

# A Comparative Study of Perceptions of Runaway and Homeliving Children

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**Abstract** The study explores the perceptions of runaway and home living children on five domains of family, school, self, future and world and also studies the difference between the two groups on these five domains. Data was collected individually by administration of a sentence completion test. The test was developed during the process of this research keeping in mind the characteristics of runaway children. The sample consisted of 80 boys of age 12-16 and 40 children were taken from Runaway and 40 were taken from Home living group. The sampling strategy adopted for data collection was Convenience sampling. Chi square and frequencies were calculated to analyze the results. The significant values of chi square indicate that there is a difference between the perceptions of runaway and home living children. Furthermore the results of distribution of frequencies show that runaway children have negative perceptions on these five domains as compared to home living children. Findings of the present study are effective for reducing the runaway behavior of children by working on the perceptions of children especially on these five domains.

**Keywords:** *perceptions, family, school, self, future, world*

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## 1. Introduction

In Pakistan a child is defined as someone below 18 according to Juvenile Justice System Ordinance, 2000. The concept "child" is vulnerable to different harsh realities of life which consequently force them to live their lives in difficult and hard circumstances.

Children in difficult and hard circumstances are divided by UNICEF into these categories working children, neglected and abandoned children, children involved in armed conflicts and natural disasters. All these children are somewhat connected to each other other e.g. working and street children may be the victims of abuse and neglect at the same time also, many of the street children and working children are the result of armed conflicts and natural disasters (Riga and Lativa, 1997).

The term street child was first originated in Brazil more specifically in Latin America (Lamberte, 2002a, p.36 as cited in Martinez, [13]). The United Nations defines street children as "boys and girls for whom 'the street' (including unoccupied dwellings, wasteland, etc.) has become their home and/or source of livelihood, and who are inadequately protected or supervised by responsible adults [28].

The term street children have been used interchangeably like "Missing children", "Thrown away children", "Abducted children", "Working children" and "Runaway children. Due to this definitional dilemma of the term street children it has remained a cause of controversy. The reason behind its controversy is the fact that it is a cross cultural term [1] also, the term differs in welfare countries

and in developing ones because of some differences in the reasons of why children decide to leave their home in welfare countries from the developing ones.

Vilkina, et.al stated in their study that the regional UNICEF report for Latin America further divides the term street children into three large categories: "Children – at-high- risk are defined as children (boys and girls) who live in utter poverty, in shelters with completely deficient environment, without provision for basic needs. Most of these children are under inadequate supervision by their parents, many of them live in slums, with no utilities, without adequate schools est. Children- in-street: This category of children consists of those boys and girls who are in the street mainly to work. These children spend much of their time in the street environment. They keep their contacts with the family but do not attend school regularly. Since the distance between their homes and the places where they "work" may be large, they sometimes spend their nights, in staircases, in parks, under bridges or abandoned buildings. Children of the street: Boys and girls for whom the street environment is their primary living space. These are children who are either neglected or, orphans or (what is most often) have fled their homes. The street is the place where they work from time to time. This is the place where their values are formed according to the "ethics of the street". The children of this category grow up completely outside the framework of two major socialization institutions: the school and the family". Considering this definition "Runaway children" come under the third category of Street children i-e "Children of the Street". Runaway children are those who leave their

homes without permission and choose not to return for at least one night [7].

According to UN (United Nations) report there are 100-140 million street children worldwide, out of these 20 million children live on the streets day and night without any support from family; in South America there are 40 million street children; in Asia 25 million; in Africa 10 million and in Eastern and Western Europe approximately 25 million children and youth live on the streets. By the year 2020, the number of street children worldwide will reach 800 million [3].

The exact number of street children in Pakistan is not available. It is estimated that almost 1.2 million children are on the major urban cities of Pakistan [32]. According to a report by Asian Human Rights Commission [16]. "The precise number of runaway children in Lahore or across the country is unknown". Most of the estimates given refer to urban cities of Pakistan. Like in Lahore the estimated number is 14,000; in Peshawar it is 5,000; in Karachi it is estimated to be 15,000 [17]. The number is continuously growing because of many factors like Rapid Urbanization, issues such as war, third world debt, corruption, commercial exploitation, environmental collapse and AIDS. Also too common is the desperate family condition due to violence, abuse, alcoholism, anxiety at home and extreme poverty. Consequently these children view street as heaven as compared to home [3].

The reasons of runaway behavior of children given by different researches [8,18,28] are family factors like attitude of parents, physical abuse and neglect, sexual abuse broken families, parental loss or absence due to armed conflict or natural disaster, HIV/AIDS, refugee problems, addicted parents, poor families, family conflicts, family living arrangements, unstable family relationships and violence. Also there is a significant relationship between child rearing patterns and children running away from home [14].

School factors like school failure [28] and punishment from teachers [15]. And Economic factors like Poverty, unemployment, forced labor and desire to become rich are also the important factors that contribute towards runaway behavior of children [13,18,21].

The consequences of living on the street places street children at a risk of juvenile arrest, sexual abuse, criminal behaviors, antisocial behaviors, substance abuse [15]. Also, In order to survive on these streets these children have to work as household servants, mobile vendors, selling coconuts, flowers and newspapers, bus conductors, shoe polishers rubbish collectors, car washers. Some of them prefer begging because it does not require hard labor [17]. Some have to engaged forcefully in sexual activities, work as prostitutes and the result is unwanted pregnancies, Sexually Transmitted Infections (SITs) and HIV/AIDS [1,15,28].

The deprivation from parental care and love, unhealthy living environment, lack of proper food and shelter, social rejection and lack of access to education and recreational plays which play an important role in making the child's personality [15]. The deprivation from these important factors places them at a risk to develop certain mental health problems like hostility, suspicion, low self – esteem and feelings of rage (Dubrow, 1992 as cited in Rizzini, & Lusk [21]), Negative effects on intellectual and emotional maturity and adjustment (Apteker, 1998 as cited in Rizzini,

& Lusk [21]), adolescent depression, comorbidity of depression and conduct disorder [31].

Considering the literature review about the reasons of runaway behavior and its effect on child's physiological, psychological and emotional wellbeing current research has selected five domains namely family, school, self, world, and future to explore the perceptions of runaway children and then to compare it with home living children.

Different theories and models also show the importance of these five domains on the development and behavior of children. Attachment theory (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991 as cited in Stein, Milburn, Zane and Borus [27]) which gives the importance of child's positive attachment with a parent or a caregiver says that a child's significant positive attachment, not necessarily with mother can have a great impact on child's "Self-Esteem" and his capacity to deal with extremes. So, significant positive attachment also, contributes in resilience of runaway children. Also, runaway children are more prone to exhibit problem behaviors (negative and antisocial) if they don't have a "secure base" (secure attachment) which make them feel safe to explore their environment leading them to develop problem behaviors (Stefanidis et al.,1992 as cited in Stein, Milburn, Zane and Borus [27]). Bronfenbrenner [4] who emphasized the importance of ecological approach on the development of children also said that children are affected by their perceptions about the activities, roles and interpersonal relationships in three levels of ecological environment that is the microsystem, the mesosystem and the exosystem. For children microsystem usually involves settings like school, peer group and home. Mesosystem consists of interaction of a child between two or more settings in which he is directly involved. While in exosystem the child is not involved directly but he or she is affected by the activities going on in these settings like workplaces of parents, school board decision and network of siblings and friends. As far as environmental influences are concerned Family systems theory says that home and family are the most important component of the child's environment [26].

In order to have an in depth understanding of runaway behavior, current research uses a semi projective technique of Sentence Completion Task to assess their perceptions on five domains of Family, School, Self, World and Future. Like other projective techniques sentence completion test is assumed to reflect the wishes, desires, fears, and the attitudes of the subject in his completed sentences. The advantages of using sentence completion test are its freedom of response and flexibility [22], due to which it can be molded according to the purpose of the tester [9].

In the present study the purpose to select "Sentence Completion Test" as a research instrument is to assess the perceptions of runaway and home living children. Sentence Completion Test was selected to use with runaway children because it is a semi projective technique which is flexible to respond [22]. Also, it can be adapted according to the culture of runaway children as it has flexibility to mold according to the purpose of the user [9]. In addition it is considered to be easily comprehensible and easy to respond by the runaway children as it has more freedom of response [22] instead of any other long and written test.

**1.1. Objectives of the Study:**

To explore the perceptions of runaway and home living children on five dimensions of family, school, self, world and future.

To compare the perceptions of runaway and home children on four dimensions family, school, self, world and future.

To explore the reasons of running away behavior of runaway children.

**2. Method**

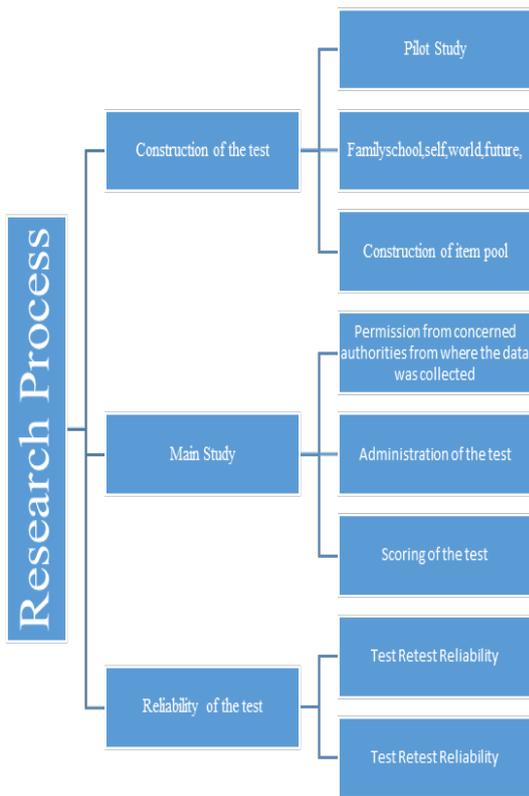
The study is conducted through survey method which is a type of descriptive research. In survey method research, subjects have to answer the questions administered to them. In order to make survey reliable and valid, the questions should be constructed properly. And if questions are in written form they would be clearer and easily comprehensible by the subjects. Descriptive research describes only a set of observations (attitudes, behaviors, responses), it does not give the cause and effect relationship between two variables (Hale, n.d).

This research was carried out in a series of three phases.

Phase I: Construction of Research Instrument

Phase II: Main Study

Phase III: Reliability of the test



**Hypothesis**

Runaway children will have more negative perceptions on five domains of Family, Self, School, World and Future than Home living children.

**2.1. Phase I: Construction of Research Instrument**

The first step while conducting the present study was to construct a test for identifying the perceptions of runaway

and home living children. For this purpose Sentence Completion Test which is based on a semi projective technique was constructed.

**Procedure:**

In order to construct the test first of all the domains that were found to be the main contributing factor towards the runaway behavior of the children were identified by reviewing the literature. The domains selected for the construction of Sentence Completion Test were Family, Self, School, World and Future. A pool of items was developed consisting of incomplete sentences on the selected domains. Then to test the difficulty level and comprehension level of the test pilot study was conducted. A sample of ten subjects each from two populations that is Runaway and home living children were selected for this purpose. All of them were boys of age 12-16 years. For home living group children who are living in intact families with their parents were taken. And for runaway group children who had run away from their homes and currently living in an institution. Children from broken families were not taken. The sampling strategy used while selecting the sample for pilot study was ‘Convenient Sampling’.

Pilot study was conducted in two settings. First the test was administered in school setting on home living group then in Child Protection and Welfare Beuru on runaway group. The same procedure was adopted for both the groups. Participants were told about the purpose of the study and the test was administered only on those participants who agreed to participate in the study. It was an individual administration and the test was administered orally. The instructions given while test administrations were

“I have some incomplete sentences for you .You have to complete these sentences by saying the first thought that comes in your mind after listening these incomplete sentences”..

After administration the subjects of both of the groups were asked to identify the difficult items and also about the difficulty level of the test as a whole. Some of the items were identified commonly as difficult to comprehend by both of the groups so those items were eliminated from the test. The items with dubious meaning were also eliminated. The final scale consisted of 33 incomplete sentences.

**2.2. Phase II: Main Study**

**Purpose:**

The purpose of the main study was to explore the difference in the perceptions of runaway and home living children by administration of a sentence completion test on five domains of Family, Self, School, World and Future.

**Sample:**

The sample consisted of 80 subjects 40 from home living group and 40 from runaway group. Home living children were taken from a Government school and for runaway children Child Protection and Welfare Bureau was approached. The sample size is selected randomly because it is a convenient sampling.

**Inclusion Criteria:**

Inclusion criteria for Home living group was Boys of age 12-16

Children who are living in their homes with their parents

Children were taken from intact families

Inclusion criteria for Runaway group was

Boys of age 12-16

Children who had run away from their homes and currently living in an institution.

**Exclusion Criteria:**

Girls were not included in the sample

Boys below 12 and above 16 were excluded from the sample

Children from broken families were excluded from the sample of home living children

Boys who participated in the pilot study were excluded from the main sample

**Sampling Strategy:**

The sampling strategy used while selecting sample for the main study was "Convenient Sampling". A convenience sample is one which is composed of the subjects easily available to the researcher. There are different strategies used for probability sampling and each starts with a sampling frame i-e the entire list of all the elements in population of your interest [20]. In the current study "Govt. child protection and welfare bureau" was selected for convenient sampling. It was the largest institute at Govt. level working for populations like Street children including Thrown away children, Runaway children, Missing and abducted children. The list of all the registered runaway children in this institute was considered as the convenient sampling frame for this research. There are several procedures available for recruiting a convenience sample but there is not any one which includes the list of all the potential respondents in the entire target population. Also, Samples are usually evaluated by the procedure of their selection rather than their size (Herek, n.d).

**Instrument:**

The instrument used while conducting the main study was the sentence completion test constructed during phase I. The number of items included in this test with respect to five domains are 7 under family domain, 11 under self domain, 3 under school domain, 5 under future domain and 6 under world domain. The test consisted of 33 items.

**Procedure:**

To conduct the main study first of all the institutions from which the sample was drawn were approached in order to take the permission from the concerned authorities. In this process the concerned authorities were informed about the topic of the research, its purpose and duration. They were also insured that information taken during this study would be kept confidential and would only be used for research purposes. After getting their permission, subjects were approached. They were briefed about the purpose of the study. Before initiating any type of work with them their consent to participate in the study was taken. Right to withdraw from the research and issue of confidentiality was also discussed with the subjects by telling them that their information will remain confidential and will only be used for research purposes. The subjects who were willing to participate in the study were called individually and administration of the test was started.

The test was administered on two groups of children that is runaway and home living. At first home living children were approached for data collection and then data from runaway children was collected. The test was

administered through oral administration on the sample of both the groups. The instructions to the sample subjects were:

"I have some incomplete sentences given for you .You have to complete these sentences by saying the first thought that comes in your mind after listening these incomplete sentences".

All of the tests administered were scored on three dimensions of Halstead's Scoring System and then the responses were entered on SPSS for the purpose of data analysis.

### 2.3. Phase III: Reliability of the Scale:

To test the reliability of the Sentence Completion Test, Test Retest and Inter Rater Reliability were computed.

#### 2.3.1. Test Retest Reliability:

**Sample:**

A sample of ten subjects from the runaway group was selected.

**Sampling Strategy:**

The sampling strategy used for test retest was also convenient sampling.

**Procedure:**

Test retest was computed only on runaway group. Ten subjects from the sample of runaway group were selected on the basis of availability of these children at that point of time. Retesting was done after one week of main study. After taking the informed consent from them, the test was re-administered on those children who were willing to participate. The test was administered individually and it was an oral administration. The instructions given to these children were same as that of given during the main study.

After scoring the data of the sample of test retest was entered in the SPSS for analysis.

#### 2.3.2. Inter Rater Reliability:

To test the rater reliability of the scoring of the test 10 forms from runaway group and 10 forms from home living group were selected randomly and in addition to the researcher these forms were given to a qualified Clinical Psychologist. She was given detailed instructions about the scoring adopted for this test. After these tests were scored by the independent rater, the percentage of agreement between the two raters on each of the 20 forms that is 10 was calculated.

## 3. Results

Results were analyzed through different statistical analysis techniques. Pearson Correlation, Chi square method and distribution of Frequencies were calculated to analyze the results of the study

### 3.1. Descriptive Analysis:

**Table 1. Mean and Standard Deviation of Age of Runaway Group (n=40) and Home living group (n=40)**

	M	SD
Runaway	13.27	1.24
Home living	13.82	1.35

Table 1 shows mean age of Runaway group (n=40) and Home living group (n=40).

**Table 2. Frequencies of Reasons of Runaway Behavior of Runaway Group (n=40)**

Reasons of Running away	F
Physical abuse	16
Peer attraction	7
Parents insist to work	6
Attraction towards freedom	4
No response Parents insist to work	3
Parental Conflicts	3
To get drugs outside home	1
Poverty	1

Table 2 shows that Physical Abuse is the most frequent reason of runaway behavior of Runaway group (n=40).

The first section of results consisted of descriptive analysis of the sample. Mean and Standard Deviation of age of Runaway group (n=40) and home living group (N=40) were calculated. And the values were M= 13.7 and SD= 1.24 for runaway group and M=13.82 and SD=1.35 for home living group. And the results of reasons of leaving home reported by the runaway group (n=40) were Poverty 1, to get drugs outside home 1, parental conflicts 2, no response 3, attraction towards freedom 4, parents insist to do work 6, peer attraction 7, physical abuse 16.

### 3.2. Psychometric Properties:

To establish the psychometric properties of the Sentence Completion Test, Test – Retest correlations and Inter Rater Reliability were computed for optimistic, pessimistic and neutral responses.

#### 3.2.1. Test- Retest:

Test- Retest correlations were computed for Optimistic, Pessimistic and Neutral responses of Runaway group (N=10). Pearson product moment correlation was calculated for this purpose and the results are given below.

**Table 3. Correlations of Optimistic Responses between 1st Testing and Retesting of Sentence Completion Test on Runaway Group (n=10)**

	1st testing	Retesting
1st testing	–	0.685*
Retesting	–	–

df = 9, \*p< 0.05.

Table 3 shows Test – Retest Correlation significant at 0.05 level (2 – tailed) which indicates that there is a good relationship between 1st testing and retesting of sentence completion test on Optimistic responses.

**Table 4. Correlations of Pessimistic Responses between 1st Testing and Retesting of Sentence Completion Test on Runaway Group (n=10)**

	1st testing	Retesting
1st testing	–	0.854***
Retesting	–	–

df=9, \*\*\*p< 0.001.

Table 4 shows Test – Retest Correlation which indicates that there is an excellent relationship between 1st testing and retesting of sentence completion test on Pessimistic responses.

**Table 5. Correlations of Neutral Responses between 1st Testing and Retesting of Sentence Completion Test on Runaway Group (n=10)**

	1st testing	Retesting
1st testing	–	0.633*
Retesting	–	–

df =9, \*p< .02.

Table 5 shows Test – Retest Correlation which indicates that there is a good relationship between 1st testing and retesting of sentence completion test on neutral responses.

The second section of results consisted of Psychometric properties of the test. To test the reliability of the test. Test Retest and Inter Rater Reliability were computed. To test the Test Retest reliability correlations of optimistic, pessimistic and Neutral responses between 1st testing and Retesting of Sentence Completion Test on Runaway children. And correlation values were for optimistic responses 0.685\* which was significant at \*p< 0.05 level, for pessimistic responses the correlation value was 0.854\*\*\* which was significant at \*\*\*p< 0.001 and for neutral responses the value was 0.633\* which was significant at the level of p< 0.02\*.

#### 3.2.2. Inter Rater Reliability:

To test the Inter Rater Reliability of the Sentence Completion Test on Runaway group (n=10) and Home living group (n=10) the tests were given to a qualified clinical psychologist. And the percentage of agreement was calculated manually between the 2 raters and the results show that 70% of the times, the agreement were above 70% between two raters.

### 3.3. Hypothesis Testing:

#### 3.3.1. Hypothesis:

Runaway children will have more Pessimistic responses on five domains of Family, Self, School, World and Future as compared to Home living group.

To test this hypothesis Chi square and percentage of Frequencies of three dimensions of responses Optimistic, Pessimistic and Neutral on Sentence Completion Test were calculated on five domains of Family, Self, School, Future, and World separately.

**Table 6. Chi Square and Percentage of Optimistic, Pessimistic and Neutral Responses of Runaway (n=40) and Home Living (n=40) Children on the Domain of Family**

Responses	Runaway %	Home living %	X2	DF	p<
Optimistic	45.68	70.71			
Pessimistic	23.3	11.27	36.00	2	.001***
Neutral	30.93	18.21			

\*\*\*p< .001.

Table 6 shows that runaway children gave more pessimistic responses, fewer optimistic responses and more neutral responses on the domain of Family as compared to home living group.

**Table 7. Chi Square and Percentage of Optimistic, Pessimistic and Neutral Responses of Runaway (n=40) and Home Living (n=40) Children on the Domain of Self**

Responses	Runaway %	Home living %	X2	DF	p<
Optimistic	51.69	67.27			
Pessimistic	28.66	16.93	24.06	2	.001***
Neutral	19.63	15.78			

\*\*\*p<.001.

Table 7 shows that runaway children gave more pessimistic responses, fewer optimistic responses and more neutral responses on the domain of self as compared to home living group.

**Table 8. Chi Square and Percentage of Optimistic, Pessimistic and Neutral Responses of Runaway (n=40) and Home Living (40=40) Children on the domain of School**

Responses	Runaway %	Home living %	X2	DF	p<
Optimistic	81.51	94.11			
Pessimistic	11.76	3.36	8.88	2.	.05**
Neutral	6.72	2.52			

\*\*p<.05.

Table 8 shows that runaway children gave more pessimistic responses, fewer optimistic responses and more neutral responses on the domain of School as compared to home living group.

**Table 9. Chi Square and Percentage of Optimistic, Pessimistic and Neutral Responses of Runaway (n=40) and Home Living (40=40) Children on the domain of World**

Responses	Runaway %	Home living %	X2	DF	p<
Optimistic	42.08	38.33			
Pessimistic	25.10	18.33	7.24	2	.05**
Neutral	31.91	43.33			

\*\*p<.05.

Table 9 shows that runaway children gave more pessimistic responses, fewer optimistic responses and less neutral responses on the domain of World as compared to home living group.

**Table 10. Chi Square and Percentage of Optimistic, Pessimistic and Neutral Responses of Runaway (n=40) and Home Living (n=40) Children on the Domain of Future**

Responses	Runaway %	Home living %	X2	DF	p<
Optimistic	74.35	79.00			
Pessimistic	19.48	10.00	36.02	2	.001***
Neutral	6.15	11.00			

\*\*\*p<.001.

Table 10 shows that home runaway children gave more pessimistic responses, fewer optimistic responses and more neutral responses on the domain of Future as compared to home living group

The third section is consisted of Hypothesis testing. To test the hypothesis Chi square and distribution of frequencies of optimistic, pessimistic and neutral responses of runaway (n=40) and home living (n=40) for all the five domains of Family, Self, School, Future and the World were computed. The values of Chi square for the domain of Family was 36.00 which was significant at the level of  $p < .001$ , for the domain of Self Chi square value was 24.06 which was significant at the level of  $p < .001$ , for the domain of School the value of Chi square was 8.88 significant at the level of  $p < .05$ , for the domain of Future the value of Chi square was 36.02 significant at  $p > .001$  and for the domain of World the value of Chi square was 7.24 significant at the level of  $p < .001$ .

## 4. Discussion

The aim of the present study was to explore the perceptions of runaway and home living children and to

see the difference between the two. More specifically the rationale of the study was to assess the perceptions of runaway and home living children on five domains of Family, Self, School, Future and the World to see the difference between the two populations. The reason of selecting these five domains was that the results of the researches both in Pakistan [3,15,29] as well as in the West [8,14,18,19,28] gave the causes behind the runaway behavior of children which primarily revolve around these five domains.

The hypothesis of the study was "Runaway children will have more Pessimistic responses as compared to home living children on the five domains of family, self, school, future and world". Chi Square was used to test this hypothesis so as to determine the distribution of observed and expected frequencies. The finding of the study proved this hypothesis and significant values of chi square indicated that there is a difference between the perceptions of runaway children and home living on the domains of family, self, school, future and world.

The distribution of frequencies among these five domains shows that on the domain of family the frequency of pessimistic responses by runaway children is double as compared to the pessimistic responses of home living group. The items included in the test which come under the domain of family most primarily measure the individual's perception towards his mother, father, siblings, and his childhood and in general how he perceives his home environment. Compared to the home living group the subjects of runaway group gave more pessimistic responses on the items that come under the family domain. On the other hand participants of home living group didn't gave even a single negative response and more than half of the home living group gave positive responses on this domain and very few of them have given neutral responses showing positive perceptions towards the family as compared to the runaway group.

Research Slesnick and Prestopnick [24] also supports the finding of the study and suggests that family disturbance has a significantly high correlation with the adolescent's runaway behavior. Slesnick and Prestopnick also proposed that adolescents perceive a more negative family environment than that of their parents. The model of family systems theory which is very useful while understanding runaway behavior of youth Slesnick and Prestopnick [24] proposes that adolescent problems, like substance abuse, externalizing problems and runaway behavior depicts the maladaptive interaction pattern between family members (Jacob, 1987 as cited in Slesnick and Prestopnick [24]). Another study Safyer [23] also supports the results of the current study by its finding that more adolescents blame parent child relationships for runaway behavior. A South African research Richer and Walt (2003) is also supportive and shows that most of the children interviewed share the perception that they are not needed by their families or their families feel better without them.

Not only family also, the extra familial systems like school, peers, and neighbors since the child's whole world contribute towards establishing the child's behavior. Bronfenbrenner's [4] model of social ecology also views individuals as interconnected between these individual, family and extra familial systems. Also, associating it with Erikson's theory (1968) unhealthy family environment

provokes them to go outside in search of their identity. This shows that while studying the perceptions of runaway children not only it is important to explore their perceptions towards their family, school and future but it is also important to assess how they perceive their own selves.

The frequency of optimistic responses by both the groups is highest on the domain of self. But the frequency of optimistic responses on this domain by home living group is even greater as compared to the runaway group. In addition on the domain of self the frequency of pessimistic responses by the runaway group is almost double as compared to pessimistic responses of home living group. The domain of self is the one on which home living children gave the most of the positive responses compared to any other domain. This shows the positive self image of home living children as compared to runaway children. This might be interpreted as the life situations of home living children including their loving parents, their encouraging teachers and their sense of identity with their home and parents helps them in achieving their "identity" and building a positive self-image. On the contrary the society perceives runaway children as negative due to which they have negative perceptions towards themselves. A research [2] also supports the finding and says that street children become the symbols of moral judgment because they violate the social norms given by most of the cultures to their children. Erikson (1968) in his theory of human psychosocial development gave eight stages of personality development. And in fifth stage about adolescence (12-18) he said that children want to become independent and look for their future in terms of family, relationships and career. If the stage ends successfully he gets a sense of integration about appropriate sex role and what one's want to be. Finally the success leads him towards fidelity which means accepting others without ideological differences. And failure in this stage leads to role confusion or identity crises and consequently the child starts to experiment with different lifestyles including different types of works.

On the domain of school home living children gave more optimistic responses, few pessimistic responses and less neutral responses as compared to the runaway group. The domain of school is also found to be perceived as more negatively by the runaway group as compared to the home living group. This might be interpreted in a manner that researches [1,3,15] suggest that most of the runaway children in Pakistan leave their home mainly because of "pushing" factors which relates to the family like conflicts, abuse, neglect, death, poverty in the family, parents insist to work and also insist to go to school and also because of "pulling" factors like attraction towards friends, freedom and drugs. In these distressing familial situations and personal interests which become the reason of runaway behavior of children runaway children might not perceive school as positively as home living children and this is understandable. Research by Ismail [29] also supports the finding that School environment is also one of the contributing factor as school teacher punish children and as a result students lose interest in studies and when parents insist them to go to school the children decide to run away from their home.

The findings on the domain of school are interpreted differently from that of Western culture. As Vilkina et.al

reports that in western culture the children leave home not only from low income families but also from high status families for some period because of some conflicts with a family member. In this situation school might not be perceived as negatively by the runaway adolescents of the west as it was perceived by the runaway children of Pakistani culture. A western study Larsen and Susen on literacy perceptions of runaway adolescents found that reading and writing were a part of the runaway group and only one of them responded as reading and writing a waste of time. Ramsey [20] also found that higher level of family cohesion and achievement orientation in runaway adolescents are associated with fewer school problems.

On the domain of World the percentage of frequency ratings of neutral responses given by home living group is greatest as compared to other four domains. And it is even double as compared to the neutral responses of runaway group on this domain. And runaway children gave greater pessimistic responses on the domain of world as compared to home living children. This might be indicative of tough life a street child has to go through while being on the street on their own. They face the great challenges of the world and the society, more closely. They do have the chance to explore the realities prevailing in the world. On the other hand, home living children live in a protective environment of home. They do not have such kind of exposure of the world. It may be due to the reason that the comfortable life situations of home living children as compared to runaway children gave them relatively less chances to understand the world as closely as that of runaway children.

On the domain of Future also, runaway children gave more pessimistic and neutral responses and less optimistic responses as compared to the home living group. The greater neutral responses of runaway group as compared to home living group indicate the ambivalent perception of runaway children towards Future. The findings of the study are also supported by a research Raffaelli and Koller [19] on studying the future expectations of Brazilian street youth. And the results showed that the responses of street youth were quite different from the responses reported in the research conducted in different countries on the adolescents of general population. As compared to the adolescents of general population the runaway youth gave vague responses as far as the hopes regarding success and attaining materialistic belongings are concerned and there is a mismatch between their hopes and expectations. On the contrary the more of the optimistic responses of home living group indicate their optimistic hopes and greater sense of direction towards their goals. This can be interpreted in the light of their optimistic perception of having better opportunities by their hopeful life situations to attain their future goals as compared to the life situations of runaway children.

On the whole runaway children gave more pessimistic responses on all these five domains as compared to the home living group.

As a part of this study, the subjects of runaway group were also asked about the reason of their running away from their homes. A league table was made and it was observed that most frequent reason reported by runaway children was "Physical Abuse". As physical abuse basically originates from the family or within the family members this indicates that family is the most important contributing

factor towards the runaway behavior of children. Runaway children also reported. Runaway children also reported frequently peer attraction and parents insist to work as the reasons of their runaway behavior. This indicates that bad company and poverty due to which parents insist their children to do work are also a major contributing factor behind the decision of their running away from their homes.

In this study the difference between the perceptions of runaway children and the home living children on the five domains of family, self, school, future and world has been successfully established. The findings demonstrate that runaway children have more pessimistic perceptions towards these five domains as compared to home living children. The more neutral responses of runaway children as compared to home living children reveal the defensive aspect of runaway children as compared to home living children. Furthermore the findings of the study also illustrates that physical abuse is the most frequent cause of why children runaway from their homes. This finding also demonstrates that among the five domains the difference between the perceptions is more prominent on the domain of family. This indicates that family is the most important contributing factor towards the runaway behavior of children. The greatest neutral responses on the domain of Self by runaway group indicate the identity confusion of runaway children due to lack of their identity with home, family, parents and other socialization groups. And the greatest neutral responses on the domain of world by the home living group as compared to runaway children indicate their lack of understanding of the world due to their hopeful and joyful family situations contrary to runaway children.

## 5. Implications

The findings of the study are beneficial for prevention and management of runaway behavior.

### **Prevention:**

The test developed in this study highlighted the importance of working on family, school, self, world and future of the child for prevention of runaway behavior. Working on family relationships by creating awareness in families about the effects of communication gap, and improving parental marital relationships, parent child relationships and healthy sibling's relationship is important. Stein, Milburn, Zane and Borus [27] also said that healthy paternal relationships are helpful for the development of healthy identity of homeless and runaway children which consequently helps in their optimal functioning despite their homeless and runaway status. School environment should also be addressed to work on prevention level. Teachers should make aware that their appropriate behavior with children by elimination of punishment environment from school and reduction of ethnic and gender issues can be helpful for prevention of runaway behavior in society. School is also important as far as the domain of self is concerned. Because teachers and school environment has a major role in creation of child's self-esteem and self-concept. In order to deal with runaway behavior ecological perspective also says that problems should need to be addressed through different systems like family, school and other socio environmental

factors like parents and friends of runaway children (Davy and Neff 2001 as cited in Chun and Springer [5]). In summary these five domains on which the test was developed namely family, school, self, future, and world are the promising area for future research on prevention and management of runaway behavior of children and adolescents.

### **Management:**

Current study is also beneficial for coping with stress and anxieties of runaway and home living children. The test developed and used in this study can be helpful to explore their stressors and anxieties especially those which are related with those five domains (family, school, self, future and world) on which the test is based. Chun and Springer, 2005 have found in their research that there are multiple sources of stress in runaways including disrespect, unstable life, family, school and friends. Previous studies (Heusel, 1995; Huang & Menke, 2001; Menke, 2000; Unger et al., 1998 as cited in Chun and Springer [25]) also show that runaways report stressors related with anxieties for example being afraid of their future, bad health, being worried about their daily life and dealing with bad things going on with them. So, homeless population who use emotional focused problem solving approach as compared to problem focused coping strategies are more prone to develop depression, poor health conditions, alcohol and substance abuse (Unger and her colleagues 1998 as cited in Chun and Springer [25]). Runaways usually use inadequate mechanisms like crying, sleeping and drug use to deal with their stressful events (Roberts, 1982 as cited in Chun and Springer [25]). In shelter homes working for homeless and runaway population current study can prove to be beneficial if they use the test developed in this research. Because, the more we are able to explore their stressors, more we will be able to enhance positive coping strategies in them like talking to friends, reading, writing, listening music e.t.c. Also, the more we are able to explore the anxieties and stressors of home living individuals more we will be able to prevent them for showing runaway behavior.

### **Limitations:**

The limitations of the study are

Data should be collected with more subjects in order to make the results more generalized.

Sample was collected from only one institute of runaway children.

## 6. Recommendations

Data from girls to see the gender differences in perception is also needed.

A similar kind of study should also be conducted in different cultures to compare the perceptions of runaway children among different cultures

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