



The Sex Trade among Calgary's Street-Involved Youth

Calgary Youth, Health and the Street - Fact Sheet #16

Catherine Worthington, Bruce MacLaurin, Dawn Dittmann, Olivia Kitt

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.

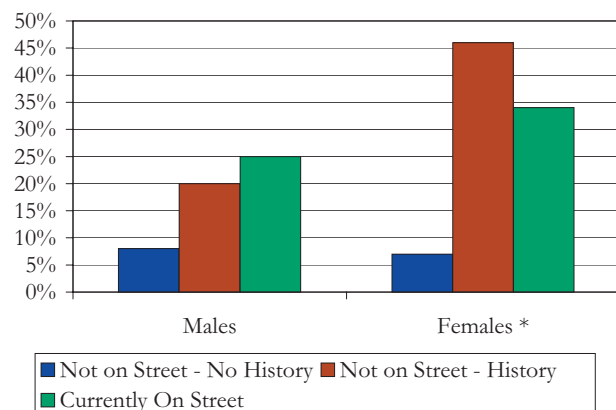
A total of 47% of survey participants were currently living on the street (*Currently On Street*); 33% were not living on the street but had lived on the street in the past (*Not on Street - History*); and 20% were involved with street culture but were not currently living on the street and had not lived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

Survival or Obligatory Sex

Sex was sometimes used by street-involved youth as currency for a place to stay, drugs or a meal, often termed 'survival' or 'obligatory' sex. One interviewed youth noted that she "moved out when I was 15, I moved in with this guy, and weren't really dating but [I] was living there. And so yes, had survival sex." The youth did not consider this to be prostitution because they were not trading sex for money.

Youth were asked if they had ever been asked to exchange sex for food or shelter - 20% of males and 33% of females said they had. Female youth *Not on Street - History* were significantly more likely to have exchanged sex for food or shelter (46%), compared to 34% of those *Currently on Street*, and 7% of those *Not on Street - No History*. See Figure 1.

Figure 1: Survival or Obligatory Sex by Current Level of Street Involvement



Based on a sample of 132 to 196 street-involved youth in Calgary.

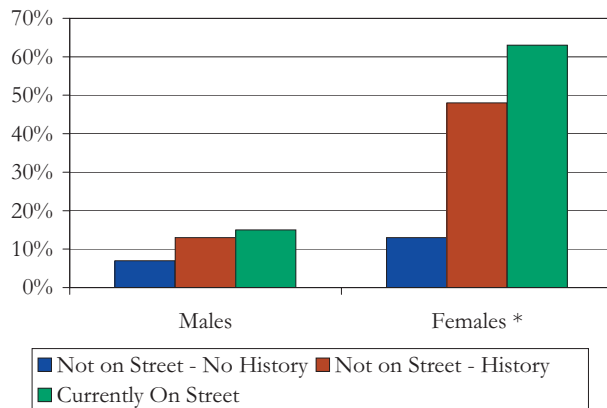
* Significance level ≤ 0.05

Source: *Calgary Youth, Health and the Street: Final Report*, Table 52

Involvement in Prostitution & Prostitution-Related Activities

Prostitution¹ was much more common among female street-involved youth than among males. Overall, 13% of male youth and 45% of female youth surveyed had been solicited for prostitution. Examining differences by current level of street involvement, a significantly larger percentage of female youth *Currently On Street* said they had been asked to be involved in prostitution (63%), compared to 48% of those *Not on Street – History*, and 13% of those *Not on Street – No History*. See Figure 2.

Figure 2: Involved in Prostitution by Current Level of Street Involvement



Based on a sample of 108 to 152 street-involved youth in Calgary.
* Significance level ≤ 0.05
Source: *Calgary Youth, Health and the Street: Final Report*, Table 53

Surveyed youth also indicated they had been asked to be involved in prostitution-related activities including recruiting others for prostitution, pimping, and spotting (being on the lookout for police). Overall, 10% of males and 19% of females indicated recruiting others for prostitution; 16% of males and 9% of females indicated having pimped; and 54% of both males and females indicated having spotted.

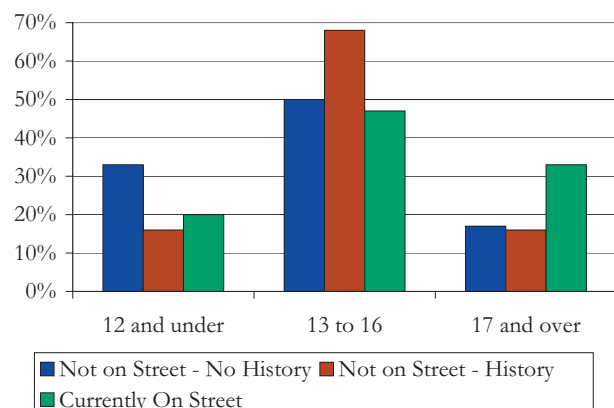
In addition, surveyed youth were asked if they had been picked up by police or social workers under the Protection of Children involved in Prostitution (PChIP) Act. Overall, 12% of youth said they had been picked up under the PChIP Act.



Age of Initiation into Prostitution and Prostitution-Related Activities

When asked how old youth were when they were first asked to be involved in prostitution and prostitution-related activities, 20% of said they were asked prior to age 13, 56% were asked between the ages of 13 and 16, and 24% were asked after age 16. A significantly larger percentage of those *Not on Street – No History* (33%) showed initiation into prostitution-related activities prior to age 13, compared to 16% of youth *Not on Street – History*, and 20% of youth *Currently On Street*. See Figure 3.

Figure 3: Prostitution-Related Activities - Age Started by Current Level of Street Involvement *



Based on a sample of 159 street-involved youth in Calgary.
* Significance level ≤ 0.05
Source: *Calgary Youth, Health and the Street: Final Report*, Table 54

¹The 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: Worthington, C., MacLaurin, B., Dittmann, D., & Kitt, O. (2009). *The Sex Trade among Calgary's Street-Involved Youth*. Calgary Youth, Health and the Street – Fact Sheet #16. 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.ucalgary.ca>

