



# Sexual Health among Calgary's Street-Involved Youth

## Calgary Youth, Health and the Street - Fact Sheet #4

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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*).

### Sexual Orientation

Surveyed youth were asked to identify who they were physically attracted to – guys (males), girls (females), or both (males and females). Overall, 92% of males and 61% of females said they were attracted to the opposite sex, while 8% of males and 39% of females said they were attracted to the same sex or both sexes. Although significant differences were not found between groups (likely due to sample size), a fairly large percentage of female youth *Currently On Street* (42%) and 47% of those *Not on Street - History* said they were attracted to the same sex or both sexes, compared to 21% of female youth *Not on Street - No History*. Much smaller percentages of male youth said they were attracted to the same sex or both sexes, especially among male youth *Currently On Street* (6%). See Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Physical Attraction by Current Level of Street Involvement**



Based on a sample of 132 female and 208 male street-involved youth in Calgary.  
Source: *Calgary Youth, Health and the Street: Final Report*, Table 13

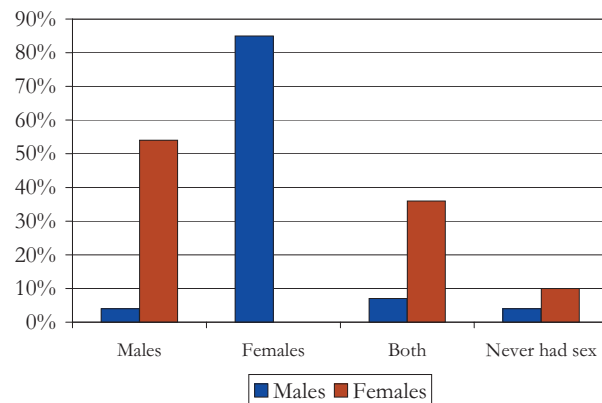


## Sexual Activity

Surveyed youth reported a fairly high level of sexual activity, with only 4% of males and 10% of females who had never had sex (defined as vaginal or anal intercourse). Among males, 85% said they had had sex with only females, 4% with only males, and 7% with both males and females. Among females, 54% said they had had sex with only males, 0% with only females, and 36% with both males and females.

While 85% of males overall reported having had sex with only females, only 54% of females overall reported having had sex with only males. Females showed a much higher percentage of having had sex with both males and females (36%), compared to only 7% of males. See Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Sexual Activity by Gender**



Based on a sample of 133 female and 206 male street-involved youth in Calgary.  
Source: *Calgary Youth, Health and the Street: Final Report*, Table 48

## Pregnancy

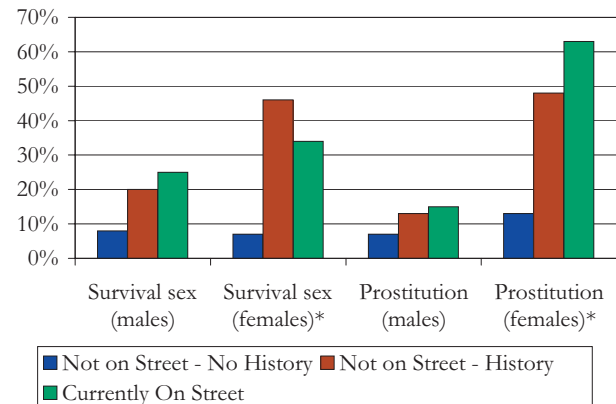
When surveyed youth were asked if they had ever been pregnant or had gotten someone pregnant, 22% of those *Not on Street – No History*, 50% of those *Not on Street – History*, and 58% of those *Currently On Street* said they had. Compared to other youth, a significantly greater percentage of those *Currently On Street* reported having ever been pregnant or gotten someone pregnant.



## Prostitution & Survival/Obligatory Sex

Participants were asked whether they had ever been asked to exchange sex for food or shelter (survival/obligatory sex). Overall, 20% of males and 33% of females said they had. Similarly, youth were asked if they had ever been asked to be involved in prostitution<sup>1</sup>, with 13% of males and 45% of females indicating they had. Females *Currently On Street* and *Not on Street – History* were significantly more likely than other female youth to have been asked to exchange sex for food/shelter or money. See Figure 3.

**Figure 3: Prostitution and Survival/Obligatory Sex by Current Level of Street Involvement**



Based on a sample of 108 to 196 street-involved youth in Calgary.  
\* Significance level  $\leq 0.05$   
Source: *Calgary Youth, Health and the Street: Final Report*, Tables 52, 53

<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.

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



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