

Excerpt from Doctoral Dissertation:
SURVIVAL AMONG MALE HOMELESS ADOLESCENTS

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Introduction

Approximately 1.7 million unaccompanied adolescents are believed to be homeless in America (United States Department of Justice, 2002); this is 7% of the total homeless population (The United States Conference of Mayors, 2000, p.50). Of the 1.7 million unaccompanied homeless adolescents 40% to 60%, or 520,000 are queer¹ (Kipke, O.Connor, Palmer, & MacKenzie, 1995; Radkowsky & Siegel, 1997; Sullivan 1996; United States Census Bureau, 1999). Although often unrecognized by society, social services, and policy-makers queer adolescents are over-represented among the homeless. Homelessness is a personal, familial, social and community phenomenon. This crisis is amplified for youth due to their limited social, economic, and legal resources.

Adolescent, Homeless and Queer

Much of the research on homeless adolescents has been conducted on samples where a subject's sexual orientation has not been asked (this is most notable in federally-funded research e.g. National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children (NISMAART)). As noted earlier, 40% to 60% of all unaccompanied homeless adolescents are queer (Kipke, O.Connor, Palmer, & MacKenzie, 1995). There are a number of reasons for over-representation of queer adolescents among the homeless.

The literature purports that queer males are at greater risk for violent expulsion from the home than females following disclosure or discovery of sexual orientation. Whereas females are more likely to be physically and verbally abused, but kept at home until graduation from high school (Coleman, 1989; Hetrick, & Martin, 1987; Powers, Eckenrode, & Jaklitsch, 1990). Although clearly marginalized, due to limited resources, and the relative absence of queer homeless female adolescents, females will not be addressed in this dissertation.

Homeless adolescents are in a precarious economic position, with few fiscal options. Exacerbating the situation, gender atypical individuals are more likely to be targeted for violence based on perceived or assumed sexual orientation (Savin-Williams & Diamond, 2000; Waldo, Hesson-McInnis, & D.Augelli, 1998). As noted earlier, transsexual males are more gender atypical than both gay and bisexual males. Gender atypicality is associated with magnified stigma, increased harassment (DiCeglie, Freedman, McPherson & Richardson, 2002) and consequently, barriers experienced (Di Ceglie, 2000). It is likely that those facing the largest barriers to shelter, safety and services, have fewer options from which to choose.