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Short-Term Outcomes for Youth Receiving Runaway and Homeless Shelter Services

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ABSTRACT

Objective: Few studies have assessed the outcomes of runaway/homeless youth that seek assistance from shelter or crisis services, which would provide much needed documentation of intervention effectiveness and point to new directions for service provision. The goals of the current study were to: (1) assess short-term outcomes among runaway/homeless youth using emergency shelters and crisis services and (2) compare short-term outcomes achieved by runaway/homeless youth in crisis shelters with similar youth using other, longer-term treatment modalities. Method: The study sampled 261 youth using runaway/homeless shelters from four mid-western states at intake and six weeks post discharge and 47 high-risk youth using longer-term services at intake and six weeks postintake; ten key outcome variables were assessed. Results: Every outcome variable demonstrated improvement postintervention: days on the run, school suspension and/or detention, and sexual activity decreased; perceived family support and self-esteem increased; and youth were more likely to be currently employed and less likely to have been fired. In comparing runaway/homeless crisis shelter users with day treatment users on the ten outcome variables, there were no significant differences across any of the outcome variables. Conclusions: Despite limitations, the research provides evidence for the short-term effectiveness of crisis shelter services for runaway/homeless youth.

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The number of homeless and/or runaway youth are increasing, yet these adolescents remain one of this country's most vulnerable and least understood populations (Kipke, Palmer, LaFrance & O'Connor, 1997; Whitbeck, Hoyt, & Ackley, 1997). Estimates indicate that between 575,000 and more than 1 million youth in the United States run away or are forced to leave their parental homes each year (Finkelhor, Hotaling & Sedlak, 1990; Greene, Ringwalt, Kelly, Iachan, & Cohen, 1995; Heflin & Rudy, 1991). These troubled adolescents come from diverse, multiple-problem living situations and often engage in risky behaviors such as school failure, substance abuse, criminal activity, and unprotected sexual activity (Greene, Ringwalt & Iachan, 1997). In addition, these adolescents have disproportionate rates of mental health problems such as depression and suicidal thoughts or attempts (Shaffer & Caton, 1984); are frequently in trouble with the juvenile justice system, typically for theft and burglary (Bass, 1992; McCarthy & Hagen, 1992); and have poor relationships with parents and continual transience (D'Andrea, 1992; Kurtz, Jarvis, & Kurtz, 1991; Rafferty, 1990, 1997; Rotheram-Borus, 1993).

Community-based youth crisis shelters are the primary method of intervention designed to meet the complex needs of these adolescents. These agencies typically serve adolescents 12 to 18 years of age, are limited in size to less than 20 beds, restrict stays to fewer than 15 days, and are partially funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (Greene et al., 1997). Shelters provide a variety of crisis and custodial services and reported serving approximately 65,000 unique cases in 1997 (Thompson, Safyer, & Pollio, 2000). However, these shelters are often underutilized because many of the youth are not aware of this resource or feel their needs are not met through these services (Green et al., 1995) or that they will be remanded to the authorities (Robertson, 1992).

Research studies have addressed the varied reasons adolescents give for running away, often focusing on family problems, conflicts, maltreatment,

and neglect (e.g., Dadds, Braddock, Cuers, Elliott, & Kelly, 1993; Powers, Eckenrode, & Jaklitsch, 1990; Zide & Cherry, 1992). To date, however, few studies have assessed the outcomes of runaway and homeless youth that seek assistance from shelter or crisis services. Systematic evaluations of outcomes for service-using youth would provide much-needed documentation of intervention effectiveness (Teare et al., 1994) and point to new directions for service development. A methodologically sound evaluation of current services, therefore, represents a critical next step for service provision and policy decisions for this underserved population.

In studying runaway and homeless youth, assessment of a variety of outcome domains is essential due to the uniqueness and diversity of this population, the broad range of environmental, cultural, socioeconomic, and interrelational factors, and the varied intervention techniques (Hargreaves & Shumway, 1992; Mirin & Namerow, 1991). In a previous study outcomes were conceptualized in terms of school, employment, self-esteem, criminal behavior, and family relationships (Thompson, Pollio, & Bitner, in press). Results demonstrated that youths utilizing shelter services that returned to their homes reported more positive outcomes than adolescents discharged to other locations.

This study builds on previous research by addressing the methodological limitations often associated with runaway and homeless youth research, that is, small sample size; recruitment from single, nonrepresentative shelter or street sites; and lack of control or comparison groups. For this study outcomes were assessed across a large number of youth using crisis shelters from four midwestern states and compared with a group of high-risk youth using longer term services. Two research questions were posed: (1) What are the short-term outcomes of runaway and homeless youth 6 weeks after discharge from an emergency or crisis shelter? and (2) How do short-term outcomes achieved by runaway and homeless youth using crisis shelters compare with outcomes of similar youth using longer term treatment modalities?

METHOD

Research Design

A quasi-experimental design was employed that included preservice and post service use interviews of runaway and homeless youth and a comparison group of youths with similar characteristics from day treatment programs. Because the majority of study participants were minors, it was generally necessary to gain parental consent, either in person, over the telephone, or by mail. Washington University's Human Subjects Committee approved all study procedures, and the State of Missouri, Department of Youth Services gave human participants approval for recruiting the comparison condition.

Participants and Agencies

Youth participating in runaway and homeless youth emergency shelters and a comparison group of youth participating in day treatment programs were recruited as participants for this study. The runaway and homeless youth sample utilized emergency shelters in 11 agencies across Missouri, Iowa, Nebraska, and Kansas between November 1997 and May 1998. These agencies, known as MINK–Region VII, are a consortium of programs providing emergency shelter and crisis services for youth and are federally funded through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. The 11 MINK agencies provide crisis shelter and services, including short-term, temporary, residential services; access to school-based education; crisis and family counseling; life skills training; and referral services. These agencies are located in urban, suburban, and rural areas; some are freestanding shelters, others are part of large service networks. Agency populations are varied, as some serve both genders and others serve only males or females, but average length of stay for youth is 2 to 4 weeks.

Participants in the comparison condition were recruited through four agencies providing day treatment for at-risk youth in the greater St. Louis area. These programs receive state and federal funding to assist youth to transition out of residential treatment. These programs provide school-based education; training in life skills, anger management, and self-awareness; family-oriented counseling; and referral services and are located in urban, suburban, and rural locations. All youth admitted during a 1-month period were recruited for participation.

Both agencies offer short-term case management, individual and group counseling, and discharge planning to youth that have had current or previous runaway episode(s) and/or other high-risk behaviors. Both shelters and day treatment programs have a mission to teach youth the skills to become independent while providing other services to improve the likelihood for successful outcomes. Day treatment programs, however, have additional long-term rehabilitative and educational components not typical of youth crisis shelters. These additional treatment options provide a conservative comparison, as longer term services should, intuitively, generate improved outcomes over shorter term shelter services. A comparison group of runaway youth not using shelter services might provide another optimal comparison group. However, many of the youth shelters provide outreach services to locate youth on the street; therefore, many of the street youth are eventually admitted to shelters. Other comparison groups that might have included youth with similar characteristics, that is, youth involved in foster care or family preservation, are difficult to locate and would have eliminated the “crisis service use” orientation sought for this study.

Data Collection Procedures

Clinical staff at each agency initially recruited all participants. Demographic information was collected for participants at MINK agencies at intake

using the Runaway and Homeless Youth Management Information System (RHYMIS) database, a well-recognized instrument developed by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). RHYMIS is an automated information system that was designed to gather comprehensive information concerning youth characteristics, problems, family, and service utilization. This federally developed database has been extensively examined and adequate reliability determined. Similar information and demographics included in the RHYMIS were collected on the comparison group.

Due to the lack of standardized measures developed to assess outcomes of this population, a brief-outcomes instrument was constructed. This instrument was designed for agency caseworker implementation with youths that would likely be unwilling to participate in lengthy interviews. Outcome questions were developed for inclusion in the instrument by utilizing previous research of this population and collaborating with agency caseworkers and ACF staff. The self-esteem scale had been developed and used by the youth shelters. Test-retest reliability analyses of the brief-outcomes instrument were performed and had a test-retest alpha ranging from .56 to 1.0, with an average reliability alpha of .78 (further information on reliability and validity procedures is provided in a previous publication, Thompson, et al., 2000).

Participants in both conditions were interviewed initially using this instrument, and follow-up interviews were collected 6 weeks postdischarge for the youth using MINK agency services and 6 weeks postintake for youth in the comparison condition. Previous studies determined that 6 weeks was a feasible length of time to re-locate youth that had utilized runaway shelters (Thompson, et al., 2000); thus, the 6-week time period was used for follow-up interviews of the comparison group to maintain comparability.

Tracking procedures. Methods were developed to track participants in the study condition for follow-up interviews. Agency staff conducted the inter-views, generally the same staff person who had conducted the intake inter-view or had

been the youth's primary case manager while at the agency. In cases where youth could not be located but a family member with postdischarge information was available, proxy interviews were conducted. Previous studies using these methods of tracking participants have been shown to yield a follow-up sample representative of initial intakes (Pollio, Thompson, & North, 2000). The participants in the comparison condition were readily available to complete the follow-up interview, as day treatment was ongoing. Attrition in this condition represents the refusal rate for follow-up.

Variables. Age, gender, race, family contact prior to intake (yes/no), runaway history (days on the run, number of previous runaway episodes), and living situation prior to intake (living with parent/legal guardian, yes/no) were collected at intake for individuals in both the study and comparison conditions. To aid in understanding the population served by runaway and homeless emergency shelter users, the following descriptive variables were also collected: (a) personal history, including referral source, school status at intake, lifetime substance use, and ever contemplated suicide; and (b) post-discharge service use (individual services used since discharge, each service coded yes/no).

Outcome data were collected at baseline and follow-up for 10 variables across six domains: (a) runaway behavior (days on the run), (b) family relationship (family contact, yes/no; perceived family support rating, range 1-4), (c) school behavior (suspended, expelled, received detention, all coded yes/no), (d) employment (currently employed, yes/no; fired in last 6 weeks, yes/no), (e) sexual behavior (currently active, yes/no) and (f) self-esteem (eight-item scale, range 8-32). Initially, substance use was expected to be included as an outcome variable; however, RHY MIS items were collected sporadically by the youth shelters, making outcome analysis impossible. Outcomes were measured by differences between intake and follow-up interviews for both groups of youth.

Data Analysis

Initially, three analyses were conducted to assess the validity of the sample. First, to examine attrition in the study condition, demographic variables (age, race, and gender) and key behaviors prior to intake (number of previous runaway episodes, days on the run, family contact, and living situation prior to intake) were compared for individuals completing follow-up interviews and those not completing. Second, to assess the validity of the comparison, the same variables collected at intake were compared between the study and comparison conditions. To evaluate differences between youth and proxy interviews similar variables were compared for runaway and homeless emergency shelter users (no proxy interviews were conducted for the comparison condition). Because the number-of-runaway-episodes variable was not collected at follow-up, it was not included in the analysis. In addition, proxy interviews were not conducted at baseline; therefore, postdischarge outcome variables were used for key behaviors. All of these analyses utilized chi-square or t tests as appropriate.

To address the first research question, outcomes for the runaway and homeless group were compared between baseline and follow-up scores on each of the outcome variables. McNemar¹ exact tests and t tests were used. To address the second research question, change scores were calculated for each outcome variable for both conditions. To examine achievement of positive change, dichotomous dependent variables were recoded as positive change (coded as 1) or no change and negative change together (coded as 0); logistic regression was used in these analyses. For continuous dependent variables, the score at intake was subtracted from the follow-up interview score, creating positive scores that represented positive achievement; ordinary least squares regression was used in these analyses. To control for differences between the study and comparison conditions, demographic or key behavior variables found to be significantly different in previous analyses were included in all multivariate analyses.

RESULTS

Sample Validity

Attrition analysis. The total sample for the study consisted of 421 participants; intake interviews were conducted with 368 youth admitted to runaway and homeless services and 54 youth admitted to the longer term service condition. A total of 308 (73%) 6-week follow-up interviews were completed: 261 (71%) for youth at runaway and homeless shelters and 47 (87%) for the comparison condition. A majority of follow-up interviews were completed by the youth (75%) rather than a proxy respondent.

In comparing baseline demographics for differential rates of attrition, only one variable distinguished between successful and unsuccessful reinterviews: Youth who reported living primarily with parents or another adult guardian prior to admission were significantly more likely to be interviewed at follow-up ($\chi^2 = 5.57, df = 1, p = .02$). No significant differences were detected for age, race, gender, days on the run, number of previous runaway episodes, and percentage having family contact prior to intake.

Analysis of validity of comparison between conditions. Table 1 presents descriptive and key behavior variables for both study conditions. Examination of differences between the two conditions indicated that youth using runaway and homeless emergency shelters were significantly more likely to be female ($\chi^2 = 45.5, df = 1, p = .000$) and younger ($t = 2.71, df = 363, p = .01$). No differences were detected between conditions for race, days on the run, number of previous runaway episodes, percentage having family contact prior to intake, and primary residence prior to intake.

TABLE 1: Demographic and Key Behavior Statistics for Runaway and Homeless Emergency Shelter and Day Treatment Users

Variable	Runaway/Homeless Shelter			Day Treatment		
	M	SD/%	n	M	SD/%	n
<i>Demographics</i>						
Age (years)	14.7	± 1.5**	341	15.3	± .8**	51
Gender (% female)	61%	***	343	11%	***	52
Race (% White)	73%		321	60%		53
<i>Key behaviors at intake</i>						
Previous runaway episodes	2.4	± 5	327	3.1	± 5.4	51
Days on the run	5.2	± 15	324	7.1	± 18.1	45
Had family contact	88%		343	90%		52
Living with parent or legal guardian	81%		321	81%		53

** $p < .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.

Analysis of youth versus proxy interviews. In examining demographic differences between youth and proxy interviews, no significant differences were detected for age, race, or gender. Evaluation of key behaviors at follow-up revealed that youth living at home after discharge were more likely to have a proxy complete the follow-up interview ($\chi^2 = 5.31$, $df = 1$, $p = .02$).

Descriptive characteristics. As shown in Table 1, youth using runaway and homeless emergency shelters were generally female, White, and averaged nearly 15 years of age. Most had a history of running away, although the range in number of episodes was quite large (0-48 episodes) and more than one third of the sample had no previous episodes (38%). The vast majority of youth who used runaway and homeless shelters had run from home (81%) and reported having contact with their family prior to intake (88%). The only significant differences between these youth and the comparison group was their gender and age; the youth in day treatment programs were predominately male and

significantly older.

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics on behavioral variables collected at intake for runaway and homeless youth using emergency shelters. Most of these youth had received referrals from their family (36%) or other formal systems (54%). Almost one third had dropped out, been expelled, or were attending school sporadically; slightly less than half attended regularly or

TABLE 2: Descriptive Statistics for Runaway and Homeless Emergency Shelter Users Only

<i>Variable</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>
<i>Referral source^a</i>		312
<i>Parent/guardian</i>	36	
<i>Child welfare/protective services</i>	21	
<i>Juvenile justice</i>	19	
<i>Outreach services</i>	14	
<i>Self</i>	4	
<i>School status at intake^a</i>		312
<i>Attending regularly/graduated</i>	49	
<i>Truant</i>	24	
<i>Dropped out/expelled</i>	8	
<i>Lifetime substance use^b</i>		
<i>Marijuana</i>	94	158
<i>Alcohol</i>		
<i>Beer/wine</i>	76	210
<i>Hard liquor</i>	75	148
<i>Cocaine</i>	17	26
<i>Inhalants</i>	13	33
<i>Contemplated suicide^b</i>	36	114
<i>Postintervention service use^b</i>		
<i>Mental health</i>	25	89
<i>Health</i>	30	76
<i>Legal</i>	18	45
<i>Employment</i>	17	42
<i>Substance abuse treatment</i>	8	20
<i>Crisis hotline</i>	8	20
<i>Housing</i>	6	15

a. Single response variable. Responses of 5% or less are not reported in the table.

b. Individual variables. Responses are percentage "yes."

had graduated. Additionally, substance use was extremely prevalent, marijuana being the most frequently reported (94%). Over one third of the sample reported they had contemplated suicide. Finally, many had used a variety of other services, most commonly mental health (35%) and health (30%).

Short-Term Outcomes

Research Question 1: Outcomes for runaway and homeless emergency shelter users. Table 3 presents intake and 6-week follow-up scores for the 10 outcomes. Every outcome variable demonstrated significant improvement postintervention, including: (a) days on the run decreased ($t = 3.66, df = 223, p = .000$); (b) perceived family support increased ($t = -4.55, df = 231, p = .000$); (c) less likely to be suspended (McNemar $p = .03$) or have received detention (McNemar $p = .04$); (d) more likely to be currently employed (McNemar $p = .002$) and less likely to have been fired (McNemar $p = .000$); (e) less likely to be currently sexually active (McNemar $p = .001$); and (f) self-esteem score increased ($t = 4.71, df = 165, p = .000$). Effect sizes (ESs) for the continuous variables are relatively small: days on the run, family support, and self-esteem were $ES = .28, .33, .42$, respectively. Outcomes improved similarly, as shown in Table 4, for the comparison group.²

TABLE 3: Outcomes of Intervention for Runaway and Homeless Youth Emergency Shelter Users Only: Intake Versus 6-Week Postdischarge Scores

Outcome Domain Specific Variable	Intake		6-Week Follow-Up		n
	M	SD/%	M	SD/%	
<i>Runaway behavior</i>					
Days on the run	5.5	± 15.1	1.3	± 6.5***	224
<i>Family relationship</i>					
Seen family	88%		93%		231

<i>Perceived family support^a</i>	2.4 ± 1.2	2.8 ± 1.1***	231
<i>School behavior</i>			
<i>Suspended</i>	24%	16%*	231
<i>Expelled</i>	7%	2%	210
<i>Detention</i>	30%	23%*	218
<i>Employment</i>			
<i>Currently employed</i>	13%	22%**	219
<i>Fired</i>	12%	2%***	189
<i>Sexual behavior</i>			
<i>Currently active</i>	40%	26%***	156
<i>Self-esteem scale score^b</i>	14.6 ± 4.3	12.8 ± 3.8***	165

a. Increase in score represents positive change, possible range 1 (never) to 4 (always).

b. Decrease in score represents positive change, possible range 32-8.

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Research Question 2: Comparison of outcomes between runaway and homeless shelter and day treatment users. Runaway and homeless crisis shelter users were compared with day treatment users across the 10 outcome variables. The change score of each outcome variable was analyzed while controlling for age and gender, which were found significantly different across the two groups. These analyses demonstrated no significant differences for any of the outcome variables between these two groups of youth.

TABLE 4: Outcomes of Intervention for Youth Day Treatment Users Only: In- take Versus 6-Week Follow-Up Scores

<i>Outcome Domain</i>	<i>Intake</i>		<i>6-Week Follow-Up</i>		<i>n</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD/%</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD/%</i>	
<i>Runaway behavior</i>					
<i>Days on the run</i>	5.2 ± 14.9		0.1 ± 06.8*		47
<i>Family relationship</i>					
<i>Seen family</i>	89%		87%***		47
<i>Perceived family support^a</i>	3.0 ± 1.1		3.2 ± 0.8		47
<i>School behavior</i>					
<i>Suspended</i>	7%		2%		42
<i>Expelled</i>	5%		0%		42

<i>Detention</i>	30%	28%	42
<i>Employment</i>			
<i>Currently employed</i>	26%	32%	47
<i>Fired</i>	6%	4%	47
<i>Sexual behavior</i>			
<i>Currently active</i>	78%	53%***	45
<i>Self-esteem scale score^b</i>	14.0 ± 3.6	11.4 ± 3.1***	47

a. Increase in score represents positive change, possible range 1 (never) to 4 (always).

b. Decrease in score represents positive change, possible range 32-8.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

DISCUSSION AND APPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

The results of this study are important for understanding outcomes for adolescents that utilize runaway and homeless shelter services. Findings indicate that youth that utilize crisis shelter services show improvement 6 weeks postdischarge. These results are consistent: Across each outcome domain youth report significant improvement. Outcomes identified as most critical for runaway and homeless youth, days on the run and feelings of support from their families, were significantly improved at follow-up. Across the other outcome domains, positive results showed that school suspension, expulsions, and detention decreased, more of the youth were employed, fewer had been fired, current sexual behavior diminished, and self-esteem improved. These positive outcomes lend support to the mission of youth crisis service agencies that design and implement services to this population.

The similarity of improvement between the youth using runaway and homeless crisis shelter services and youth using longer term day treatment services on pre-discharge and postdischarge changes is also of particular relevance. Long-term day treatment continued to be provided at the time of the follow-up interview, whereas the youth in the runaway and homeless group had

discontinued services 6 weeks prior. Intuitively, this should positively bias results for the day treatment condition. Therefore, although the findings are encouraging for both types of interventions, they are particularly important for brief shelter services. As the results demonstrated no significant difference on outcomes between these two groups of youth, it suggests that appropriate crisis intervention can have immediate positive impact on short-term outcomes of runaway and homeless youth and is comparable in effectiveness to the initial 6-week period of long-term youth services.

Examining the demographics for this sample of youth using shelter services demonstrates similarity with previous studies of runaway and homeless youth. The youths in this study were typically female, almost 15 years of age, had limited runaway history, current family contact, and had been referred for crisis services outside the home environment. These youth characteristics are comparable to a secondary analysis of the national data set for 1997 RHY MIS data (Thompson et al., 2001). Other research with large samples of shelter users reports similar sample demographics (i.e., Ringwalt, Greene, & Robertson, 1998; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1986; Windle, 1989). Understanding the demographics of this population of youth who require these services will aid in targeting those youth who need this assistance.

Examining demographic differences between the two samples in this study showed that day treatment users are more likely to be male and are almost a year older than runaway and homeless shelter users. However, the study and comparison samples are statistically identical in runaway and family contact histories. A possible explanation may be that there are different treatment opportunities for males and females based on organizational differences. However, it is unclear whether the system is making gender-based decisions or whether families of runaway youth are simply choosing a different service system during the youth's "crisis." Females may also seek crisis shelter services more often and/or sooner than males.

This study expands on the current research literature on runaway and homeless youth in several ways. First, the use of multiple agencies across a multistate region serving urban, suburban, and rural areas provides more representative samples. In addition, statistical power is improved by increasing the sample size. The inclusion of a valid comparison sample also allowed exploration of relative improvements between two types of services. Perhaps most important, this study demonstrates the feasibility of agency-based tracking and evaluation for this difficult-to-follow population (Pollio et al., 2000).

Despite the methodological improvements made in this study, caution is needed in interpreting these results due to small ESs. Other limitations include, first, whether a youth lived at home before or after intervention introduced a methodological limitation both in lower attrition rates and a greater likelihood of the youth being interviewed at follow-up. As interviewers were only able to locate youths with known discharge locations, locating the youth possibly biased the sample. For example, if a youth left the agency against clinical advice, we were frequently unable to re-locate that youth and outcomes could not be assessed. Although there are no significant differences for demographic or outcome variables at intake or 6 weeks and the bias appears to have little or no impact on the findings, the youth that were impossible to track may have had very different outcomes than those who were not re-located.

Second, as previously discussed, the two study conditions appear to have some differences in demographic composition. They were also different in that the long-term treatment participants continued to receive services at the time of the 6-week follow-up interview, whereas the runaway and homeless group had terminated 6 weeks before the follow-up interview. Again, because there are no differences in key behaviors and the analysis of the second research question controlled for gender and age differences, this bias appears to have little impact on the current study findings.

A potential bias may have been introduced by having clinicians from the various agencies conduct intake and follow-up interviews. The trade-off for this limitation is that the clinicians were likely to have re-located a greater number of participants, based on their knowledge of the youth, their families, and their discharge location than professional interviewers who would have been unknown to them. A further limitation of using agency personnel as interviewers was that because of their heavy work schedules, outcome interviews had to be relatively simple and brief. This limited the complexity and depth of the variables collected in the study.

The results of this study highlight the need for social work researchers and clinicians to implement a broad research agenda aimed at understanding this population and providing increasingly effective services. A critical next step for research is to examine outcomes of service use over a longer period of time in order to examine whether treatment effects continue, are short term, or if cycles of service use appear. Research incorporating more extensive outcome measures is also critical to provide more comprehensive and useful information concerning these youth and the consequences of their interactions with social work practitioners in crisis shelter services.

Social work practitioners typically provide the care to these youth; therefore, additional research is also needed to examine the specific treatment strategies provided and the organizational approaches that affect youth utilizing these services. These findings suggest the importance of crisis intervention skills and need for sophisticated short-term treatment modalities for practitioners with this population.

This study provides encouraging initial results for youth using crisis shelters. Despite limitations, the research provides evidence for the short-term effectiveness of these services and demonstrates the feasibility of evaluation research that utilizes social work practitioners as interviewers. As the importance of accountability increases, evaluation studies provide evidence that studies can be implemented by service providers to appraise service effectiveness.

NOTES

1. McNemar exact tests are calculated directly for the binomial distribution measuring the probability of change only; thus, no χ^2 statistic is calculated. Therefore, only the probability of the distribution is reported in text.
2. As this article's focus is on runaway and homeless youth and no significant differences were found between the outcomes for the comparison

group and the study group, these statistics were not included in the text. However, Table 4 was created for those who were interested in this group's specific details.

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