National Runaway Switchboard

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National Runaway Switchboard Crisis Caller Trends

An analysis of trends in crisis calls to the National Runaway Switchboard's 1-800-RUNAWAY crisis hotline for the period 2000-2008.

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Executive Summary

There are a number of indicators from the trend analysis that point to the economic downturn as negatively affecting runaway and homeless youth. There has been an increase of more than 200 percent in crisis calls from or about a youth which identify economics as a reason for the call to the 1-800-RUNAWAY crisis line between 2005-2008. Youth are resorting to panhandling and stealing in order to survive at significantly higher rates in 2008 than in 2007, with panhandling up 57 percent and stealing up 25 percent. Another indicator that may be affected by the economic downturn is the number of youth who identify themselves as throwaway who are calling the National Runaway Switchboard. "Throwaway youth" have been kicked out of their parents' homes and are not wanted back. The number of throwaways calling the National Runaway Switchboard crisis line has increased 15 percent in 2008 compared to 2007 and 40 percent between 2005-2008.

There has also been a 16 percent increase in the number of crisis calls from or about a youth aged 18 to 20 in 2008 over 2007 and an increase of 107 percent between 2005-2008. It is possible that the increase in older youth calling the 1-800-RUNAWAY crisis line is also related to the economic downturn. These older youth may have been able to get by in the past, but with the scarcity of jobs, they may be turning to crisis lines for help surviving. There is also evidence that youth who leave home are staying away from home for longer periods of time prior to calling NRS. There has been a 14 percent increase in crisis calls from youth gone 2-6 months, and a 31 percent increase in crisis calls from youth gone for more than six months between 2007-2008.

The National Runaway Switchboard has had an increase of nine percent between 2007-2008 in crisis calls from youth who have never run away before, and an increase of 21 percent in crisis calls from this group between 2005-2008. There has also been a significant increase in the number of crisis calls identifying abuse or neglect as a reason for the call, with abuse calls up 33 percent and neglect calls up 54 percent between 2005-2008.

Research Methodology

The National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) has analyzed records of crisis calls to 1-800-RUNAWAY for the nine-year period 2000-2008 for this trend report, giving us a maximum trend horizon of eight years. Absolute and percentage change across years were calculated. This data was analyzed using Chi Square Statistical Analysis to determine statistical significance using a confidence interval of 95 percent or above. All data is significant at the 95 percent level or above unless the category has one or more asterisks next to it; one asterisk signifies that the one year trend was not significant, two asterisks signify that the eight year trend was not significant, and three asterisks signifies that neither trend period was significant. The sample size of these categories varies due to the fact that not all categories are pertinent to providing crisis intervention and therefore may not be addressed in every crisis call.

Youth Crisis Caller Status

The largest group of crisis callers to the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) in 2008 were runaways (see figure 1). However, the number of throwaway youth calling NRS has increased dramatically both between 2007-2008 and between 2000-2008 (See Figure 2). There has also been a jump of more than 200 percent in crisis calls from homeless youth between 2000-2008. *(NRS defines youth as young people through 21 years old)*.

Figure 1: Distribution of Youth Crisis Caller Status in 2008

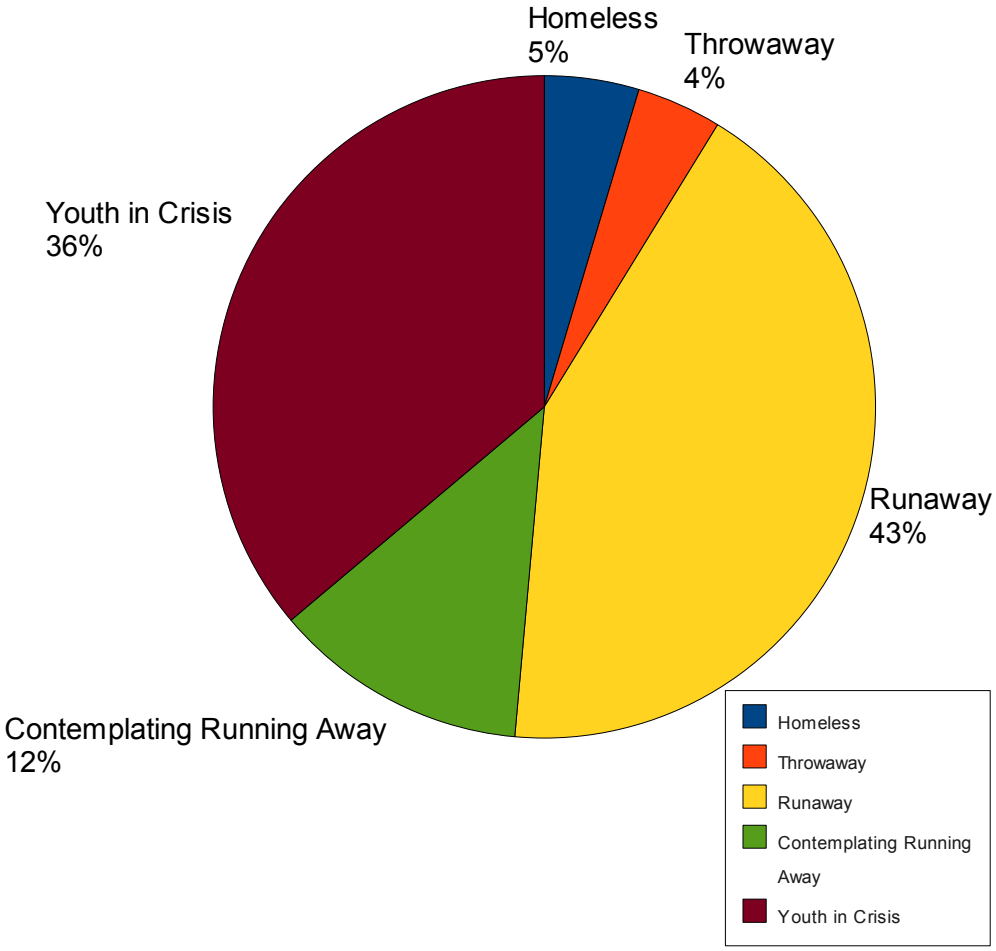
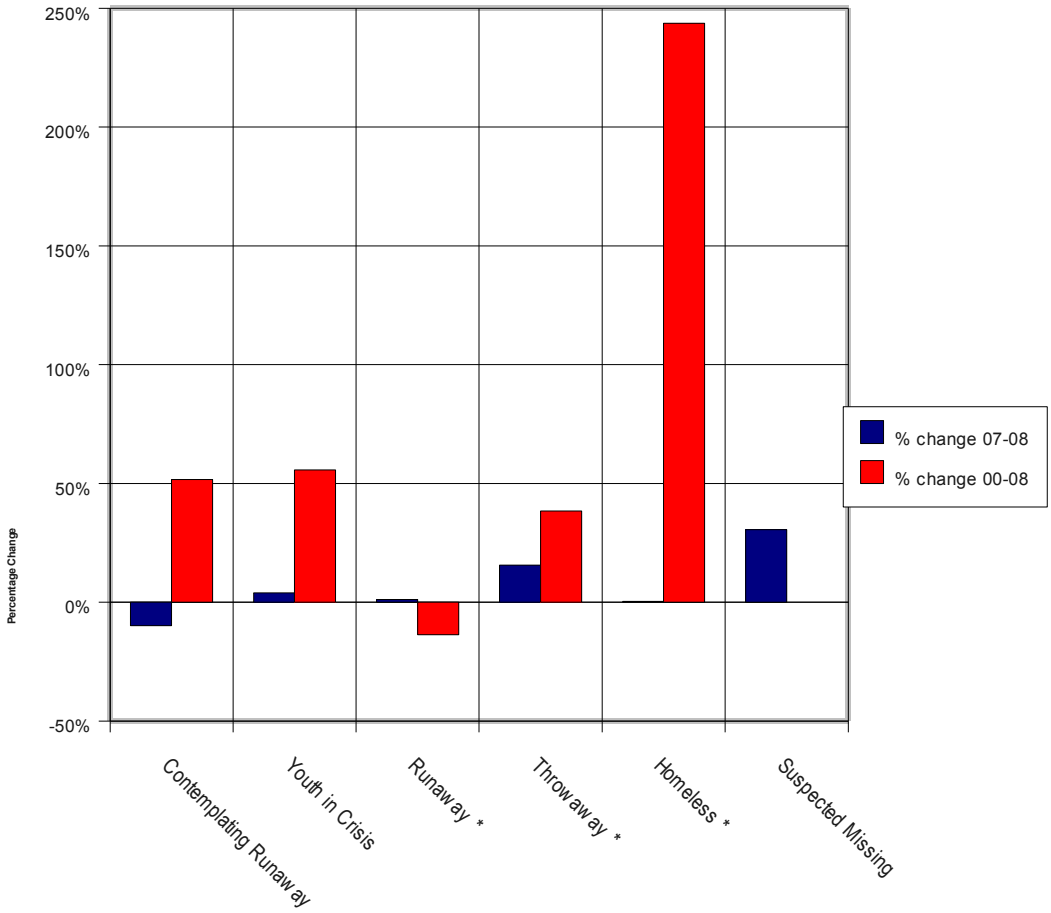


Figure 2: Trend Analysis of Youth Crisis Caller Status 2000-2008

(Based on a combined sample of 126,514 for all nine years)



NOTE: There is no information for the category "Suspected Missing" for the period 2000-2008 because the category was added in 2007.

Crisis Caller Age

The majority of crisis callers to the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) in 2008 were aged 15-17 at 52 percent (see figure 3). However, the two extremes of very young and above age 18 are growing at a faster rate than the middle age group (see figure 4). The number of crisis callers under 12 in 2008 has increased 105 percent over 2000. The age groups of 12 and 13 are also increasing rapidly in 2008 at 51 percent, and 47 percent, respectively over 2000. In addition, the category of crisis callers age 18 to 21 has increased by more than 500 percent between 2000-2008.

Figure 3: Distribution of Age of Crisis Callers in 2008

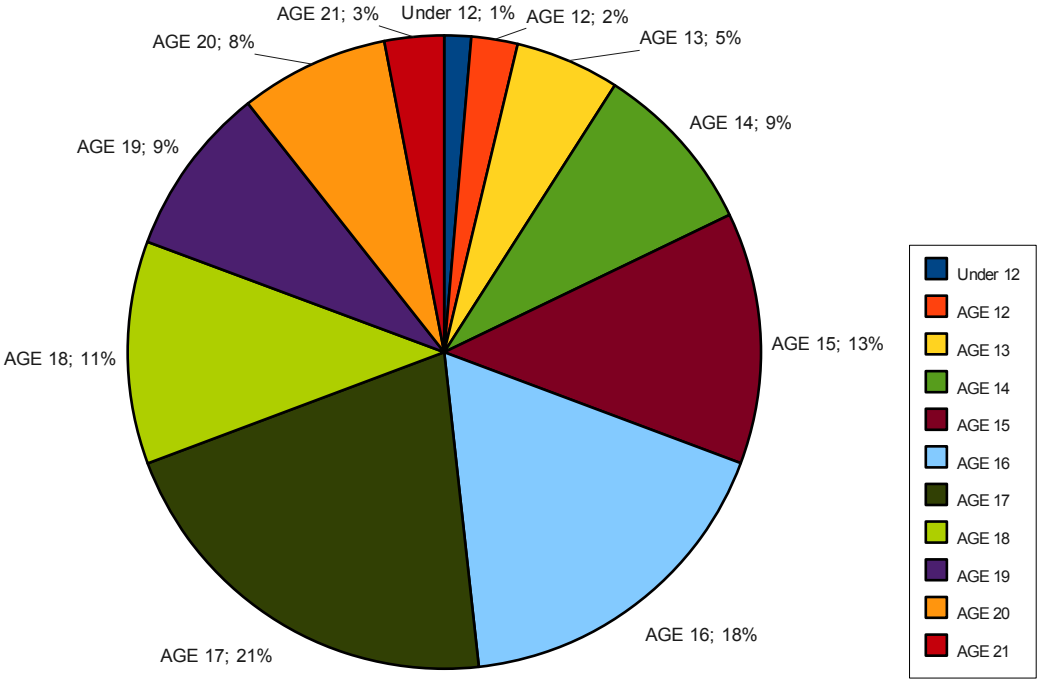
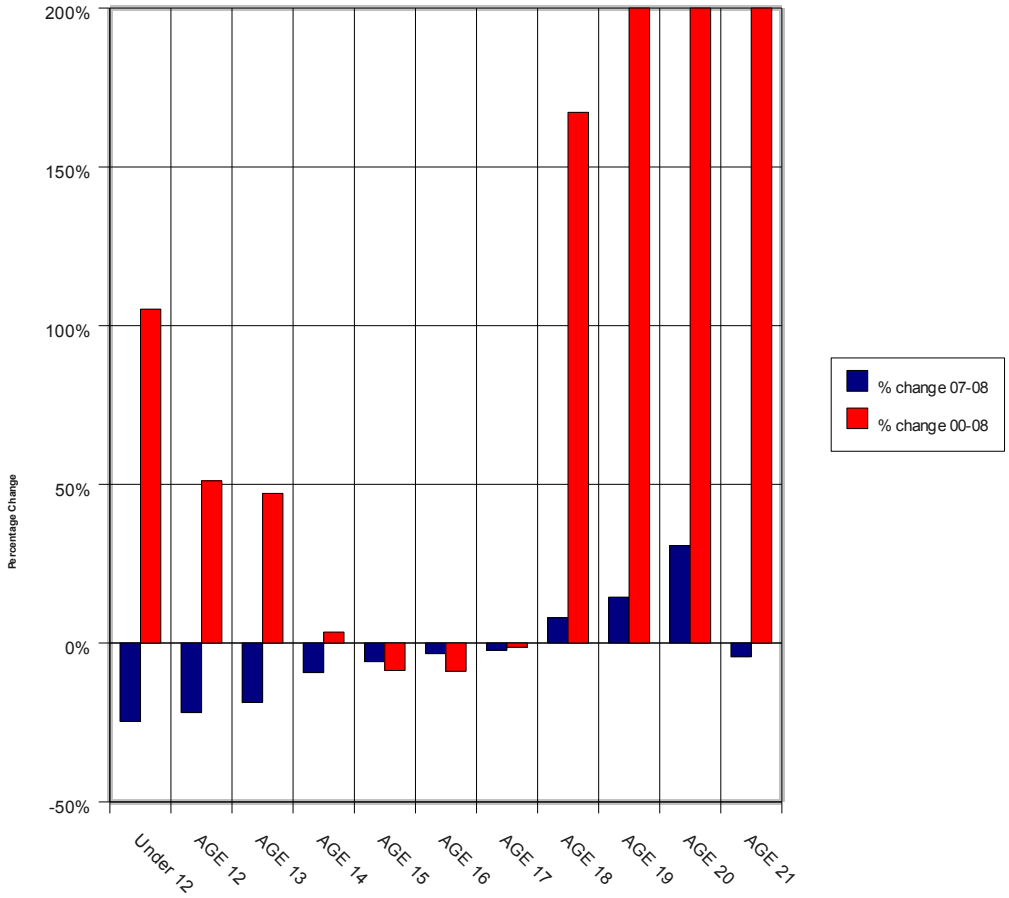


Figure 4: Trend Analysis of Age of Crisis Caller 2000-2008

(Based on a combined sample of 61,819 for all nine years)



NOTE: In order to show the details of this entire graph, the categories of ages 19-21 were cut off for the trend period 2000-2008. The figures for these categories are as follows age 19 had a 3,204% increase, age 20 had a 5,936% increase, and age 21 had a 2,550% increase.

Crisis Caller Means of Survival

The majority of crisis callers to the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) in 2008 were surviving through assistance from friends and relatives at 74 percent (see figure 5). There has been a 61 percent drop in the number of youth calling from detention or police between 2000-2008 (see figure 6). More crisis callers in 2008 are turning to panhandling, a 139 percent increase, sex industry, a 30 percent increase, stealing, a 49 percent increase, and selling drugs, a 33 percent increase, to survive than in 2000.

Figure 5: Distribution of Crisis Caller Means of Survival in 2008

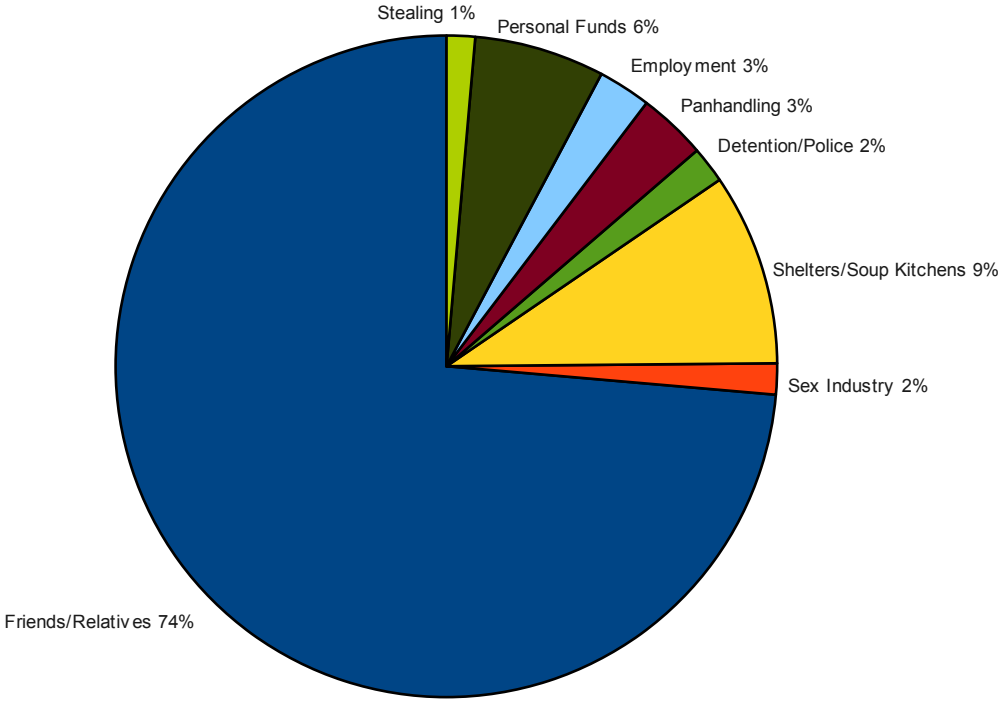
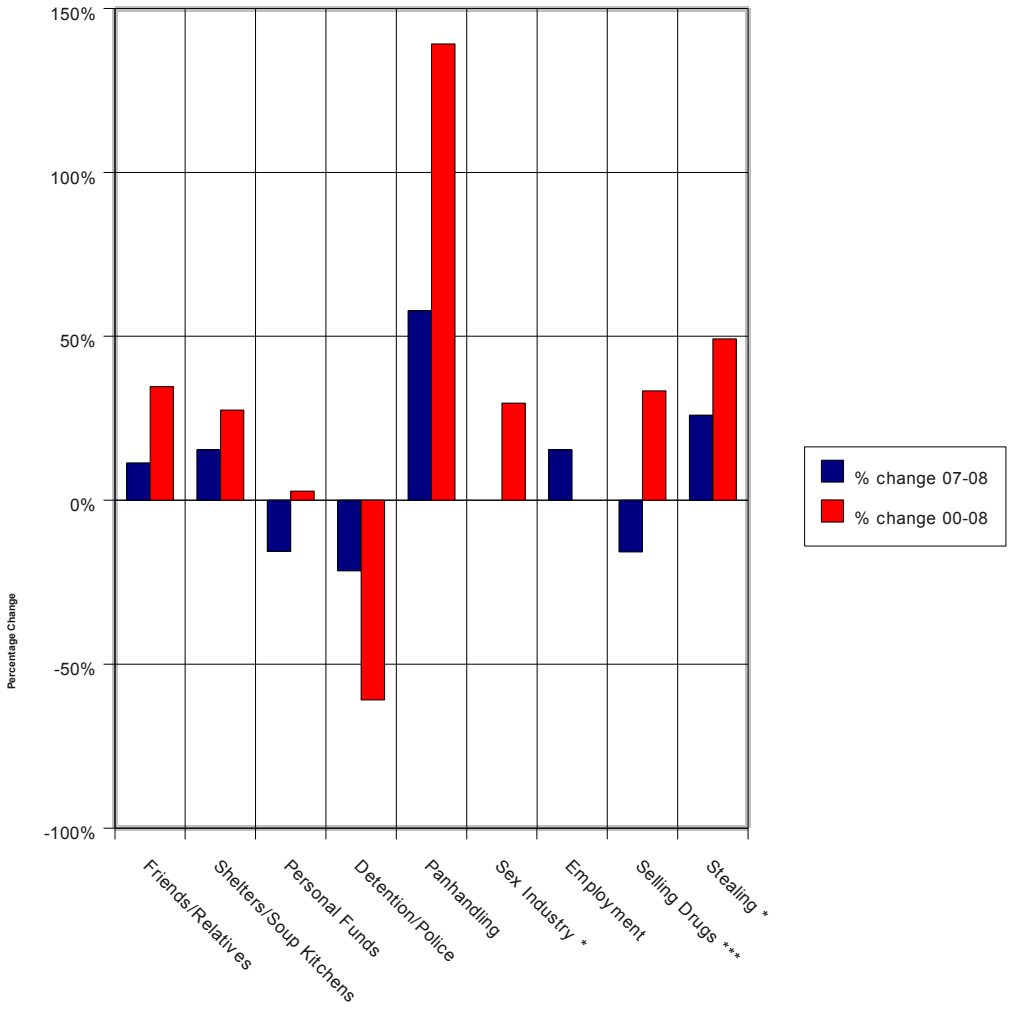


Figure 6: Trend Analysis of Crisis Caller Means of Survival 2000-2008

(Based on a combined sample of 45,420 for all nine years)



Crisis Caller Time on the Street Before Calling NRS

The largest proportion of crisis callers to the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) in 2008 had been on the street for one to three days at 39 percent (see figure 7). However, the largest increases in crisis calls have been from youth on the streets for over two months. In 2008 there was an increase of 14 percent in crisis callers away from home for two to six months, and an increase of 31 percent in youth callers gone for more than six months compared to 2007 (see figure 8).

Figure 7: Distribution of Time on the Street for Crisis Callers in 2008

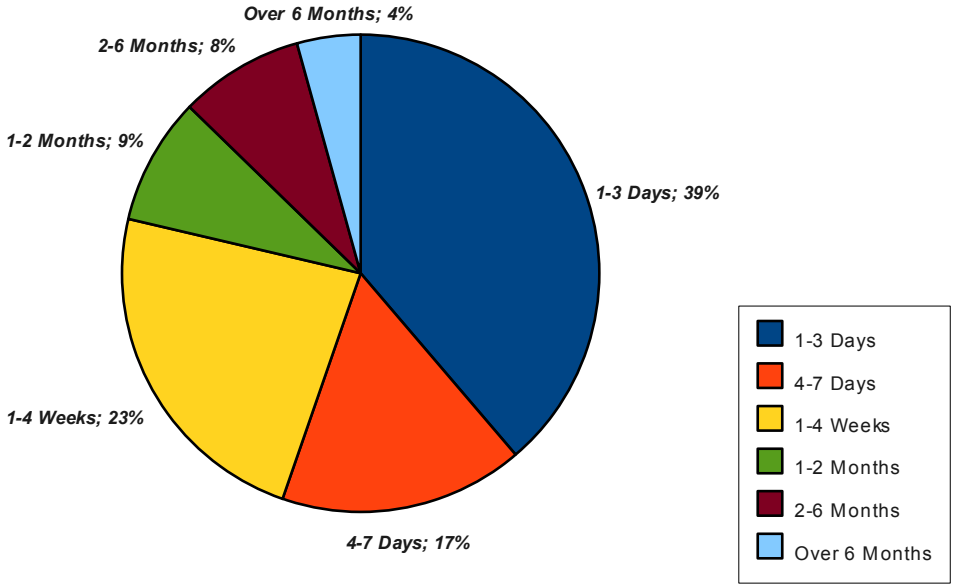
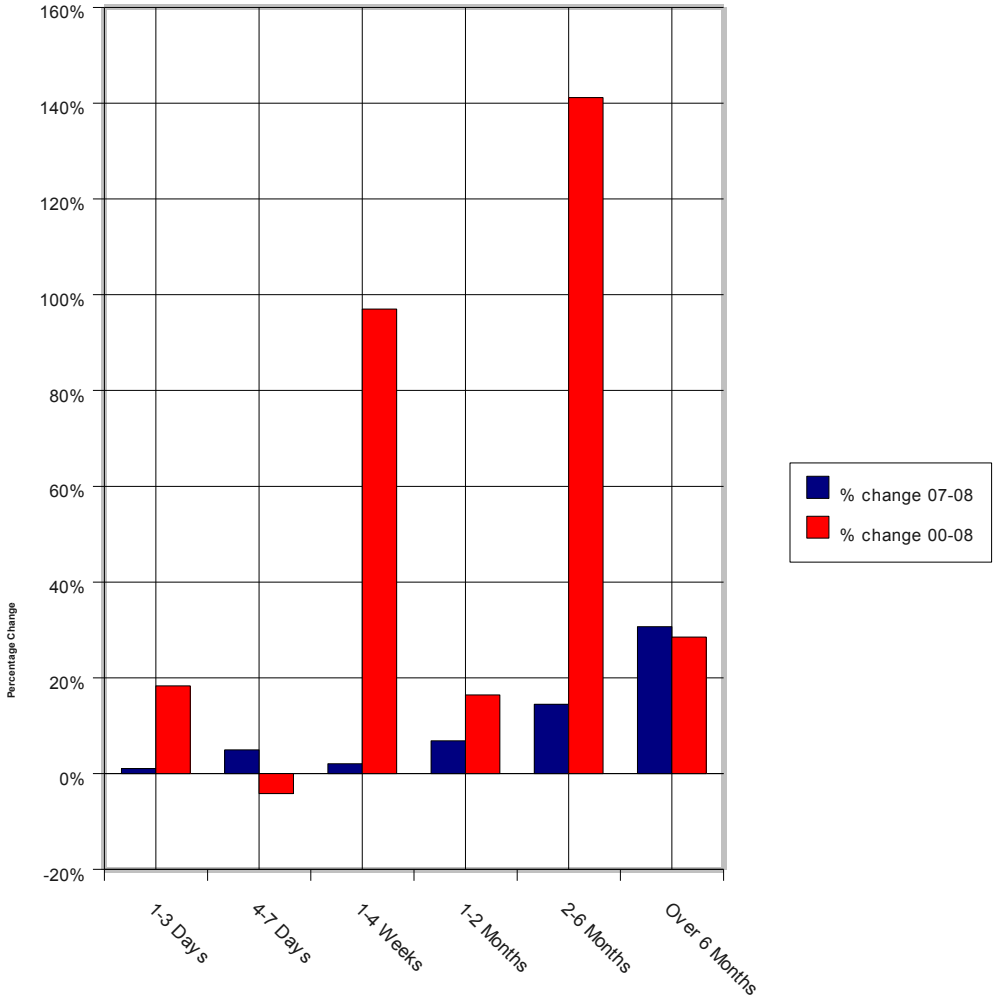


Figure 8: Trend Analysis of Crisis Caller Time on the Street Before Calling NRS 2000-2008

(Based on a combined sample of 76,510 for all nine years)



Crisis Caller Whereabouts at Time of Call

The largest proportion of crisis callers to the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) in 2008 were calling from home at 32 percent (see figure 9). The number of youth calling from home has also increased 61 percent between 2000-2008. This reinforces the conclusion that NRS is reaching more youth before they run away from home. Conversely, there has been a decrease in the number of youth calling from police/detention of 54 percent between 2000-2008. This parallels the finding that the number of crisis callers calling from police/detention is down 61 percent in 2008 from the numbers in 2000 (see figure 6). Between 2000-2008, there has been an 86 percent increase in the number of youth who have called NRS from school, which is important to note because even though they're away from home they're in a safe place when calling (see figure 10).

Figure 9: Distribution of Crisis Caller Whereabouts in 2008

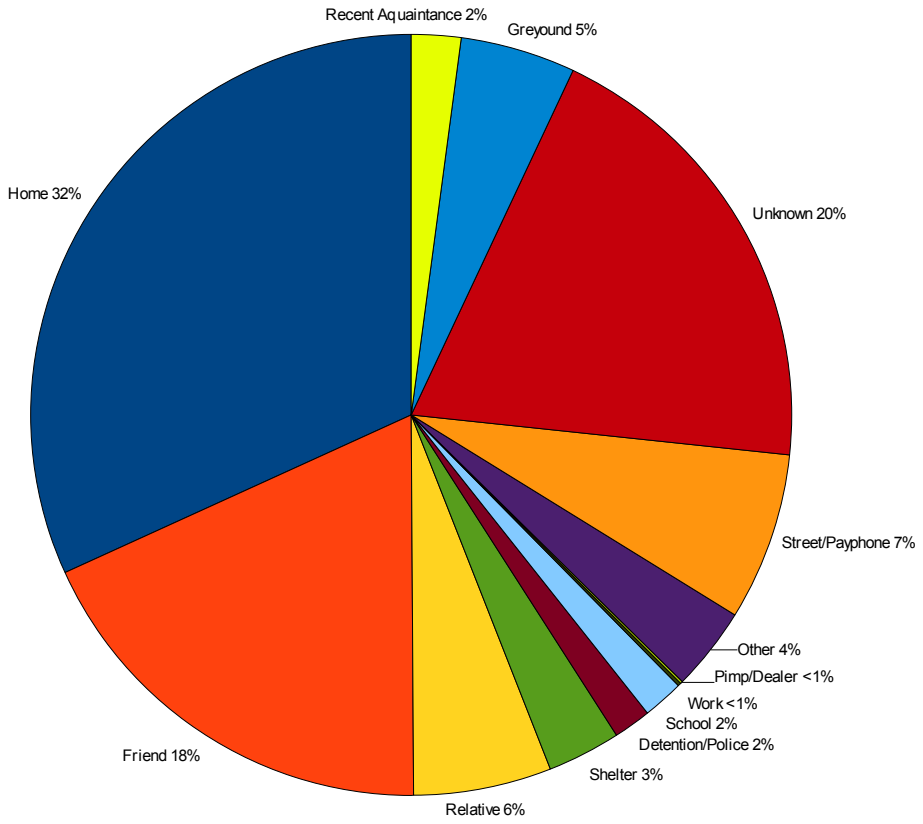
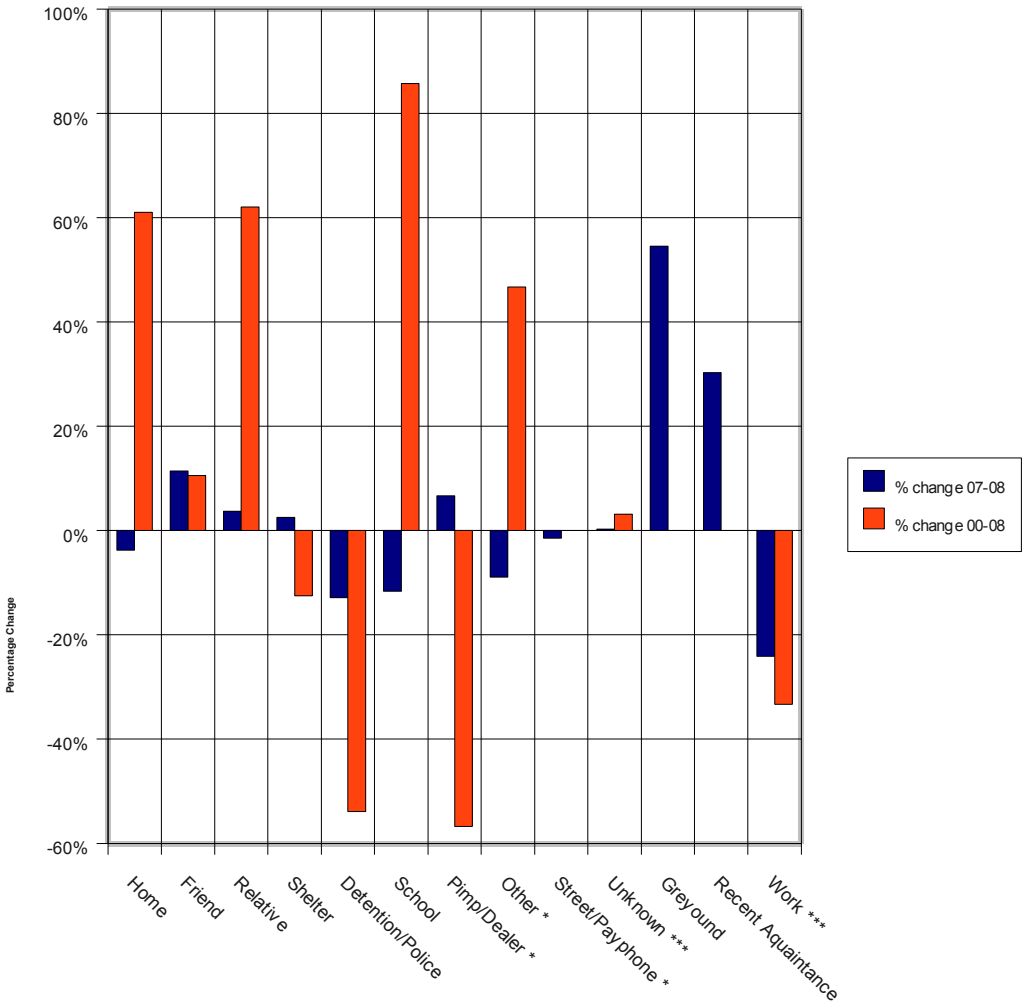


Figure 10: Trend Analysis of Crisis Caller Whereabouts 2000-2008

(Based on a combined sample of 110,210 for all nine years)



Crisis Caller Problems

There has been an increase of more than 300 percent in crisis calls to the National Runaway Switchboard that cite the economy as a problem between 2001-2008 (data for this statistic is limited to a seven year time horizon). The bulk of that increase occurred between 2005-2008, which saw a jump of over 200 percent in crisis calls about the economy.

The most commonly reported crisis caller problem in 2008 was family dynamics at 29 percent of crisis callers (see figure 11). However, the number of youth reporting family dynamics as a problem has steadily dropped by a total of 27 percent between 2000-2008. NRS has seen a decline of nine percent overall in youth reporting any kind of abuse (physical, emotional, sexual, verbal, and neglect) as a problem between 2007-2008. Abuse figures had risen steadily every year for the three years leading to 2007 with a shift downward between 2007-2008.

Figure 11: Distribution of Youth Crisis Caller Problems in 2008

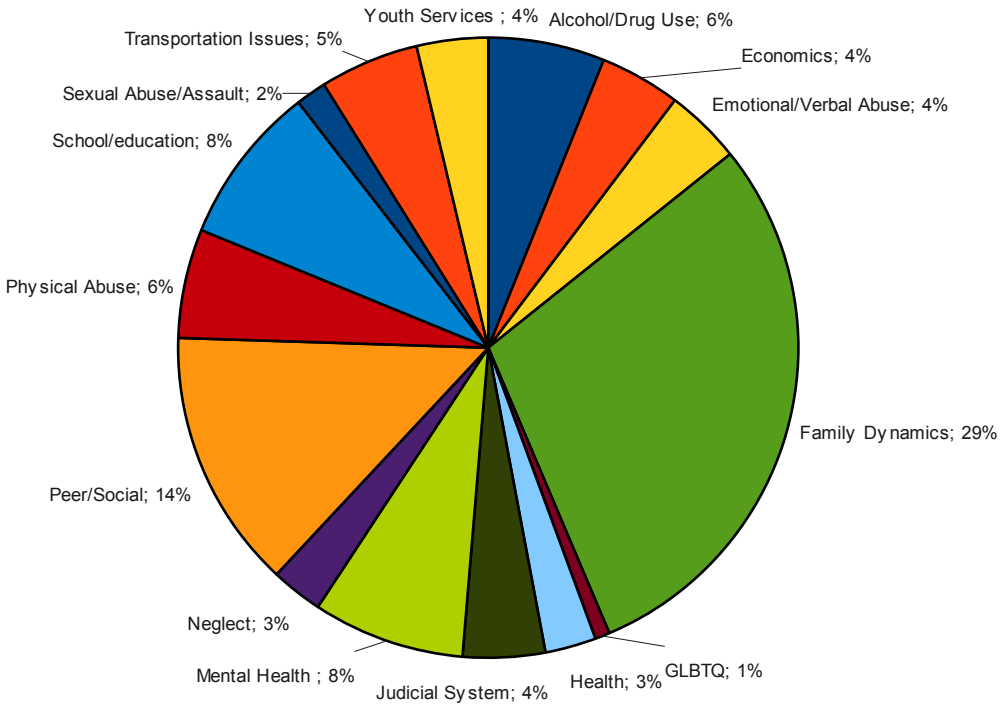
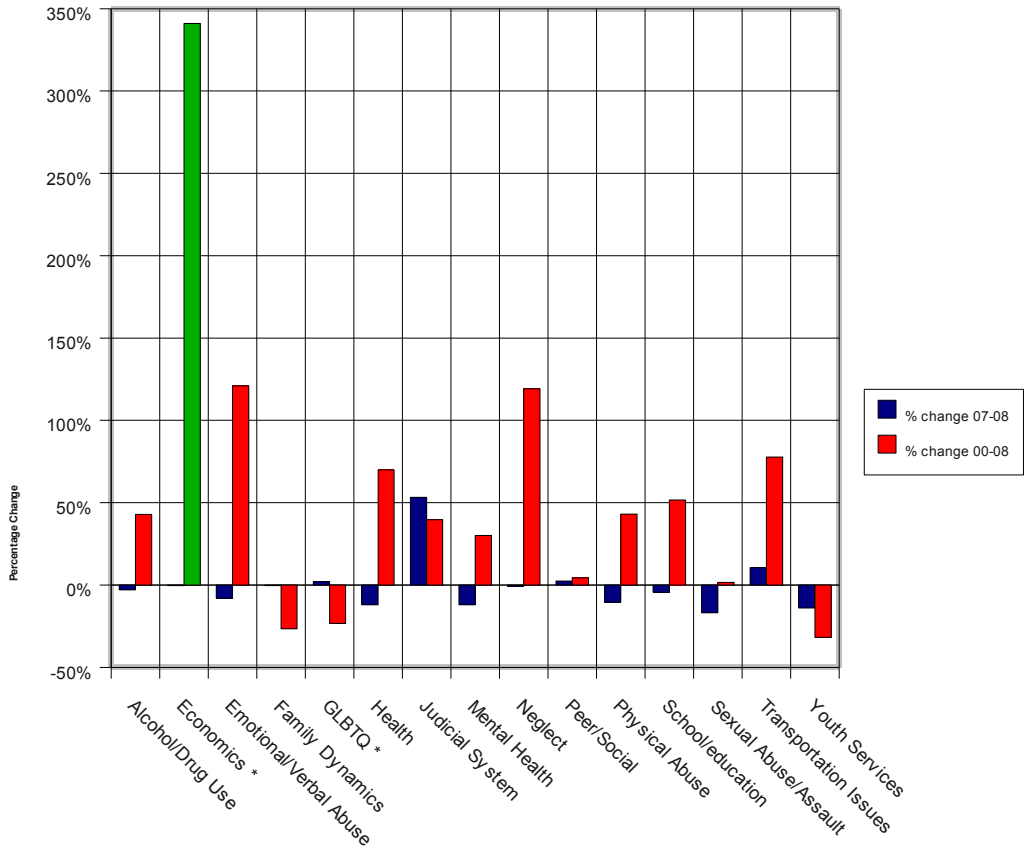


Figure 12: Trend Analysis of Youth Crisis Caller Problems 2000-2008

(Based on a combined sample of 408,930 for all nine years)



NOTE: The category of economics (colored green) is based on the seven year trend horizon from 2001 through 2008 because this category was created in 2001 and no data is available for the year 2000.

Crisis Caller Relationship to Youth

The majority of crisis callers to the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) in 2008 were youth calling about themselves at 49 percent (see figure 13). Youth calling about themselves has increased 34 percent between 2000-2008 (see figure 14). There has also been an increase in calls from youth's friends at 7 percent, relatives, at 14 percent, and non-relative adults, at 37 percent, calling about a youth in crisis during the period 2000-2008.

Figure 13: Distribution of Crisis Caller Relationship in 2008

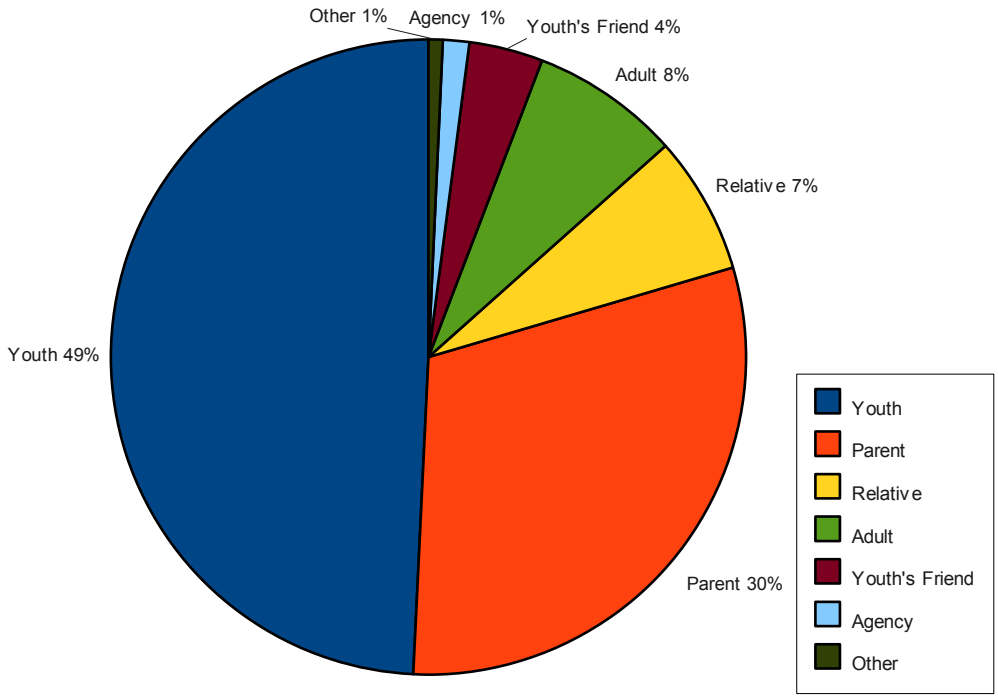
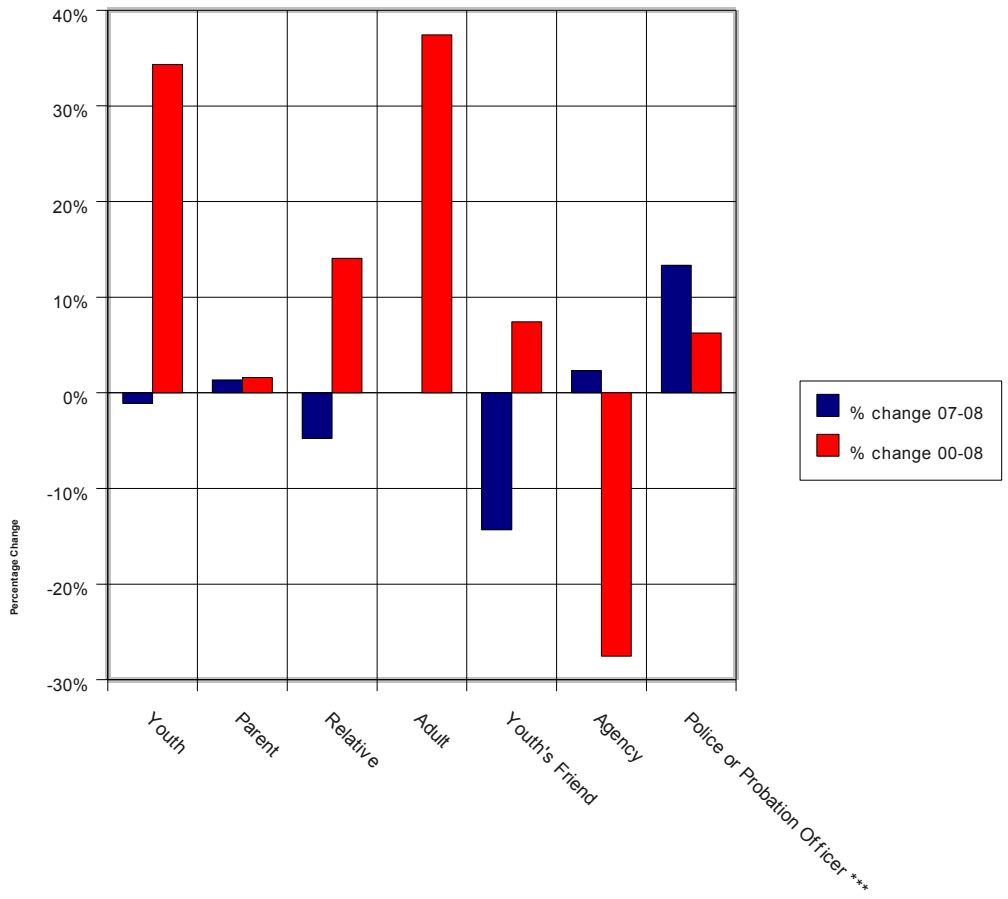


Figure 14: Trend Analysis of Crisis Caller Relationship 2000-2008

(Based on a combined sample of 128,814 for all nine years)



Crisis Caller Gender

The majority of crisis calls to the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) in 2008 came from females at 70 percent. However, there was a 56 percent increase in the number of males calling NRS between 2000-2008 and a 20 percent increase in the number of females calling NRS in the same period. This shows that male crisis calls to NRS continue to increase more rapidly than female crisis calls to NRS, and if the trend continues it will slowly equalize the call rates for males and females (see figure 15).

Figure 15: Crisis Caller Gender

(Based on a combined sample of 103,379 for all nine years)

Gender	***Percent Change 2007-2008***	***Percent Change 2000-2008***
Female	3%	20%
Male	23%	56%

Contact Information

For questions or comments on this research please contact Katy Walsh, Director of Development and Communication at the National Runaway Switchboard at kwalsh@1800RUNAWAY.org, or (773) 289-1727.

Media interested in additional information or to schedule an interview with an NRS spokesperson, please contact Joel Kessel at joel@kesselcommunications.com, or (614) 467-9083.