

## Comparison of homeless youth to the general youth population

In this section, we compare the homeless youth interviewed for this study (age 17 and under) to a sample of youth in the general population, as well as to three other populations: youth in alternative schools, youth in residential behavioral treatment facilities, and youth in juvenile correctional facilities.

The first comparison examines data from ninth-graders (ages 13 to 17) who participated in the 2004 Minnesota Student Survey.<sup>1</sup>

As part of the Minnesota Student Survey, youth in alternative schools and learning centers (2004), residential behavioral treatment facilities (2001), and juvenile correctional facilities (2001) were also surveyed.<sup>2</sup> Youth between the ages of 11 and 21 are included in these tables.

The vast majority of the youth are 14 to 17 years old (87% of residential treatment youth, 85% of juvenile corrections youth, and 57% of alternative school or Area Learning Center youth).

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<sup>1</sup> The Minnesota Student Survey is conducted ever three years in 6<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grades. Data available through Coordinated School Health at <http://www.mnschoolhealth.com/resources.html?ac=data>

<sup>2</sup> Minnesota Student Survey Interagency Team. (2004). *2004 Minnesota Student Survey Statewide Tables*. St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Department of Education.

Minnesota Department of Human Services and the Minnesota Department of Children, Families & Learning. (2001). *Minnesota Student Survey 2001 Tables for Residential Behavioral Treatment Facilities*. St. Paul, MN: Author. Retrieved December 6, 2004, from:

[http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/groups/healthcare/documents/pub/dhs\\_id\\_020538.pdf](http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/groups/healthcare/documents/pub/dhs_id_020538.pdf)

Minnesota Department of Human Services and the Minnesota Department of Children, Families & Learning. (2001). *Minnesota Student Survey 2001 Tables for Juvenile Correctional Facilities and Detention Centers*. St. Paul, MN: Author. Retrieved December 6, 2004, from:

[http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/groups/healthcare/documents/pub/dhs\\_id\\_008347.pdf](http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/groups/healthcare/documents/pub/dhs_id_008347.pdf)

Minnesota Student Survey Interagency Team. (2005). *2004 Minnesota Student Survey Alternative Schools and Area Learning Centers Tables*. St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Department of Education.

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**Comparing the Minnesota student population to the homeless youth survey sample**

	Student survey, 9 <sup>th</sup> grade, general population, 2004 (N=49,210)		Student survey, alternative schools, 2004 (N=3,331)		Student survey, residential behavioral treatment population, 2001 (N=302)		Student survey, juvenile corrections population, 2001 (N=759)		Homeless youth survey, 2003 (N=129)	
	Male (N=23,999)	Female (N=25,211)	Male (N=1,763)	Female (N=1,568)	Male (N=139)	Female (N=163)	Male (N=618)	Female (N=141)	Male (N=46)	Female (N=83)
Race: White	77%		65%		56%		51%		35%	
Ran away from home in last year	11%	15%	20%	26%	38%	68%	42%	69%	-	-
Cigarette use <sup>a</sup>	14%	16%	65%	68%	39%	47%	47%	69%	46%	55%
Treated for drug or alcohol problem	5%	3%	24%	21%	30%	39%	46%	49%	24%	17%
Ever been hit by date <sup>b</sup>	5%	5%	9%	20%	6%	32%	13%	29%	15%	19%
Ever been pregnant (females)	-	1%	-	32%	-	29%	-	25%	-	29%
Ever gotten someone pregnant (males)	2%	-	12%	-	11%	-	23%	-	21%	-
Ever been physically abused <sup>c</sup>	9%	14%	14%	21%	33%	46%	21%	35%	33%	41%
Ever been sexually abused <sup>d</sup>	3%	9%	5%	20%	15%	47%	10%	39%	22%	31%
Ever attempted suicide	7%	16%	16%	34%	31%	53%	21%	42%	17%	25%
Recent use of alcohol <sup>e</sup>	27%	29%	62%	57%	20%	25%	28%	45%	16%	15%

- Notes:** a) The Minnesota Student Survey states, "during the last 30 days, on how many days did you smoke a cigarette?" (those reporting more than one day were counted for this item). The homeless youth survey states, "during the past week have you used cigarettes or other tobacco products?"
- b) The Minnesota Student Survey states, "victim of violence on a date." The homeless youth survey states, "during anytime in the past 12 months, have you been in a personal relationship with someone who hit you, slapped you or pushed you around or threatened to do so?"
- c) The Minnesota Student Survey states, "has any adult in your household ever hit you so hard that you had marks or were afraid of that person?" The homeless youth survey states, "physically mistreated as a child or youth?"
- d) The Minnesota Student Survey states, "has any older person outside the family touched you sexually against your wishes or forced you to touch them sexually?" The homeless youth survey states, "sexually mistreated as a child or youth?"
- e) The Minnesota Student Survey states, "On how many occasions have you had alcoholic beverages to drink during the last 30 days?" (those reporting more than one day were counted for this item). The homeless youth survey states, "during the past week, have you used alcohol (beer, wine, hard liquor)?"

### ***Comparisons between homeless youth and the general population of similarly aged youth***

By examining information provided by the general population of Minnesota youth (Minnesota Student Survey) compared with youth who were homeless on October 23, 2003, we find:

- Homeless youth are *more* likely than youth in the general Minnesota student population to have been physically or sexually abused, to smoke cigarettes, to have experienced violence in a recent relationship, to have been pregnant, and to have attempted suicide.
- Homeless youth are slightly *less* likely than youth in the general Minnesota student population to report recent use of alcohol, but they are more likely to have been treated for an alcohol or drug problem.

The incidence of substance abuse disorder (diagnosed within the last six months) in the general population of youth 9-17 years of age is 2 percent.<sup>3</sup> In the homeless youth sample, the rate of alcohol or drug abuse disorder (diagnosis within the last two years) is 13 percent. Even allowing for the different timeframes (two years versus six months), and the fact that the homeless youth sample includes a high proportion of 16 and 17 year olds, homeless youth interviewed are more likely to have substance abuse disorder than youth in the general population.

### ***Comparisons between homeless youth and youth taking the Minnesota Student Survey in alternative schools, residential treatment facilities, and juvenile corrections facilities***

Where comparison data are available, it is apparent that many of the experiences of homeless youth are very similar to those found in youth surveyed in juvenile corrections or residential behavioral treatment programs.

- Youth in alternative schools, residential behavioral treatment, juvenile corrections, and who are homeless report *similarly* high rates of having been abused and having been the victim of domestic violence.
- Compared to youth surveyed in juvenile corrections and residential behavioral treatment programs, homeless youth are *less* likely to have attempted suicide and less likely to have received chemical dependency treatment services.

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<sup>3</sup> Shaffer, D. et. al. (1996). The NIMH Diagnostic Interview Schedule for Children Version 2.3 (DISC-2.3): Description, acceptability, prevalence rates and performance in the MECA Study. Methods for the Epidemiology of Child and Adolescent Mental Disorders Study. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 35 (7), 865-77.

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- Homeless boys are *more* likely to have been sexually abused than boys in residential treatment, corrections, or alternative schools.

***Prevalence of running away reported by Minnesota youth***

- According to the Minnesota Student Survey, 11 percent of 9th grade boys and 15 percent of 9th grade girls have run away from home at some point during the 12 months prior to the 2004 survey.
- These rates jump to nearly a quarter of the population of students attending alternative schools and to over half of all students in residential treatment or juvenile justice facilities.
- Particularly for those living in residential treatment or corrections programs, girls are more likely than boys to report that they have run away within the past year.

It is not known how many of these youth end up participating in the homeless youth and young adult survey. We do know that seven out of 10 youth who participate in our study have lived in some type of out-of-home placement.

In 2003, there were 1,345 calls to the National Runaway Switchboard placed by children and youth from Minnesota. Seventy-six percent of calls made to the switchboard were made by girls, and 61 percent were made by youth on the street.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Retrieved December 10, 2004, from: <http://www.nrscrisisline.org/2003stat.asp>

## Comparisons to other studies of homeless youth and young adults

As part of the National Health Interview Study sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in 1992 and 1993, researchers interviewed a nationally representative household sample of 6,496 youth ages 12 to 17. Youth were asked if they spent one or more nights in the past year in a variety of places. These included shelters as well as places not intended as housing such as bridges and cars. Based on these interviews, researchers estimated that 5 percent of the total population of 12 to 17 year olds are homeless each year (or 22,563 youth in Minnesota in a year).<sup>1</sup>

There are very few comprehensive descriptive studies of the homeless youth population. Many use information collected from service providers that often report duplicated information (a youth may be counted more than once during a study period). This was true for the geographically closest statewide study – a study conducted in Iowa in 1999. Basic demographics were collected by surveying service providers who came in contact with homeless or near-homeless children and youth.<sup>2</sup>

However, there have been increased efforts in some communities to enumerate and describe homeless youth. In comparing the homeless youth interviewed for this survey with the results of other recent studies of youth homelessness, a number of common characteristics are evident. The comparisons are drawn from the following studies:

United States	1992	Interviews conducted by Research Triangle Institute in Fall 1992 with youth residing in 23 shelters nationally and with youth on the streets in 10 urban areas (two samples). <sup>3</sup>
Minnesota	2000	Interviews conducted by Wilder Research with youth and young adults in shelters and non-shelter locations throughout Minnesota on the evening of October 26, 2000. <sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ringwalt, C., Greene, J.M., Robertson, M., McPheeters, M. (1998). The prevalence of homelessness among adolescents in the United States. *Am J Public Health*, 88, 1325-1329.

<sup>2</sup> University of Iowa. (2000). *Iowa's homeless population: 1999 estimates and profile*. Iowa City, IA: Author.

<sup>3</sup> Greene, J. M., & Ringwalt, C. (1995). *Youth with runaway, throwaway and homeless experiences: Prevalence, drug use, and other at-risk behaviors*. Silver Spring, MD: National Clearinghouse on Families and Youth.

<sup>4</sup> Wilder Research. (2001). *Homeless youth in Minnesota: statewide survey of people without permanent shelter*. St. Paul, MN: Author.

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Lower Midwest	2000	Interviews conducted between the spring of 2000 and the fall of 2001 as part of the Midwest Longitudinal Study of Homeless Adolescents. Interviews conducted in Nebraska, Iowa, Missouri, and Kansas with 455 youth. <sup>5</sup>
Monterey CA	2002	Interviews conducted with 316 homeless youth between February and March 2002. Of these 316 youth, 27 percent were unaccompanied and living on their own. The rest were with families. <sup>6</sup>
Minnesota	2003	Interviews conducted with youth and young adults in shelters and non-shelter locations throughout Minnesota during the evening of October 23, 2003 (this study).

Studies of youth homelessness include youth of varying age ranges. Many include youth who are between the ages of 12 and 21 (see the age ranges included in other studies, below). To better compare basic information collected about Minnesota's homeless youth population to other studies done in other parts of the county, we have **combined youth and young adult data** in the following table.

Because these statistics combine youth and young adult data, percentages differ from those provided elsewhere in this report. In nearly all other tables, data for youth under the age of 18 are reported separately from data for young adults 18 to 20 years old.

The table below illustrates the demographic profiles and the life experiences of **youth and young adults** described in these varied samples.

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<sup>5</sup> Whitbeck, L., & Hoyt, D. (2002). *Midwest Longitudinal Study of Homeless Adolescents. Baseline summary for all participating agencies*. Lincoln Nebraska: University of Nebraska – Lincoln. Retrieved May 11, 2004, from: [www.endhomelessness.org/pub/MidwestStudy.pdf](http://www.endhomelessness.org/pub/MidwestStudy.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> Monterey County Department of Social and Employment Services (2002). *Homeless Census and Homeless Youth/Foster Teen Study*. Monterey, CA: Author. Retrieved December 6, 2004, from: [http://www.co.monterey.ca.us/dss/affiliates/cap/downloads/homeless\\_teens/07\\_main\\_study.pdf](http://www.co.monterey.ca.us/dss/affiliates/cap/downloads/homeless_teens/07_main_study.pdf)

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**Comparison of youth characteristics from six homeless youth and young adult studies**

<b>Sample population</b>	<b>RTI, 1995 Street N=600</b>	<b>RTI, 1995 Sheltered N=640</b>	<b>Monterey CA, 2002, Street and sheltered N=316</b>	<b>Lower Midwest, 2002 Street &amp; sheltered N=455</b>	<b>MN, 2000 Street &amp; sheltered N=494</b>	<b>MN, 2003 Street &amp; sheltered N=431</b>
	<b>Street youth from 10 urban areas</b>	<b>Sheltered youth from 23 shelters nationally</b>	<b>County-wide survey of youth with parents and on their own</b>	<b>Survey of youth ages 16-19</b>	<b>Statewide sheltered and street (not with parents)</b>	<b>Statewide sheltered and street (not with parents)</b>
<b>Gender</b>						
Male	61%	39%	64%	44%	40%	39%
Female	39%	61%	36%	56%	60%	61%
<b>Age</b>						
Average age	17.9	16.1	18	18	17.4	17.9
Range of ages	12-21	12-21	14-21	16-19	10-20	8-20
<b>Race</b>						
African American	28%	41%	6%	22%	29%	34%
Caucasian	46%	32%	35%	59%	41%	39%
American Indian	-	-	-	3%	16%	13%
Latino/Hispanic	18%	20%	53%	4%	8%	10%
Asian	-	-	4%	1%	2%	2%
Other	9%	8%	-	11%	7%	9%
<b>Placements</b>						
Drug/alcohol treatment	24%	18%	Not asked	Not asked	16%	16%
Foster home	Not asked	Not asked	10%	Not asked	36%	42%
<b>Abuse</b>						
Physical	Not asked	Not asked	Not asked	77%	45%	43%
Sexual	14%	8%	Not asked	22%	33% 40% girls, 21% boys	29% 37% girls, 16% boys

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**Comparison of youth characteristics from six homeless youth and young adult studies (continued)**

<b>Sample population</b>	<b>RTI, 1995 Street N=600  Street youth from 10 urban areas</b>	<b>RTI, 1995 Sheltered N=640  Sheltered youth from 23 shelters nationally</b>	<b>Monterey CA, 2002, Street and sheltered N=316 County-wide survey of youth with parents and on their own</b>	<b>Lower Midwest, 2002 Street &amp; sheltered N=455  Survey of youth ages 16-19</b>	<b>MN, 2000 Street &amp; sheltered N=494 Statewide sheltered and street (not with parents)</b>	<b>MN, 2003 Street &amp; sheltered N=431 Statewide sheltered and street (not with parents)</b>
<b>Survival sex</b>						
Engaged in sex for food, money, or shelter	21%	7%	Not asked	20%	17% 19% girls, 15% boys	14% 15% girls, 13% boys
<b>Children</b>						
Ever been pregnant (girls only)	50%	41%	50%	46%	45%	49%
Have children	Not asked	Not asked	19%	17%	30%	25%
<b>Suicide</b>						
Ever attempted suicide	32%	26%	Not asked	37%	28%	24%
<b>Violence</b>						
Been assaulted	29%	15%	Not asked	31% girls 36% boys (while homeless)	19% 20% girls 18% boys (while homeless)	17% 18% girls, 15% boys (while homeless)

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The table shows that:

- Homeless youth are disproportionately youth of color.
- Homeless youth report high levels (8% to 33%) of past sexual abuse. Research Triangle Institute's national sample reported the lowest levels of sexual abuse. This may be due, in part, to differences in social climate with regard to reporting abuse.
- Nearly half of homeless girls report having been pregnant.
- One-fourth to one-third of homeless youth report having attempted suicide.
- Fifteen to 36 percent of homeless youth report having been assaulted since becoming homeless.
- Between 16 and 24 percent of homeless youth have been in drug or alcohol treatment facilities.

## Comparisons to children and youth in residential treatment centers and treatment foster care

Youth who are homeless share common experiences with youth who are living in treatment programs. In many ways, the experiences of homeless youth parallel those of children who are served in residential treatment programs and treatment foster care. In fact, some of these facilities can also serve children who need short-term shelter. Backgrounds of abuse, alcoholism, and prior institutionalization are common. The table below provides selected comparisons between the 2003 homeless youth survey and information about children and youth served through the Minnesota Council of Child Caring Agencies.<sup>1</sup> Please note that the residential treatment center and treatment foster care samples include children of all ages (although three-quarters are ages 12 to 18 at intake), while the homeless youth population includes no one under the age of 8.

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### Demographics and life experiences

	Youth being discharged from residential facilities in 2002 (N=377)	Youth being discharged from treatment foster care in 2002 (N=104)	2003 homeless youth (Age 8-17) (N=129)
<b>Average (mean) age</b>	13.4 years	13.1 years	15.6 years
<b>Gender</b>			
Female	37%	51%	64%
Male	63%	49%	36%
<b>Youth of Color</b>	38%	69%	67%
<b>Victimization<sup>a</sup></b>			
Physical abuse	51%	46%	38%
Sexual abuse	46%	36%	28%
Abuse OR neglect <sup>b</sup>	68%	77%	52%

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<sup>1</sup> Becker, L. and the MCCA Research and Evaluation Committee. (2003). *Minnesota Council of Child Caring Agencies 2003 Annual Outcomes Report*. St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Council of Child Caring Agencies.

**Demographics and life experiences (continued)**

	Youth being discharged from residential facilities in 2002 (N=377)	Youth being discharged from treatment foster care in 2002 (N=104)	2003 homeless youth (Age 8-17) (N=129)
<b>Prior Placement</b>			
Foster care	37%	56%	53%
Group home	18%	13%	29%
Drug or alcohol treatment	6%	8%	13%
Residential treatment <sup>c</sup>	28%	27%	20%
Correctional facility	7%	12%	35%
Shelter/Shelter foster care	40%	60%	74% <sup>d</sup>

**Notes:** a) Data from residential treatment programs are based on abuse that was either suspected or documented. Homeless youth data are based on self-reported abuse.

b) Homeless youth were asked "did your parents ever neglect to provide you with food, shelter, or medical care, or consistently ignore your physical or emotional needs in other significant ways?" Residential treatment and treatment foster care programs reported on youth who were emotionally abused or physically neglected.

c) Refers to residential programs for emotional, behavioral, or mental health problems; does not include corrections programs.

d) Homeless youth were asked if they had ever lived in an emergency shelter.

The data suggest that many homeless youth have experienced circumstances similar to those of youth treated in residential programs. Homeless youth, however, appear less likely than those in treatment to have been physically or sexually abused. Homeless youth are more likely to be girls, to be persons of color, and are older on average than those in residential treatment facilities.

Institutionalized and homeless youth show similarities in their incidence of out-of-home placements. A substantial percentage of both groups have had prior placements in foster care, residential treatment facilities for mental health or behavioral problems, and correctional facilities. Homeless youth are more likely than youth in placement to have been in group homes, chemical dependency treatment facilities, and correctional facilities.