

National Runaway Switchboard

3080 N. Lincoln Ave
Chicago, IL 60657
773-880-9860



Over A Decade of Trends in Crisis Calls to the National Runaway Switchboard

An analysis of trends in crisis calls to the National Runaway Switchboard's 1-800-RUNAWAY crisis hotline for the period 2000-2011.

Report Authors: Jennifer Benoit-Bryan, PhD Candidate at the University of Illinois-Chicago and Beth Kovacic, Research Analyst for Benoit-Bryan Consulting

Report Release Date: April 2012

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
Research Methodology	4
Youth Crisis Caller Status	5
Crisis Caller Age	7
Crisis Caller Means of Survival	9
Crisis Caller Time on the Street Before Calling NRS	11
Crisis Caller Whereabouts at Time of Call	13
Crisis Caller Issues raised	15
Crisis Caller Relationship to Youth	17
Crisis Caller Gender	19
Contact Information	20

Executive Summary - 2012

A number of important trends emerge through analysis of the past 12 years of crisis call data from the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS). NRS received consistent increases in calls from homeless and throwaway youth compared to past years. Economics, neglect and GLBTQ issues are more frequently cited by callers than in the past and the number of calls from the oldest and youngest youth increased. Calls from youth who have been on the street for longer periods of time, six months or more, have also increased over the past year.

The upward trends in calls from homeless and throwaway youth may be indicators of an economy that is still in recovery. The number of calls received from homeless youth increased 5 percent over the past year, a 50 percent increase over the past three years and more than an 80 percent increase over the past decade. Throwaway youth also increased 3 percent over the past year, 18 percent over the past three years, and 50 percent over the last decade.

Older youth are in need of greater support than in the past and are calling NRS for assistance more frequently than in the past. The number of crisis calls increased from both the older youth, especially youth aged 21, increasing 14 percent over the past year, and the youngest youth, increasing 5 percent over the past year for youth 12 and under, and 11 percent for youth age 13. Youth aged 21 also increased over both the past three and 10-year periods.

NRS received 32 percent more crisis calls over the past year from youth who have been on the street for six months or more. This is a 48 percent increase over the past three years, and a 70 percent increase over the past 10 years.

Another indicator of the effect of the economy on youth callers is the continued increase in callers who are identifying economics as a problem, a 27 percent increase over the past three years, and 83 percent over the past decade. Youth identifying neglect as a problem also increased 11 percent over the past year and 44 percent over the last decade.

NRS has also seen an increase in calls from youth who want to talk about a crisis relating to their sexual identity. The increase in LGBTQ callers may be tied to publicity and awareness of NRS' relationship with Cyndi Lauper's True Colors Fund. There has been an increase in LGBTQ callers of 7 percent over the last three years, and 37 percent over the past decade.

Research Methodology

The National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) has analyzed records of crisis calls to 1-800-RUNAWAY for the 12-year period 2000-2011 for this trend report, giving a maximum trend horizon of 11 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 a symbol next to the variable name. An * signifies that the change is not significant for the one year trend, a + signifies that the change is not significant for the three year trend, and a – signifies that the change is not significant for the 10 year period. 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. In addition, the response category “unknown” was excluded from analyses in the categories of crisis caller means of survival, and crisis caller whereabouts.

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP)¹ defines a runaway episode as one that meets any one of the following criteria:

- A child leaves home without permission and stays away overnight.
- A child 14 years old or younger (or older and mentally incompetent) who is away from home chooses not to come home when expected to and stays away overnight.
- A child 15 years old or older who is away from home chooses not to come home and stays away two nights.

The OJJDP defines a throwaway episode as one that meets either of the following criteria:

- A child is asked or told to leave home by a parent or other household adult, no adequate alternative care is arranged for the child by a household adult, and the child is out of the household overnight.
- A child who is away from home is prevented from returning home by a parent or other household adult, no adequate alternative care is arranged for the child by a household adult, and the child is out of the household overnight.

¹ Second National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and throwaway Children (NISMAART-2), Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, 2002; <http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org>.

Youth Crisis Caller Status

Runaways made up the largest group of crisis callers to the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) in 2011 at 38 percent (see Fig. 1). The second largest group of callers was youth in crisis who have not yet run away from home at 30 percent. NRS also received calls from youth contemplating running away (13 percent of calls), homeless youth (12 percent of calls), throwaway youth (6 percent of calls), and suspected missing youth (1 percent of calls). Calls to NRS from homeless youth have increased by 5 percent over the last year, 54 percent over the last three years and by 82 percent over the last decade (see Fig. 2). Those youth who are contemplating running away increased 10 percent over the past year and 21 percent over the past decade. Throwaway youth calls have increased 3 percent over the past year, and more than 50 percent over the last decade. (NRS defines youth as young people up to 21 years old).

Figure 1: Distribution of Youth Crisis Caller Status in 2011

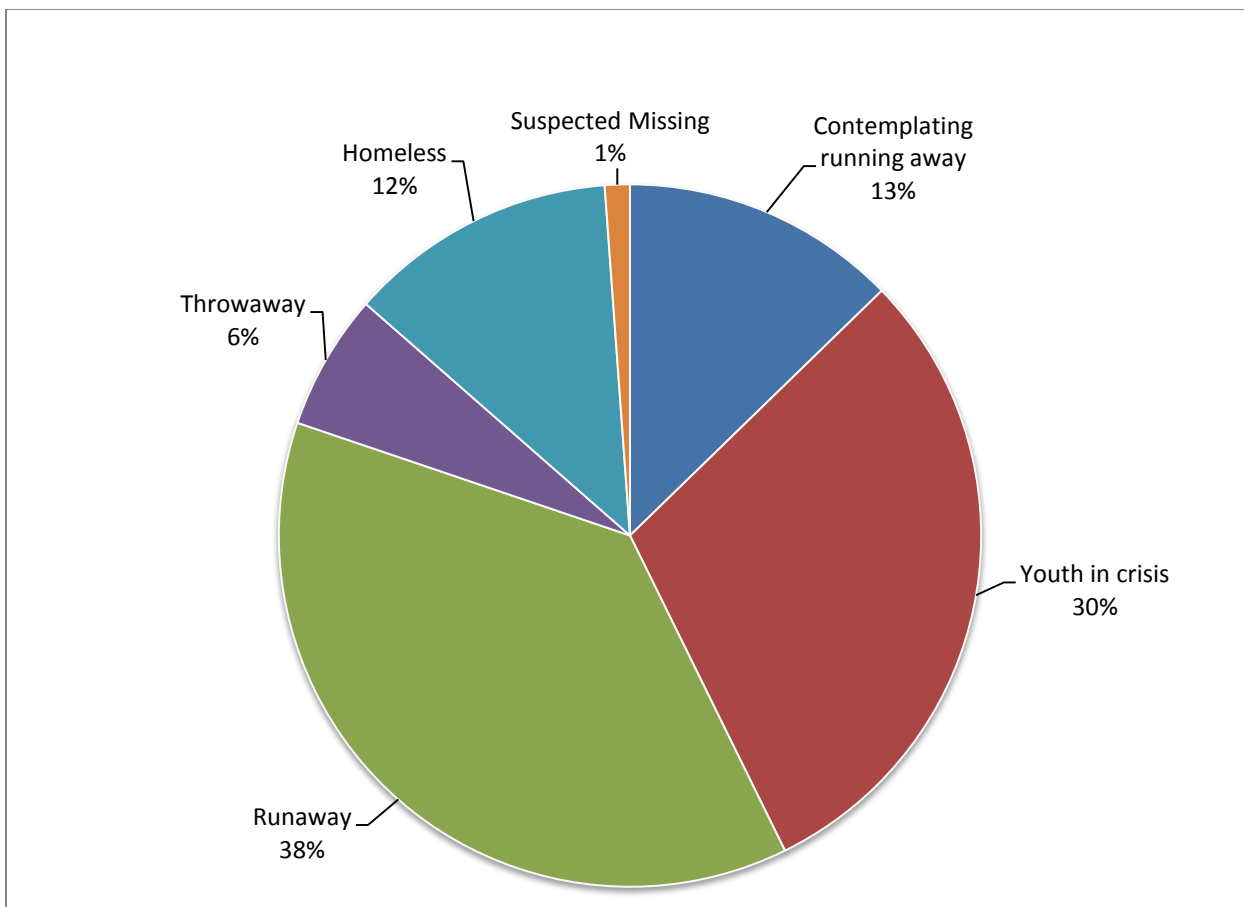
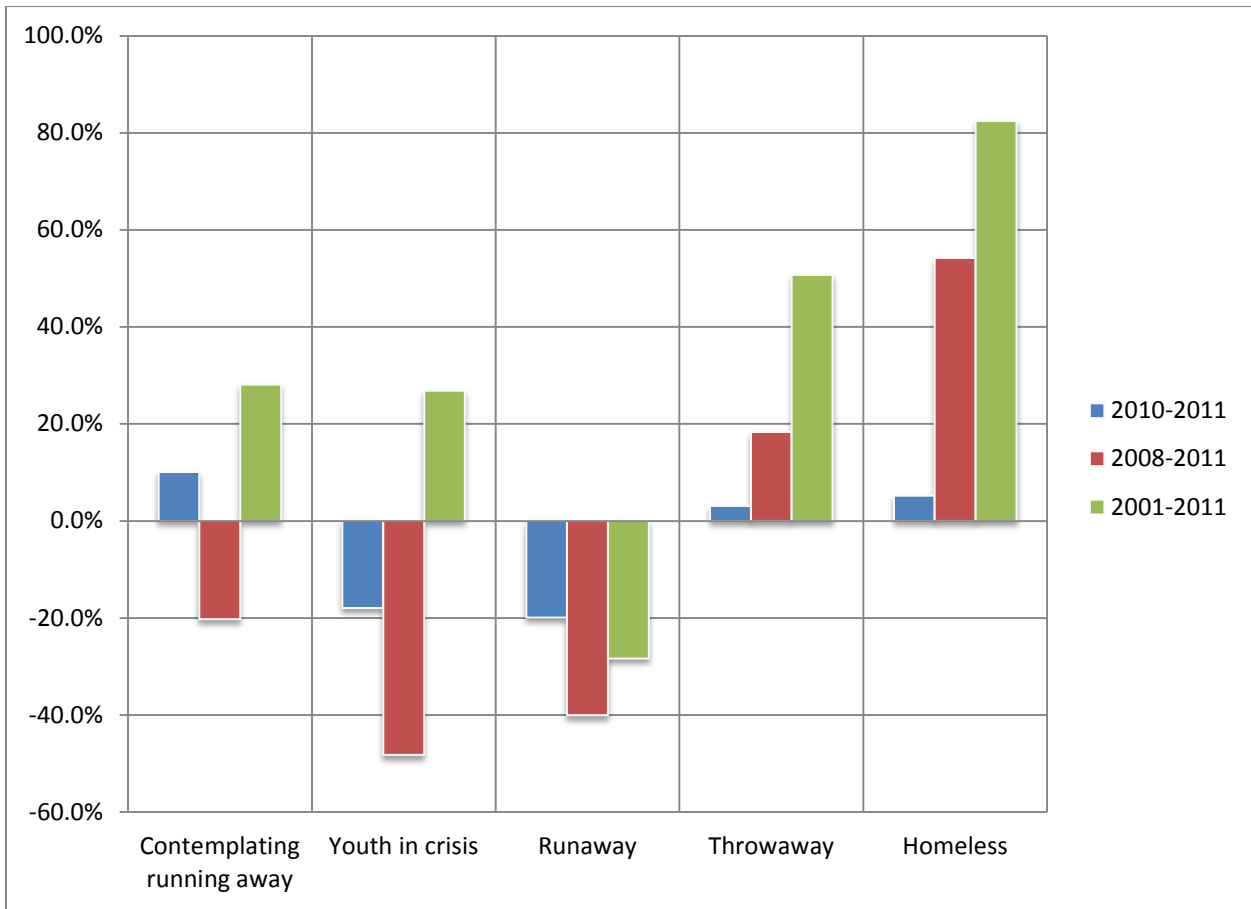


Figure 2: Trend Analysis of Percentage Change in Youth Crisis Caller Status 2000-2011 (Based on a combined sample of 170,949 for all 12 years)



Crisis Caller Age

The largest group of crisis callers to the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) in 2011 was age 17 at 20 percent (see Fig. 3). Age 18 (16 percent) and ages 19 and 16 (14 percent each) were the next largest groups. Older youth show the largest increases in calls over the last decade. Calls from those aged 19, 20 and 21 years old all increased more than 97 percent. While those aged 13 and under total 6 percent of calls, those age groups had increases of 11 percent and 5 percent over the past year, respectively (see Fig. 4).

Figure 3: Distribution of Age of Crisis Callers in 2011

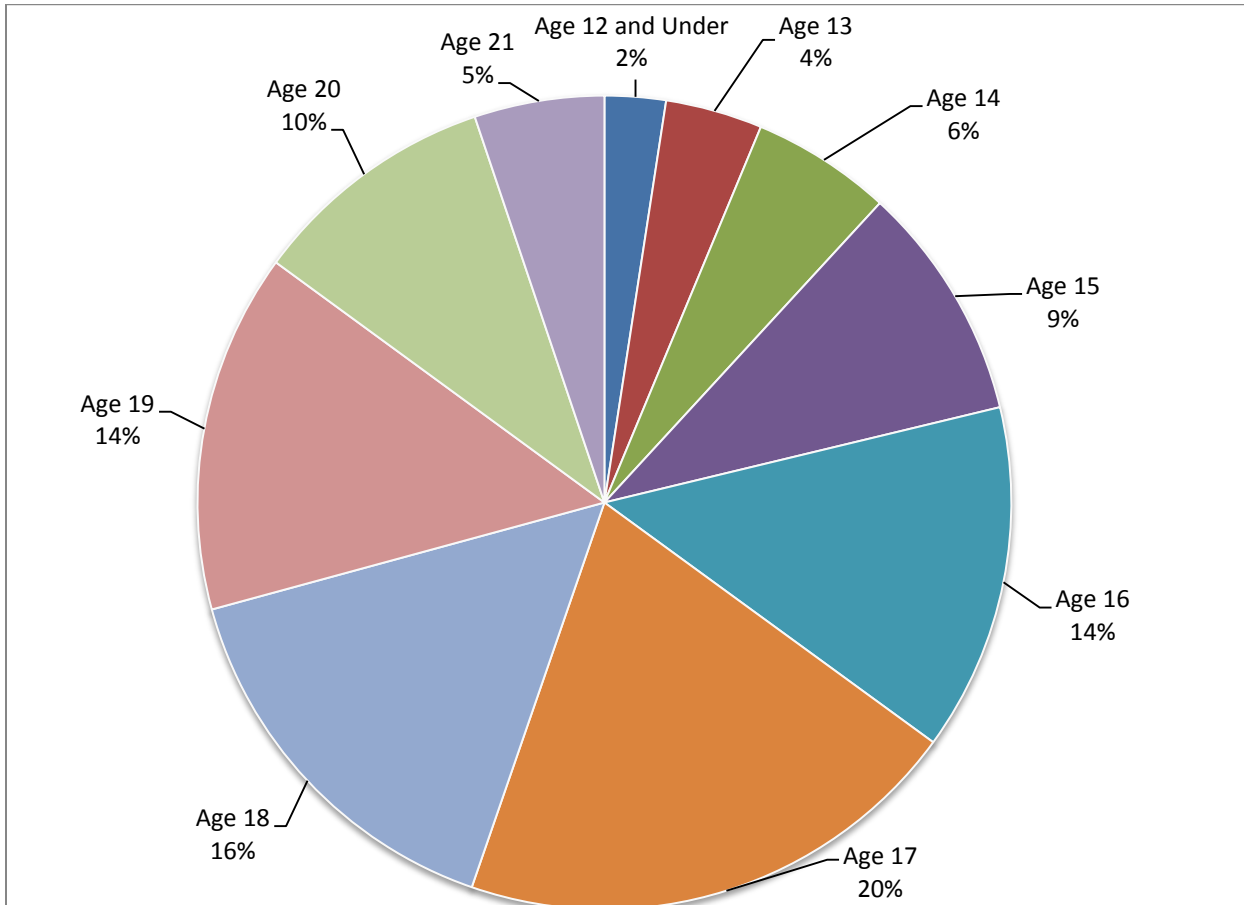
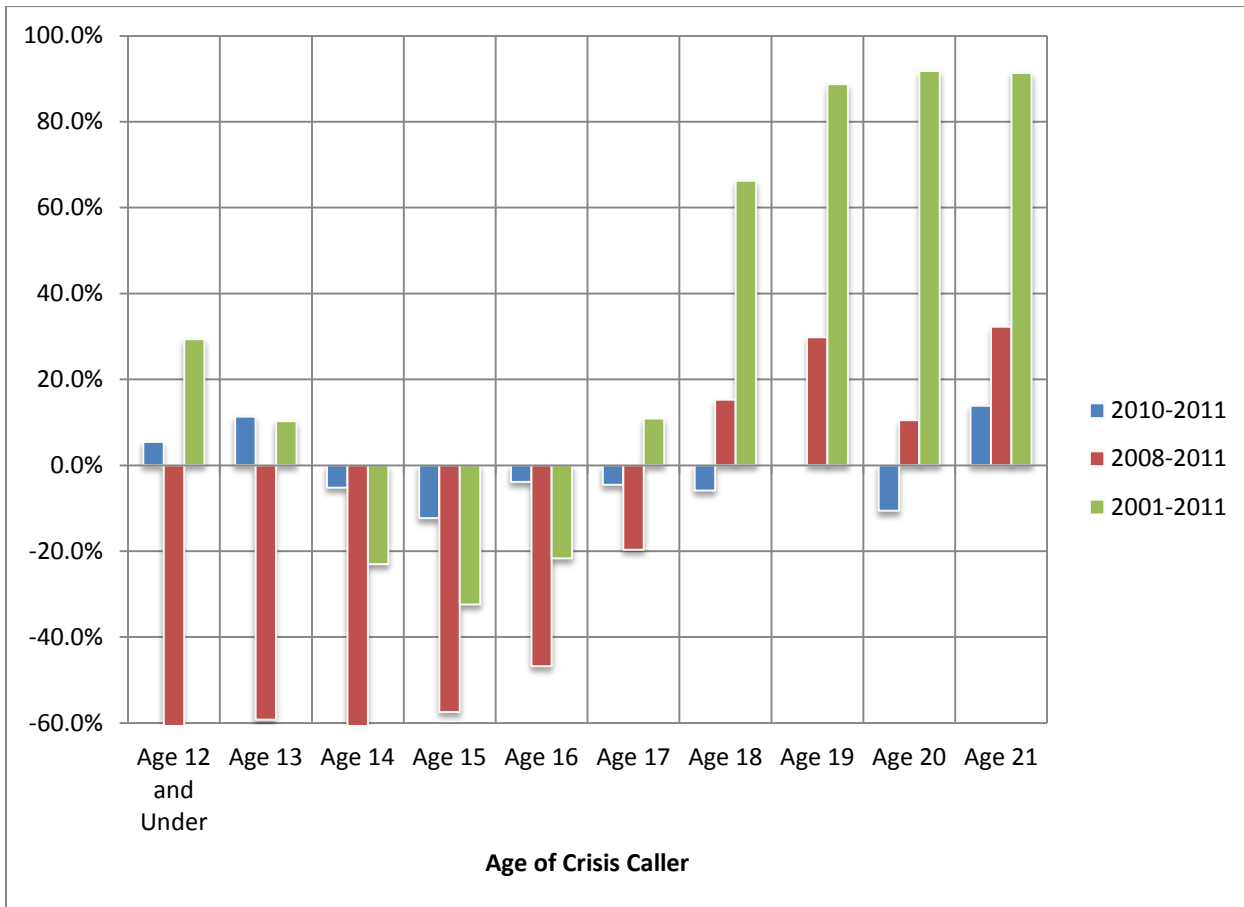


Figure 4: Trend Analysis of Percentage Change in Age of Crisis Caller 2000-2011 (Based on a combined sample of 88,007 for all 12 years)



Note: In order to show the details of this entire graph, the categories of Age 12 and under (decrease of 77 percent) and Age 14 (decrease of 83 percent) were cut off for the trend period 2008-2011.

Crisis Caller Means of Survival

The majority of crisis callers to the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) in 2011 were surviving through assistance from friends and relatives at 73 percent. Ten percent of crisis callers reported using shelters to survive in 2011 (see Fig. 5). Illegal activity reported by callers has decreased over the past year including participating in the sex industry, a decrease of 52 percent and panhandling, a decrease of 25 percent. Stealing or selling drugs decreased 37 percent over the past year and 70 percent over the past three years. Callers also reported less police/detention as a means of survival, a decrease of 33 percent over the past year.

Figure 5: Distribution of Crisis Caller Means of Survival in 2011

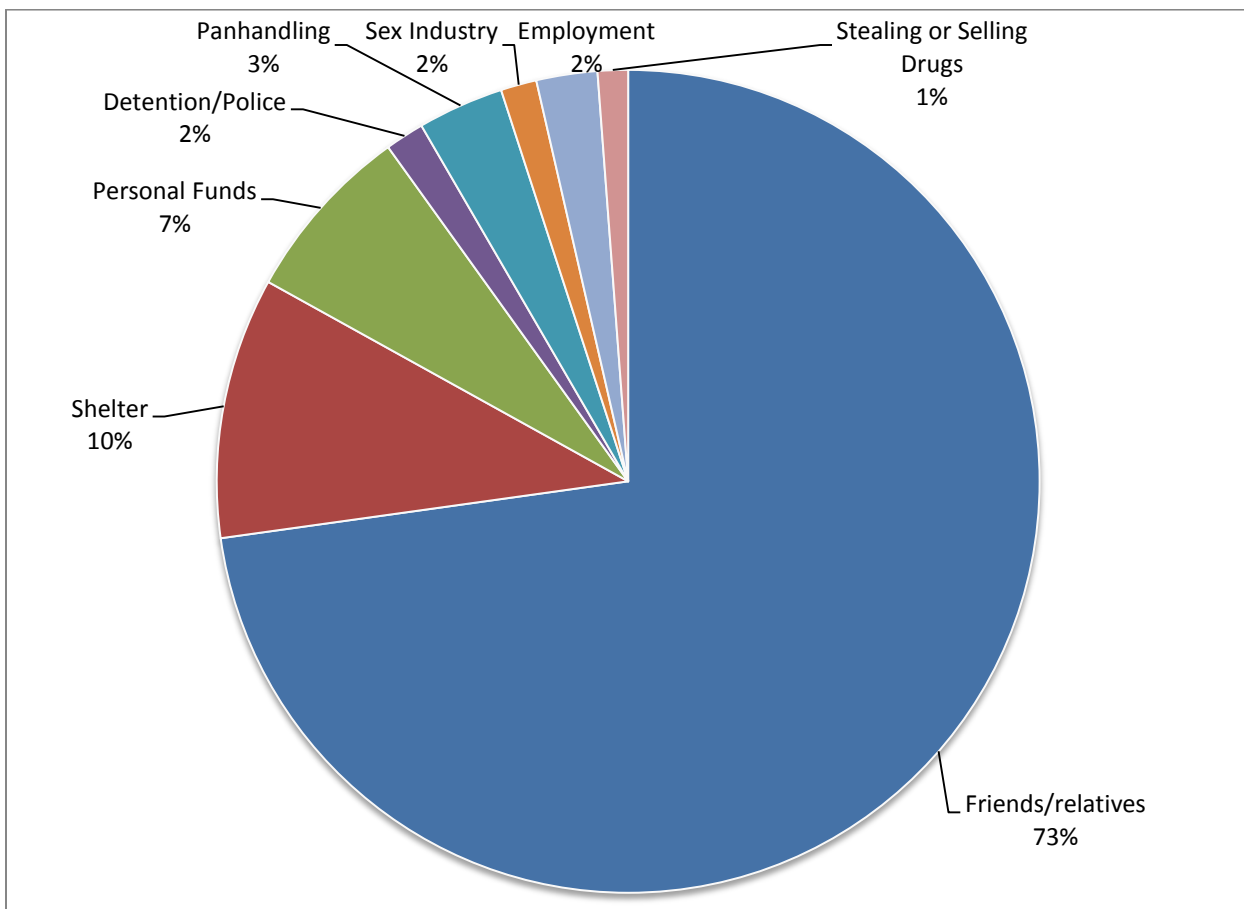
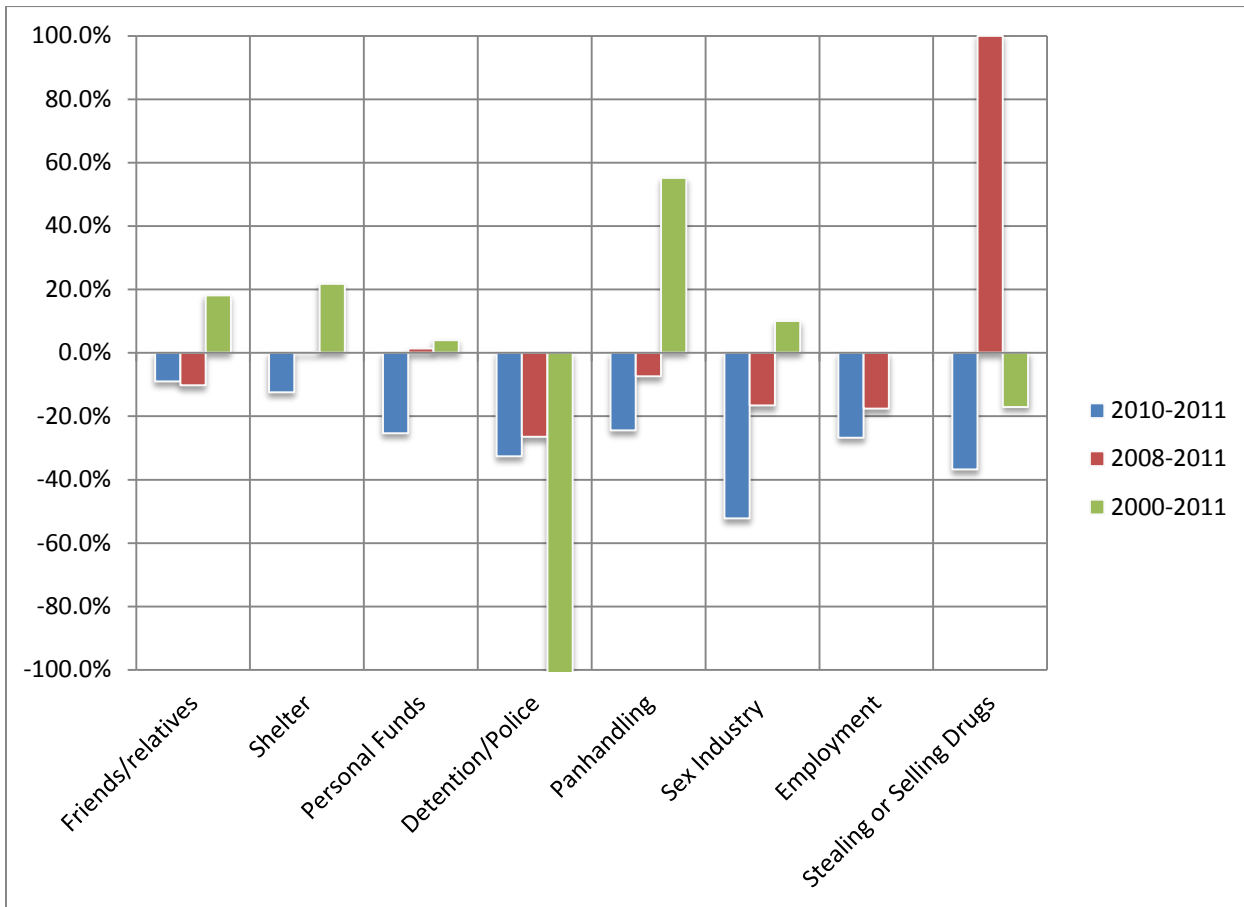


Figure 6: Trend Analysis of Percentage Change in Crisis Caller Means of Survival 2000-2011 (Based on a combined sample of 69,301 for eight years of data)



Note: The "Employment" category of data was not collected until 2005, therefore there is no trend data for the 2000-2011 period for this category.

Note: In order to show the details of this entire graph, the category of Detention/Police was cut off for the trend period 2000-2011, this category decreased 224 percent over the trend period.

Crisis Caller Time on the Street Before Calling NRS

The most common crisis caller to the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) in 2011 had been on the street for one to three days at 43 percent (see Fig. 7). However, the largest percentage increases in crisis calls have been from youth on the streets for more than six months. The number of youth calling NRS who had been on the streets for more than six months has increased 48 percent over the past three years and 70 percent over the last decade. Callers who had been on the streets two to six months increased 48 percent over the last decade. The largest decrease, 20 percent over the past year and 136 percent over the past decade, appears in youth who had been on the streets four to seven days (see Fig. 8).

Figure 7: Distribution of Time on the Street for Crisis Callers in 2011

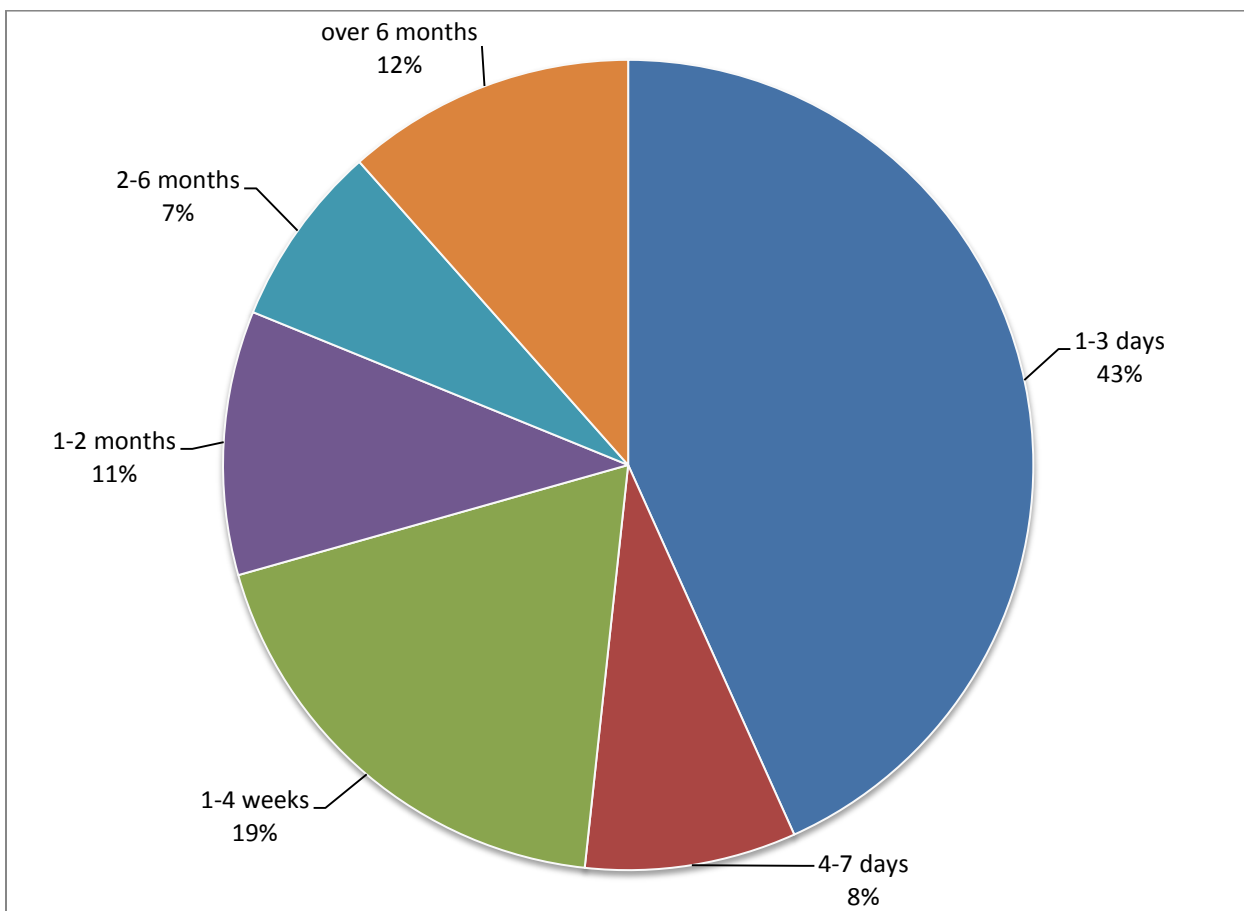
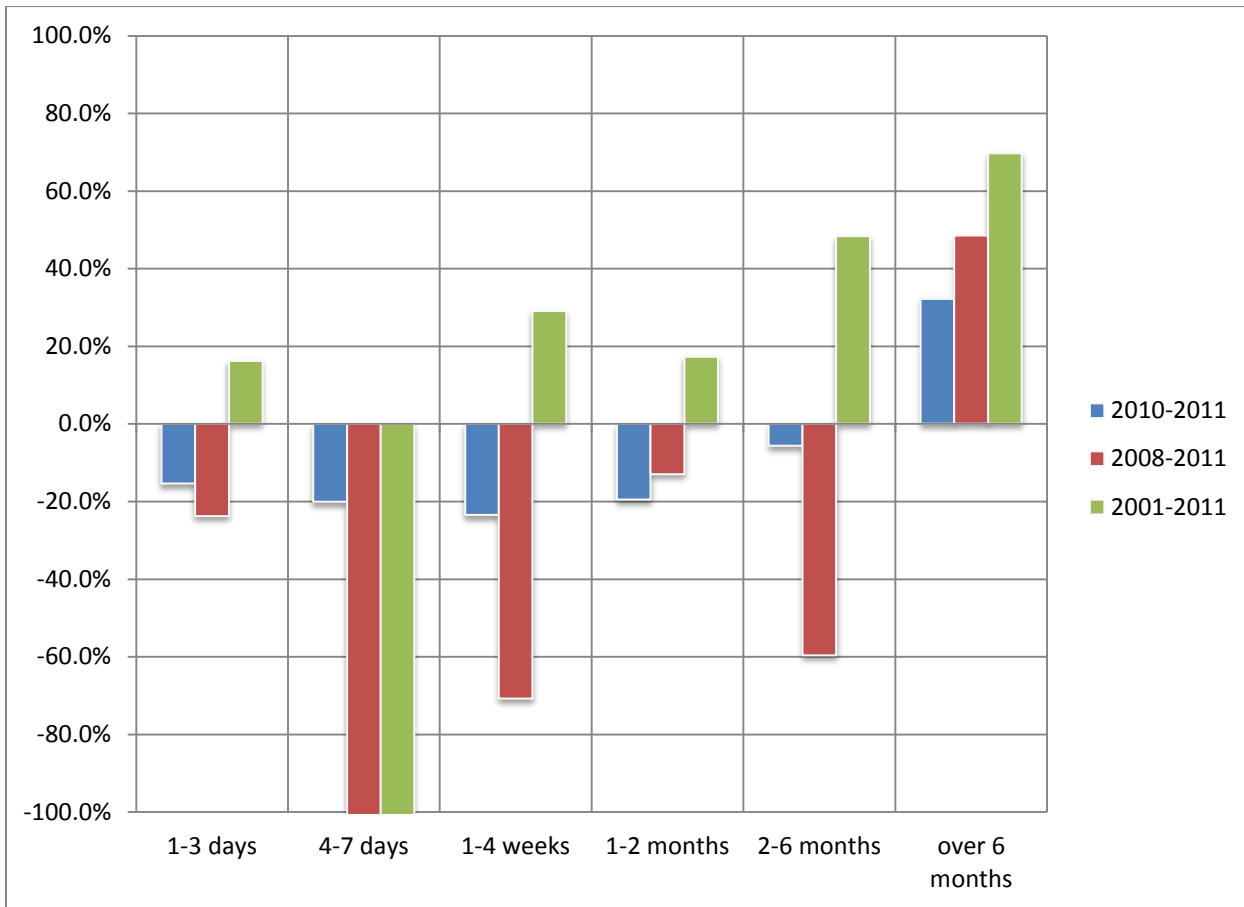


Figure 8: Trend Analysis of Percentage Change in Crisis Caller Time on the Street Before Calling NRS 2000-2011 (Based on a combined sample of 104,936 for all 12 years)



Note: In order to show the details of this entire graph, the category of 4-7 days was cut off for the trend period 2008-2011 (decrease of 171 percent) and 2001-2011 (decrease of 136 percent).

Crisis Caller Whereabouts at Time of Call

The largest proportion of crisis callers to the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) in 2011 was calling from home at 34 percent. Youth calling from a friend or relative's house comprised an almost equal percentage of callers at 35 percent (see Fig. 9).

Over the past decade, youth calling from the street (91 percent), school (50 percent), and a relative's home (44 percent), have all increased significantly. Calls from police/detention decreased 72 percent over the past decade and 27 percent over the past year. The percentage of callers from Greyhound Bus Line stations decreased 72 percent over the past year and 114 percent over three years (see Fig. 10).

Figure 9: Distribution of Crisis Caller Whereabouts in 2011

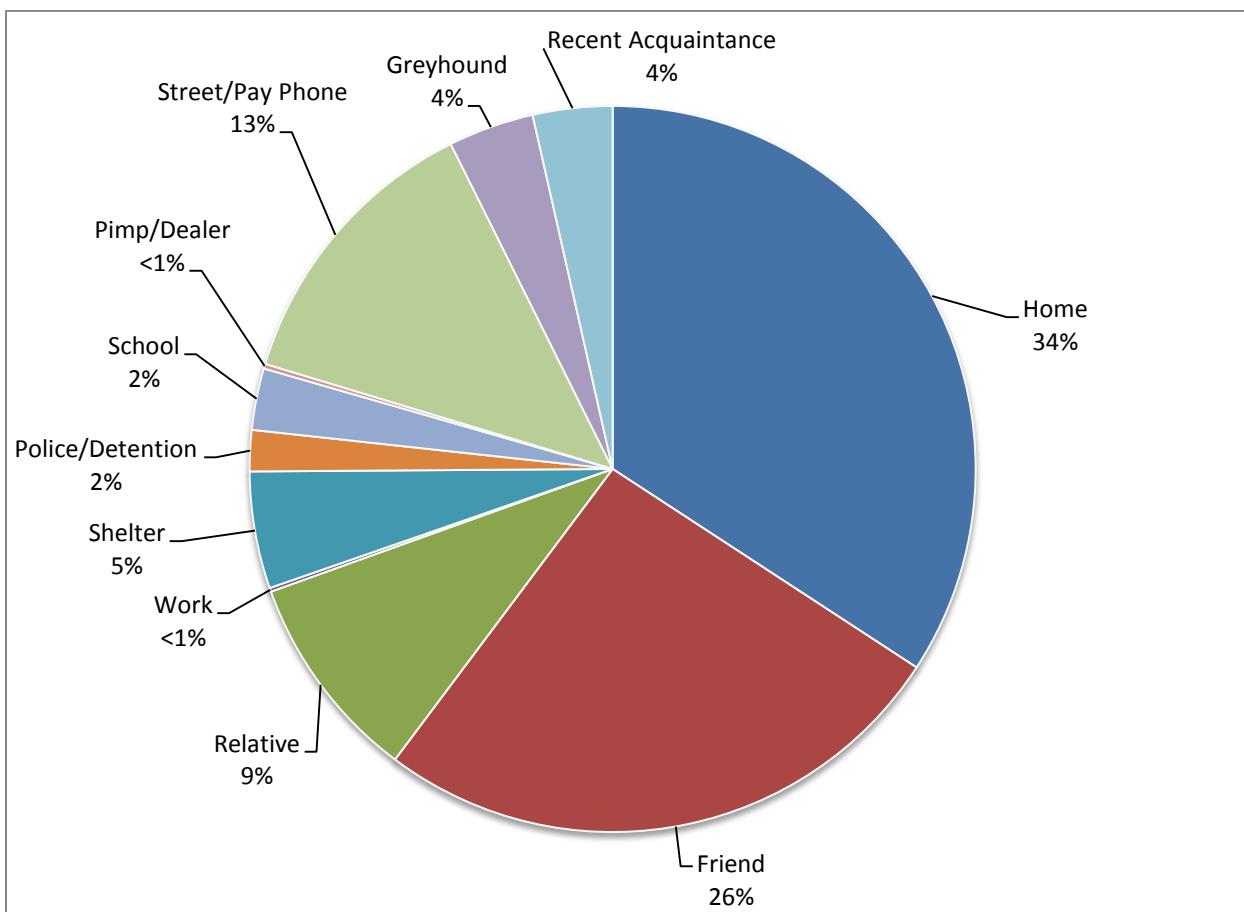
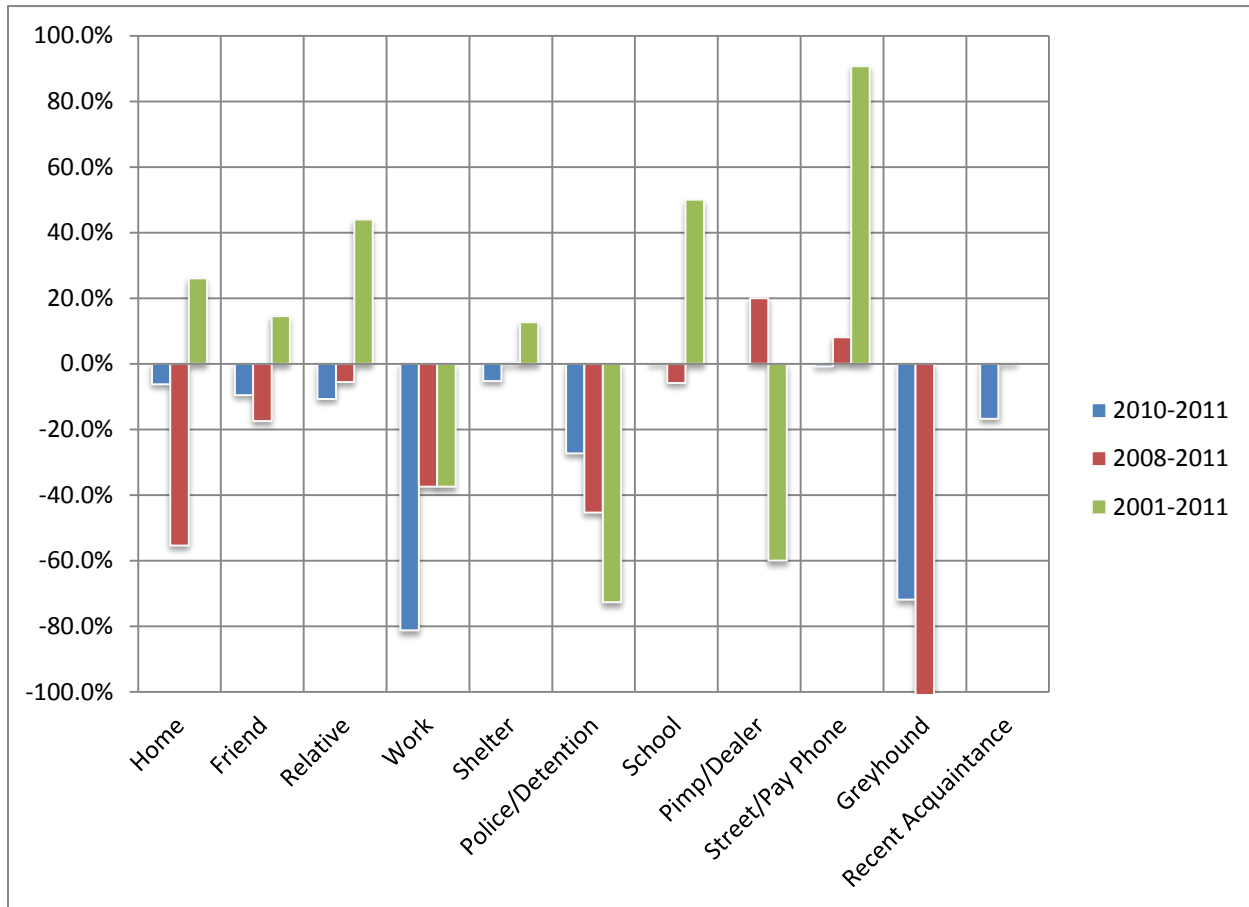


Figure 10: Trend Analysis of Percentage Change in Crisis Caller Whereabouts 2000-2011 (Based on a combined sample of 149,486 for all 12 years)



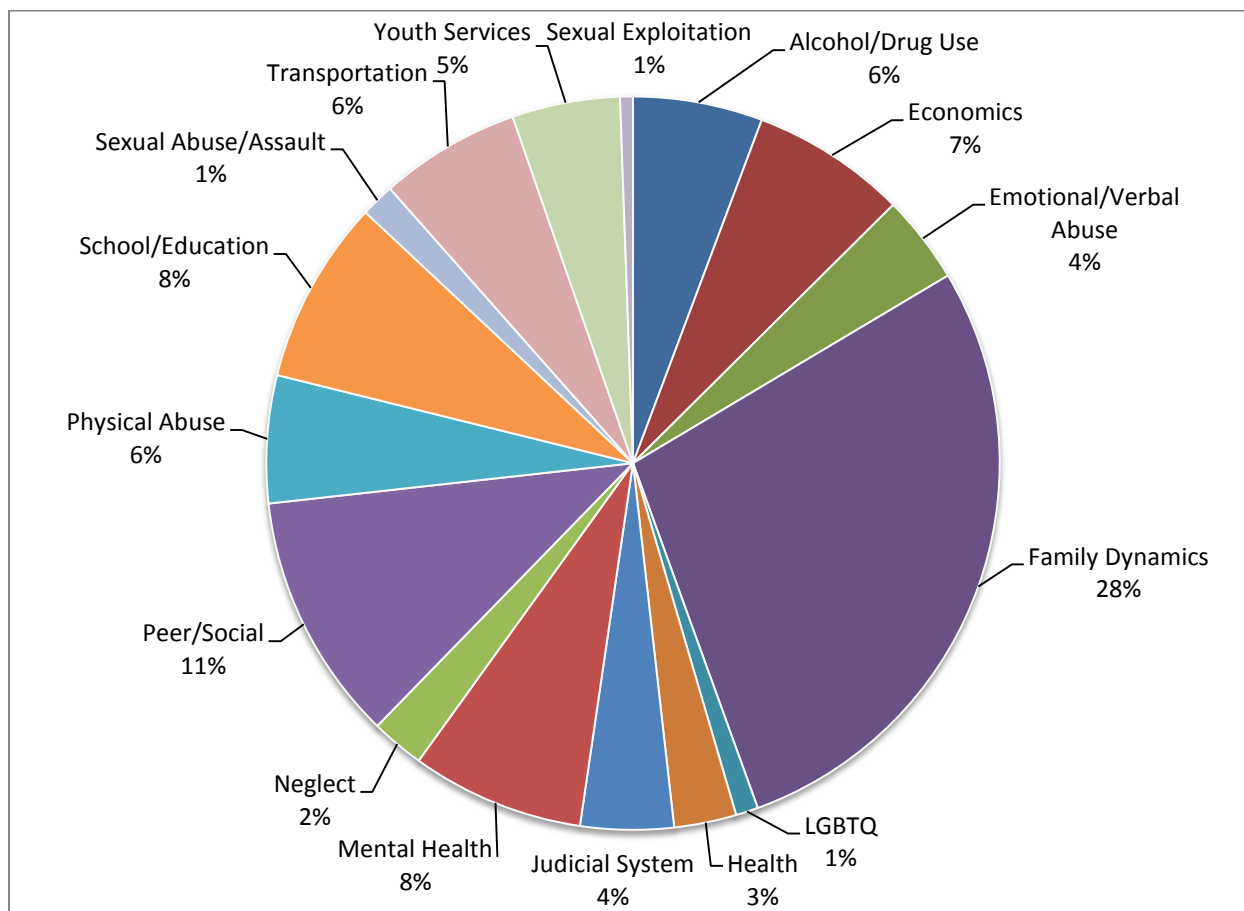
Note: The categories of Greyhound and recent acquaintance were added in 2007 and do not have data for the 2000-2010 trend horizon. In order to show the details of this entire graph, the category Greyhound was cut off for the trend period 2008-2011. This category decreased 114 percent for the 2008-2011 trend period.

Crisis Caller Issues Raised

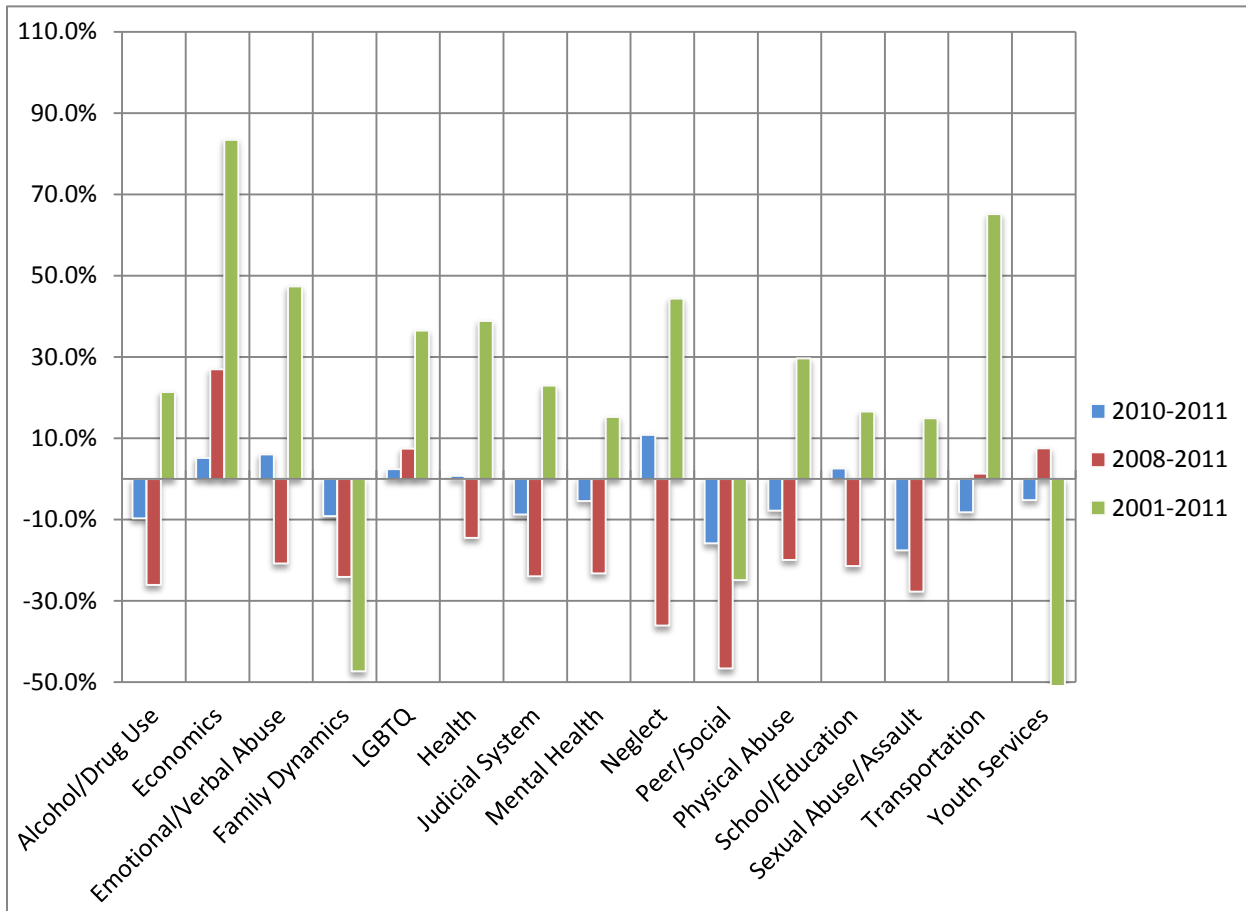
The issue most often cited by crisis callers to the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) in 2011 was family dynamics at 28 percent. The next significant group of issues was neglect, physical, sexual, emotional and verbal abuse at 13 percent. Peer and social issues are indicated by 11 percent of callers (see Fig. 11).

Emotional and verbal abuse increased by 6 percent over the past year and 47 percent over the last decade. Neglect increased by 11 percent over the past year and 44 percent over the past decade. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning/queer (LGBTQ) issues increased 2 percent over the past year, 7 percent over the past three years and 37 percent over the past decade. Sexual abuse decreased 18 percent over the past year and 28 percent over three years. Peer and social issues have decreased 25 percent over the past decade and 16 percent over the past year (see Fig. 12).

Figure 11: Distribution of Youth Crisis Caller Issues Raised in 2011



**Figure 12: Trend Analysis of Percentage Change in Youth Crisis Caller Issues Raised 2000-2011
(Based on a combined sample of 532,933 for all 12 years)**



Crisis Caller Relationship to Youth

Over half of crisis callers to the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) in 2011 were youth calling about themselves at 55 percent. Parents made up the second largest group of crisis callers to NRS in 2011 at 26 percent (see Fig. 13).

Over the past decade the number of youth calling about themselves has increased by 35 percent. Over the past year, calls from parents decreased by 28 percent, relatives decreased by 22 percent, and police decreased by 32 percent. Over the past three years they decreased by 49, 35 and 82 percent respectively.

Figure 13: Distribution of Crisis Caller Relationship in 2011

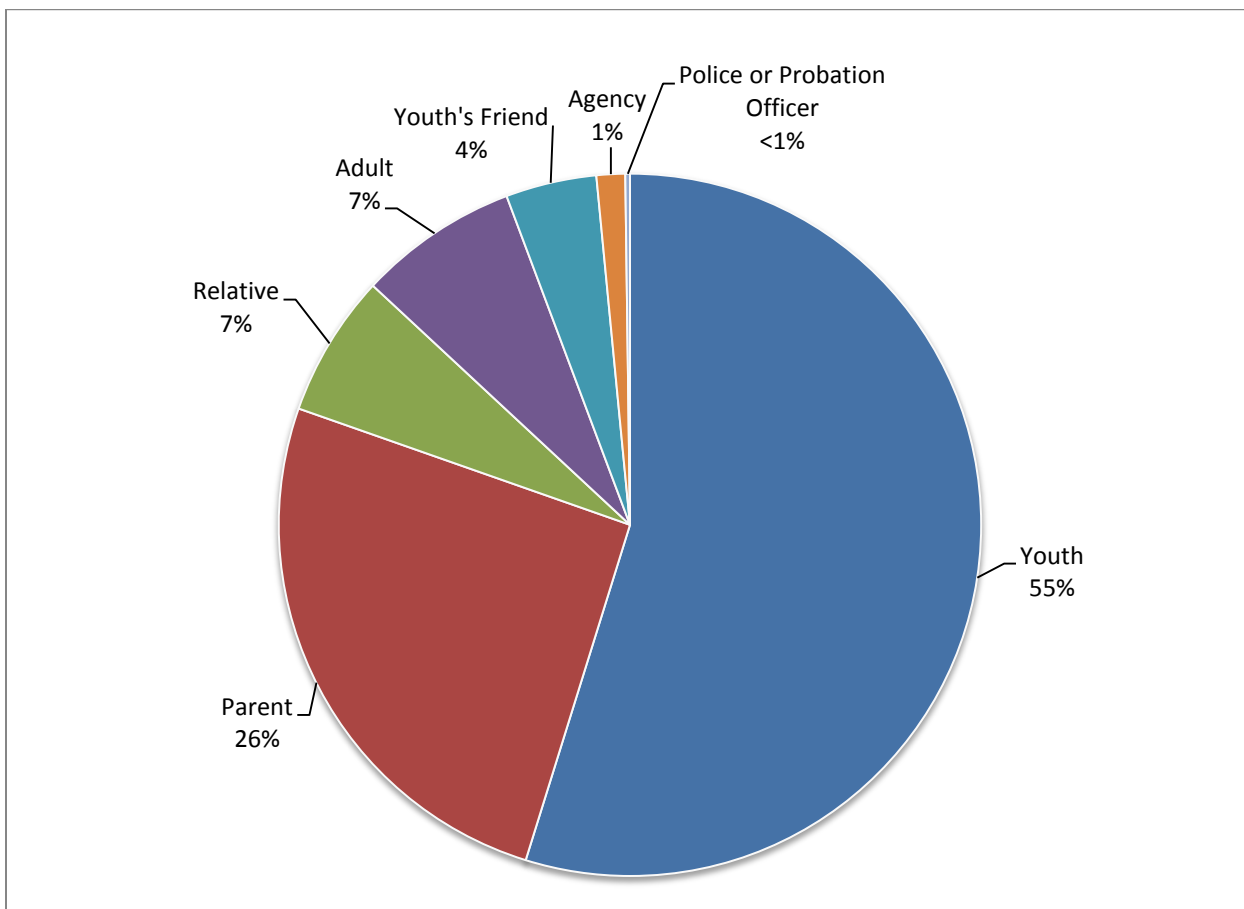
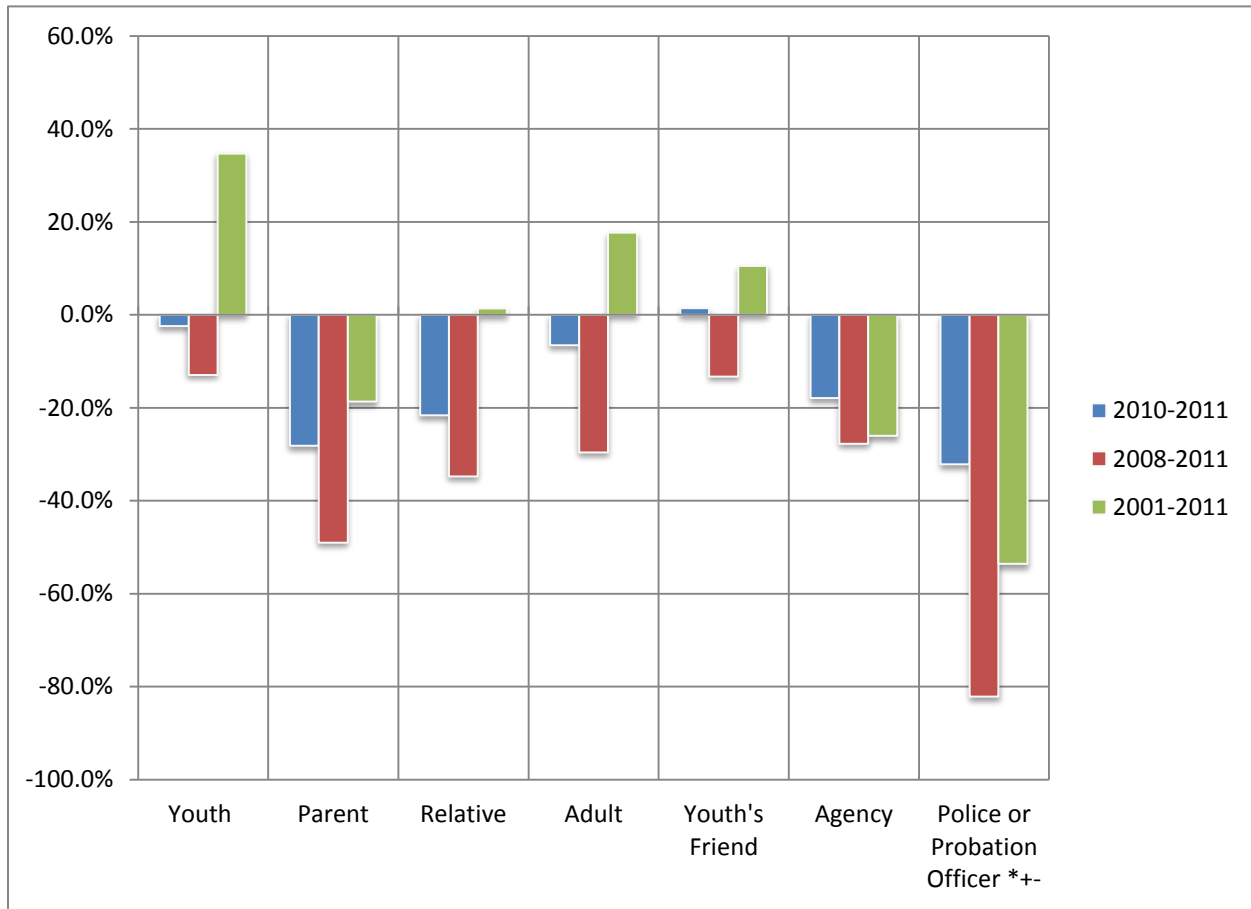


Figure 14: Trend Analysis of Percentage Change in Crisis Caller Relationship 2000-2011
 (Based on a combined sample of 173,744 for all 12 years)



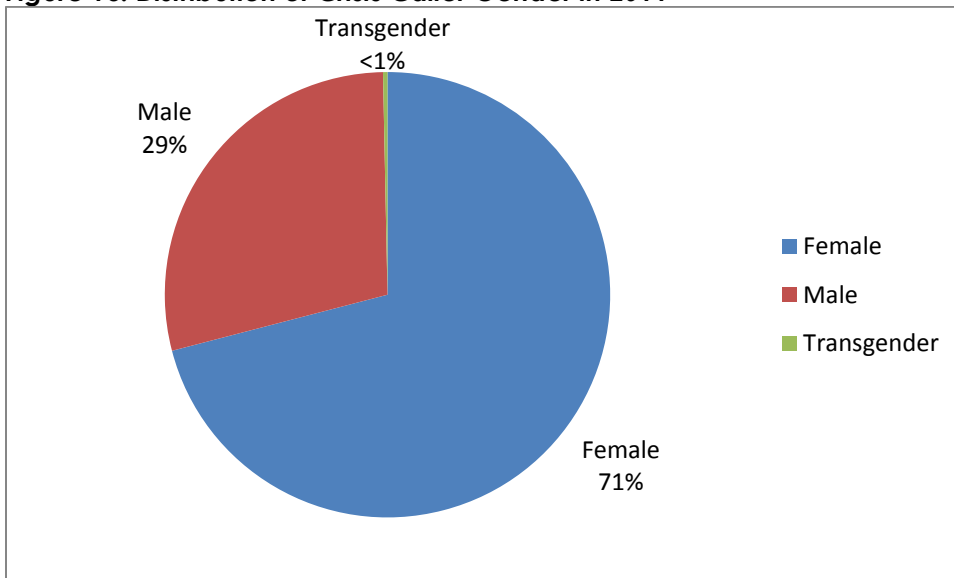
Crisis Caller Gender

The majority of crisis calls to the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) in 2011 came from females at 71 percent. Male crisis calls to NRS continue to increase compared to calls from females, increasing 33 percent over the past decade, more than four times the increase in calls from females over the same period. NRS is also receiving more calls from transgendered individuals than in the past with a 45 percent increase over the past three years and a 100 percent increase over the past decade (see Fig. 15).

Figure 15: Crisis Caller Gender (Based on a combined sample of 175,970 for all 12 years)

Gender	Percent Change 2008-2011	Percent Change 2001-2011
Female	-12 %	7 %
Male	-12 %	33 %
Transgender	45 %	100 %

Figure 16: Distribution of Crisis Caller Gender in 2011



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 Apryl Ehmann at apryl@kesselcommunications.com, or (614) 439-7596.