



# Criminal Activities among Calgary's Street-Involved Youth

## Calgary Youth, Health and the Street - Fact Sheet #11

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### Background to the Study

Street-involved youth have been identified as an at-risk group for numerous health issues, including alcohol and drug abuse, STIs and HIV, pregnancy, and suicide. Working in partnership with many youth serving agencies, AIDS Calgary and researchers from the University of Calgary developed the *Calgary Youth, Health and the Street* study to examine the health and HIV risks, coping mechanisms, and service needs of the broad spectrum of street-involved youth. This fact sheet is one in a series highlighting key findings from the study.

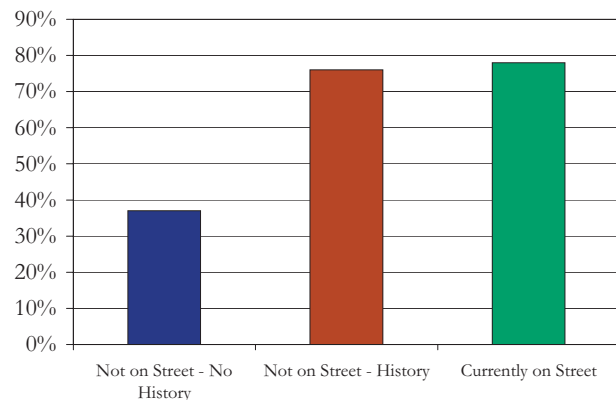
Between June and December 2005, 355 surveys were completed by street-involved youth on their street experiences in Calgary, and 40 interviews were conducted to provide a more in-depth look at these experiences. Youth targeted for the study were between the ages of 14 and 24, and involved in the street to varying degrees. Thus, in this study the term 'street-involved youth' included youth who were currently living on the street; youth who were not living on the street but who had lived on the street in the past; and youth who were involved with street culture but were not currently living on the street and had no history of living on the street. This last group primarily included youth who spent time on the street or in public places during the day.

A total of 47% of survey participants were currently living on the street (*Currently On Street*); 33% were not living on the street but had lived on the street in the past (*Not on Street – History*); and 20% were involved with street culture but were not currently living on the street and had not lived on the street in the past (*Not on Street – No History*).

### Previous Criminal Charges

Overall, 69% of youth reported having been charged with a crime, including 78% of those *Currently On Street*, 76% of those *Not on Street – History*, and 37% of those *Not on Street – No History*. Of youth who had been charged with a crime, those *Not on Street – No History* more often reported having been charged under the juvenile justice system (93%), while those *Currently On Street* more often reported having been charged under the adult justice system (63%). Three-quarters of youth had spent time in jail for their charges, including 84% of those *Currently On Street*, 74% of those *Not on Street – History*, and 42% of those *Not on Street – No History*. In addition, a small percentage of youth (12%) reported having been picked up under the Protection of Children involved in Prostitution (PChIP) Act. See Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Been Charged with a Crime by Level of Street Involvement \***



Based on a sample of 345 street-involved youth in Calgary.

\* Significance level  $\leq 0.05$

Source: *Calgary Youth, Health and the Street: Final Report*, Table 64

## Prostitution-Related Activities

Prostitution-related activities<sup>1</sup> were fairly common among participants. Youth reported having been asked to be involved in prostitution (13% males, 45% females), to recruit others for prostitution (10% males, 19% females), to spot (be on the lookout for police) (54% males and females), and to pimp (16% males, 9% females). See Figure 2.

Female youth were vulnerable to solicitation for prostitution, including 63% of those *Currently On Street*, 48% of those *Not on Street – History*, and 13% of those *Not on Street – No History*. Youth *Not on Street – No History* were less often solicited for spotting (24% males, 26% females), than those *Not on Street – History* (60% males, 66% females), or *Currently On Street* (61% males, 54% females).

**Figure 2: Prostitution-Related Activities by Gender**

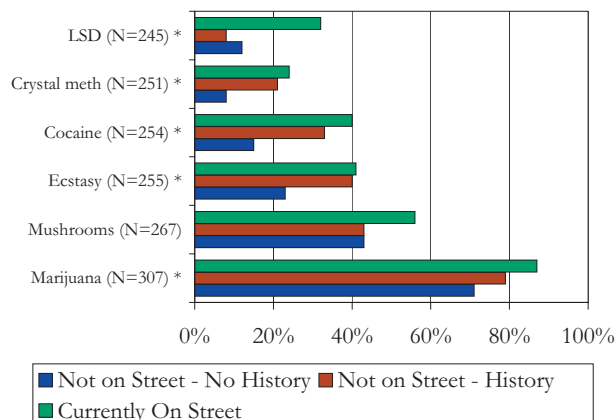


Based on a sample of 108 to 152 street-involved youth in Calgary.  
Source: *Calgary Youth, Health and the Street: Final Report*, Table 53

## Use of Illegal Substances

Street-involved youth reported a fairly high level of illegal substance use. Illegal substances used included marijuana (81%), hash (58%), mushrooms (49%), ecstasy (37%), cocaine (32%), crack (29%), crystal meth (20%), LSD (20%), morphine (11%), PCP (10%), and heroin (9%). Youth *Currently On Street* used illegal substances more often than all other youth, ranging from 14% for PCP to 87% for marijuana. See Figure 3.

**Figure 3: Illegal Substances Used in the Past Two Weeks by Current Level of Street Involvement**



Based on a sample of 245 to 307 street-involved youth in Calgary.  
\* Significance level  $\leq 0.05$   
Source: *Calgary Youth, Health and the Street: Final Report*, Table 44

## Other Criminal Activities

Crime seems to be part of life for street-involved youth. A small percentage (6%) said they received their main source of income from non-legally sanctioned activities, such as selling/running drugs, hooking, trading sex for food/shelter, and stealing/selling stolen goods. Others mentioned friends on the street who sold/ran drugs (55%), stole/sold stolen goods (41%), hustled/conned/scammed (31%), and hooked (17%). Finally, 62% of all youth said they had been violent toward others while on the street.

<sup>1</sup>The term ‘sex work’ is often used to describe these activities. Language used here reflects wording of the survey questions.

This fact sheet is based upon the report, Worthington, C., MacLaurin, B., Huffey, N., Dittmann, D., Kitt, O., Patten, S., & Leech, J. (2008). *Calgary Youth, Health and the Street - Final Report*, Calgary: University of Calgary.

Suggested Citation: Dittmann, D., MacLaurin, B., Worthington, C., & Kitt, O. (2009). *Criminal Activities among Calgary's Street-Involved Youth*. Calgary Youth, Health and the Street – Fact Sheet #11. Calgary: University of Calgary.

*The Calgary Youth, Health and the Street study was funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, HIV/AIDS Community-Based Research Program. Views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the official policy of the funder.*

For more information, please visit the following websites:  
<http://www.aidscalgary.org>, <http://fsw.ualgary.ca>