



# Maltreatment among Calgary's Street-Involved Youth

## Calgary Youth, Health and the Street - Fact Sheet # 1

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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.

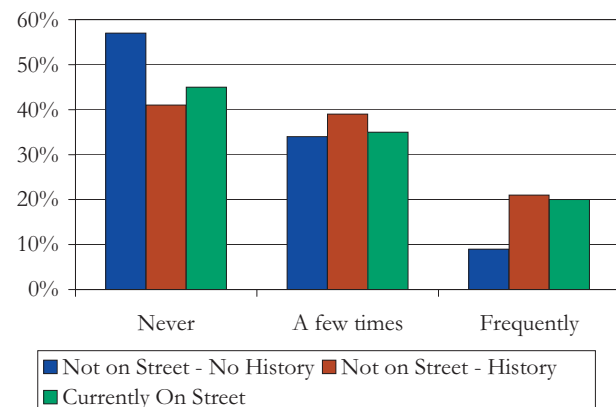
Between June and December 2005, 355 surveys were completed by street-involved youth on their street experiences in Calgary, and 40 interviews were conducted to provide a more in-depth look at these experiences. Youth targeted for the study were between the ages of 14 and 24, and involved in the street 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*).

### Exposure to Domestic Violence

Over half of all street-involved youth reported having witnessed violence between parents (54%) or between parents and siblings (50%). Overall, 36% said they had witnessed violence a few times between parents, 18% said they had seen frequent violence between parents, 32% said they had witnessed violence a few times between parents and siblings, and 18% said they had seen frequent violence between parents and siblings. While no significant differences were found between groups, those *Not on Street - No History* more often reported never witnessing domestic violence compared to other youth. See Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Witnessed Violence between Parents by Level of Street Involvement**



Based on a sample of 336 street-involved youth in Calgary.  
Source: *Calgary Youth, Health and the Street: Final Report*, Table 28

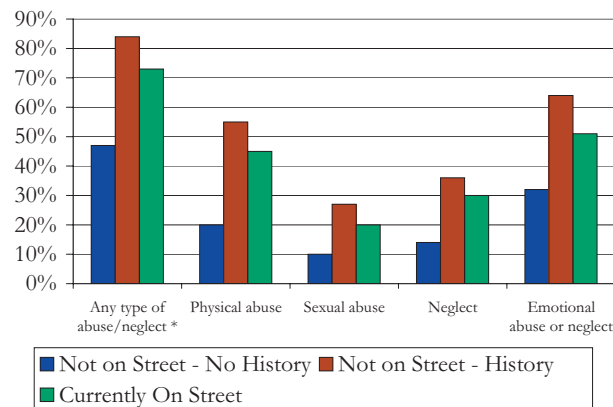
*Over half (54%) of all street-involved youth have witnessed domestic violence between parents.*

## Prevalence of Abuse and Neglect

A substantial proportion of street-involved youth reported having experienced abuse or neglect in their past. Overall, 71% said they had experienced any type of abuse or neglect. Looking at level of street involvement, 73% of youth *Currently On Street* and 84% of those *Not on Street – History* reported experiencing any type of abuse or neglect, compared to 47% of those *Not on Street – No History* (this difference was significant).

Participants also noted specific types of maltreatment they experienced. Overall, 43% said they had experienced physical abuse, 20% had experienced sexual abuse, 29% had experienced neglect, and 52% had experienced emotional abuse or neglect. Youth *Not on Street – No History* consistently showed lower levels of all types of abuse, although this difference was not significant. See Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Abuse and Neglect by Current Level of Street Involvement**



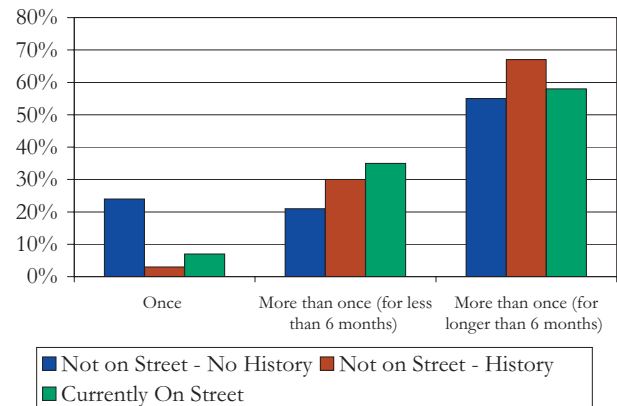
Based on a sample of 339 street-involved youth in Calgary.  
\* Significance level  $\leq 0.05$   
Source: *Calgary Youth, Health and the Street: Final Report*, Table 29

## Frequency of Abuse and Neglect

Abuse among street-involved youth was often not a one-time occurrence. The majority of those who had experienced abuse indicated that it had occurred more than once (92%), and 61% said that it had lasted for longer than six months. A significantly greater proportion of youth *Not on Street – No*

*History* reported abuse occurring only once (24%), compared to 3% of those *Not on Street – History*, and 7% of those *Currently On Street*. Those *Not on Street – History* most often reported recurrent abuse for longer than six months (67%), compared to 58% of those *Currently On Street*, and 55% of those *Not on Street – No History*. See Figure 3.

**Figure 3: Frequency of Abuse and Neglect by Current Level of Street Involvement \***



Based on a sample of 235 street-involved youth in Calgary.  
\* Significance level  $\leq 0.05$   
Source: *Calgary Youth, Health and the Street: Final Report*, Table 30

*Overall, 71% of street-involved youth experienced abuse or neglect, including 73% of those Currently On Street and 84% of those Not on Street - History.*

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.

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