

Runaway girls: an understanding of the reasons and consequences

Priyanka ¹ & Monika ²

Abstract

The phenomenon of runaway girls, wherein young females leave their homes for various reasons, presents a complex intersection of social, psychological, and cultural factors. This review article delves into the multidimensional nature of the issue, aiming to provide a comprehensive understanding of the causes, consequences, and potential interventions related to girls running away from their homes. The article synthesizes existing research and literature to illuminate the diverse array of reasons that drive girls to run away, including family conflicts, forced marriages, economic hardships, aspirations for autonomy, and peer influence. Furthermore, the emotional, psychological, and social consequences faced by these girls are explored, encompassing safety concerns, mental health implications, loss of support networks, and legal complications. Importantly, the study also highlights the ripple effects on families and societies, encompassing emotional distress, strained relationships, and the challenge of addressing social stigma. To mitigate the adverse impacts of girls running away, this review article discusses various intervention strategies. These encompass targeted support systems, counseling services, education on healthy relationships, empowerment initiatives, and policy reforms aimed at safeguarding girls' rights. Drawing on global experiences and best practices, the review emphasizes the significance of collaboration between government agencies, NGOs, families, schools, and communities to effectively address this issue. In conclusion, this review article sheds light on the multifaceted phenomenon of runaway girls, underscoring the need for a holistic approach to understanding the causes and consequences by addressing the emotional, psychological, and social implications for girls, their families, and society, and by proposing evidence-based intervention strategies, this review aims to contribute to a more informed discourse and foster positive change in tackling this complex challenge.

Key Words: Runaway girls, social stigma, mental burden, interventions.

¹ Social Worker, RP Education Society, Rohtak

² Student, Master of Social Work, IGNOU, Delhi

INTRODUCTION

Youth who leave home without parental consent are mostly designated as runaways (Thompson, Bender, Windsor, Cook and Williams, 2010). It could refer to young girls who have left their homes or are missing for various reasons like the current trends of modern societies, weakening of family relationships, likelihood of delinquent

Corresponding Address:

Priyanka Dahiya, ¹ Social Worker, RP Education Society, Rohtak

Email: priyankadahiy9@gmail.com

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behavior, elopement, consumption of substances, due to other mental health issues and sometimes due to abuse experienced in the home (Gupta, et al 2012). Conceptualizing the Problem: The problem of runaway girls is one of the social problems which has become more prevalent and is considered a serious challenge for families, welfare centres and governmental organizations (Toubaei, Nateghi, Dehbozorgi, Sadr Esfahani, 2012). Runaway youth are at heightened risk for violence, substance use, suicide, and other high risk concerns (Crawford, 2021). Runaway might be a choosing to run from intolerable and undesirable states for a better life or it might be experienced as the outcome of pushed out of the home by parental figures (Duru, & Arslan, 2014). The roots of girls running away from their homes can vary greatly and often stem from complex social, economic, and personal factors. While the exact reasons can differ from case to case, but a number of reasons have been elicited in different studies worldwide, including to escape physical or sexual abuse (Lin, 2012; Meltzer, Ford, Bebbington, & Vostanis, 2012), family disagreements (Whitbeck, Hoyt, Ackley, 1997), substance use (Nebbitt, House, Thomspson, & Pollio, 2006), and domestic violence (Whitbeck, Hoyt, & Bao, 2000). If adults are facing some conflicts with parents and siblings then they can choose this platform or adjust themselves with household settings (Bademci, Karadayı, & De Zulueta, 2015) because they have improper plans (Aptekar, & Stoecklin, 2014).

Here are some other common reasons that might contribute to girls running away, like family conflict, forced marriages, economic difficulties, educational issues, etc. These days many people are not aware about many things which are related to running away girls that are based on disagreements, abuse (physical, emotional, or sexual), strict parental control, or strained relationships within the family can drive girls to seek an escape and the other reason of fear of forced marriages, child marriages, or marrying against their wish can lead girls to run away to avoid such circumstances like, Poverty, lack of financial resources, and inability to meet basic needs might prompt

girls to leave home in search of a better life or livelihood opportunities and pressure to drop out of school or pursue careers deemed inappropriate for girls may lead them to leave in order to pursue education or careers they are passionate about. If some females are friendlier in the group then they can easily get effect from friends or peers who have already run away or romanticized the idea of leaving home can play a role. Adolescents may want to assert their independence and make their own decisions, which might conflict with their family expectations for instances physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, neglect, or lack of emotional support within the family can push girls to seek safety elsewhere. But sometimes societal norms that restrict girls' freedom, choices, and opportunities might push them to escape and seek a more liberal environment and some families are providing these things such as girls might run away to avoid being trafficked or exploited, particularly if they are vulnerable due to poverty or lack of support. Some cases are undiagnosed or untreated mental health issues could lead to girls leaving home as they struggle to cope with their emotions and run away in search of love, belonging, or acceptance that they feel is lacking in their current environment. If girls are involved in substance abuse, it could contribute to conflicts at home and their decision to run away. In many important ways these girls share common experiences but as general consensus girls who run away are even more vulnerable to severe kinds of consequences. Some potential consequences for girls as well as families are as follows:

Consequences for Girls: The reason for running away is that they don't believe home can protect them from the problems and runaway girls might find themselves in vulnerable situations, susceptible to exploitation, abuse, or trafficking and they feel lack of support system and resources provided by their family, which might lead to financial instability, lack of access to education, and healthcare and depending on the age of the girl and the laws in the region, running away could result in legal issues such as being declared a runaway or facing charge related to underage relationships. Due to emotional and

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physical assistance can create a biggest platform, but it's impossible in every case and some cases are very problematic because girls are facing emotional and psychological challenges, including anxiety, depression, and feelings of isolation. As studies has proven that these individuals are at higher risk of self-harm (Tyler, Whitbeck, Hoyt, & Johnson, 2003) and death by suicides (Meltzer, Ford, Bebbington, & Vostanis, 2012; Walls et al., 2009). Roy and colleagues (2014) found that runaway youth were 11 times more likely to die than youth who did not run away.

Relationship Challenges: Romantic relationships formed under these circumstances might not always be healthy or stable, potentially leading to further emotional distress.

Consequences for Families: Families are likely to experience intense worry, fear, and stress when a loved one goes missing or runs away. In some cultural contexts, having a family member run away can lead to social stigma and gossip, impacting the family's reputation, but families might face legal consequences if the girl is underage or if the situation involves legal issues related to abduction or elopement. Running away can strain family relationships, leading to fractured trust and communication breakdowns. Most of the families are facing pressure from their community to address the situation in a certain way, which could further complicate matters. If families are unable to reconcile with the girl, she might miss out on educational and economic opportunities that her family

could have provided. In some cultures, running away of young girl makes the girl subject to severe punishment (Kardam, 2005). Hence, this kind of severe reaction makes the sufferers more vulnerable to develop different emotional, social, and psychological reactions and consequences.

Emotional, Psychological & Social Consequences for Girls: (a) Emotional Turmoil: Runaway girls often experience intense emotional turmoil, including feelings of fear, guilt, anxiety, and uncertainty about their decisions. (b) Isolation: Being away from their support networks can lead to feelings of isolation, loneliness, and a

lack of belonging. (c) Loss of Identity: Leaving behind familiar environments and relationships can cause a loss of identity and a struggle to define oneself in new surroundings. (d) Vulnerability to Exploitation: Runaway girls can become vulnerable to exploitation, abuse, and trafficking, leading to further emotional trauma. (e) Trauma: The experiences of running away and potentially encountering dangerous situations can result in lasting emotional trauma. (f) Loss of Relationships: Running away can strain relationships with family and friends, leading to feelings of abandonment and rejection. (g) Limited Opportunities: Girls who run away might miss out on educational and career opportunities that could have been available if they had stayed within a supportive environment. (h) Social Stigma: Society might stigmatize girls who run away, impacting their reputation and making it harder for them to reintegrate into their communities. (i) Depression and Anxiety: The stress of running away and dealing with the aftermath can contribute to the development of depression and anxiety disorders. (j) Low Self-Esteem & Coping Mechanism: The challenges they face can lead to lowered self-esteem and feelings of worthlessness because they are getting proper support and girls can adapt unhealthy coping mechanisms, such as substance abuse or self-destructive behavior.

Emotional, Social & Psychological Consequences for Families: (a) Worry and Anxiety: Families experience intense worry and anxiety about the safety and well-being of their missing or runaway family member. (b) Guilt and Blame: Families might blame themselves for the situation, leading to guilt and emotional distress. (c) Communication Breakdown: Running away can lead to a breakdown in communication and trust between the girl and her family. (d) Social Dishonour: Families might face social dishonour and gossip within their community, impacting their social standing. (e) Relationship Worry: Running away can worry relationships within the family causing long-lasting damage. (f) Helplessness and Frustration: Families might feel helpless and frustrated in their efforts to locate and reconnect with the girl. (g) Impact on Mental Health: The stress and emotional toll of dealing with a

runaway situation can affect the mental health of family members. (h) Societal Consequences: Norms and Values: The occurrence of girls running away due to romantic relationships can challenge societal norms and values related to family, relationships, and gender roles. (i) Awareness and Education: Societal consequences can include the need for increased awareness about healthy relationships, communication, and support systems for young people. (j) Legal and Policy Considerations: These situations might prompt discussions about legal frameworks and policies surrounding underage relationships, child protection, and support services.

Other costs of runaway from home: In another source (Walker, 2002), it is evident that clear documentation exists indicating that a significant portion of adolescent individuals engaged in prostitution are those who have fled their homes. The repercussions for these adolescents are considerable; for instance, more than 80% are reported being physically assaulted even about one-fourth of these have had broken bones. More than 85% have developed sexually transmitted diseases. Additionally, more than two-thirds having experienced instances of rape, often occur repeatedly. Approximately one-half have been victims of sexual abuse and torture, and one fourth has been mutilated. Nearly 50% have attempted suicide. Mortality rate is 40 times higher than the national average. More than 75% have drug and/or alcohol problems. A significant portion—over two-thirds—meet the criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder based on diagnostic criteria and other mental health issues also. Some ways to help Runaway girls: It is believed that reliable estimates of the prevalence of mental disorders in the runaways and throwaways would help policy makers as well as mental health professionals in the development of psychiatric services (Gupta et al 2012). Experts advocate the human rights mainly of the homeless people with mental disorders should be more focused on and it's a great urgency to eradicate mental illness in this comparatively more vulnerable population (Gupta et al, 2012). Hence, it is important to approach this issue with empathy and understanding for the complexities involved. Addressing

the emotional, social, and psychological consequences requires a holistic approach involving counseling, education, support services, and community engagement to ensure the well-being of the individuals involved and to create a more supportive environment for everyone affected by combining these intervention approaches, tailored to the specific needs of each individual, a comprehensive support network can be established to address the challenges faced by runaway girls and promote their well-being and successful reintegration into society. It is important to note that while romantic relationships can be a factor, there are often deeper underlying issues contributing to the decision to run away. Open communication within families, education about healthy relationships, and providing support and guidance to young individuals can help mitigate the risks associated with running away due to romantic relationships. If you or someone you know is in such a situation, it is advisable to seek assistance from trusted adults, counsellors, or organizations that specialize in providing support to young people facing these challenges. Addressing the issue of runaway girls requires a multi-faceted approach involving families, communities, governments, NGOs, and social services. Creating safe spaces, providing educational and economic opportunities, raising awareness about girls rights, and offering counselling and support services are crucial steps in preventing such situations. Involving runaway girls in a treatment approach would ascertain following positive changes in their physical, social and psychological well-being.

(a) Emergency Shelter Services: Establishing emergency shelters specifically designed for runaway girls provides them with a safe and supportive environment where they can find temporary refuge while their immediate needs are addressed. (b) Counseling and Therapy: Offering individual and group counselling sessions helps girls process their experiences, address trauma, and develop coping mechanisms to deal with the emotional challenges they face. (c) Education and Skill Development: Providing access to education, vocational training, and life skills workshops empowers runaway girls with tools that

enhance their self-esteem, employability, and future prospects. (d) Family Reunification and Mediation: Efforts to mediate and reconcile with families can be undertaken, with the goal of providing a stable and nurturing environment for the girl to return to. (e) Legal Support: Providing legal assistance and advocacy can help girls navigate any legal issues they might face due to their decision to run away, ensuring their rights and protection. (f) Healthcare Services: Comprehensive healthcare services, including physical and mental health assessments, reproductive health care, and treatment for any sexually transmitted infections, are vital for the well-being of these girls. (g) Trauma-Informed Care: Creating interventions that are sensitive to trauma helps girls feel understood and supported, improving their chances of successful recovery. (h) Peer Support Programs: Establishing peer support groups or mentorship programs allows girls to connect with others who have faced similar challenges, fostering a sense of belonging and understanding. (i) Outreach and Awareness: Developing awareness campaigns within communities and schools can help prevent runaway situations by educating girls about their rights and available support systems. (j) Substance Abuse Programs and Empowerment Workshops: Integrating substance abuse treatment programs into interventions addresses one of the common issues faced by runaway girls, helping them overcome addiction. In addition, conducting workshops on self-esteem, assertiveness, and decision-making empowers girls to make informed choices about their lives.

What is the practical Implication: The practical implications of the issue of runaway girls are wide-ranging and impact various aspects of society, families, and the individuals themselves. Social Services and Support Systems, and legal framework might need adjustments to provide protection, apart from these facilities, educational institutions play a paramount role in identifying and supporting girls at risk of running away. Governments and policymakers should take into account the specific needs of runaway girls when formulating policies related to child protection, education, healthcare, and social services and

facts on runaway girls is essential to understanding the scope of the issue, identifying trends, and formulating effective strategies. Incorporating these practical implications into policies, programs, and societal attitudes can help mitigate the damaging things of runaway states and create a further reassuring environment for girls who find themselves in such positions.

Conclusion: Runaway girls take vast toll in the societies, culture, in human suffering, mental burden and social stigma in the society as well as in families. Understanding how to manage the social, emotional, psychological consequences of runaway girls is critical to developing and applying realistic effectively methods. In many ways, mental health professionals and individual can function as leaders and models for appropriate and healthy reactions to defeating stigma. It is also crucial not to avoid role of social activists along with particular solution. We advocate major role of society in attempts to get out from these types of situations and their family members in maximizing their chances of positively recovery and readjustment in society and family. Counseling, mediation, and educational initiatives on healthy relationships and communication can play a role in preventing such situations and helping families and girls cope with the consequences if they arise. It is important to recognize that each case is unique and might require tailored solutions based on the specific circumstances involved.

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