



HIV Risk among Calgary's Street-Involved Youth

Calgary Youth, Health and the Street - Fact Sheet #3

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.

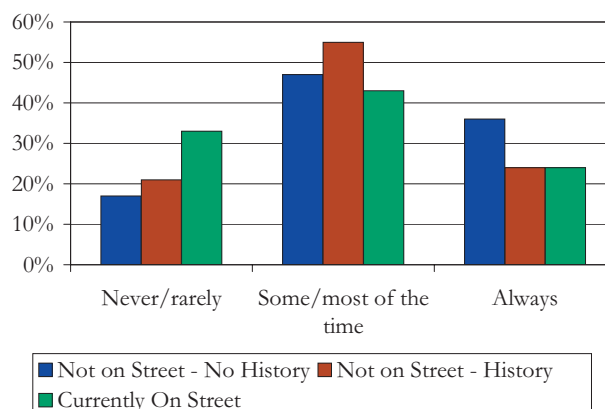
Between June and December 2005, 355 surveys were completed by street-involved youth on their street experiences in Calgary, and 40 interviews were conducted to provide a more in-depth look at these experiences. Youth targeted for the study were between the ages of 14 and 24, and involved in the street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

Condom Use

Overall, of surveyed youth who had had sex, 26% said they "always" used condoms, 48% said some or most of the time, and 26% said never or rarely. There were significant differences between condom use based on level of street involvement. One-third (33%) of youth *Currently On Street* said they never or rarely used condoms, compared to 21% of those *Not on Street – History*, and 17% of those *Not on Street – No History*. See Figure 1.

Figure 1: Condom Use by Current Level of Street Involvement *



Based on a sample of 314 street-involved youth in Calgary.

* Significance level ≤ 0.05

Source: *Calgary Youth, Health and the Street: Final Report*, Table 49

Youth surveyed gave a variety of reasons for not using a condom. A significantly greater proportion of youth *Not on Street – No History* reported not using a condom because they never had sex (23%), compared to 6% of youth *Not on Street – History*, and 5% of youth *Currently On Street*. Youth *Currently On Street*

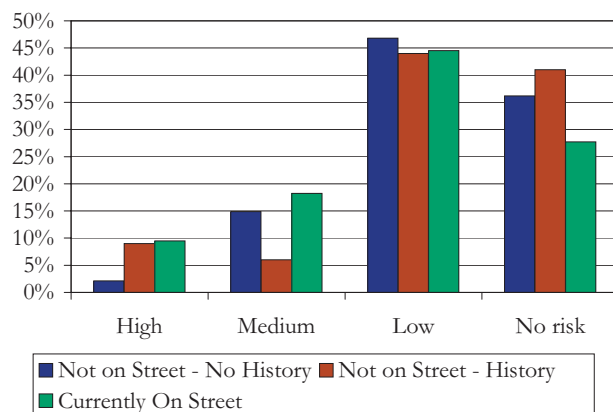
more often reported not using a condom because they did not want to (34%), or their partner did not want to (34%). Youth *Not on Street – History* more frequently reported not using a condom because they did not think they had HIV/AIDS/STI (28%), they did not think their partner had HIV/AIDS/STI (24%), they were in a long-term relationship and knew through testing that neither one had HIV/STI (43%), or they were forced to have sex against their will (16%).

HIV Testing & Perceived HIV Risk

Overall, 59% of youth surveyed reported having had an HIV test in their lifetime. Of youth *Currently On Street*, 65% had been tested for HIV, compared to 63% of youth *Not on Street – History*, and 37% of youth *Not on Street – No History*.

Of youth who had been tested for HIV, 2% said their test results indicated they were HIV-positive, 89% said their result indicated they were HIV-negative, 6% said they didn't know what their test results was, and 2% indicated that the HIV test result was unclear. For those youth who said they were HIV-negative or who did not know their HIV status, over three-quarters (79%) thought they were at low or no risk of contracting the virus. See Figure 2.

Figure 2: Perceived HIV Risk by Current Level of Street Involvement



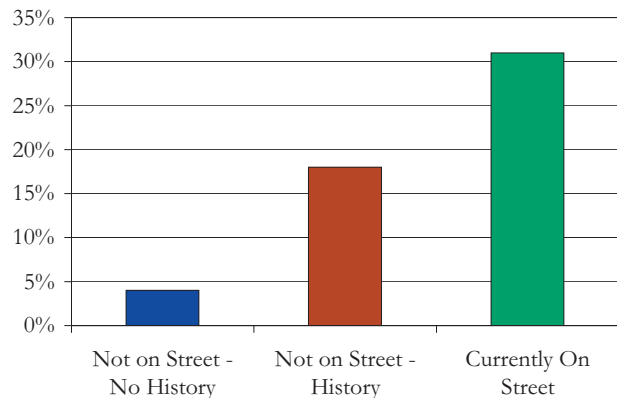
Based on a sample of 281 street-involved youth in Calgary.
Source: *Calgary Youth, Health and the Street: Final Report*, Table 57



Injection Drug Use

Participants were asked about their history of injection drug use. Overall, 21% of youth had ever injected drugs, 29% of whom had ever shared needles or injection equipment. A significantly higher percentage of youth *Currently On Street* reported using injection drugs than did other youth. Thirty-one percent of youth *Currently On Street* said they had ever injected drugs, compared to 18% of those *Not on Street – History*, and only 4% of those *Not on Street – No History*. See Figure 3.

Figure 3: Injection Drug Use by Current Level of Street Involvement *



Based on a sample of 342 street-involved youth in Calgary.
* Significance level ≤ 0.05
Source: *Calgary Youth, Health and the Street: Final Report*, Table 46

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) *HIV Risk among Calgary's Street-Involved Youth*. Calgary Youth, Health and the Street – Fact Sheet #3. 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>



UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY