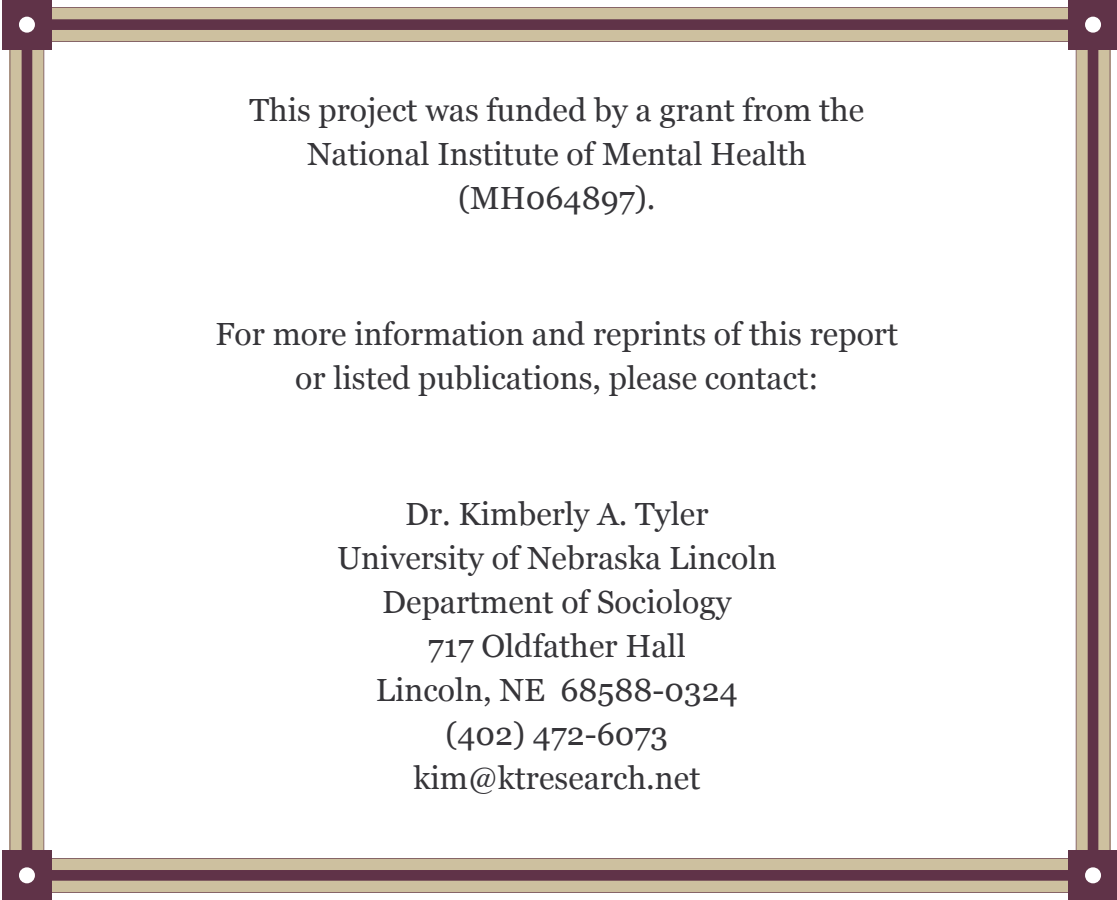
## **Forthcoming Publications**

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Tyler, Kimberly A. and Katherine A. Johnson. "Pathways In and Out of Substance Use among Homeless Youth." *Journal of Adolescent Research*, Fall 2005.

Tyler, Kimberly A. "A Qualitative Study of Early Family Histories and Transitions of Homeless Youth." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, November 2006, 21 (11).

Tyler, Kimberly A. and Katherine A. Johnson. "Trading Sex: Voluntary or Coerced? The Experiences of Homeless Youth." *Journal of Sex Research*.



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