



Physical Health among Calgary's Street-Involved Youth

Calgary Youth, Health and the Street - Fact Sheet #6

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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.

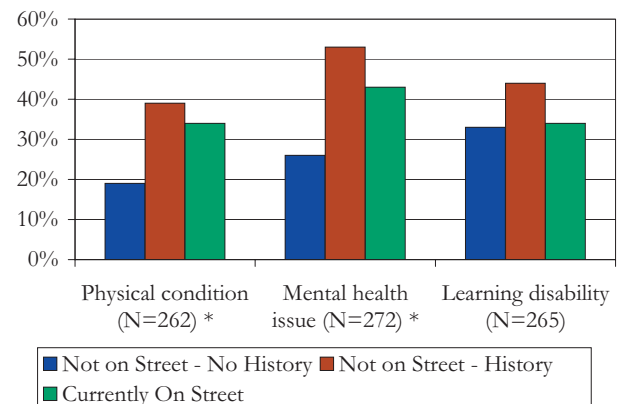
Between June and December 2005, 355 surveys were completed by street-involved youth on their street experiences in Calgary, and 40 interviews were conducted to provide a more in-depth look at these experiences. Youth targeted for the study were between the ages of 14 and 24, and involved in the street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

Health Problems

Survey participants were asked if they had been diagnosed with certain health problems when they were growing up. Overall, 33% indicated they had been diagnosed with a physical condition, 43% with a mental health issue, and 37% with a learning disability. Physical conditions and mental health issues were significantly related to level of street involvement. Youth *Not on Street - No History* reported having had less physical conditions (19%) or mental health issues (26%) compared to other youth, while those *Not on Street - History* had significantly more problems, with 39% reporting having had physical conditions and 53% reporting mental health issues. Among youth *Currently On Street*, 34% reported having had physical conditions and 43% reported mental health issues. See Figure 1.

Figure 1: Health Problems by Current Level of Street Involvement



Based on a sample of 262 to 272 street-involved youth in Calgary.
* Significance level ≤ 0.05
Source: *Calgary Youth, Health and the Street: Final Report*, Table 31

Self-Reported Health

Surveyed youth were asked to rate their health on a 5-point scale from excellent to poor. Overall, 18% said they had excellent health, 26% said their health was very good, 32% said they had good health, 18% said their health was fair, and 6% rated their health as poor. Compared to other youth, a greater percentage of youth *Currently On Street* said they had poor (8%) or fair health (20%). At the other end of the health spectrum, youth *Not on Street – No History* more often reported very good health (49%), and those *Not on Street – History* more often reported excellent health (23%). See Figure 2.

Figure 2: Self-Reported Health by Current Level of Street Involvement *



Based on a sample of 351 street-involved youth in Calgary.

* Significance level ≤ 0.05

Source: *Calgary Youth, Health and the Street: Final Report*, Table 32

Medical & Dental Care

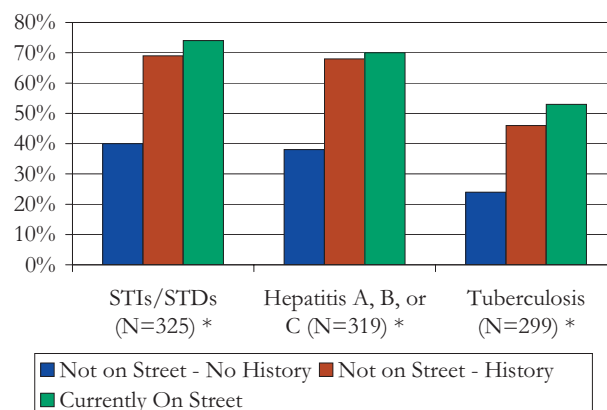
Overall, 19% of youth reported receiving medical care within the past week, 18% one week to one month ago, 33% one to six months ago, 13% six months to one year ago, and 17% more than one year ago. For dental care, 27% overall received care within the past six months, 19% six months to one year ago, 19% one to two years ago, 16% two to five years ago, and 19% more than five years ago. Compared to other youth, those *Currently On Street* more often reported seeing a dentist more than five years ago (29% versus 10%-11%).



Preventive Health Testing

Survey participants were asked if they had been tested for an STI/STD, hepatitis A, B, or C, or tuberculosis. Significant differences were found between infections ever tested for and level of street involvement. Youth *Currently On Street* more often reported having been tested for an STI/STD (74%), hepatitis A, B, or C (70%), and for tuberculosis (53%). Youth *Not on Street – No History* reported being tested significantly less often for all infections, including 40% for an STI/STD, 38% for hepatitis A, B, or C, and 24% for tuberculosis. See Figure 3.

Figure 3: Diseases Ever Tested For by Current Level of Street Involvement



Based on a sample of 299 to 325 street-involved youth in Calgary.

* Significance level ≤ 0.05

Source: *Calgary Youth, Health and the Street: Final Report*, Table 76

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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