

Abstract

Runaway and abandoned children are considered to be among the most vulnerable sections of the population in industrialized societies. Socio-psychological factors associated with running away and abandonment have been well documented but not much work has been done to unravel the mental make-ups of these children that may be the cause of such behaviors. This study explored and compared the ways runaway, abandoned and home-living children view the self, the family, the world and the future. The sample consisted of 28 institutionalized runaway children; 40 abandoned children; and 50 home living children. The main research tool that was adapted for using with children having limited education was the Repertory Grid Technique. In addition to it School Children Problem Scale, and the Hand Test were also used. Results of the study showed that runaway children experience push from the familial abuse and neglect while they experience a substantial degree of pull towards the external world due to the accepting attitude of friends. The three groups appeared to be quite similar in their perceptions regarding self. Results also showed that majority of the runaway children had a vague or no idea of the future as opposed to home-living and abandoned children. More emotional and behavioral problems were reported by runaway children than home living and abandoned children. Findings of the study highlight the critical role played by the push and pull factors in running away as it has been illustrated by the case studies.

Key words: grid technique, runaway children, abandoned children, cognitions.