

The Self-Concept of Homeless Adolescents

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Thirty adolescents who had lived away from home for at least six months were compared on self-concept with 120 adolescents living at home. The latter group was divided into equal numbers of adolescents who were employed, unemployed, school students, and college students. The Offer Self-Image Questionnaire for Adolescents was used to measure self-concept. Other measures used were the Beck Depression Inventory, the Hopelessness Scale of Beck et al., and the Rotter Internal External Locus of Control Scale. These were used to examine the relationship between deficits in self-concept and psychopathology. Environmental factors such as family relationships, employment, school achievement, and friendships were also examined. It was found that homeless adolescents demonstrated significant deficits in five areas of self-concept and a specific pattern of deficits was related to hopelessness. Results were discussed with reference to the theory that acting-out behavior mitigates the impact of affective disturbance on self concept.

INTRODUCTION

From early in this century, psychologists and sociologists have used the self-concept as a central theoretical construct (e.g., Cooley, 1902; James, 1910; Mead, 1934; Rogers, 1951; Allport, 1955; Rosenberg, 1965; Coopersmith, 1967). Self-image has been studied as one component of the self-concept, the other component being self-esteem or the evaluation of the self.

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In his review, Epstein (1973) summarized from an extensive literature a number of common characteristics of the self-concept. These include (1) internally consistent, hierarchically organized concepts; (2) different empirical selves; (3) dynamic organization, changing with experience; (4) developing from experience, particularly interactions with significant others and (5) maintenance of an organized self-concept essential for individual functioning. Epstein concluded that the self-concept is a self theory with the aims of optimizing the pleasure-pain balance over the lifetime, maintaining self-esteem and organizing experience for effective coping.

Interest in the concept of self-image has extended from theoretical and experimental concerns to clinical applications, where positive self-image and high self-esteem are held to indicate healthy psychological functioning. Clinical applications have ranged from humanistic perspectives focusing on self-actualization to cognitive behavioral approaches to self-esteem enhancement (e.g., Pope *et al.*, 1988).

During adolescence it has been argued that radical changes in self-image occur as a result of physiological change, psychological development, and social experiences (Erikson, 1968). However, Burns (1979) disputed this traditional view. From a review of studies from 1959 to 1976 he concluded that there was no evidence of increased instability of self-concept during adolescence unless experiences were subjectively interpreted as traumatic. Further evidence of self-image stability from later studies has been presented by Silbereisen and Zank (1984).

Homelessness objectively constitutes a traumatic experience. Many studies have pointed to family separations or conflicts and difficulties at school prior to running away (Howell *et al.*, 1973; Maar, 1985; Sherman, 1985; Soriano, 1985; Krawitz, 1985). As a runaway, the homeless adolescent faces the predicament of obtaining food, shelter, and necessities in a radically changed social context. It would be expected that these experiences should result in a negative self-concept and low self-esteem. Surprisingly, Howell *et al.* (1973) reported that the majority of runaways in their sample claimed it had been a positive experience resulting in significant growth, but quantitative evidence was not collected to support this claim.

Turley (1988) reported no differences between homeless and non-homeless adolescents on measures of self-concept and maladjustment, but instruments were not specified, nor were statistical results presented. On the other hand, Wolk and Brandon (1977) used the Adjective Check List as a measure of self-concept and found that runaways held less favorable concepts than nonrunaways in areas of anxiety, self-doubt, interpersonal relationships, and defensiveness.

Thus, a general focus of this study was to explore the self-concept of homeless adolescents in comparison with adolescents living at home. The

impact of negative past events, together with current negative experiences as a runaway, were of interest.

In addition to poor self-concept, it is likely that homeless experiences would also result in depression and related psychopathology. According to Beck's cognitive theory of depression (1979), early separations or losses may produce negative concepts about the self, world, and future. When these are activated by subsequent separations or losses, depression will be triggered. Related to adolescent depression are attributional style variables such as external locus of control, with higher levels of depression associated with a more external locus of control (Siegel and Griffin, 1984) and hopelessness has been shown to be strongly correlated with depression and suicidal wishes in adults (Nekanda-Trepka *et al.*, 1983). A second aim of this study was thus to investigate the relationship between self-concept of homeless adolescents and three measures of psychopathology: depression, hopelessness, and external locus of control.

Many studies have examined the relationship between psychological disturbance and self-concept in adolescents, particularly the effects of depression and conduct disorder (e.g., Teri, 1982; Ostrov *et al.*, 1982; Offer *et al.*, 1986; Koenig, 1988). Generally, it was concluded that the greater the depression or delinquency, the poorer the self-image. However, Koenig (1988) argued that delinquent acting-out behavior could mitigate some of the effects of depression on self-image. That is, she found that adolescents diagnosed as having depression and conduct disorder scored higher on self-image than the depressed only group but lower than the conduct disorder only group. Thus, in addition to examining the effects of life experiences and depressive pathology on self-concept, it was decided to explore the effects of delinquency, defined in terms of juvenile convictions.

METHOD

Subjects

Subjects were 150 adolescents aged from 13 years to under 20 years, divided into five groups. Group 1 comprised 30 homeless adolescents who were residing at a short-term refuge in Kings Cross, Sydney, when interviewed. They had left school, and were neither studying full time nor employed in permanent jobs. It was decided to sample only those respondents who had been living away from home for at least six months in order to avoid contamination of measures by acute factors that may have precipitated running away from home.

Groups 2-5 comprised adolescents who were living at home with at least one parent or guardian. Thirty subjects were included in each comparison group. Group 2 were all unemployed at the time of the study, Group 3 were employed full time with no current studies or part-time studies only, Group 4 were studying full time at high school with no job or part-time job only, and Group 5 were studying full time at a university or college with no job or part-time job only.

Measures

Self-concept was measured by the Offer Self-Image Questionnaire for Adolescents (OSIQ; Offer *et al.*, 1982). Total score reflects global self-esteem while 11 subscales may be grouped into measures of personal self (Scales 1, 2 and 3), social self (Scales 4, 5, and 9), sexual self (Scale 6), familial self (Scale 7) and coping self (Scales 8, 10, and 11). Each of the 130 items is answered on a 6-point scale, and scale scores are standardized with a mean of 50 and standard deviation of 15. Standard scores are provided separately for two age (13-15 years, 16-19 years) and gender groups, with higher scores indicating better adjustment.

Reliability data were summarized by Offer *et al.* (1982). Stability coefficients ranged from .48 to .84 for the 11 scales and .73 for the total score using data from Chicago adolescents tested six months apart. Internal consistency, measured by coefficient alphas, ranged from .36 to .88 for various subgroups.

Validity has been reported in terms of correlations with other personality measures and the ability of the tool to discriminate between different samples. Moderate to high correlations were reported between the OSIQ and the Bell Inventory, the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) and the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (Offer, 1969; Coche and Taylor, 1974; Hjorth, 1980). No significant cross-cultural differences were found between American and Australian adolescents, while differences between normal and disturbed adolescents were as expected (Offer and Howard, 1972).

Other psychological measures comprised the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI; Beck *et al.*, 1961), Rotter's internal-external locus of control scale (RIELC, 1966), and the Hopelessness Scale (HS) of Beck *et al.* (1974). The BDI comprises 21 items covering different symptoms of depression. Split-half reliability (Spearman-Brown-formula) for the normative sample was .93 and validity was established through measures of association (Kruskal-Wallis test, Mann-Whitney U test, Pearson biserial r) between scores and clinical ratings, yielding highly significant results with p less than

.01 (Beck *et al.*, 1961). Its applicability to adolescent populations was analyzed and confirmed by Teri (1982).

The RIELC is a 29-item measure of a person's expectation of internal vs. external control of reinforcement. High scores indicate that reinforcement is perceived as externally controlled: that reinforcement is not entirely contingent upon one's own actions, but is the result of luck, fate, or the control of powerful others. Normative data were based on large samples of university students, high school students, and Peace Corps trainees: combined data yielded split-half reliability (Spearman-Brown formula) of .73 and test-retest reliabilities over several months of .55 to .72. Construct validity was established by studies correlating low scores which indicate internal locus of control with behavioral measures such as resistance to influence, emphasis on skill and personal ability and behaviors that would improve the environment (Rotter, 1966).

The HS comprises 20 true-false items measuring negative expectancies regarding oneself and one's future. Norms were based on 294 hospitalized, recent suicide attempters: the Kuder-Richardson measure of internal consistency was .93 while validity was assessed by correlations with clinical ratings of hopelessness using an 8-point scale, yielding correlations from .62 to .74 for various samples (Beck *et al.*, 1974).

Data were also collected on environmental variables relating to family relationships, school achievement, family discipline, friendships, and juvenile convictions. On 6-point scales scored from 0 (*none*) to 5 (*very much*), subjects rated love displayed toward them by father and mother, frequency of physical punishment, extent of separation from father and mother, and their perceived achievement at school. Friendships were also rated on average duration in months and on supportiveness from 0 (*totally unsupportive*) to 5 (*extremely supportive*). They also reported numbers of past juvenile convictions. Homeless adolescents reported involvement in illegal activities as a runaway, and rated typical experiences such as sexual harassment or being thrown out of accommodation on a scale of difficulty from 0 (*no difficulty experienced*) to 6 (*severe difficulties*).

Procedure

Interviews and self-report measures were used with homeless adolescents. Data on adolescents living at home were obtained by questionnaires distributed by approximately 90 students at the University of Western Sydney as part of a course in research methods.

Table I. Age by Group^a

	Mean age in years	SD
Homeless group	16.17 _a	1.34
School group	16.10 _a	1.18
Unemployed group	16.77 _a	1.48
Employed group	17.87 _b	1.11
College group	18.20 _b	0.85

^aMeans with different letter subscript are significantly different by Neuman-Keuls test ($p < .05$).

RESULTS

Homeless and comparison groups were similar in composition by sex, but differed in age. Target proportions of 60% males and 40% females were set, corresponding to proportions received at the refuge in the past. The groups did not differ significantly by sex (chi square = 2.32, $df = 4$, $p = .68$). As expected, the groups differed significantly by age, according to one-way analysis of variance ($F[4,145] = 19.18$, $p < .01$). Paired comparisons between the five groups were computed using the Neuman-Keuls test ($p < .05$, two tailed), which indicated that the employed and college groups were significantly older than the others (see Table I).

However, this age distribution is not a chance occurrence but reflects typical patterns for adolescents on the high school-employment/unemployment/college studies continuum. In addition, scoring for the OSIQ takes

Table II. Means for OSIQ Scores by Group^a

OSIQ scale	Homeless	Unemployed	School	Employed	College
Impulse control	34.8 _a	39.1 _{ab}	47.2 _{ab}	45.5 _{ab}	48.7 _a
Emotional tone	31.1 _a	42.2 _{ab}	54.8 _b	48.3 _b	55.9 _b
Body and self-image	34.9	31.4	39.6	41.0	44.1
Social relations	33.6	37.3	45.6	41.0	45.7
Morals	48.8	45.2	51.8	49.9	57.4
Sexual attitudes	42.0	47.6	40.9	47.6	47.6
Family relations	17.3 _a	31.6 _b	49.7 _c	43.4 _{bc}	49.8 _c
Mastery of the external world	41.5	41.5	53.1	48.9	53.4
Vocational and educational goals	42.4 _{ab}	38.2 _a	54.5 _b	46.1 _{ab}	52.9 _b
Psychopathology	35.2 _a	41.3 _{ab}	47.7 _b	49.1 _b	51.5 _b
Superior adjustment	44.1	38.0	44.0	43.6	51.3
Total OSIQ score	36.9 _a	39.4 _{ab}	48.1 _{bc}	45.9 _{bc}	50.8 _{bc}

^aMeans on a row not showing the same letter subscript are significantly different by Tukey Studentized Range statistic ($p < .05$).

broad age differences into account. Hence statistical techniques controlling for age differences were not used.

Self-Image Score Comparisons Between Groups

Scores on the 11 OSIQ subscales for the five adolescent groups were analyzed by multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA) and a significant effect for group ($p < .001$) was found. On 5 scales univariate tests reached significance, with four significant at the $p < .001$ level (one significant at $p < .01$). Pairwise group differences were examined by means of Tukey's Studentized Range statistic ($p < .05$) and means that differ significantly from each other are noted in Table II.

Homeless adolescents perceived their family relationships more negatively than any other group living at home. In the area of personal self, they scored significantly lower than those adolescents working or studying on emotional tone, which measures feelings of tension, sadness, loneliness,

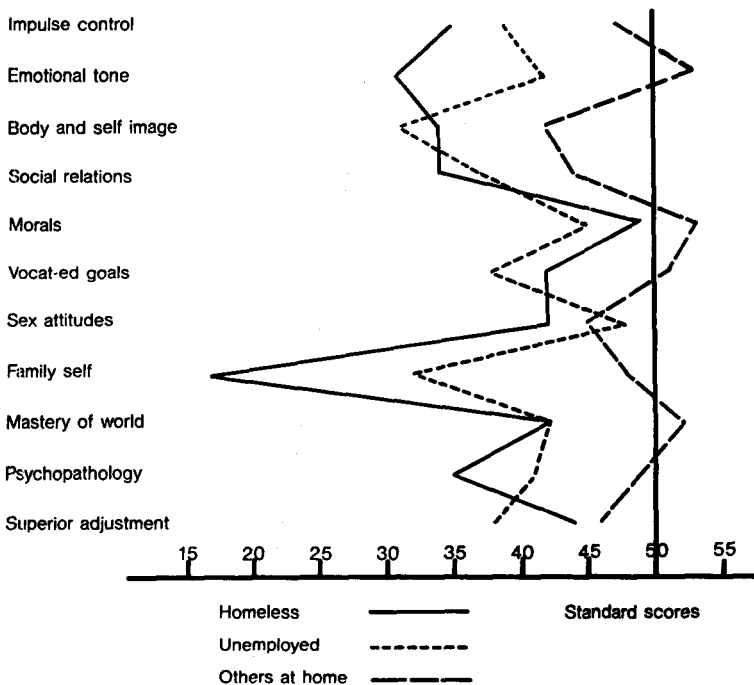


Fig. 1. Pattern of OSIQ scores for homeless, unemployed, and other adolescents living at home.

and inferiority, and scored lower than college students on impulse control, which reflects control of aggression, anxiety, resentment, and fear. Their coping self was affected in the area of psychopathology on which the homeless group scored lower than those working and studying at home. On total score, which measures global self-esteem, the homeless adolescents scored significantly lower than adolescents who were employed or studying.

Unemployed adolescents living at home tended to score at a level between homeless and other adolescents at home on family relationships, emotional tone, impulse control, psychopathology, and global self-esteem. However, they scored lowest on vocational and educational goals, differing significantly from school and college students.

The general pattern of similarities between homeless and unemployed adolescents on OSIQ scores, together with differences from adolescents living at home but working or studying, can be seen in Fig. 1.

Relationship Between Self-Concept and Current Homeless Experience

At the time of the interview the homeless adolescents had been living away from home for an average of 31 months (range 6–83 months). Exactly half left home because of physical or sexual abuse, whereas another 23% left because of home conflicts. Apart from refugees, the adolescents had spent nights on the streets or in the bush, at homes of friends or relatives, “squatting” in unused buildings or in detention centers. Two-thirds of the homeless adolescents reported involvement in at least one delinquent or illegal activity such as prostitution, stealing, and drug dealing. On average they rated sexual harassment and finding shelter as being no real difficulty. However, 44% of respondents reported moderate to severe difficulties with police activities, 37% reported similar problems with being thrown out of accommodation, 30% with illness, and 30% with hunger.

Relationships between experiences as homeless youths and self image scores were measured using product moment correlations for continuous variables and the chi square statistic for categorical data. Low scores on the OSIQ subscales of morals and vocational/educational goals were significantly related to police activities ($r = .54$ and $r = .65$, respectively) and problems finding shelter ($r = .67$ and $r = .47$, respectively). Low scores (dichotomized measure) on total OSIQ score (self-esteem) were related to drug dealing as a means of obtaining money as a runaway (corrected chi square = 3.73, $df = 1$, $p = .05$). There were no significant correlations between experiences as a homeless youth and depression or hopelessness.

It is clear that there were no consistent relationships between negative experiences as a runaway and either self-image scores or measures of affect.

Relationships Between Psychopathology, Environmental Factors, and Self-Concept

Stepwise multiple regression analyses were performed separately on each OSIQ scale for homeless adolescents, unemployed adolescents, and then the other groups combined, using as predictor variables all measures of psychopathology and those background variables that correlated significantly with OSIQ subscales: love shown by mother and father, separations

Table III. Stepwise Regression on OSIQ Scales, Homeless Group^a

Scale/independent variable	Multiple R	r ²	r ² Change	F ratio
Global self-esteem				
Hopelessness		.54		29.71
Love shown by mother	.77	.60	.06	17.89
Emotional tone				
Hopelessness		.45		20.42
Love shown by mother	.77	.59	.14	17.38
Love shown by father	.81	.65	.06	14.16
School achievement	.84	.71	.06	13.65
Body and self-image				
Hopelessness		.45		20.25
RIELC	.71	.51	.06	12.52
Social relations				
Hopelessness		.13		3.67
Separation from father	.47	.23	.10	3.49
Morals				
Hopelessness		.21		6.79
Convictions	.56	.32	.09	5.52
Sexual attitudes				
Separation from father		.15		4.32
Family relationships				
Love shown by father		.48		22.89
Hopelessness	.77	.60	.12	17.78
Love shown by mother	.82	.67	.07	15.27
Mastery of world				
Hopelessness		.41		17.55
Punishments	.70	.49	.08	11.70
Vocational educational goals				
Hopelessness		.44		19.62
Convictions	.79	.63	.19	20.20
Love shown by father	.83	.70	.07	17.50
Psychopathology				
School achievement		.19		5.70
Superior adjustment				
Hopelessness		.33		12.32
Convictions	.68	.47	.14	10.53

^aThere were no significant predictors of the scale of impulse control.

from mother and father, punishments, juvenile convictions, and school achievement. Measures of the duration and strength of current friendships were not found to be related significantly to any aspect of the self-concept.

For the homeless group, hopelessness strongly predicted low global self-esteem (accounting for 54% of score variance) and was the major predictor variable in 7 out of the 11 subscales (see Table III). Relationships with father were also prominent themes: love shown by father predicted 48% of score variance on family relationships, while separation from father

Table IV. Stepwise Regression on OSIQ Scales, Unemployed Group

Scale/independent variable	Multiple R	r^2	r^2 Change	F ratio
Global self-esteem				
Depression		.54		28.71
Love shown by mother	.79	.62	.08	18.76
Impulse control				
Hopelessness		.42		17.43
Separation from mother	.71	.50	.08	11.39
Emotional tone				
Depression		.56		30.06
Punishment	.79	.63	.07	19.38
Love shown by mother	.84	.70	.07	17.46
Convictions	.88	.78	.08	18.50
Body and self-image				
Hopelessness		.30		10.27
Social relationships				
Hopelessness		.26		8.35
Morals				
Love shown by father		.30		10.06
Separation from mother	.64	.41	.11	8.12
Sexual attitudes				
Separation from mother		.43		18.13
School achievement	.71	.51	.08	11.91
Separation from father	.76	.58	.07	10.05
Family relationships				
Hopelessness		.46		20.56
Love shown by mother	.75	.56	.10	14.78
Punishment	.82	.68	.12	15.61
Mastery of world				
Hopelessness		.38		14.74
Vocational educational goals				
Love shown by mother		.45		19.73
RIELC	.74	.54	.09	13.64
Psychopathology				
Depression		.46		20.34
Superior adjustment				
Love shown by mother		.33		11.70
Love shown by father	.64	.41	.08	7.85

accounted for 15% of the variance on sexual attitudes. Paternal relationships figured as minor predictors, after hopelessness, in the subscales of emotional tone, vocational/educational goals and social relations. Maternal relationships were not strongly related to self-concept as they were secondary predictors in only three scales.

Hopelessness was a major predictor of global self-esteem and another 5 self-image subscales for unemployed adolescents (see Table IV). However maternal relationships also figured prominently: love shown by mother and separation from mother were major predictors in three scales (vocational/educational goals, sexual attitudes and superior adjustment) and minor predictors in another five scales. In contrast, love shown by father was a main predictor of morals only, and contributed less than 10% of variance in superior adjustment.

For the combined employed and student groups, depression was the major predictor of low self-esteem and poor self-image on 8 of the 11 subscales, while hopelessness was a main predictor of vocational/educational goals, mastery of the external world and superior adjustment (see Table V). Family relationship variables contributed little to subscale variance, with love shown by mother accounting for less than 10% of the variance in the scales of morals, vocational/educational goals and superior adjustment.

Effects of Delinquency on Self-Concept

In order to establish whether acting out behaviors mitigated the impact of depression on self-concept, all adolescents scoring higher than 16 on the BDI (empirical cutoff point for major depressive episode; Barrera and Garrison-Jones, 1988) were identified, and divided into two groups: depressed with juvenile convictions ($N = 10$) and depressed only ($N = 22$). Paired t tests were used to determine the significance of differences in OSIQ scale scores.

As can be seen in Table VI, adolescents who were depressed and delinquent displayed significantly more disturbance in self-image on 6 out of the 11 subscales. This is clearly contrary to prediction from Koenig's (1988) work with psychiatrically disturbed adolescents.

A possible explanation was that hopelessness was exacerbating the effects of depression in this study, since 60% of the delinquent-depressed group showed severe hopelessness defined as scores equaling or exceeding those of suicide attempters (mean score of 9; Beck *et al.*, 1975) and 73% of the depressed-only group were severely hopeless. Ideally, those with affective disorder should have been split into three groups (depressed, hopeless, depressed and hopeless) and further subdivided into those with and

without convictions for multivariate analyses. However numbers in each group were too small for such a comparison.

DISCUSSION

In contrast to the findings of Howell *et al.* (1973) and Turley (1988), it is evident from this study that adolescents experiencing long-term homelessness exhibited impaired self-esteem, compared with adolescents living at home, and impairments of self-concept across areas of personal, social,

Table V. Stepwise Regression on OSIQ Scales, School, Employed, and College Groups Combined

Scale/independent variable	Multiple R	r^2	r^2 Change	F ratio
Global self-esteem				
Depression		.62		138.79
Impulse control				
Depression		.34		42.51
RIELC	.65	.42	.08	29.84
Emotional tone				
Depression		.57		110.90
Body and self-image				
Depression		.54		99.22
Social relationships				
Depression		.35		48.68
RIELC	.66	.43	.08	31.95
Morals				
Depression		.18		18.62
Love shown by mother	.47	.22	.04	11.51
Sexual attitudes				
Depression		.26		29.02
Separation from father	.54	.30	.04	17.48
Family relationships				
Depression		.31		38.13
Love shown by father	.65	.43	.12	30.92
Separation from mother	.68	.47	.04	23.79
Mastery of world				
Hopelessness		.50		84.31
Depression	.76	.58	.08	57.97
Vocation/educational goals				
Hopelessness		.15		14.68
Love shown by mother	.46	.21	.06	11.18
Psychopathology				
Depression		.44		65.17
Superior adjustment				
Hopelessness		.38		52.31
Love shown by mother	.64	.41	.03	28.68

Table VI. OSIQ Scale Means (and Standard Deviations) for Depressed with Convictions and Depressed Groups

OSIQ scale	Depressed with convictions	Depressed only
Impulse control ^a	18.90 (23.01)	33.09 (12.24)
Emotional tone ^a	7.10 (21.58)	25.50 (18.07)
Body and self-image	12.20 (27.85)	23.64 (13.38)
Social relationships	22.40 (22.52)	27.82 (15.28)
Morals ^a	25.70 (19.82)	46.73 (17.78)
Sexual attitudes	32.90 (21.02)	38.09 (17.58)
Family relationships ^a	12.00 (20.35)	24.64 (17.52)
Mastery of external world	21.70 (29.86)	31.55 (18.11)
Vocational/educational goals ^a	14.80 (27.61)	41.91 (14.97)
Psychopathology	24.00 (23.63)	30.36 (15.72)
Superior adjustment ^a	22.80 (21.69)	35.18 (18.07)

^aSignificantly different according to paired *t* test, *p* < .05.

and family self. In addition, the self-concepts of homeless adolescents were much more differentiated than those of adolescents living at home. The strengths of homeless adolescents warrant comment. They did not differ from comparison groups on sexual attitudes, on body and self-image, which measures adjustment to physical changes of puberty, on social relationships, morals, mastery of the external world, and on superior adjustment, which is a measure of ego strength. While there is evidence of severe pathology in self-concept and self-esteem, there are nonetheless areas of satisfactory adjustment to provide a basis for positive development in the future.

It is interesting that traumatic experiences resulting from a homeless situation were not directly correlated with self-image or affective state, despite the average length of homelessness exceeding two years. This indicates that the seeds of pathology lie in experiences prior to leaving home. Hence refuges that provide food, shelter, and social support without dealing with the effects of family trauma may fail to improve self-concept and affect.

From this study, some tentative conclusions may be drawn concerning the impact of a range of environmental factors on self-concept. It must be noted, however, that results from regression analyses do not establish causation and longitudinal studies are required for definitive cause-effect analyses. Nonetheless, it makes sense theoretically to view self-concept as the product of relationships and experiences rather than the cause.

For homeless and unemployed adolescents, poor self-concept is strongly influenced by hopelessness, a sense of pessimism about the future.

To a lesser extent, problematic relationships with father affect self-image of the homeless group, while poor relationships with mother contribute to self-image deficits in the unemployed group. In contrast, poor self-image in adolescents who are employed or studying is largely associated with depression.

Thus, there are two different processes resulting in poor self-concept in these adolescents. For relatively stable adolescents who were living at home and studying or working, negative experiences produced depression that involves lowered self-worth and lowered evaluations of the world: depression then resulted in poor self-image. On the other hand, where severe life experiences more frequently reported by the homeless and unemployed adolescents produced strong pessimism about the future, in addition to depression, the result was very poor self-concept.

These processes in turn both support and extend the threshold hypothesis of depression advanced by Koenig (1988): that there is a threshold of affective disturbance before which self-concept is not affected. If hopelessness is viewed as an extension of the negative cognitions of depression, with emphasis on an impoverished future and suicidal ideation (Nekanda-Trepka *et al.*, 1983), then the presence of severe hopelessness may cross a further threshold of disturbance resulting in very poor self-concept and the possibility of self-destruction.

A further point about the buffering effect of conduct disorder upon the effects of depression is also of interest. Whereas Koenig (1988) found that conduct disorder compensated for major depression on self-image scores, in this study depressed adolescents with juvenile convictions showed poorer self-image than the depressed-only group. However, most of the adolescents with severe depression also exhibited severe hopelessness. Thus it would appear that when the level of depression reaches a state where hopelessness figures prominently, acting-out behavior is unable to compensate. It is possible that for hopeless adolescents, acting-out behavior becomes a means of self-injury where activities are carried out regardless of consequences for the self, rather than simply discharging negative affect onto the environment.

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