Surviving Crime
and Violence:

Street Youth and Victimization in Toronto

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About Justice for Children and Youth

This report was conducted by *Street Youth Legal Services*, a program of *Justice for Children and Youth* in collaboration with Stephen Gaetz, Associate Dean of Research and Field Development, Faculty of Education, York University, and Bill O'Grady, Professor, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Guelph.

Justice for Children and Youth (JFCY) provides select legal representation to low-income children and youth in Toronto and vicinity. We are a non-profit legal aid clinic that specializes in protecting the rights of those facing conflicts with the legal system, education, social service or mental health systems. We give summary legal advice, information and assistance to young people, parents (in education matters), professionals and community groups across Ontario.

JFCY runs a specialized outreach and education program called **Street Youth Legal Services** (SYLS). Founded in 1999, SYLS has now been in operation for over 10 years. SYLS is a collaborative and community-based approach to assisting street-involved youth (16-24) in the City of Toronto. The program provides legal information, advice, and referrals to street-involved youth through workshops and individual consultation.

Street-involved young people often have multiple and interconnected legal problems. Complex barriers, including a lack of financial resources, social isolation and mistrust often prevent youth from getting the help they need.

SYLS reaches out to street-involved youth by bringing legal information and resources directly to them - at drop-in centres, shelters and street youth programs where young people congregate to access other services, such as health care, food, employment and housing assistance, and counselling. These are places where street-involved youth are already comfortable and often literally "at home".

Acknowledgements

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First, we want to express our appreciation to the funder of this research, the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

Second, we wish to thank the many street youth serving agencies that supported this work, and assisted us in conducting research with young people who are homeless. These agencies opened their doors to our researchers, and provided support for young people who we interviewed. The list of agencies includes:

> Covenant House
> Eva's Place
> Eva's Phoenix
> Evergreen Street Mission
> Horizons
> Second Base Shelter
> Shout Clinic
> Stop '86
> Street Outreach Services
> Touchstone
> Turning Point
> Youthlink - Inner City
> Youth Skills Zone
> Youth Without Shelter

Finally, and most importantly, we wish to thank the many young people who participated in this research through sharing their time and their stories.

Surviving Crime and Violence
Street Youth and Victimization in Toronto

Executive Summary

Any parent would be outraged if their child was exposed to violence and crime. Any community would consider this to be unacceptable. Should we be concerned about the risks that young people who are homeless face?   In our report, "Surviving Crime and Violence", we explore the relationship between youth homelessness and criminal victimization. Our research highlights the degree to which the lives of young people who are homeless are characterized by high levels of crime and violence.

This report, prepared for Justice for Children and Youth, was led by Stephen Gaetz (York University) and Bill O'Grady (University of Guelph). Two hundred and forty four homeless youth in Toronto were interviewed in 2009 about life on the streets, including their experiences of criminal victimization. While street youth are often portrayed in public discussions as dangerous, threatening and delinquent, this new research highlights the degree to which it is street youth themselves who are clearly vulnerable to crime and violence.

The findings of this research reveal that street youth are victimized frequently, in large part due to the vulnerabilities that young people face when they are homeless. Particularly concerning are the findings which indicate that interventions to this victimization are not being effectively addressed by the criminal justice and shelter systems or by other professionals involved in the lives of street youth. We suggest that if the levels of violence and other forms of crime found in this study were being experienced by any other group of youth in Canada there would be immediate public outrage and considerable pressure for government to take action. Street youth deserve the same level of attention in responding to and preventing crime and violence that any other group of Canadian citizens are entitled to. Such attention is needed so that street youth have an opportunity to move forward in life.

Key Findings:

- *When young people become homeless, they are much more likely than housed youth to be victims of crime and violence.*

While young people in Canada are more likely to be victims of crime than any other age group, homeless youth experience rates of criminal victimization that are much greater. The results of our survey show incredibly high rates of criminal victimization amongst the street youth population, with over 76% reporting at least one instance in the previous 12 months. This is an extremely high rate of criminal victimization, when compared to housed youth in the general population. In addition, the frequency of such victimization is quite high, with almost three quarters (72.8%) reporting multiple incidents of victimization.

The kinds of crime street youth experience are different as well. Within the general population, most incidents of victimization have to do with property crime. This, however, is definitely not the case with street youth, as 63.6% report being victims of violent crime at least once, while only 56.5% report being victims of property crime.

- *When homeless youth are victims of crime, their networks of support are weak.*

Relative to young people who are housed, those who are homeless have rather weak supports in the event that they are victims of crime. A very high percentage (23%) report that they do not tell anyone, even friends, when they have been victimized. This is a reflection of the isolation that often comes with being homeless, and the weakness of social networks that young people are able to rely on when in crisis.

It also seems that very few street youth share their experiences of victimization with persons in authority. Only 16% reported telling social workers or counsellors about their worst recent experience of victimization (though females were more likely to report this), while around 20% alerted the police. The latter figure is important to consider, as street youth report that they are more likely to encounter police when they are seen as potential perpetrators of crime, rather than when they need help as victims of crime.

- *Homeless youth are unable to take appropriate measures to protect themselves.*

  The actions young people can do to protect themselves from crime are limited by their poverty and their experience of homelessness. Street youth report doing a number of things to try to make themselves safer, including for instance, moving regularly, carrying their possessions with them at all times, altering their appearance to look tougher or more menacing, or in some cases carrying weapons to defend themselves.   While all of these strategies represent an adaptive response, the reality is that the condition of being homeless profoundly undermines any protective measures street youth engage in. Ultimately, moving regularly (presumably between shelters) and changing routines is not going to make you safe if you lack protective measures such as access to a private home with a door that locks, the ability to avoid spending time in public (and often dangerous) places, and having adult figures (and institutions) in place to protect you and give you support. In sum, street youth do not have even the minimum level of protection available that would reduce their risk of being victims of crime or that would moderate the consequences of such victimization.

- *Young homeless women in particular are much more likely to be victimized, and report high levels of sexual assault.*

  The notion that the streets are unsafe for homeless youth is particularly true if you are young, homeless and female. One of the key findings of our research is that female street youth are more likely to report being victims of crime (85.9%) than young males (71.8%). These higher rates of victimization hold across all criminal code categories, including property crime and violent crime. Notably, 38.2% reported being victims of sexual assault.

  Amongst female street youth, black females were much more likely to report being victims of sexual assault (47%) than were white females (33%). Sexual orientation was a significant factor in determining victimization, with queer female youth (lesbian, bisexual) more likely to report being victims of most forms of crime (including both property and violent crimes), and on more occasions. Sixty percent of queer female youth report being victims of sexual assault during the past year. We argue that this is perhaps the most victimized street youth population.

- *Young homeless women report high rates of partner abuse.*

   A unique aspect of our research was the exploration of the degree to which young homeless women have a history of abusive relationships with their partners, also known as intimate partner violence and abuse (IPV). Interestingly, this is an issue that has not attracted attention of researchers in the past. We found that young women who are homeless also report extremely high levels of IPV; rates that are much greater than are found amongst the general population.   Over 55% report at least one incident of IPV (and of those, 79.5% reported more than one incident). Fifty-three percent reported emotional abuse, and 35% reported physical violence. There is a need to further explore the relationship between interpersonal violence and homelessness, as such violence is clearly not only a cause of losing one's home, but is also an ongoing factor in intimate relationships while young women remain on the streets.

- *The younger you are, and the earlier you leave home, the more vulnerable you are to criminal victimization.*

   One of our key findings is that younger members of the sample (under 20 and particularly those between 16-17 years old) were the most prone to victimization. This applied to all areas of victimization, with the exception of vandalism (suggesting, perhaps, that older street youth have more possessions). Most striking was the high levels of violent crime reported by younger teens aged 16-17 (75%) compared with their counterparts over the age of 20 (57%). Younger street youth were more than twice as likely to report sexual assault in the previous year (age 16-17: 35.7%; age>20: 15.3%).   They were also more likely to report being victims of intimate partner violence and abuse (71%) than those twenty years old or more (32%). This is true whether one is referring to violent assault or emotional abuse.

   Another age-related factor that has an impact on victimization is the age at which one left home. As we found, those who left home at 16 or younger had experienced victimization at levels which exceeded those recorded for youth who left home after 16. Our findings indicated that those who first left home when they were 16 or younger were more likely than other youth in the sample to be LGBT, had not completed high school, had lived in a foster or group home, and had experienced early contact with police. These factors are

likely indicative of either family conflict or victimization when these youth were children or young adolescents.

- ***The solution to this problem lies in changing the way we address youth homelessness.***

When young people are homeless, they experience marginalization because they lack some of the basic protective factors that most young people have access to: a home, supportive adults and friends, and places to seek refuge. Being homeless means constant exposure to dangerous people and places, a lack of safe housing and privacy and the need to engage in income generating activities associated with poverty. Homelessness, then, clearly compounds the social exclusion of otherwise marginalized young people, and this has much to do with their experience of criminal victimization.

How we respond to homelessness, then, will have a significant impact on the safety of homeless youth. A balanced response to youth homelessness would emphasize three key elements: preventive measures, an emergency response, and efforts to move young people quickly out of homelessness.

It can be argued that the Canadian response to homelessness relies most heavily on the provision of emergency services, and much less so on prevention and proactive support for transitions out of homelessness. There is no strategic response to youth homelessness at either the Federal, Provincial or Municipal levels (in Toronto and most Canadian cities). Instead, the Canadian response to youth homelessness is largely characterized by the attempt to 'manage' homelessness through a network of emergency services (shelters, drop-ins, etc.) and not incidentally, through law enforcement.

This is important, because being on the streets clearly leave young people vulnerable and unprotected, and it is not clear that the infrastructure of emergency supports for homeless youth is able to provide them with the protection that they need. One cannot underestimate the importance of a safe and secure home, one that provides a degree of privacy, a place to relax and recover.

Recommendations

The goal of this report has been to develop a more in depth understanding of the issues surrounding homelessness, street youth, and criminal victimization.   Recommendations aimed at better understanding and responding to the criminal victimization of street youth will be offered as potential solutions to end youth homelessness in Canada.   Details of these recommendations can be found in the conclusion of the report.

1.   Government of Canada

1.1   **The Government of Canada, as part of its Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS), must adopt a strategy to end youth homelessness.**

1.2   **Led by the Government of Canada's Homelessness Partnering Strategy and Status of Women in Canada, all levels of government must develop and implement a strategy to respond to the needs of young women who are homeless.**

2.   Provincial Government(s)

2.1   **The Province of Ontario must develop a strategy to end youth homelessness that includes a focus on prevention.**

2.2   **The Child and Family Services Act should be amended to enable young people to continue their involvement with Children's Aid Societies to a more appropriate age.**

2.3   **The Province of Ontario should establish an inter-ministerial committee to develop an effective intervention strategy to reduce the number of young people between the ages of 12 and 17 who wind up homeless and to ensure seamless access to appropriate services.**

2.4   **Regional health authorities across Canada (in Ontario, the LHINs) and the mental health sector must, in partnership with the youth homelessness sector, develop and adopt a targeted strategy to address youth homelessness.**

2.5   **The Government of Ontario in partnership with Legal Aid Ontario, must ensure ongoing funding and support for Justice for Children and Youth's Street Youth Legal Services (SYLS) program.**

3.   Municipal government (City of Toronto)

3.1   **The City of Toronto (and other municipal governments across Canada) must develop a strategy to end youth homelessness.**

3.2   **The City of Toronto should support street youth serving agencies in developing strategies to meet the needs of young people who are victims of crime.**

3.3   **The City of Toronto should open separate shelters (with daytime programming) for young women who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.**

3.4   **Street youth serving agencies should be funded to remain open to young people twenty four hours a day.**

3.5   **The City of Toronto should work with street youth serving agencies to develop and host a series of workshops aimed at preventing intimate partner violence and criminal victimization.**

3.6   **Toronto Police Services must establish a Youth Homelessness Safety strategy.**

1

Introduction

Crimes are committed every day in Canada. It is safe to say that victims of crime are in many ways harmed by these experiences. Our legal and justice systems exist to help prevent crime from happening, and to address crime when it does occur. Politicians often call for changes to laws or more resources for law enforcement to protect citizens from crime.

While all of us are to some degree at risk of being victims of crime, there is no doubt that some people are more likely to be victims than are others. For instance, we know that teenagers are more likely than the elderly to be victims of crime (Gannon and Mihorean, 2005).   First Nations people are ALSO at greater risk (Brzozowski et al. 2006).   Some neighbourhoods are more dangerous than others. Who you are, where you are and the resources you can draw on to make yourself safe have a huge impact on your risk of victimization.

In this report, we explore the degree to which homeless youth – also referred to as street youth – are more or less likely to be victims of crime. This is an issue worth exploring, because in the minds of many policy makers and members of the general public, there is a direct link between crime and homelessness. However, this link usually frames street youth not as victims, but rather as the potential criminals; as dangerous and delinquent young people who represent a

threat to other citizens. The existence of laws such as the Safe Streets Act (1999) is testament to such fears.

This report tells a different story.   In partnership with *Justice for Children and Youth's Street Youth Legal Services* program (SYLS), we conducted research with over 240 homeless youth in Toronto. Our findings suggest that street youth are a highly vulnerable and victimized group. In fact, when compared to housed youth in the general population, street youth are exponentially more likely to be victims of a broad range of criminal acts, including violent crimes such as assault, robbery, sexual assault, and property crimes such as theft, assault and vandalism. Within the street youth population, young women are particularly vulnerable, and many also reveal histories of partner abuse. Also particularly vulnerable are street youth who are young – those aged 16-18.

Many young people who become homeless are fleeing family backgrounds characterized by abuse, violence and addictions. Leaving home, however, does not necessarily represent an escape from harsh circumstances. In fact, we argue that it is the experience of being homeless that produces an environment which is extremely conducive for criminal victimization. That is, when young people are homeless, they are exposed to a number of situations and circumstances where there is a greater chance of being victims of crime. At the same time, they have less access to the means to protect themselves than young people in the general population do, including a safe home, private space, trusted adults, and protective environments to inhabit during the days and nights.

What all of this means is that young people who are homeless have very little control over their lives and the spaces they inhabit. Much, if not most, of their time is spent in public spaces where they are closely monitored by police but are denied the supervision and support of youth who live at home. Even in street youth facilities, much of their time is spent in congregate settings. A lack of control of space, and significantly, not having private space and a door to lock means that homeless youth do not have the refuge that they need in order to be proactive about taking protective measures against victimization.

In 2002*, Justice for Children and Youth* released the *Street Justice Report* which first highlighted the degree to which homeless youth in Toronto are likely to be victims of crime (Gaetz, 2002;

2004). This report updates that research, and offers a point of comparison. Much has changed since the *Street Justice Report* was written over seven years ago. In Toronto, the municipal government and a range of non-profit agencies addressing youth homelessness have not only continued to provide valuable services, but have also constantly strived to improve their services and to innovate. The policy and practice of the City of Toronto have been directed at encouraging homeless youth to access the network of existing street youth services; through street outreach and other tactics that discourage people from living outside of the shelter system in parks, under bridges and in abandoned buildings. In 2007, the City expanded its outreach efforts to engage street youth in its successful "Streets to Homes" program, which uses a 'housing first' approach to moving young people from the streets directly into housing.

While these changes have been positive, it is also true to say that in many ways, things haven't progressed that far in terms of our response to youth homelessness. Canada still lacks a national housing strategy, and there is plenty of evidence that there is an inadequate supply of affordable housing. Neither the Federal, Provincial nor Municipal government has a strategic response to homelessness in general, nor to youth homelessness in particular.

This is an important point, as this has a direct bearing on the vulnerability of the young people we spoke to about their experiences of criminal victimization. To put it simply, an effective and strategic response to youth homelessness would focus equally on prevention, emergency services, and transitional supports out of homelessness. At this time, however, the work of prevention exists largely outside of the homelessness sector. An integrated preventive approach would include an adequate supply of (supported) affordable housing that young people can access, plus efforts by the health and mental health sectors, the education system, corrections and child welfare services to work effectively to ensure that improvements in their service delivery models and practices can be made which do not contribute to homelessness. Preventive strategies also include crisis intervention, and family mediation approaches that help young people stay housed. Transitional approaches (including Housing First) are most effective when there is an adequate housing supply, as well as appropriate levels of income, social and health care supports. We must always remember that street youth are young, and like all young people, they need ongoing support from adults and community.

While preventions and transitions are important, the Canadian response to homelessness has

relied too long on a dependence on emergency supports. This includes, on the one hand supportive services such as shelters and drop-ins. These services bear the burden of the failure of other systems (health and mental health care, corrections, child protection) to prevent homelessness. The other distinguishing feature of the emergency response to homelessness is an increase in law enforcement, through policing (ticketing and 'moving people on'), and special laws that target the behaviours of people who are homeless, such as the Safe Streets Act.   Since the *Ontario Safe Streets* Act was put in place in the early part of this decade, an effort has been made to reduce public acts of money-making such as panhandling and squeegeeing. While one could argue that these efforts have made homeless youth in Toronto less visible 'on the streets' than was the case in 2002, there is no evidence that the actual numbers have fallen.

It is also questionable as to whether our ongoing focus on emergency services (as opposed to prevention and transitional supports out of homelessness) make street youth any safer. It is worth asking: whose responsibility is it to ensure the safety and protection of street youth? Currently, it seems that this responsibility has fallen on the homelessness sector; on staff at shelters and drop-ins who have little if any training on the subject and often report feeling over burdened with responsibilities (dealing with mental health issues, addictions, health problems, etc.) stemming largely from the failure of other systems. That street youth are a highly victimized population is one of the most damaging outcomes. This is what we have documented in the pages that follow.

This report, then, highlights the vulnerability of street youth to crime and victimization, but at the same time raises some very important questions about the Canadian response to youth homelessness. While our current approach certainly does not provide this marginalized population with the protection that it needs, there are a number of steps that can be taken so that the present situation can be improved. These steps are discussed in a series of recommendations included in the conclusion to this report. The safety of street youth is important. It is certainly worth emphasizing that there are solutions; we needn't continue to allow this situation to exist.

Our report "Surviving Crime and Violence" blends original research with an extensive literature review, and is organized in the following way.

Section 1 – Introduction begins a general discussion of the key issues relating to youth homelessness and why this research was conducted.

Section 2 – Understanding Criminal Victimization and Youth Homelessness offers a background discussion of the previous research literature surrounding criminal victimization and homelessness. The methodology used in our research is also reviewed.

Section 3 – The Results of this study begin by describing the demographic profile of the street youth interviewed in this study. The report then discusses the criminal victimization experienced by the street youth sampled for this project. The analysis begins by comparing our data to instances of criminal victimization reported by youth who are not homeless taken from Canada's General Social Survey. Our findings then focus on issues of intimate partner abuse reported by our sample and how these issues affect youth homelessness. The discussion of our results concludes with a commentary about how criminal victimization of street youth is responded to by the justice system and other professionals involved in the lives of street youth.

Section 4 – Discussion: Criminal Victimization of Street Youth offers a discussion of the issues involved in the criminal victimization of street youth in an effort to develop a more comprehensive understanding about the significance of these issues and why they matter. The discussion moves to offer an explanation about why it is important to understand how levels of victimization vary according to the ages at which youth experience violence on the streets, in addition to the time when youth first became homeless. Section 4 concludes with a discussion about why female street youth are more likely to be victimized than males.

Section 5 – Conclusion and Recommendations offers concluding comments on the findings of our research and the issues of criminal victimization of street youth and homelessness. Recommendations are then offered which focus on the responses to the criminal victimization that street youth experience and toward solutions to urban youth homelessness.

2

Understanding Criminal Victimization and Youth Homelessness

2.1 Introduction

In many public debates about street youth, there is a link drawn between crime, criminality and the lives of young people who are homeless. However, more often than not these debates have framed homeless youth as criminals, delinquents, drug addicts or potential perpetrators of crime. It is in this context that demands for a law enforcement response to youth homelessness usually emerge. That is, calls for more policing and new laws focused on homeless youth have been an outcome of this dominant perception about street youth.

Within this context, what is often ignored is any analysis of street youth as victims of crime. There is in fact a growing body of research that explores this relationship, and we believe that this knowledge can and should be a part of public debates, policy and program planning. In this section of the report, we review the literature on street youth and criminal victimization in order to frame the results of our current research and analysis. In what follows, we review key research findings, and outline the most relevant themes that emerge from this scholarly activity.

2.2 Background

Research about crime and victimization of street youth has evolved over time. Even though the study of "street youth" in North American can be traced back to the 1920s, (cf. Anderson, 1923), it was not until the 1970s when research focused on homeless youth, rather than on homeless people of all age groups together[1]. At this time researchers, mostly psychologists, treated street youth as a distinct group of youth thought to suffer from serious psychological problems such as depression, psychopathology and other forms of mental illness. However, by the end of the 1970s and into the early 1980s attention began to shift from describing individual pathology to the role of contextual and environmental factors. Here researchers were beginning to understand the variety of reasons young people become homeless, focusing mainly on the role of dysfunctional and often violent family living conditions (physical and sexual abuse), but also including school experiences and relationships with peers (e.g., Nye, 1980).

It was not until the late 1980s and early 1990s, however, that researchers began to examine the experiences of street youth after they arrived on the street (e.g., Whitbeck and Simons, 1990). Not unlike adult homeless persons, homeless youth were found to experience unemployment, hunger and drug and alcohol problems. It was also at this time that "survival crimes" such as prostitution were examined by the research community (cf. Webber, 1987; Visano, 1991). In a thorough review of research about street youth and crime conducted in the 1980s and 1990s, Hagan and McCarthy reported that being involved in crime was not only more common among street youth than youth who are not homeless, but was more frequent and serious (1997: 9).

What was becoming more obvious from research on street youth was that the backgrounds of street youth (i.e., familial neglect and abuse, mental health problems, school failure, issues of sexual orientation, poverty) explained how and why these youth became homeless in the first place. As Hagan and McCarthy discovered, when it came to understanding why some street youth engage in crime, situational adversity (hunger, lack of money and inadequate shelter) was the most common condition. In other words, being without food and shelter is more important in explaining why some street youth engage in theft and other economic crimes, compared to background factors such as whether or not youth had completed high school or whether or not

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[1] Reasons for this attention can be found in <u>Mean Streets</u>, by John Hagan and Bill McCarthy (1997)

they came from broken homes. This important finding helped reframe how we think about street youth and crime, moving us from notions that this group of young people are fundamentally more delinquent or deviant than other groups of young people.

This line of thinking informed later research on youth homelessness including studies of money making (Gaetz and O'Grady, 2002, O'Grady and Gaetz, 2004, O'Grady and Greene, 2003), unemployment (Baron and Hartnagel, 1997) and the paths that young people take in order to exit the streets (Karabanow, 2009). Particular to this report, are studies which have explored victimization among those who are young and homeless.

Similar to the research on homelessness and involvement in criminal activity, recent work has revealed that homeless youth are over-represented in counts of Canadian youth who are victims of crime. For example, a self-report study undertaken by Gaetz (2002, 2004) for *Justice for Children and Youth* revealed that homeless youth in Toronto are more likely to experience criminal victimization than similarly aged youth, according to data from the Canadian General Social Survey (GSS) (1999). In that study Gaetz found that, according to the GSS, 39.7% of Canadian youth were a victim of a crime in the previous year, compared to 81.9% of Toronto street youth. Moreover, 79.4% of these homeless youth reported to have experienced more than one of these events in the past 12 months.

Criminal Victimization and Youth Homelessness

The literature on youth homelessness and criminal victimization typically looks at the causes and consequences of victimization, both in terms of what happens before young people become homeless, and after. For many street youth, criminal victimization begins before they leave home. There is a great deal of research that points to the fact that a high majority of street youth in Canada and the United States come from homes where there were high levels of physical, sexual and emotional abuse, interpersonal violence and assault, parental neglect and exposure to domestic violence, etc. (Gaetz, O'Grady and Vaillancourt 1999; Karabanow, 2004; 2009; Kimberley and Bersani, 2008; Tyler et al., 2001; Whitbeck and Simons, 1993; Whitbeck and Hoyt 1999; Van den Bree et al., 2009). One study estimated that street youth are five times more likely to report being victims of sexual abuse as children (Rotheram-Boris, et al., 1996).

The consequences of these early experiences of violence and abuse are clear. A history of abuse can lead to a greater chance of negative developmental outcomes, including low self-esteem, higher rates of depression and suicide attempts, increased risky sexual behaviour, substance abuse, difficulty in forming attachments and of course, running away or being kicked out of home (Tyler et al. 2000; Whitbeck, Hoyt, & Ackley, 1997; Kimberley and Bersani, 2008; Van den Bree et al., 2009).   For homeless women, childhood abuse directly predicts later physical abuse, chronic homelessness, depression and low self-esteem (Stein et al., 2002).

Such early experiences of violence and abuse also lead to a greater risk of being a victim of crime later in life, and this is even more likely if one is street involved (Baron 1997; Browne and Bassuk 1997; Kipke, et al., 1997; Tyler et al. 2000; Whitbeck et al.1997).   Survivors of childhood sexual abuse, for instance, are much more likely to be victims of sexual abuse and exploitation once they become adults, and once again, this is even more likely if they wind up being homeless (Finkelhor, 1984; Janus, et al., 1987; Simons & Whitbeck, 1991; Tyler et al., 2000).

For young people who are homeless, the implications of being a victim of crime – whether prior to becoming homeless or once on the streets – are important to consider. There is of course a link between the experience of violence and victimization as a child or youth, and mental disorders ranging from depression to more serious forms of mental illness (Kidd, 2002, 2003, 2004; Thrane et al, 2006; Gwadz, et al, 2007).   Childhood abuse has also been linked with a range of trauma based disorders, including post-traumatic stress disorder (Gorske et al. 2006, Gwadz, et al., 2007).   People with histories of violence are also more likely to engage in risky behaviours and to hang out with other young people who are considered to be dangerous or delinquent (Whitbeck et al., 1997). Finally, there is evidence that young people in these situations are more likely to become aggressors themselves (Baron 1997; Baron and Hartnagel 1998; Patterson, DeBaryshe and Ramsay 1989; Whitbeck et al. 1999). Baron, for instance, argues that the 'informal rules' that develop on the streets are a result of these early experiences of violence. That is, young people become conditioned to adopt more 'violent' approaches to problem solving as they grow older, and particularly once they are on the streets with few other means to protect themselves (Baron, et al., 2001; Terrell, 1997).

The streets, it seems, cannot be said to offer a refuge from violence and abuse. In fact, there is a growing body of research identifying that once on the streets, the risk of being a victim of crime

is quite substantial. This includes the chance of being a victim of serious and violent crimes, including sexual assault. American studies from the 1990s began to show a strong link between youth homelessness and the experience of, and exposure to violence, both as victims and witnesses (Kipke et al. 1997; Whitbeck, et al. 1997). Even in these early studies it was becoming clear that females were more likely than males to report this kind of thing. This is important to consider, for amongst the general population (that is, young people with homes), young males are more likely than females to be exposed to violence.

There is also Canadian research that identifies the risks that homeless youth face. Research by *Justice for Children and Youth* (Gaetz 2002; 2004) highlights the degree to which young people who are homeless, both male and female, are much more likely to be victims of crime than youth who are not homeless. This research also indicates that not only are they more likely to be victims of a whole range of crimes, but they have much weaker social support networks to rely on. Finally, this research shows that concerns for public safety at the time did not properly take account of the risks faced by highly victimized groups such as homeless youth. Other research, undertaken at the same time in Toronto, found similar results. According to Tanner and Wortley (2002:62), the street youth they surveyed "experienced substantially more victimization . . . and the experiential gap was particularly pronounced for violent crime".

More current research explores the victimization of street youth from the view point of gender (O'Grady, & Gaetz, 2004, 2009; Stein et al., 2002; Tyler et al., 2004). Tyler et al. found, for instance, that both males and females who engaged in high risk behaviours were more likely to be victims of violent assault. For females, moving from home for the first time at an earlier age was strongly associated with a higher risk of sexual assault.

In sum, this review of research on youth homelessness and victimization tells us that, as a group, street youth experience exceptionally high levels of crime and violence. This literature also tells us that these experiences should not be taken lightly, as exposure to violence is associated with serious mental health problems and involvement in high risk lifestyles.   Research also makes clear that females are more likely than males to endure such mayhem. What is less understood, however, are questions about how street youth respond to this victimization, whether or not factors beside gender explain variation in these harmful experiences, and to what extent is intimate partner violence (IPV) present among this population.

2.3   About Our Study

Our review of the literature provides the context for our current study of youth homelessness and criminal victimization. In this report, we build on and move beyond the original needs assessment conducted for *Justice for Children and Youth* in 2002. We interviewed 244 homeless youth at fourteen different street youth serving agencies across Toronto, in the winter and spring of 2009. Our overall goals are to understand the experiences of street youth in terms of criminal victimization, what they do to protect themselves, and what kinds of supports they are able to access. It is with this knowledge that we can begin a discussion of solutions. Our project is guided by the following key research questions:

1) *Does the experience of homelessness increase the likelihood that street youth will be victims of crime?*

   The criminal victimization of street youth is best understood when their experience is compared with young people in the general population. As with the 2002 study, we compare our results with Statistics Canada's General Social Survey (2004). In this study, we have paid special attention to the diversity of the street youth population, in terms of age, gender, sexual orientation, immigrant status, race and Aboriginal status. One new critical area of research we present, that has heretofore been unexplored, is the issue of partner violence and abuse amongst female street youth.

2) *How do young people who are homeless respond to the experience of criminal victimization?*

   People respond to being victims of crime by seeking support from others, and by taking steps to lower their chances of being a victim again. When people are victims of crime, they may or may not tell someone else. In order to get at this, we first asked our street youth sample to identify the worst thing that had happened to them in the past year, and then who they told (or did not tell) about it. Who one tells about incidents of victimization can suggest something about the strength of a person's social supports, the importance of relationships, and the trust people have in authority figures.

   In order to enhance personal safety, people may engage in a variety of strategies that potentially reduce personal risk. These are referred to as 'protective measures'.   This may

include avoiding dangerous places or carrying weapons, but also, importantly, involves protecting oneself and one's property through the use of locks, safety alarms, and other physical barriers that limit access. Importantly, what people do to protect themselves reveals something about the personal resources they have available to them, their understanding of what is necessary to keep them safe in the situation in which they live, and how they perceive their chances of becoming a victim of crime in the future.

3) What are effective measures to enhance the safety of young people who are homeless?

In democratic society, a key responsibility of government is to ensure the safety of citizens. When particular sub-populations are identified as being at higher risk of criminal victimization, the factors that produce such vulnerability need to be addressed.

A key focus of our research is to move from an analysis of the problem to the identification of solutions. In the Discussion section of the report, we draw on our results as well as a broad body of research to address the key factors that make young people vulnerable to crime when they are homeless. We then identify practical solutions through our analysis, and produce a list of recommendations. The vulnerability of street youth to criminal victimization is a problem that can be - and must be - addressed in an effective way.

2.4   Methodology

The research for this project was conducted between January, 2009 and July, 2009 in Toronto. Our focus was to undertake quantitative and qualitative research on homeless youth aged 16-25 in the City of Toronto. Our research team included Stephen Gaetz (York University), Bill O'Grady (University of Guelph), and research assistants: Kristy Buccieri, Matthew Aaron and Tara Patton.

Our study design consisted of interviews with 244 homeless youth. Doing research with street youth poses many challenges, especially in terms of establishing a representative sample from a diverse and often hard to reach population. We used a purposive sample (as a random sample is not possible with homeless populations), and recruited research participants exclusively through

a range of street youth serving agencies in downtown Toronto and surrounding suburbs (see page v for details) during the months of March to May, 2009. Compared with the 2002 Street Justice survey, our research sample was more heavily weighted towards young people who sleep regularly at youth shelters.

Those eligible to participate had to be between 16 and 25 years of age (the upper age limit accepted by street youth serving agencies), had to have been homeless (including staying in emergency shelters) or without shelter for at least one week during the previous month.

Our procedure was as follows: each young person was asked to fill out a standard self report questionnaire. Those with literacy problems were assisted by the research team. Upon completing the questionnaire, each young person was then interviewed by a member of our research team so as to provide additional information difficult to gather through a questionnaire. The data from the interview was more qualitative than the data we collected from the self-administered survey. All research participants were paid $20 after they completed the research protocol.

The questions for our survey were drawn from the 2002 Street Justice Survey, the 2004 General Social Survey and several other surveys designed for research projects conducted by Bill O'Grady and Stephen Gaetz. The research design included content and questions by *Justice for Children and Youth*. The survey instruments were then pilot tested before the project was administered.

The research design, including procedures, survey instruments and consent forms, was thoroughly reviewed by York University's Human Participants Review Committee, which granted ethics approval in March 2009. Because of the sensitive nature of our questioning, we designed the project in such a way as to ensure the anonymity of all respondents. We also took special care to explain research procedures, and to obtain written consent from all participants.

Quantitative Data Preparation and Analysis

After data collection was complete, each survey was given a sequential identification number to assure confidentiality. Care was taken so that the identities of our respondents would not be revealed. The next step involved entering the coded data into a database (SPSS version 17). The qualitative data from the interviews was coded by the research team and also entered into the database. Data were analyzed using SPSS uni-variate and bi-variate procedures.

3

Results

3.1   Introduction

In the following chapter, we present our key findings from the survey and interviews conducted in this study. In order to provide some context for these findings we will first discuss key aspects of homelessness and street youth in Toronto and the demographic makeup of the youth from our sample. We will then examine statistics pertaining to criminal victimization within our sample. These data will be compared with statistics obtained from youth who are not homeless, which were taken from the Canada's General Social Survey. Afterwards we will shift our focus by paying special attention to the issues of intimate partner abuse in a broader context and how those issues have affected youth from our sample. To conclude this section, we will discuss how the criminal victimization of street youth is and is not responded to by the police and justice systems as well as other professionals involved in the provision of services to street youth.

3.2   Street Youth in Toronto

The starting point for this discussion is a general overview of street youth in Toronto, drawn from our current study and including discussion from other key research on street youth.   This section provides the background information that allows for a more thorough analysis of the safety and lived experiences of young people who are homeless, and who are potentially victims of crime.

In order to understand the experiences of criminal victimization, it is essential to discuss key aspects of youth homelessness. Through this discussion we can identify key situational and environmental factors that have an impact on the criminal involvement of street youth, and the likelihood of criminal victimization.

We have paid special attention to the demographics of the street youth population, reflecting the reality of diversity. This allows us to engage in an analysis of data in terms of age, gender, sexual orientation, immigrant status, race and Aboriginal status. This will allow us to do a more fine grained analysis of the experiences of sub-populations.

In defining homeless youth, we borrow our definition from the *Homeless Hub*, which defines homelessness as:

> "an extreme form of poverty characterized by the instability of housing and the inadequacy of income, health care supports and social supports. This definition includes people who are absolutely homeless (those living on the streets, sometimes referred to as "rough sleepers"); shelter dwellers (people staying temporarily in emergency shelters or hostels); the "hidden homeless" (people staying temporarily with friends or family), and others who are described as under housed or "at risk" of homelessness."
> http://www.homelesshub.ca/Topics/Homelessness-176.aspx

Homeless youth (also referred to as street youth) are distinguished from the adult population not only by their age, but also by the causes of homelessness (which, as our literature review pointed out, are more likely to include family problems, involvement with child welfare services, and a history of physical, sexual and / or emotional abuse), their lack of history of independent living, and the fact that in Toronto at least, there is a separate infrastructure of services (shelters, drop-ins, health care) to meet the needs of homeless youth.

Profile of Respondents

Consistent with most North American research on homeless youth, males in our sample outnumbered females by a ratio of about 2:1 (65.8% males; 32.0% females; 2.3% transgendered). Also in line with previous research is the finding that almost one quarter of the sample was LGBT[2] (23%).

The mean age for the youth we interviewed was 21.2, a figure which also corresponds to previous research. The mean age when males left home was 16.9, while for females the average was a little lower at 16.5.

Where are Homeless Youth From?

According to our survey, 45.3% of the sample was born in the greater Toronto area (GTA), 22.3% were born outside of Canada, and the remaining 32.4% were born in Canada, but outside of the GTA. The table below displays the diversity of the sample.

Table-1
Ethno-Racial Identity

Ethno-Racial Background	(Number) percent
White	(102) 47.7
Black (AFRICAN CANADIAN/AFRICAN//CARIBBEAN)	(48) 22.4
First Nation /Inuit/Metis/Other Aboriginal	(32) 15
Latin American	(7) 3.3
Arab/West Asian (AFGHAN, ARMENIAN, IRANIAN, ISRAELI, KURDISH, TURKISH, WEST ASIAN)	(4) 1.9
Southeast Asian (CHINESE, PHILIPINO, INDO-CHINESE, INDONESIAN, JAPANESE, KOREAN, MALAY, OTHER ASIAN)	(4) 1.9
South Asian (BENGALI, PUNJABI, SINGHALESE, TAMIL, BANGLADESHI, EAST INDIAN, PAKISTANI, SRI LANKANI)	(2) 0.9
Other (specify)	(15) 6.2
Total	233
Missing	8

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[2] Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, Trans-Gendered, Trans-Sexual or Queer.

Just under one-half the sample were "white," a little over 20% were "black," fifteen percent were "Aboriginal," with the remaining 25% comprised of youth from several other ethno-racial backgrounds. Interestingly, 35.8% of the sample self identified as being a visible minority. This figure is somewhat lower than it is for the GTA population as a whole. According to the 2006 census 46% of the population in the GTA was visible minority.

Levels of Education

Educational attainment for homeless youth has historically been a problem, both because the factors that produce youth homelessness impede educational engagement and success, and the fact that the infrastructure in place to support young people who are homeless does not place a priority on education. Not surprisingly, then, our research shows that the levels of education completed for our sample are, by Canadian standards, quite low. In fact, most (65.7%) of the young people we interviewed did not complete grade 12. A more detailed breakdown of how far our respondents were able to get in school can be found in Table-2.

Table-2
Educational Levels

Highest level of attainment	n	%
Grade 8 or Lower	(15)	6.4%
Grade 9	(27)	11.6%
Grade 10	(46)	19.7%
Grade 11	(65)	27.9%
Grade 12	(42)	18.0%
Grade 13	(2)	0.9%
G.E.D./Equivalency	(6)	2.6%
Post-Secondary**	(30)	13.0%
Total	(233)	
Missing	(9)	

**Includes: Some University or College; College Degree/Diploma; Technical/Vocational School; Diploma; University Degree; Other.

Current Living and Employment Situations

The majority of the sample (66%) had stayed in an emergency youth shelter the night before we interviewed them. Others reported having stayed in their own apartment (10.6%), with relatives (9.2%) or in a rooming house (6.9%). The remaining 7.5% stayed in a range of other locations, including sleeping "rough."[3] With respect to employment, 77% were currently unemployed. For the minority who were presently working (23%), most were employed part-time in the food services or retail service sector.

A key indicator of the poverty these youth were experiencing can be found in response to the question: what is your main way of making money? Approximately one in five reported that the Personal Needs Allowance they received while staying in a shelter was their main source of income ($27/week). A more complete breakdown of youths' money making activities can be found in Table-3.

Table-3
Main Ways of Making Money in the Past Month

Means of earning money	Percent
Employment (part time, full time)	23%
Personal Needs Allowance (PNA)	21%
Crime	15%
Social Assistance / Ontario Works	15%
Sex Trade	8%
Money from Friends/Family	4%
Panhandling/Squeegee Cleaning	3%
Other	11%
Total	(n) 176
Missing	(n) 66

In sum, the profile of this sample points to diversity in some areas and similarities in other areas. Statistics on age, ethnic/racial identity, gender composition and sexual orientation point to unique differences within the sample. On the other hand, levels of unemployment, educational attainment and shelter use suggest uniformity.

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[3] Denotes: sleeping in bus shelters, doorways, ravines, rooftops, cars, parks, squats (abandoned buildings) etc.

3.3 Criminal Victimization

Public safety is a concern for all Canadians. The ability to walk down the street and carry out one's daily business without fear of being robbed or assaulted, or to feel safe and secure in one's home, is not merely a desire, but rather an expectation in a democratic society such as Canada. The need for safety is of importance to everyone, regardless of whether you live in a house, or if you are homeless.

This section of the report highlights our key findings on the experiences of criminal victimization among street youth in Toronto as reported in 2009. Central to our approach is a comparison with criminal victimization amongst Canadians, as reported in the General Social Survey. We begin with a definition of criminal victimization that organizes victimization in terms of criminal code categories. We then explore the experiences of criminal victimization, paying special attention to the degree to which young women, as well as homeless youth who are queer, black or Aboriginal are more or less likely to be victims of crime. We also examine the relative age of street youth in relation to victimization, for the circumstances a 15 year old faces can be profoundly different from that of a 24 year old.

One of the key areas we explore through this research is intimate partner violence. While there is a large body of research on this subject, we do not have a solid understanding of how this impacts on street youth, particularly young women. We examine and discuss the considerably higher rates of abuse (both emotional and physical) experienced by female street youth in comparison to the general housed youth population.

What our data reveals is that street youth in general continue to be vulnerable to a whole range of crimes. Moreover, young women, and street youth in their mid-teens, are especially vulnerable to criminal victimization. All of this suggests that our current response to the plight of homeless youth is not providing them with adequate protection from crime.

Defining Criminal Victimization

The term 'criminal victimization' refers to a broad range of events where individuals or groups are subject to criminal acts. The potential range of crimes is broad, and includes acts of violence (murder, sexual assault, physical assault and robbery), property crimes (referring to theft from

households, vandalism of personal property, and a whole range of automobile-related crimes), fraud, and discrimination.

Since the 1960s, the interest in understanding criminal victimization has led many criminologists and indeed, national governments, to explore the experiences of those who have been victims of crime. The most reliable indicators of crime tend to be 'criminal victimization surveys', where people are asked about their personal experiences of crime, usually over the past year. While such surveys do have their limitations[4], they are considered to be more reliable than police records of crime, as these only relate to crimes that have come to the attention of the police and/or incidents where police lay charges. As such, police crime rates tend to under-report some types of crime (assault, vandalism and theft for example).

The key categories of criminal victimization used in this report are similar to those used in Statistics Canada's General Social Survey.

Figure 1

Categories of Criminal Victimization	
Offence	**Description**
Violent Victimization	
Sexual Assault	Forced sexual activity, an attempt at forced sexual activity, or unwanted sexual touching, grabbing, kissing, or fondling.
Robbery	Theft or attempted theft in which the perpetrator had a weapon or there was violence or the threat of violence against the victim.
Physical Assault	An attack (victim hit, slapped, grabbed, knocked down, or beaten), a face-to-face threat of physical harm, or an incident with a weapon present
Property Crimes	
Theft	Theft or attempted theft of personal property such as money, credit cards, clothing, jewellery, a purse or a wallet (unlike robbery, the perpetrator does not confront the victim).
Break and Enter	Illegal entry or attempted entry into a residence or other building on the victim's property.
Vandalism	Willful damage of personal or household property.

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4   Victimization surveys are limited in that they do not capture all types of crime (for instance, murder), and tend to focus more narrowly on victimization and not criminal offending.

In Canada, the most detailed and reliable research on criminal victimization is available through Statistics Canada's General Social Survey, which is conducted on a five year cycle (most recently, 2004). Over 20,000 Canadians are routinely asked a range of questions relating to their experiences of crime, their attitudes about the justice system, and how they respond to crime.

In this report, we have adapted many questions used in the GSS as part of our research on street youth. We have also conceptually organized our understanding of criminal victimization using criminal code categories similar to those used in the GSS (Gannon& Mihorean, 2005), with some modifications[5]. This allows us to build on a reliable methodology for assessing criminal victimization, and also offers the opportunity for comparison.

Criminal Victimization in Canada

The 2004 version of the GSS showed that slightly over one quarter (28%) of Canadians 15 years of age and older reported being victims of crime on at least one occasion. About four in ten of these victims (11% of the total sample) reported that they were victimized on more than one occasion, and 5.6% (of the total sample) reported they were victimized three or more times.

The types of crime people report are important to consider. Over ten percent of Canadians (10.6%) reported being victims of violent crime, including assault, robbery and sexual assault. 9.3% reported being victims of theft and 24.8% were victims of property crime (which includes "break and enter", motor vehicle / parts theft, theft of household property, and vandalism).

The majority of incidents of criminal victimization experienced by housed Canadians, then, involve household property crimes (including automobile-related theft and vandalism), rather than crimes of violence. This is important to consider when drawing comparisons with street youth, who in general do not have their own households, nor do they typically own automobiles or own many possessions at all.

Are crime rates in Canada particularly high? International comparisons show that the rates of criminal victimization in Canada are about average when compared to 30 other countries (Van

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[5]   In our research with street youth, we have chosen not to use terminology associated with "household victimization" as this is a description that does not apply to many street youth. We have also omitted the category "Motor vehicle/parts theft" as few youth living in poverty actually own motor vehicles.

Dijk, van Kesteren & Smit 2008). Also, it is important to note that in spite of public perceptions, Canadian crime rates have continued to drop over the past two decades. This is confirmed by Canadian research in 2006 that shows the crime rate had reached its lowest point in 25 years, and had decreased by about 30% since peaking in 1991 (Silver, 2007). It should be pointed out that much of this decline had to do with reductions in property crime.

National crime rates suggest that there are some important regional differences to consider. For instance, Atlantic Canada has, on average, the lowest crime rates in Canada (the highest rates being in the north and the Prairie Provinces). As well, in comparisons of municipalities, the City of Toronto typically has amongst the lowest crime rates for Canadian cities with populations over 500,000 (Sauve & Hung, 2008). This, in spite of the media attention devoted to the city's reputation for violent gun-crime.

However, when looking at national or local crime statistics, it is important to note that not all members of the population are equally at risk, and that there are important differences to consider in terms of sub-populations. For instance, young people continue to be the most victimized age group. The GSS reveals that the rate of violent victimization experienced by young people aged 15-24 (226 incidents per 1000 people) is more than twice the average rate for all Canadians (106 incidents per 1000 people).

Gender is another important factor to consider.   While, for instance, it is known that women and men experience similar rates of violent victimization (f=102/1000; m=111/1000), the kinds of violence they experience differ. Men are more likely to be victims of physical assault and robbery, while women are five times as likely to be victims of sexual assault.

Other factors that are generally correlated with violent victimization include: unemployment, low household income, living in an urban area, sexual orientation, and Aboriginal status. First Nations people are more than three times as likely to report being victims of violent crime.

To summarize, just over one quarter of Canadians are victims of crime in a given year.   Young people are more likely to be victims of crime than are adults. Levels of reported crime in Canada are dropping and the City of Toronto, in comparison to other large Canadian cities, is considered to be relatively safe.

Criminal Victimization Amongst Homeless Youth

As a means of assessing the experiences of criminal victimization that street youth report, we asked them a range of questions that were used in the GSS. The results of our survey (Table-4 below) show incredibly high rates of criminal victimization amongst the street youth population, with over 76% reporting at least one instance in the previous 12 months. In addition, the frequency of such victimization is quite high, with almost three quarters (72.8%) reporting multiple incidents of victimization.

Table-4
Percentage of street involved youth reporting incidents of criminal victimization, by victim characteristics (past 12 months)

Victim Characteristics	Victim of Violent Crime					Victim of Property Crime			
	TOTAL Victimiz-ation	TOTAL Violent Crime	Assault	Sexual Assault	Robbery	TOTAL Property Crime	Theft	Vandalism	Break and Enter
Total	76.3% (180)	63.6% (145)	48.2% (106)	18.6% (39)	32.9% (70)	56.5% (126)	41.5% (88)	25.8% (54)	12.0% (25)
Sex									
Females	85.9%	73.9%	52.2%	38.2%	38.8%	66.7%	48.5%	34.8%	13.8%
Males	71.8%	57.9%	46.4%	9.7%	31.0%	51.0%	38.2%	21.7%	11.2%
Age									
16-17 years old	87.5%	75,0%	62.5%	35.7%	46.7%	66.7%	57.1%	7.1%	14.3%
18-19 years old	86.7%	77.8%	57.8%	28.9%	38.6%	62.2%	50.0%	37.8%	12.0%
20-25 years old	71.8%	57.4%	42.2%	15.3%	28.0%	52.1%	39.3%	25.2%	10.4%
Sexual Orientation									
Straight	74.7%	62.3%	50.0%	13.5%	31.4%	54.6%	40.8%	26.5%	10.4%
LGBTTQ	79.2%	66.0%	45.3%	33.4%	36.0%	58.8%	43.1%	26.5%	12.2%
Race & Ethnicity									
White	77.1%	62.0%	49.4%	17.7%	31.7%	55.5%	44.0%	25.8%	11.7%
Black	74.5%	67.4%	42.2%	23.8%	29.3%	53.3%	31.8%	26.3%	12.2%
Aboriginal	75.0%	62.5%	46.9%	15.6%	18.8%	43.8%	28.1%	18.8%	9.4%
Born outside Canada	69.6%	57.8%	37.8%	25.6%	25.6%	53.3%	38.6%	26.2%	4.9%
Age First Homeless									
16 or under	82.5%	71.3%	50.5%	33.7	17.6%	52.5%	44.9%	32.7%	15.8%
Over 16	69.6%	53.5%	40.0%	14.4%	30.2%	46.9%	54.1%	20.8%	8.4%

These rates of criminal victimization amongst street youth are extremely high, when compared to the general population. There are some other notable differences. Amongst the general public, most incidents of victimization relate to property crime. Over 56% of street youth report being victims of property crime, a much higher level than reported by the general public. While one might question why people with so few possessions are victims of this type of crime, this is due to the fact that people who are homeless own very little property (this is certainly the case), it is worth pointing out that when they do own personal property, or have money, they typically carry it with them which makes them targets of crime.

It is, however, the high rates of violent crime reported by street youth, which is particularly worth drawing attention to.   Over 63% report being victims of violent crime on at least one occasion during the past year, a rate that is exponentially higher than what members of the general public typically experience. Not only that, some kinds of violent crime – such as sexual assault – are also extremely high, particularly for young women.

In conducting this research, we are very aware of the diversity of the street youth population in terms of age, gender, sexual orientation and ethno-racial background. Our analysis attempted to draw out any significant differences between these sub-populations. The most significant factors that determine the likelihood of being a victim of crime include gender (women are more likely than men to be victims), age (younger street youth are more vulnerable) and the age when one first left home (early leavers are most vulnerable). These variations will be discussed in much greater detail throughout the rest of the report.

Injury

Assessing the impact of crime can be difficult. One indication of the seriousness of violent crime is whether a person was physically injured or not and whether they sought treatment in a hospital. Having said this, it is important to note that the consequences of crime, violent crime in particular, can go way beyond physical injury. The emotional and psychological impacts of being a victim of crime can be long lasting.

In the GSS Survey of 2004, 25% of victims of violent crime reported being injured, a figure that was up from 18% reported in 1999. The percentage of street youth reporting injury as a result of

violent victimization is much higher. When asked if they were physically injured in any way as a result of the violent crime incident, 44.9% reported "yes", with 35.9% of that group reporting that this had happened on more than three occasions.   Over twenty one percent (21.7%) of violent crime victims reported that they required medical attention in a hospital as a result of the incident.

The Significance of Gender, Age and Time of First Leaving Home

Perhaps the key finding of our survey is the degree to which the experience of crime is not evenly distributed within the street youth population, and that some sub-groups are more likely to be victimized than are others. Most significant, and consistent with past research, is the fact that young women are much more likely to be victims of crime than are young men. This is true for virtually all categories of crime, though some types of crime stand out. For instance, the reported rates of sexual assault (38.2%) are very high, not only in comparison to male youth, but also in comparison to the GSS (rates of sexual assault for women was reported at 35 incidents per 1000 persons).

Amongst female street youth, those who are black or Aboriginal generally reported lower levels of criminal victimization than did white females, except in the case of sexual assault. Here, black females (47%) were much more likely to report being victims of sexual assault than were white females (33%). Sexual orientation was a significant factor in determining victimization amongst young females. Queer female youth (lesbian, bisexual) were more likely to report being victims of most forms of crime (including both property and violent crimes), and on more occasions. Sixty percent of queer female youth report being victims of sexual assault during the past year. This is perhaps the most victimized group of street youth.

In fact, young people who are sexual minorities - both male and female - were a little more likely than straight youth to report being victims of crime (LGBT=79.2%; Straight=74.7%). Much of this difference is accounted for by the much higher rates of sexual assault reported by queer youth.

In terms of race, there were no large differences reported between black, white and Aboriginal youth in terms of overall rates of criminal victimization. However, the crimes black youth reported were more likely to be violent in nature (including sexual assault).   Young people born

outside of Canada were overall less likely to report being victims of crime, except, again, in the case of sexual assault.

Age, however, is an incredibly important factor in relation to criminal victimization. Young street youth – those between 16-19 years of age (and in particular, 16-17 year olds) – reported much higher levels of victimization in virtually every category, and in particular, sexual assault. They are however, less likely to report being victims of vandalism, and this may reflect the fact that younger street youth are in possession of less personal property.

Finally, youth who were homeless for the first time at age 16 or less were considerably more likely to be victims of crime than youth who left home for the first time when they were over the age of 16. This is particularly the case for crimes involving violence (82.5% versus 69.6%). However, when we explore the interaction between age when first left home with current age (under 21 versus 21 and over), interesting patterns emerge. The 2 figures below show the experiences of violent and property victimization for four groups of youth based on when they first left home and their current age.
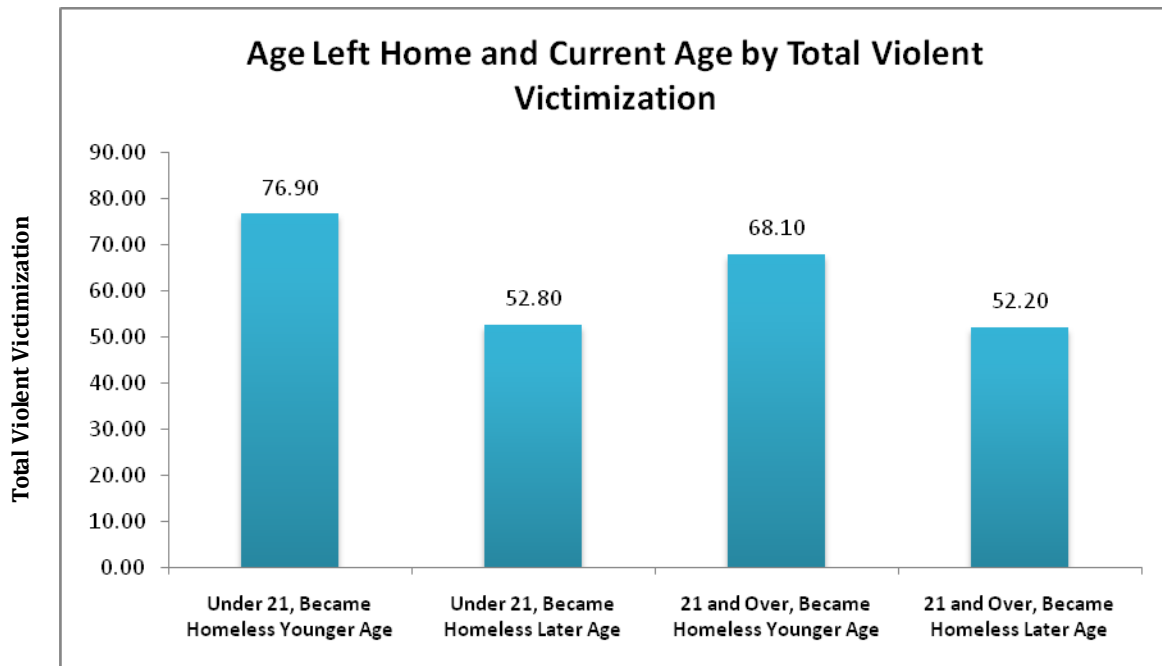
Figure-2

Figure-2 clearly shows that the two groups with the highest levels of violent victimization were those who became homeless at a younger age—both those under 21 and the 21 and over group. The groups with the lowest levels of victimization were those who became homeless for the first time after they were 16, with those currently 21 and over reporting the lowest scores of all.

Figure-3 (below) examines differences in levels of total property crime victimization, using the same 'age' and 'time left home' groupings. The relationship between age first left home and current age for property crime victimization is not as strong as is the case with violent crime. Those who were 21 and over and left home at an early age tend to have higher levels of property crime victimization than those 21 and over who left home at a younger age.

Figure-3
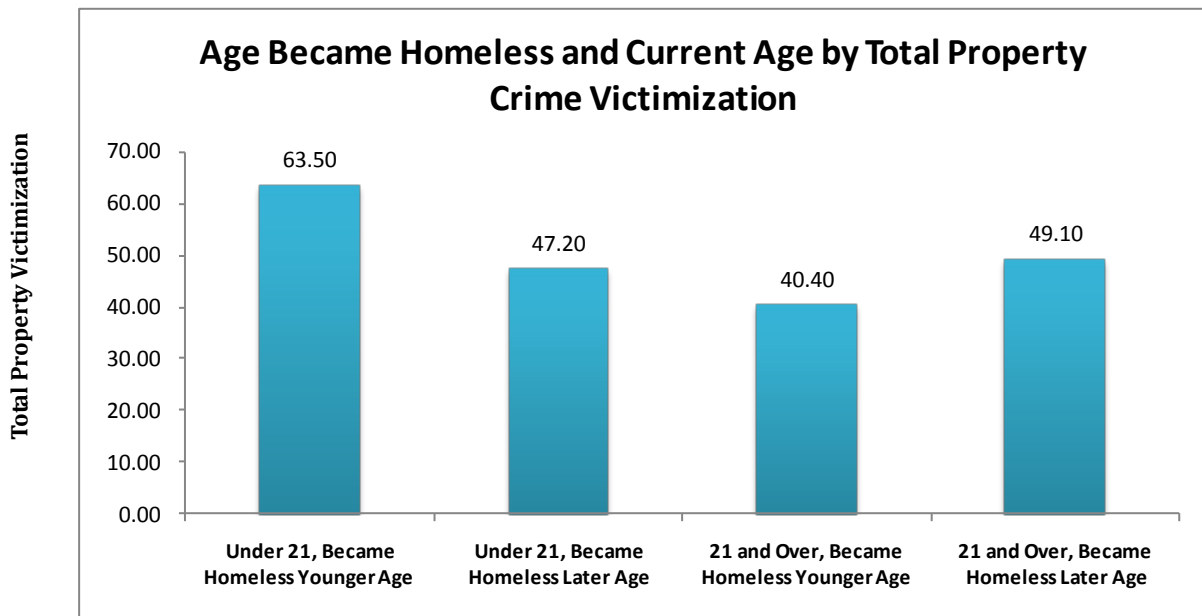
Figure-3 nevertheless shows that youth under 21 who left home at an early age had the highest levels of property crime victimization in the entire sample. This, once again, shows the strong interaction between age at which a youth left home with current age and victimization.

To explain the reasons for elevated levels of victimization among youth who first became homeless at relatively young ages, we must delve more deeply into the backgrounds and examine the present day experiences of this group of young people.

To do so, let us begin by exploring the gender and ethno-racial characteristics of this group of youth. With respect to gender, the overall ratio for the sample of approximately 2:1 (male to female) also applies for youth who took to the streets at age 16 or younger. However, the ethno-racial profile of this group, compared to those who became homeless at a later age, is notably different for three groups: white youth, Aboriginal youth, and black youth. The former two are over represented, while black youth are under-represented in terms of youth who became homeless while they were 16 or younger. Incidentally, there are only minor differences on this measure for the other ethno-racial groupings. The table below illustrates these key differences.

Table-5
Age When First Became Homeless by Ethno-racial Background

	White Youth	**Aboriginal Youth**	**Black Youth**
First Homeless 16 or younger	57.1%	63.3%	26.2%
First Homeless over 16	42.9%	36.7%	73.8%

Levels of education completed, not surprisingly, also vary according to this dimension. For instance, youth who first became homeless when they were 16 or younger were more likely to have not completed high school compared to youth who became homeless at an older age (73.8% versus 58.6%). Moreover, people who became homeless at a younger age were more likely than those who became homeless later to have had foster or group home experience (51.5% verses 32.0%). People who became homeless at a younger age were also more than twice as likely to be non-heterosexual (36% versus 15.3%). As a final background measure, having become homeless at a younger age meant a greater likelihood of having experienced contact with the police *prior* to becoming homeless than those who became homeless at an older age. (63.1% versus 52.9%).

In sum, the backgrounds of those who became homeless at a younger age are considerably different than youth who became homeless for the first time after the age of 16. According to this set of background measures, those who became homeless at a younger age experienced more turbulence in their lives growing up before ending up on the streets, compared to those

who became homeless at a later age. Furthermore, given what we know from the literature about why youth become homeless, this turbulence was likely a key factor leading to initial street involvement.

Turning to measures capturing the more recent experiences of street involvement, there is evidence to suggest that those who became homeless at a younger age were more entrenched in drug sub-cultures than youth who became homeless after 16. Take, for instance, levels of drug and alcohol use. Cigarette smoking (the drug of choice amongst street youth) is most prevalent amongst those who became homeless at a younger age (daily use 69% versus 55%). So too is alcohol use. With this measure just under half (48.5%), those who left home at a younger age drank at least once a week compared to 27.5 % of those who became homeless at an older age. These patterns are also evident when we compare daily cannabis use (48.5% versus 29.4%). While the usage of drugs such as cocaine, crack cocaine and LSD are considerably lower than are levels of tobacco, alcohol and cannabis use, the group who became homeless at a younger age tended to use these substances more often than those who became homeless at a later age.

In terms of nutrition, 19% of youth who were street engaged at a young age reported that they went without food for at least one day a week over the course of the past year. This compares to 6.1 % of those who became homeless at a later age. Another interesting finding between the two groups concerns their involvement with so called "street families." More than two thirds of those who became homeless at a younger age (68%) reported that they had been involved with a group of friends that they would describe as a street family, yet clearly the protection offered by these relationships is not anywhere near adequate. On the other hand, while it was not uncommon for those who became homeless at a later age to have similar street involved experiences, their involvements were much lower at 31.6%. Owing a pet (normally a dog), like being involved with a "street family," which can also be interpreted as a means of protection, was also higher for those who became homeless at a younger age (16% versus 9%).

A final measure of the troubles that those who left home at a younger age have experienced, concerns eviction. Just under 40% of those who became homeless at a younger age had been evicted by a landlord in the past. This compared to 26.4% for those who became homeless at a later age.

Overall, these findings have at least two important implications. First, they attest to the findings of previous research, which has shown that experiences of family trauma are inextricably linked with early street engagement. Secondly, this trauma and subsequent early street involvement are experiences that do appear to have lasting consequences. For instance, results obtained from the Yonge Street Mission Report show that youth who began street life at an earlier age consistently average a longer time on the street (Public Interest, 2009).

3.4 Intimate Partner Violence and Abuse

There can be no doubt that spousal and partner abuse continues to be a problem in Canada. We will refer to intimate partner violence and abuse (IPV) as incidents and / or patterns of physical and emotional abuse in intimate relationships, whether people are dating, common law partners or are married. This includes violent acts such as physical aggression (hitting, shoving, restraining), assault (including assault with a weapon), sexual assault, and abuse.

Intimate partner violence also includes emotional abuse, which refers to a range of acts (including controlling or domineering behaviours, intimidation or stalking) that have the outcome of isolating a person and increasing dependence, including shutting someone off from family or friends, denying them access to income, and controlling or destroying private property.

While it is worth separating violent behaviours from other forms of abuse, it is important to point out that all intimate partner abuse is likely to have an emotional impact on the victim. It can be a single humiliating event or an on-going pattern of abuse that leads to lower self-esteem and / or physical injuries. Abuse of any kind can interfere with the victim's ability to carry out tasks and to plan for the future, making it potentially more difficult to leave the relationship.

There is also a strong correlation between emotional abuse and violence. That is, women who are victims of emotional abuse are much more likely to encounter physical and sexual violence in their interpersonal relationships (AuCoin, 2005, Wilson, Johnson and Daly, 1995; Pottie Bunge, 2000). In fact, numerous studies indicate that emotional abuse is typically a precursor to other forms of physical violence.

Finally, it is important to recognize that the impact of intimate partner violence and abuse whatever its form, can be long lasting and can lead to life altering circumstances. It can also lead to homelessness.

In the 2004 GSS survey, respondents were asked a range of questions relating to intimate partner violence. In this report, 8% of women and 7% of men reported IPV in either their current or past relationships.   Two points should be made regarding these figures. First, it is well established in the literature (including GSS) that while both males and females are likely to report IPV, the kinds of abuse differ. While men are more likely to report violence in the form of threats, having something thrown at them, or being pushed, women are much more likely to report serious violent acts, such as being beaten, choked, threatened with a weapon (gun or a knife) or sexually assaulted. Second, the meaning of such abuse is different for men and women, as in most cases the severity and consequences of this abuse is generally much greater for women, who are much more likely than men to report serious and repetitive violence, injury, seek medical attention and fear for their life.

While not to diminish the experiences of men who are victims of abuse, in this report, our focus will be on the violence that women experience at the hands of their partners or spouses.   The 2004 GSS reports that 21% of women report spousal violence. Age is a key factor here, with spouses aged 15-24 being more than twice as likely to be victims of violence than are those aged 35 or older (Silver, 2007). This is significant, because our research with street youth focuses on a younger group of women as well.

Our results reveal that the level of intimate partner violence experienced by young homeless women is much higher than the rate experienced by women who are housed (reported in the GSS). In Table-6 (below) a breakdown of the kinds of IPV experienced by female street youth is presented. Overall, more than 55% report at least one incident of IPV over the previous 12 months.   A high percentage - 34.8% - report experiencing assault of some kind, ranging from threats to physical violence (23.2%). In addition, 52.9% reported some kind of emotional abuse.

In the majority of relationships characterized by partner abuse, the experience of violence is unfortunately rarely an isolated incident (AuCoin, 2005). In the 2004 GSS, over half of women (54%) who were victims of violence at the hands of their partner, reported experiencing violence

on more than one occasion. Young homeless women also report multiple occasions of partner violence, although at a much higher rate (83%).

Table-6
Intimate Partner Abuse amongst Street Involved Female Youth

Form of abuse	%
ASSAULT **In the past 12 months, has your partner ever . . .**	
. . . threatened to hit you?	27.9%
. . . hit you (slapped, kicked, punched)?	23.2%
. . . Beaten you up?	13.0%
. . . Forced you to have sex when you did not want?	7.2%
. . .USED or THREATENED to use a gun or knife on you?	10.1%
TOTAL: Percent who reported at least one incident of assault	34.8%
TOTAL: Of those who reported physical violence (any kind), the percent who experienced it on more than one occasion	83.3%
EMOTIONAL ABUSE **In the past 12 months, has your partner ever . . .**	
. . . Tried to limit contact with your family or friends?	24.6%
. . . Put you down or called you bad names to make you feel bad	42.0%
. . . been jealous and stopped you from talking to other men / women?	33.0%
. . . demanded to know who you are with and where you are at all times?	35.7%
. . . Forced you to hand over money that is yours?	15.9%
. . . forced you to earn money in ways you did not want to?	15.9%
TOTAL: Percent who reported at least one incident of Emotional Abuse	52.9%
TOTAL: Of those who reported emotional abuse, the percent who experienced it on more than one occasion.	73.0%
INTIMATE PARTNER ABUSE (including violence and emotional abuse): TOTAL	
TOTAL: Percent who reported Intimate Partner Abuse at least once during the past 12 months	55.7%
TOTAL: Of those who reported Intimate Partner Violence (total), the percent who reported it Percent who experienced Interpersonal Violence and Abuse: (more than once)	79.5%

It is also worth reflecting on the link between the experience of emotional abuse and physical violence. In the 2004 GSS, of women who experienced emotional abuse with previous partners,

37% were also being physically abused. The link is even stronger within our street youth sample. Of women who experienced emotional abuse, 61.1% also reported experiencing physical abuse and violence.

One final note is that race does not appear to be a significant factor when looking at partner abuse, and in fact black and Aboriginal females showed slightly smaller levels of physical and emotional abuse. Sexual orientation does not appear to be a significant factor either. However, the age of the respondent is significant. Young women who are 16-17 years old are much more likely to report intimate partner violence and abuse (71%) than those 20 years old or more (32%). This is true whether one is referring to violent assault or emotional abuse.

3.5   Responding to Victimization

When people are victims of crimes, they respond in different ways, depending on the severity of the incident. In this section, we explore several ways in which street youth respond to victimization. First, we examine who (if anyone) victims tell about their experiences of victimization. This can be revealing of the strength of social networks, which are not only important in terms of recovery, but also in identifying how people may think about redressing crime. Second, we look at 'protective measures' that people take to make themselves feel safer.

Informal and formal sources of support

When people are victims of crime, they generally seek support from other individuals, organizations, and institutions to help them cope with the experience. Commonly people turn to informal sources of support, such as a friend or family member, who can offer understanding, support, and guidance. Young people in particular are more likely to relate stories about victimization to close friends   (cf. Tanner & Wortley, 2002).   More formal sources of support include persons in authority who not only may provide understanding and support, but may also be able to address the transgression, or to help enhance the safety of the victim in the future. This latter category includes counsellors, psychiatrists and teachers, for instance, and formal help agencies such as community or family centres, women's centres, victim services and help lines. Finally, of course, people can and do contact the police.

In the 2004 General Social Survey, victims of crime were asked about their informal and formal sources of support. While some victims of violent crime reported turning to formal help agencies (one in ten) the majority turn to informal supports (around 90%) such as friends and neighbours (74%) and / or family members (60%).

Perhaps surprisingly, a large number of incidents do not come to the attention of the police. When police do become involved, it is not always because of the report of the victim. In some cases, this is because the victim goes out of their way to contact police, but in other cases, it is because police show up at the scene of a crime. Interestingly, only about 30% of violent crimes are reported to police, and in some cases, such as rape, the percentage is even lower. Four in ten people report instances of property crime to police, which is a higher rate than is the case with violent crime. When property loss is high, or when an insurance claim needs to be made, there is a greater likelihood of a report to police.

In general, young people are less likely to report offences to police than are people over 25. In fact, it is in only around 24% of cases that young people go out of their way to contact the police, a lower rate than for all other age groups.   Women are less likely to report violent offences to police than men (f=26%, m=38%). It is suggested that this difference is driven, in part, by the greater likelihood that women are victims of sexual assault, which as suggested above, is an offence that is less likely to be reported.

Reasons for reporting

Who one tells, and indeed whether one tells anyone, depends on a number of factors. First and foremost may be the severity or seriousness of the incident (for instance, whether one was injured or not). Minor crimes and offences may be told to friends and family, but not necessarily reported to the authorities. People also make judgements based on their assessment of whether telling someone, especially authorities might actually help. If people feel, for instance, that the police cannot or will not be able to do anything about a crime, they are less likely to report it.   The type of offence also has an impact on reporting. For instance, it is well established that certain crimes such as sexual assault and sexual abuse are generally under reported. Other crimes, such as property crime, are less likely to be reported if there is no insurance claim involved.

Finally, there are differing views regarding one's 'duty' to report. The 2004 GSS, for instance, reveals that the vast majority of victims of violent crime feel it is their duty to report the incident to the police (83%). Other reasons for reporting are a desire for the offender to be arrested or punished (74%), or the person was seeking protection and wanted the violence stopped (70%). For young people in particular, the question of a duty to report becomes complicated if social norms dictate that reporting crimes represents 'ratting' or 'snitching'.

In our survey, we asked respondents to recall the most serious crime that had been committed against them in the past 12 months. The responses were broad, reflecting a wide range of acts, both violent and non–violent. In Table 7 (below), street youth report who they told about the event in question.

Table-7
Reporting Serious Criminal Victimization

Who victims told about the most serious crime committed against them, by victim characteristics (During past 12 months, self identified)						
Victim Characteristics	**No one**	**A friend**	**Partner**	**Social worker, counsellor, Teacher**	**Lawyer**	**Family member**	**Police**
Sex							
Females	20.0	49.1%	29.1	25.5	9.1	25.6	40.0
Males	25.5	38.8	15.5	11.7	9.7	18.4	8.7
Age							
15-17 years old	43.8	43.8	6.3	0.0	6.3	6.3	25.0
18-19 years old	16.7	52.8	33.3	19.4	13.9	36.1	33.3
20-25 years old	26.6	41.7	17.7	18.8	9.4	19.8	15.6
Sexual Orientation							
Straight	24.0	43.0	19.6	14.9	9.9	23.1	19.0
LGBTTQ	15.8	42.1	18.4	21.1	10.5	13.2	18.4
Race & Ethnicity							
White	21.6	48.6	25.7	13.5	8.1	21.6	28.4
Black	33.3	40.0	13.3	20.0	16.7	20.0	13.3
Aboriginal	30.4	56.5	26.1	26.1	17.4	26.1	4.3
Born outside Canada	16.1	48.4	25.8	25.8	6.5	29.0	18.8
Total	23.0	41.8	19.4	16.4	10.3	20.6	19.4

In recalling the most serious thing that had happened in the past year, street youth most commonly reported assault (and attempted assault), theft of personal belongings, and sexual assault, but also identified a number of other issues including fraudulent and criminal acts by figures in authority ("ripped off by an employer", "theft by a landlord").

Following this, we asked respondents to relate who they told about the incident in question.   A surprisingly large percentage (23.0%) did not tell anyone about the incident, with males, youth under 18, black youth and Aboriginal youth being least likely to tell anyone.

Not surprisingly, when people chose to tell someone, it was most typically a friend or a partner. Females, older youth and minority youth were more likely to confide with social workers and counsellors. Reporting to the police was a less likely option, with only 19.4% of the total sample identifying this. Females (40%) were much more likely to report this than were males (8.7%) with Aboriginal youth being least likely of all youth to report this (4.3%). As a rule, minority youth are less likely than white youth to engage the police in such cases. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that when police are told about a crime, it is not always because the victim pursued the police. In fact, in many cases, the police simply showed up or were called by another person.

Protective Measures

Whether the fear of criminal victimization is justified or not, most Canadians take steps to enhance their personal safety. 'Protective measures' are strategies that people engage in to reduce the risk of being a victim of a crime in the future. Some of these are personal strategies that individuals will take to protect themselves, their loved ones and their property. This includes investing in locks for doors, windows, and possessions, obtaining security alarms, and adding lighting to their property. It can also mean taking steps to ensure personal safety through learning self-defence, avoiding areas considered to be dangerous, carrying a weapon, or obtaining a dog. It is also important to consider that people collectively seek to create safe public environments, through ensuring that there is adequate lighting, for instance. Finally, Canadians generally rely on the police to enhance their safety, through surveillance, preventive measures, and ensuring that criminals do not remain on the streets.

One of the realities of living in Canada is that not all Canadians have equal access to protective measures. In a relatively safe city such as Toronto, it is worth pointing out that some neighbourhoods are much safer than others. At the same time, income becomes a key determinant of safety, as individuals with more wealth are able to invest in hardware and services to enhance their safety, and to purchase homes in safer neighbourhoods.

Street youth are of course at a relative disadvantage. Nevertheless, they do engage in protective measures when possible. In Table-8 (below)we outline a number of key strategies street youth suggest they employ to enhance their safety.

Table-8
Protective Measures

Strategies street youth engage in to protect themselves from crime					
Q: In order to PROTECT yourself or your property from crime, do you or have you done any of these things in the last 12 months?	Street involved youth	Female	Male	Age Left Home	
				16<	>16
. . . changed your routine, activities or avoided certain places	49.8% (107)	47.0%	50.4%	49%	45.7%
. . . carried your possessions with you at all times.	40.1% (85)	39.4%	39.1%	40%	38.5%
. . . taken a self defence course.	10.5% (22)	9.2%	10.9%	7.5%	4.5%
. . . tried to look as tough as possible so people will leave you alone	20.5% (43)	20.0%	19.6%	24.5%	13.3%
. . . changed your phone number	20.4% (43)	30.3%	16.7%	17.9%	20.0%
. . . obtained a dog	5.7% (12)	6.2%	5.1%	8.5%	2.2%
. . . obtained a gun	6.2% (13)	4.6%	7.3%	4.3%	8.9%
. . . changed residence or moved	33.2% (70)	46.3%	25.5%	40%	26.4%
. . . decided to carry a weapon regularly	16.6% (35)	9.1%	19.6%	13.7%	13.2%
. . . I don't do anything special to protect myself	27.5% (52)	28.1%	27.8%	36.4%	36.7%

While some of these strategies are perhaps typical for teenagers (taking a self defence course, changing routine activities, or avoiding certain places), others are related to their experience of

homelessness. For instance, 40.1% report carrying their possessions with them at all times, and 20% suggest that they try to look as tough as possible so people will leave them alone. These are key strategies for people who lack access to private space, and who spend much of their time in public areas.

There are some interesting differences between males and females. Females are much more likely to report that they changed their residence or their phone number in order to ensure their safety, and this could be an outcome of the greater likelihood that they have experienced intimate partner violence.   Males on the other hand, are more likely to report that they carry a weapon with them at all times, relying on a potentially more violent solution to their personal safety.

Those who identify that they "don't do anything special" to enhance their safety are much more likely to be youth who reported no victimization during the previous month. For instance, 48.6% of those who reported no victimization gave this response, as opposed to 22.6% who reported at least one incident. A final point about protective measures relates to the age at which a youth left home. According to most measures, youth who left home at 16 or under were more inclined to have taken protective action than older leavers. For example, the youngest group of leavers were much more likely to report that they tried to look as "tough" as possible, to have changed residence and to have obtained a dog for protection. On the other hand, interestingly, the older group of leavers where more likely to have obtained a gun for protection than the younger group of leavers (8.9% versus 4.3%).

Encounters with Police

The responsibility for protection from criminal victimization does not simply fall on the individual. In a democratic society, police services (and to a lesser degree, private security) are charged with the responsibility of providing safety and protection to citizens, and to intervene when they are made aware of a crime. The relations between the police and victims of crime are complex. Not all crimes come to the attention of police, which is why there can be a large discrepancy between police-reported crime statistics and statistics derived from criminal victimization surveys. In addition, for a variety of reasons the intervention of police in criminal incidents does not always produce satisfactory outcomes for victims of crime.

While most members of the general public have few direct encounters with the police, there are many different contexts and situations in which contact can occur. In some cases, this can be in community settings, where police are doing presentations, walking down the streets, or riding bikes. In such cases, encounters typically have little to do with either investigating criminal acts of the individual involved, or responding to their victimization. In other cases, police may stop to offer help or support to a person. Finally, people may encounter police when they are suspected of having committed a crime, they have been caught committing a crime, or they have been a victim of crime. In such cases, it is the occurrence (or suspected occurrence) of a criminal act that defines the encounter between a citizen and the police.

Given the high degree of criminal victimization experienced by the street youth population, one might expect a large number of interactions and encounters with police. Overall, this is borne out by our research, where we explored self-reported encounters between street youth and police, focusing on incidents that involve victimization, helping and assistance by police, as well as incidents where the police approach street youth for a range of other reasons, including stop and searches, ticketing and arrests.

Seventy eight percent of the sample report some kind of encounter, with males (84%) more likely than females (65.7%) to report this.   Of those reporting encounters with police, 77.5% reported more than one interaction. Males are also more likely than females to report multiple encounters (m= 83%; f=63%) The circumstances under which these encounters occurred are interesting.

We asked a number of questions relating to the circumstances in which street youth interacted with police, as can be seen in Table 9 (below). While a high percentage of street youth report encounters with police, only 25% indicate that they interacted with police due to their own criminal victimization. While this is in some ways not surprising (many Canadian youth who are not homeless do not report every instance of criminal victimization to the police), the high rate of victimization amongst street youth, and the frequency with which they experience such victimization (including assault) one would think should increase the likelihood that they encounter police. In some cases, these encounters are because the victim actually contacted the police, but in other cases, it is because the police showed up to the scene of the crime (or were contacted by someone else).

Table - 9
Encounters with police by gender

Q: During the past 12 months, did you come into contact with the police . . .	Total	Female	Male
. . . as a victim of crime?			
At least once	25.10%	33.80%	20.80%
More than once	9.80%	11.30%	9.00%
Never	74.90%	66.20%	79.20%
. . . as witness to crime?			
At least once	19.20%	31.90%	13.10%
More than once	7.50%	11.60%	5.50%
Never	80.80%	68.10%	86.90%
. . . when they stopped to help you?			
At least once	13.60%	11.40%	14.70%
More than once	4.70%	2.80%	5.60%
Never	86.40%	88.60%	85.30%
. . . because they asked you to "move on"?			
At least once	36.80%	21.70%	44.10%
More than once	18.40%	14.50%	20.30%
Never	63.20%	78.30%	55.90%
. . . because they asked you for identification?			
At least once	59.80%	31.90%	73.60%
More than once	38.70%	20.30%	47.90%
Never	40.20%	68.10%	26.40%
. . . because they ran a CPIC or looked up your name on computer or over walkie-talkie?			
At least once	44.80%	22.90%	55.60%
More than once	29.70%	11.50%	38.70%
Never	55.20%	77.10%	44.40%
. . . because they gave you a ticket?			
At least once	33.00%	20.00%	39.40%
More than once	16.50%	12.90%	18.30%
Never	67.00%	80.00%	60.60%
. . . because you were being arrested?			
At least once	44.10%	34.30%	49.00%
More than once	21.10%	17.20%	23.10%
Never	55.90%	65.70%	51.00%

If not in response to criminal victimization, how, then, do we account for the high level of interaction between street youth and police? In a number of cases (13.6%), street youth indicate that their encounters with police were because police stopped to help them, including

offering of assistance, directing them to street youth services, etc. In other cases, street youth encounter police as witnesses to crime.

What is clear, however, is that the vast majority of encounters that street youth have with police are not when they are victims of crime, but rather, when they are seen as being a public nuisance, and / or suspected of a crime. That is, 71% of street youth report that on at least one occasion they were stopped and searched, asked to move on, ticketed or arrested. Of this group, over 78% report being stopped on more than one occasion. Males (81.9%) are much more likely than females (48.6%) to be stopped by the police in these situations; however, the figures are high for both groups.

4

Discussion: Criminal Victimization of Street Youth

4.1   Introduction

There can be no doubt that being a victim of a crime has an impact on one's health, mental health, and well-being. Being safe is generally considered to be a key prerequisite for leading a healthy and happy life. For young people on the road to adulthood, we know that things such as bullying, abuse, physical assault, and sexual assault can have a profound impact on one's engagement with and achievement in school, the development of a healthy sense of self, and the ability to form healthy, trusting relationships. In other words, the transition from childhood to adulthood, already fraught with many developmental challenges (physical, social, emotional), becomes much more challenging when one is (routinely) a victim of crime. While all young people may potentially be victims of crime, we also know that environmental and contextual factors (poverty, living in dangerous neighbourhoods, racism, sexism and homophobia, for instance) increase the likelihood of such occurrences.

In this report we have explored the relationship between youth homelessness and criminal victimization. Our research has highlighted the degree to which the lives of homeless youth are characterized by high levels of violence and criminal victimization. While young people in Canada are generally more likely to be victims of crime than any other age group, those who are homeless experience rates of criminal victimization that are much greater. Seventy-six percent of our street youth sample reported being the victim of at least one incident of crime in the past year, and of that group, 72% reported being victimized on more than one occasion.

Young people who are homeless have rather weak supports (relative to domiciled youth) in the event that they are victims of crime. A very high percentage (23%) report that they do not tell anyone, even friends, when they have been victimized. This is a reflection of the isolation that often comes with being homeless, and the weakness of social networks that young people are able to rely on when in crisis.

It also seems that very few street youth share their experiences of victimization with persons in authority. Only 16% reported that they told social workers or counsellors about their worst recent experience of victimization (though females were more likely to report this), and around 20% alerted the police. The latter figure is important to consider in light of the very negative attitudes street youth have about police. This may be due to the fact that street youth do not typically encounter police when they need help (when they are victims of crime) but more often when they are seen as potential perpetrators of crime.

The things young people can do to protect themselves from crime are limited by their poverty and their experience of homelessness; street youth report doing a number of things to try to make themselves safer, most notably by moving regularly or changing their routines. Many try to carry their possessions with them at all times because they lack safe storage, but it is possible that this may increase their risk of being robbed. Some young people choose to carry weapons to defend themselves, while others alter their appearance to look tougher or more menacing. While all of these strategies represent an adaptive response, the reality is that the condition of being homeless profoundly undermines any protective measures street youth engage in. Ultimately, moving regularly (presumably between shelters) and changing routines is not going to make you safe if you lack protective measures such as access to a private home with a door that locks, the ability to avoid spending time in public (and often dangerous) places, and having

adult figures (and institutions) in place to protect you and give you support. In sum, street youth do not have even the minimum level of protection available that would reduce their risk of being victims of crime or that would moderate the consequences of such victimization.

In this report, we have highlighted the degree to which homeless youth are vulnerable to crime and violence. We begin our discussion with an attempt to explain why street youth are more vulnerable to crime than are young people in the general population. Here we draw on a range of explanations to highlight the degree to which it is the experience of homelessness itself that produces the risk of criminal victimization. Following this, we address three key issues stemming from our research that we feel bear further discussion:

First, it is necessary to make clear why violence and victimization matter in any discussion of (or response to) street youth homelessness. While this may seem obvious at first glance, it is our view that the extreme degree of criminal victimization that young people who are homeless face is not adequately addressed by our response to homelessness. There are consequences to being a victim of a crime whether you are housed or not, and this includes physical injury as well as on-going mental health challenges, including depression and potentially post-traumatic stress. How the infrastructure to address youth homelessness takes up these issues and questions is worth considering.

Second, the fact that homeless youth who are very young are particularly vulnerable to crime and violence is an issue that must be addressed in terms of policy and service provision. A key finding in our study is that age matters: younger homeless youth (between 16-18) are much more vulnerable to criminal victimization than those who are older. This is particularly the case for youth who left home at an early age (16 or less), which raises important questions not only about the protective nature of emergency services, but of the importance of preventive strategies to help young people avoid the streets.

The *third* key finding is related to gender and in particular the fact that female homeless youth (especially those who are young) experience extremely high levels of criminal victimization. An important new finding from this study is that young homeless women are also subject to high levels of partner violence and abuse.

For each section, we address our key findings, and conclude with a series of questions and comments. Here we address the question of how and whether our system of emergency services for young people who are homeless has the organizational structure and capacity to ensure the safety and well-being of homeless youth. Here, we are referring to strategies to prevent victimization, but also to support young people who have been victimized, and in particular, young women and street youth under the age of 18. We conclude the discussion with a series of recommendations.

4.2   Understanding the Criminal Victimization of Street Youth

There are several factors to consider in attempting to understand and explain why homeless youth experience such high rates of victimization. As noted in section 3 of this report, there can be little doubt that what happens to young people prior to becoming homeless has an impact on their lives once on the streets.   That is, for a number of reasons, early experiences of violence and victimization increase the odds that these kinds of things will happen later in life. This alone suggests the need for more preventive measures and early intervention to protect the health, safety, and well-being of children in Canada.

Nevertheless, understanding young peoples' experiences *prior* to becoming homeless does not fully explain what happens once on the streets. We argue here that it is the situations and circumstances associated with being homeless that have a much more profound impact on the risks that homeless youth face in terms of falling victim to crime and violence.

Research in criminology has gone a long way towards explaining how one's situational or environmental context has an impact on a person's chances of being a victim of crime.   One approach, "Routine Activities Theory", provides a good place to start. This theory was first developed by Cohen and Felson (1979) as a way of explaining both offending and victimization in terms of the leisure activities of young people, particularly those activities which are unregulated

by adult supervision[6]. The basic idea is that the places people frequent, by choice or by constraint, generally carry different levels of risk, and this will have an impact on the likelihood that a person may become a victim of crime. This is so for several reasons. The first thing to note is that some places and situations increase the likelihood that an individual will come into contact with potential victimizers or criminals; others do not. Second, the places one occupies also shape the manner and degree to which one can defend oneself, either through removing oneself from a situation, or to be able to rely on public safety mechanisms such as the police. Finally, if a person is seen by a potential criminal to be vulnerable, they have something the criminal wants, and at the same time seem unlikely or unable to protect themselves or rely on others to do so, then they pose an attractive target for criminals.

Routine Activities Theory goes some ways towards explaining the circumstances of young people who are homeless. By no means, however, are the activities of homeless youth "routine," according to normative standards. The routines of street youth are unlike the routines of youth who live at home, attend school on a regular basis, work part-time and pursue leisure activities with friends and/or family on weekends. Furthermore, "normal" (especially middle-class Canadian youth) are expected to have longer term commitments that often involve post-secondary education of some sort.

Homelessness, Social Exclusion and Vulnerability to Crime

In the end, while Routine Activities Theory helps us understand what happens when young people spend (leisure) time in places that can be dangerous, it does not adequately explain how and why young people, in this case street youth, end up in such situations in the first place (Gaetz, 2004).   People who are homeless in general have little control over the places they inhabit, and have limited access to places that are safe, protected, and private. Their vulnerability is further compounded by their rather weak networks of social supports, limited

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[6] These 'ecological' approaches in criminology include the 'opportunity model of predatory victimization' (Cohen and Felson, 1979; Cohen, Klugel and Land, 1981). Put simply (according to Macmillan (2001:3), *in* extending the work of Hindelang and colleagues, those touting *opportunity perspectives* have argued that probability of victimization is influenced by: a) exposure to potential offenders; b) proximity to potential offenders; c) guardianship against victimization, and d) attractiveness as a target. Fitzpatrick, LaGory & Ritchy, (1999) have made similar arguments with regards to street youth.

access to trusted adults, and not incidentally, their compromised physical and mental health. It is not, then, that young people who are homeless choose to inhabit such spaces and places. Rather, there are a range of circumstances mostly beyond their control that limit their choices, and present them with few options but to spend time in places that are not safe.

Finding oneself in dangerous places and situations, then, is not so much about choice, but about structural factors that lead to exclusion and marginalization. The concept of *Social Exclusion*, we argue, is useful for better understanding the conditions which give rise to the circumstance that place unprotected youth as targets to motivated offenders. Often regarded as synonymous with poverty, social exclusion is a multi-dimensional concept that refers to groups or persons who are shut out fully or partially from the social, economic, political and cultural institutions of society. That is, structural factors such as poverty, unemployment, inadequate housing, racism, sexism and homophobia greatly restrict people's access to the spaces, institutions and practices that create opportunity, and which at the same time reduce risk.

For young people who become homeless, social exclusion is experienced across several intersecting domains, with the degree of exclusion becoming exacerbated the longer one remains homeless. It is a process that, in most cases, begins well before the young person in question becomes homeless, but intensifies and becomes more complex once they are removed from family and community and begin their lives on the streets.   In this case, understanding the different dimensions of homelessness requires that we look at not only the circumstances of being young and homeless, but also (and importantly) how our response to homelessness may in fact increase social exclusion, and vulnerability to crime and criminal victimization.   Below, we explore some of these factors:

Lack of safe, affordable housing and private space.   Once on the streets, homeless youth most acutely experience exclusion through their lack of access to safe, affordable (and perhaps supportive) housing, because of their youth, inexperience and (most importantly) poverty. Street youth have difficulty securing housing and, as a result, spend much of their time moving between shelters, friends' places, squats and the streets. Staying in emergency shelters often means living in congregate environments (sleeping in rooms with strangers, eating in group contexts). Rarely does it mean your own room, and the right or even access to privacy. We do know that when street youth do obtain rental housing, it is often of very low quality, temporary,

unsafe and at the margins of the housing market, where accommodations are poorly regulated, often resulting in victimization by landlords (Gaetz, 2002). One cannot underestimate the significance of having secure access to your own, private space, with a door to lock. Having access to such refuge is perhaps the minimum condition of enabling someone to be safe from stranger or acquaintance victimization.

Not having a home means that young people are excluded from the security of place and tenure, that they have much less control over their lives, their personal safety and over who is around them. Without a place of their own, many homeless youth are forced to spend much of the day (and night) in public or semi-public places such as street corners, alley ways, parks and abandoned buildings. These places are often in marginal and dangerous areas of the city.

The spatial aspect of social exclusion is important. When people become homeless, they often experience greater surveillance in public and semi-public spaces, and lacking money limits their access to a range of businesses and services. It is our perspective that public pressure, laws and police tactics often results in homeless persons being forced to live in poor and unsafe urban spaces, where the effects of "NIMBYism"[7] are less likely to be present. Because street youth are typically excluded from many of the places, spaces, services, resources and supports that many (if not most) young people have access to, their vulnerability increases.

Income generation and criminal behaviour.   These public spaces are also the places where many street youth seek friends and companionship, and importantly, it is where many seek out ways to earn money to survive. Some of these activities are illegal or quasi-legal (ranging from involvement in the sex trade, dealing drugs, theft or other petty crimes). Past research (Gaetz and O'Grady 2002) shows quite clearly that street youth engage in these activities not because they are inherently delinquent, but because they have few options. In fact, street youth are not avoiding work, the vast majority do want regular jobs but they face significant barriers to obtaining and maintaining employment. The money making activities of people who are homeless are a consequence of very limited employment options, inadequate employment supports, and the need to meet immediate survival needs through generating small amounts of cash on a daily basis (Gaetz and O'Grady 2002; Hagan and McCarthy 1997, Hagedorn 1998).

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[7] Not in my backyard.

There can be little doubt that the money making strategies people who are homeless engage in to survive present risks and dangers[8]. Money making activities often occur in unsafe and marginal places, and put people who are homeless in close proximity to other people who may be deviant or dangerous, including more powerful criminals such as pimps and drug dealers. Finally, it is worth pointing out that because street youth money making activities such as prostitution, panhandling, squeegeeing often occur in highly visible locations and produce cash in hand on a daily basis, street youth present attractive targets for criminals, in spite of their seeming poverty. That is, acts of robbery or violence against these youth are perpetrated by offenders who recognize the vulnerability of the victim and know that the victim is less likely to seek the involvement of the police (Baron 1997; Sparks 1992).

For young people who are homeless, involvement in the sex trade often becomes a means by which young people excluded from the job market are able to earn income. While 8% of our sample report involvement in the sex trade as their primary source of income, other research suggests that the percentage of young people who trade sex for food, temporary shelter or to get other needs met is much higher (Gaetz & 'Grady, 2002).   Young people also engage in the sex trade through street prostitution, internet sex, work in massage parlours and strip clubs, or through engaging in relations with specific individuals where sex is exchanged for money (or other resources) over an extended period of time. For young people with little earning potential and other barriers to economic stability, survival sex offers a way to meet needs in the short term. Unfortunately, at the same time, certain activities associated with the sex trade (notably street prostitution, work in clubs, etc.) places young people in a vulnerable situation where they are potential victims of a range of crimes, including assault, sexual assault, theft and exploitation by pimps.

Weak social capital.   The concept of social capital refers to the value of your social networks and relations in achieving goals. Leaving one's community, disengagement from institutions such as

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[8]   Research has shown that there is generally a strong positive correlation between offending and victimization (Russell 1999; Tyler et al. 2000; Terrell 1997; Whitbeck, et al. 1997).   Simply put, those who are involved in street crime are also at risk of victimization. For example, youth who engage in street level prostitution are vulnerable to violence (Loman, 2000) as well as street level drug dealing (Topalli et al., 2002). However, our previous research on street youth demonstrated that young people who were criminally involved were no more or no less likely to be victims of crime (Gaetz, 2004).

school can mean weaker social capital in the form of reduced interactions with supportive adults, and greater reliance on other marginalised youth. Dealing with the trauma of loss (of family, friends, community), moving from shelter to shelter or living on the streets, and lacking money for transportation and supplies makes continued attendance at school particularly difficult. The trajectory of social exclusion is cumulative in nature, making it difficult to escape, particularly when constant exposure to risk compromises health, safety and opportunity. Recent research shows that the longer one is homeless and the more entrenched one becomes in the street youth lifestyle, the more difficult it is to re-enter mainstream society (Public Interest, 2009).

Adolescence interrupted.   For young people who become homeless, social exclusion means being denied the protection and security of a safe home, and the supports we typically deem essential to healthy adolescent development. Rather than being granted the relative privilege of adjusting to adulthood and its responsibilities and challenges over an extended period of time, street youth experience an adolescence interrupted, whereby their process of moving into adulthood becomes truncated. In some ways, they are thrust into adult roles and responsibilities almost immediately, having to obtain shelter, being responsible for obtaining income and food and for making wise purchasing choices. Typically, they are also exposed to early sexual activity, safety issues and substance use challenges in a much more compressed time frame than we usually allow for young people growing up. All of these challenges may be faced rather rapidly, within the first several months, or even weeks of becoming homeless, at a time when young people are still suffering from the trauma of leaving their homes, families and communities, and have very limited social and economic supports to rely on.

Short-term thinking.   One of the consequences of the chaotic life circumstances of street youth is that long term thinking and planning becomes more difficult, as short term needs must be met. The immediate priorities of food, shelter and security, for instance loom much larger than is typically the case for mainstream teenagers, who are generally more able to focus on longer term goals (education, career) because they have more adequate supports. For most teenagers, immediate needs may be defined more typically in terms of leisure and recreation.

For example, a recent study of street involved youth carried out in downtown Toronto found that participants showed a strong tendency to focus on short-term rather than long-term strategies for addressing their needs. Youth selected the most visible, short-term options when making

choices about their immediate future and took few, if any, opportunities to explore long-term planning opportunities, such as pursuing a post-secondary education and/or training for an occupation. Long-term planning was unrealistic and ill-suited to current needs and circumstances. As one youth said, "it's hard to think long term when you haven't eaten" (Public Interest, 2009: 4)

Short-term strategies were thought to provide realistic benefits and reflected the pressing nature of their immediate needs. However, it also puts them in a position of vulnerability, being placed in situations where they do not have the luxury of considering the longer term consequences of behaviours (for example, engaging in unprotected sex, drug use, involvement in criminal acts). It also means that they may make compromises that are not in their interests, or forego advocating for their own rights, if there is no obvious short term benefit. This, as we will see, has an impact on the legal and justice issues of street youth.

The Emergency Response to Homelessness and Social Exclusion

In making sense of the vulnerability of street youth to crime, it is important to consider not only how the adaptive strategies of individuals may make them vulnerable, but equally important, how the Canadian response to homelessness may in fact contribute to this vulnerability. A balanced response to youth homelessness would emphasize three things: preventive measures, an emergency response, and efforts to move young people quickly out of homelessness.

It can be argued that the Canadian response to homelessness relies most heavily on the provision of emergency services, and much less so on prevention and proactive support for transitions out of homelessness. There is no strategic response to youth homelessness at either the Federal, Provincial or Municipal level (in Toronto and most Canadian cities). Instead, the Canadian response to youth homelessness is largely characterized by the attempt to 'manage' homelessness through a network of emergency services (shelters, drop-ins, etc.) and not incidentally, through law enforcement.

This is important, because being on the streets clearly leaves young people vulnerable and unprotected, and it is not clear that the infrastructure of emergency supports for homeless youth is able to provide them with the protection they need. At night, homeless youth who need a place to stay have access to a network of homelessness shelters spread throughout the city.

The shelters are virtually all co-ed, and are organized in different ways. Most involve congregate living of some sort, in that at night young people share rooms and washroom facilities. When not sleeping, shelter activities (such as eating, watching TV etc.) generally occur in congregate settings as well.

However, it is worth pointing out that for the most part, shelters are refuges for young people during the night time only. During the day and into the evenings, young people are forced to spend much of their time either in public places and spaces such as streets, parks and in some cases semi-public spaces such as shopping malls. Street youth also have access to a number of drop-ins for people who are homeless, some of these are specifically for young people under the age of 25, and others are for all ages. While some young people who are homeless manage to stay in school or get jobs, for most the circumstances of life on the streets make participation in these activities at best challenging and highly impractical.

One of the defining features of being homeless is that one is constantly on the move. Some shelters limit the length of time you can stay as a resident. Most force you to leave during the daylight hours. Along with these considerations, the routines of street youth thus must also be understood in terms of their relative transience. Compared to youth who are not homeless, homeless youth are not nearly as rooted geographically by institutions such as family or the school system. Another interesting finding from the Yonge Street Mission Report (Public Interest, 2009) was that few youth (1 in 4) hung out in areas where they sleep. And while the sample, as a whole, was generally mobile during the day, only one-half slept in the same neighbourhood over the last month. Movement, during the day and evening, were quite varied (e.g., forced departure, to escape personal conflict, to be closer to a drug supplier), and no single reason for movement stood out over others. While the authors state that "...there are no systemic causes for the mobility" (Public Interest, 2009: 49), we would argue that the lack of a safe home and connections to family and school, as well as characteristics of street youth emergency services, are systemic factors that underlie the increased mobility or transience of street youth.

It is also important to point out that the emergency response to homelessness also includes law enforcement. This includes a range of activities including community policing, efforts to move visibly homeless people out of public settings such as sidewalks and parks. This is achieved through encouraging people to 'move on', but also includes more aggressive efforts, including

issuing of tickets for misdemeanours. Perhaps the most notorious efforts to use law

enforcement to control homelessness is through the enactment of special laws that in essence

criminalize the behaviours of homeless people.   In Ontario, the passage of the Safe Streets Act

(1999) targeted 'aggressive' panhandling and squeegeeing, but arguably has been used more

generally to severely restrict the income generating activities of street youth. While there can be

little doubt that policing of the money making activities of those who are homeless has had the

effect of reducing the public visibility of such activities, there is no evidence that this has

resulted in higher rates of employment, or more safety for street youth. Rather, it has been

argued that this has led to the further marginalization of an already socially excluded group of

people (O'Grady and Greene, 2003). That is, restrictions on panhandling and squeegeeing may

force street youth into more risky money making activities, including crime and various forms of

survival sex.

In reviewing all of the above factors, it is clear that the criminal victimization of homeless youth

is best understood in terms of a combination of background experiences of violence prior to

becoming homeless, and the dangers inherent in being homeless. That is, when a young person

is homeless, they experience marginalization because they lack some of the basic protective

factors that most young people have access to: a home, supportive adults and friends, and

places to seek refuge. Being homeless means constant exposure to dangerous people and

places, a lack of safe housing and privacy and the need to engage in income generating activities

including the sex trade associated with poverty.   It is also the case that our lack of a strategic

response to homelessness creates the conditions whereby young people in crisis have to rely

heavily on emergency services, and may be more exposed to law enforcement strategies.

Homelessness, then, clearly compounds the social exclusion of otherwise marginalized young

people, and this has much to do with their experience of criminal victimization. One cannot

underestimate the importance of a safe and secure home, one that provides a degree of privacy,

a place to relax and recover.

4.3   Why Violence and Victimization Matter

Being a victim of a crime can be harmful – physically and emotionally – for anyone. The criminal victimization of street youth should draw our attention for two reasons. First, the levels of violence and victimization are extremely high when one compares street youth to the general population. Second, as a marginalized population of young people (many of whom are escaping the violence of care-givers), we need to address the degree to which exposure to such high levels of crime has a negative impact on their lives, and impairs their ability to move forward.

 We know that the consequences of victimization can potentially be quite significant. Many street youth reported being physically injured as a result of being victims of crime. Forty five percent (44.9%) reported that they had been injured as a result of a violent incident, and a third indicated they had been injured on more than one occasion. In some cases, the injuries were quite severe, with 21.7% of those who were victims of violent crime reporting that they required medical attention in a hospital as a result of the incident.

The impact of criminal victimization of course goes well beyond physical scars and injury. While we did not explore the consequences of victimization in great detail through our survey, there is a lot known about what generally happens to people when they are victims of crime, particularly violent crime. For instance, the General Social Survey results (AuCoin & Beauchamp, 2007)) identified that the overwhelming majority of victims of violent crime report that the incident impacted them emotionally. One third had their daily routines disrupted. Victims of crime are also more likely to report being 'angry' than are non-victims, to have problems sleeping, and to be much more fearful when in public places, for instance. For people who are repeatedly victims of crime, and it is worth pointing out that the majority of street youth fit this category, the problems are compounded. It could be argued that the impact is even greater when victims are unable to take steps to protect themselves (such as being able to lock doors) or rely on the protection of others. Other research points to the greater likelihood of post-traumatic stress disorder, as well as depression, substance abuse and panic (this research is summarized by Kilpatrick and Acierno, 2003). Finally, recent research points to the social exclusionary effects, with victims of crime often reporting social stigmatization and isolation (Nietlisbach and Maercker, 2009a, 2009b). For young people who are already marginalized by homelessness (in

addition to other factors such as racism, sexism or homophobia) one can anticipate the outcomes to be more severe.

It is worth considering, then, the impact of criminal victimization on the mental health of street youth, and the ability of the homelessness sector to respond. While many people in the street youth sector in Toronto have in recent years remarked that the prevalence of mental health problems amongst street youth has been increasing, there is at present no longitudinal research that demonstrates this to actually be the case.   Nevertheless, it is certainly true that within the sector, there is a heightened awareness that mental health is a core issue that must in some way be addressed through service delivery.

There are a number of Canadian studies of youth homelessness which clearly establish the degree to which young people on the streets are much more likely to suffer from an array of mental health challenges, and emotional and behavioural problems (Ayerst, 1999; Boivan, et al. 2005; 2009; Enyan, et al., 2002; Kidd & Kral, 2002; Kidd, 2003, 2004, 2007, 2009; McKay, 2009, Menkes, 1998; Cause, et a., 2000; Tolomiczenko, et al., 2001; Votta & Manion, 2004). This ranges from anxiety, depression and self-esteem problems, to more serious forms of mental illness and disorders including bipolar disorder, schizophrenia and addictions. A study by McKay (2009) highlighted the degree to which street youth "exhibit profoundly high levels of depression, anxiety (obsessive/compulsive and phobic), hostility, paranoia, psychoticism, and interpersonal sensitivity compared with healthy young adults". The degree to which young people who are homeless suffer from depression and suicidality is well established (Enyan et al. 2002; Kidd & Krall, 2002; Kidd, 2003, 2007, 2009; Leslie et al, 2002; Molnar et al., 1998; Rew et al 2001; Votta, 2004). Another study has identified that young street youth (aged 16-17) and young homeless women in particular were more likely to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (Cauce, et al., 2000).

Some of this research links the mental health disorders of street youth with their experiences prior to becoming homeless.   The experience of being homeless no doubt exacerbates pre-existing mental health problems, and creates new ones. Cauce et al. (2000) remark that "leaving a dysfunctional home situation was akin to going from the frying pan into the fire" (p. 236). A key point here is that the high levels of criminal victimization experienced by street youth undoubtedly has an impact on their mental health. And, as the emotional and behavioural

problems and mental health disorders of this population continue to go largely unaddressed, the consequences for street youth, their health and well-being, may be quite severe.

The issue of the emotional and psychological impact of criminal victimization raises questions about the role and capacity of agencies that serve young people when they are homeless. We discuss several of these concerns:

- *What is the impact of criminal victimization on the lives of street youth, and how is this issue taken up in the Canadian response to homelessness?* The high levels of victimization are clear. The long range consequences are not, and we need more research to understand this. Street youth agency service delivery models are typically built upon expectations are that street youth work towards self-sufficiency (Klodawsky, Aubry & Farrell (2006)). However, the impact of victimization on the ability of street youth to move forward with their lives must be questioned, if the problem is not explicitly recognized and addressed through systems level and agency planning and service delivery.   Prevention and intervention strategies targeting youth homelessness must address criminal victimization.

- *Is there an adequate police response to the criminal victimization of street youth?* If such high levels of victimization highlighted within this report were reported in most neighbourhoods, there would be public demands for more protection for citizens. It is not clear the degree to which the safety of street youth is a high priority for police forces across the country. Rather, there is more often expressed concern about the potential criminality of street youth, resulting in legislation such as the Safe Streets Act (1999). The safety of street youth should become a key priority.

At the same time, we need to address the relationship between repeated victimization, criminal offending and other undesirable behaviours. Given what we know about the link between victimization and behavioural disorders, if we seek to reduce anti-social and criminal behaviours amongst street youth, we need to address their safety as a preventive strategy. Leaving criminal victimization and trauma unaddressed not only produces incredible vulnerability in street youth populations, it is possible that it also contributes to many of the behaviours and activities that we consider to be undesirable; ones that produce a law and order response.

- ***What is an appropriate 'systems level' response to criminal victimization?*** At a systems level, what supports are in place to assist front line agencies in providing mental health supports for street youth dealing with trauma and other consequences of criminal victimization? Agencies require access to respectful and relevant community-based mental health supports for their clients, including in some cases crisis intervention support, therapy and in-patient treatment.   Toronto has a large number of agencies serving street youth. Other municipalities also have street youth serving agencies, it is not clear that any jurisdiction has a coordinated strategy for linking necessary health and mental health supports to the community agencies that do most of the direct work with homeless youth.

- ***What is the capacity of staff working at street youth serving agencies to provide ongoing support to homeless youth suffering from trauma and mental health disorders?*** Workers in the homelessness sector are tasked with the difficulty of having to provide a broad range of supports to people, including help with employment, health, housing, settlement, obtaining identification, addictions and mental health. This includes the very difficult work of listening to and supporting people who have been victimized and who experience trauma. A question has to be raised as to how well staff are being supported in doing such difficult and important work. There is some emerging research that suggests that agency staff who routinely work with survivors of traumatic events may suffer from secondary traumatic stress (that is, they experience trauma themselves) as well as other problems, including "burnout, compassion fatigue, vicarious trauma and countertransference" (Salston and Figley, 2003). Adequate training and support can help moderate some of these consequences. If agencies are expected to do this kind of mental health work, they need to have appropriate resources, including access to training and funding.   In 2009, the City of Toronto held a Trauma and Homelessness Workshop for agency staff. This kind of workforce development needs to be continued on an ongoing basis, and expanded in scope, with a special focus on those who work with street youth and young women.

- ***Does the way in which street youth services are organized present barriers to providing necessary support for victims of crime?*** Klodawsky, Aubry & Farrell (2006) have identified that the senior level funders of services for marginalized youth have typically placed the goal of supporting young people to be 'self sufficient' above all others, including 'care'. That

is, a fundamental expectation of the service delivery model of most street youth agencies is that street youth must work towards self sufficiency and 'success' (through employment training, getting and retaining a job, organizing one's life, obtaining and maintaining a shelter and moving towards independent living). These are all challenges for young people who are in mainstream society. It is considered part of the work of growing up, and we give young people lots of leeway to make mistakes along the way, and assume that supports (including income, shelter and adult mentoring, supervision and support) are necessary ingredients for making this happen.

The question to be addressed is how the needs of street youth who are victims of crime, and who may be suffering from trauma are taken into account. It is well known that trauma and criminal victimization interfere with people's ability to carry out day to day tasks, to think long term and make good decisions. Can expectations of self sufficiency really be fulfilled when the issue of criminal victimization remains unaddressed?

Another feature of street youth services is the notion of enforced movement. Some (not all) shelters set limits on how long one can stay, before moving on. At the same time, shelters expect young people to leave the premises during the day. This forces young people to spend much of their waking time in unregulated, unsupervised and as a result, potentially unsafe places.

- *What are the special challenges that specific sub-populations of street youth face in terms of criminal victimization?* In our study, the two groups of street youth who appear to be most vulnerable include young women, and those under the age of 18. Addressing the needs of these sub-populations as part of a strategy to end or reduce street youth homelessness becomes paramount. As Cauce et al. (200:238) argue "understanding of this gender and age-based heterogeneity may also prove important in developing prevention and intervention programs targeted to specific sectors of the population".

- *What role can legal services play in helping young people deal with criminal victimization?*   One of the key findings of this report is that young people who are victims of crime struggle to find informal and formal sources of support.   There are many circumstances and situations in which street youth may require legal information,

consultation and representation, and most certainly dealing with criminal victimization is one of them. Not having money means that the actual instances where street youth can access such resources is profoundly limited. In fact, our previous research conducted with Justice for Children and Youth identified that "in spite of the broad range of legal and justice issues that street youth are faced with, it is when they are up on criminal charges that they are most likely to engage in the services of lawyers" (Gaetz, 2002:86)

Very few cities have either appropriate or adequate levels of legal support for young people who are homeless. Toronto has benefitted from the existence of the program Street Youth Legal Services (Justice for Children and Youth), which provides free legal advice, referrals and support to homeless youth in collaboration with a broad range of street youth serving agencies. The support they provide includes helping young people deal with criminal victimization. The collaborative model they have developed is unique in Canada and should be expanded to other communities.

4.4   Age and Street Violence

More and more, researchers on homelessness are coming to understand that the term 'homelessness' papers over some very key and important differences within the population. Most notably, there has been an interest in highlighting the ways in which racism, sexism and homophobia impact on racialized minorities, women and sexual minorities (and the intersection of these sub-populations). Age is another factor that is worth considering. While Toronto and other big cities have designated services for street youth, some do not. In Toronto, there is some variation between agencies in terms of mandate (some serve young people up to the age of 18): most consider "street youth" to include homeless youth between 16-24. While in the general lifecycle, an eight year spread may not be significant, it can be argued that there are potentially huge differences between 16 and 24 year olds, in terms of physical, cognitive and emotional development, as well as education, experience, life skills and preferred social networks. Why does this matter?

One of our key findings is that age is an important factor in determining the risk of victimization

within the street youth population. We found strong evidence showing that younger members of the sample (under 20 and particularly those between 16-17 years old) were the most prone to victimization. This finding is consistent with the National Crime Survey from the United States on age and criminal victimization, which revealed "… for all crimes of violence in 1998, rates of victimization increased from 87.9 per 1,000 for adolescents 12 to 15 years of age to 96.2 for those 16 to 19 years of age, and then declined sharply with advancing age. By age 65, the rate was 4.4 per 1,000 or one twentieth the rate for adolescents" (Macmillan, 2001:4).

Young street youth may be more 'attractive targets' to criminals not just because of the spaces and places they inhabit, but because their age may increase their vulnerability. It is likely the case that those in their early teens are less developed physically and cognitively, and have less experience of the streets and knowledge of how to keep safe, than do older teens or young adults.   Complicating the situation is the fact that while on the one hand homeless youth may be more likely to inhabit such dangerous places, on the other hand, they are less likely to be able to escape to safer refuges such as homes or other buildings that offer protection, including locks and adult supervision.

In terms of our findings, it is not surprising then that the youngest members of the sample reported the highest levels of victimization. This applied to all areas of victimization, with the exception of vandalism (suggesting, perhaps, that older street youth have more possessions). Most striking was the high levels of violent crime reported by younger teens aged 16-17 (75%) compared with their counterparts over the age of 20 (57%). Younger street youth were more than twice as likely to report sexual assault in the previous year (age 16-17: 35.7%; age>20: 15.3%).   They were also more likely to report being victims of intimate partner violence and abuse (71%) than those 20 years old or more (32%). This is true whether one is referring to violent assault or emotional abuse.

Another age-related factor that has an impact on victimization is the age at which one left home. As we found, those who left home at 16 or younger had experienced victimization in levels which exceeded those recorded for youth who left home after 16. Our findings indicated that those who first left home when they were 16 or younger were more likely than other youth in the sample to be LGBT, had not completed high school, had lived in a foster or group home, and had experienced early contact with police. These factors are likely indicative of either family conflict or victimization when these youth were children or young adolescents.

There is a degree to which the two factors above intersect. That is, the young people that we interviewed were in many cases more likely to have left home at an earlier age than was the case for older street youth we spoke with. These findings are clearly relevant for understanding the interaction we found in this study relating to victimization, current age, and age when youth first became homeless. It is now firmly established in the literature that youth who are victims of abuse or neglect are more likely to become homeless. Moreover, since such victimization is linked to several psychological problems, youth who became homeless at young ages are truly disadvantaged. It should come as no surprise, then, that a group of youth who are homeless, have not completed school, have little if any employment experience, may be LGBT and who are psychologically distressed while trying to survive in an environment where they are exposed to potential offenders, are in proximity to potential offenders, and have little guardianship against victimization become attractive targets to criminal victimizers.

The fact that younger homeless youth are so much more likely to be criminally victimized raises important questions about the way in which homeless services are organized. We discuss several of these questions and concerns:

- ***What are the longer term consequences of early exposure to violence and victimization?***
  Our finding that street youth who are younger, and those who became homeless at an early age are more vulnerable to crime and violence can be related to psychological research showing that violence experienced early in the life cycle has important developmental implications. Research on psychological well-being attempts to identify events and experiences early in the life course that put people at risk for continuous or repetitive distress over the life course (Coyne & Downey 1991). Violent victimization is one such experience that influences psychological well-being over the life course. Victims of physical and sexual abuse before adolescence have increased prevalence of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. (White et al., 1988). Moreover, such early victimization has also been seen as a precursor to criminal behaviour and further victimization (Macmillan, 2001).   Early exposure to violence thus has developmental implications for street youth, and this needs to be explicitly addressed.

- ***How might the Canadian response to homelessness be structured to meet the needs of street youth under the age of 18?*** This is an important question to ask, for generally

speaking we acknowledge that the needs of 16 year olds vary greatly from those who are in their early 20s. This is true in terms of how we organize our institutions and services (education, corrections, automobile licensing, access to alcohol, etc), and also in terms of the expectations we have of young people in general regarding decision-making, maturity, independence and autonomy, and the need for adult supervision and support. It is worth asking how the homelessness sector (as a system) and individual agencies take up the significance of these age differences.

In the absence of a strategic response to youth homelessness (at the national, provincial and local levels), a broad network of community-based youth services has developed across the country (though many communities lack youth specific homelessness services). The age mandates of the organizations vary. Whether specific organizations plan their services to effectively meet the needs for support, adolescent development, safety and protection is unclear. In light of our findings, this clearly is an important issue to address.

- *For street youth who become homeless prior to the age of 16, what services and supports are available?* Because Ontario laws mandate that unprotected children under the age of 16 are to be in the care of Children's Aid Society, street youth agencies have historically been in a difficult situation in terms of providing services for the underage population. While there is an agreement that such agencies can provide some level of service for homeless youth under the age of 16, the ambiguity in the application of the law (this ambiguity is likely experienced by the youth themselves) means that many young people who become homeless at an early age may go 'underground' and be beyond the easy reach of the youth homelessness sector. This further increases the vulnerability of a group of young people we now know to more likely be victims of crime.

- *Given the vulnerability of young street youth, should a strategic response to youth homelessness shift from the provision of emergency services to prevention?* It is very clear that those who leave home at a young age are more vulnerable to violence and crime. The most appropriate response is to prevent such young people from becoming homeless in the first place. A strategic response to youth homelessness would shift responsibility from the homelessness sector, to other social and health sectors, including those responsible for child welfare, mental health, addictions, justice and the education system.

4.5   Gender and Street Violence

Violence against women has been long recognized as a human rights issue, one that both underlies and perpetuates women's poverty.   In 1993, the United Nations put forward a "Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women". In that declaration, such violence was defined as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm done towards women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life" (United Nations General Assembly, 1993).

In recent years, researchers have begun to turn their attention to the significance of gender in their analyses of homelessness (Novac, et al., 2002; Novac et al, 2009; Paradis, et al, 2009; Klodawsky, 2006). While some of these studies have focused on street youth (Klodawsky, 2006; Klodawsky, Aubry & Farrel, 2006; O'Grady and Gaetz, 2004; Reid, Berman & Forchuk, 2005) the majority have focused on adult homeless women. Nevertheless, this emerging body of research provides valuable insights into our understanding of victimization and homelessness. In fact, the higher rates of criminal victimization of young homeless women are best understood in the context of violence against women in Canada. Most analyses of violence against women take note of the fact that such violence is rooted in a broader inequality between men and women, where women typically lack the power, resources and opportunities open to men[9].   The point is that violence, whether experienced in the home, on the streets, in the workplace, etc., is the outcome of this inequality.

There is also a relationship between the violence women experience, and poverty. This is a bi-directional relationship. First, women who live in poverty are often at greater risk of experiencing violence and abuse, because their options and opportunities are more profoundly limited. That is, the ability to 'escape' a violent relationship or situation is constrained if one lacks the resources, connections or opportunities that enable one to leave a situation, create a safe environment and start again.   A recent report by METRAC demonstrates that "Violence limits women's opportunities; it undermines and erodes women's capabilities, jeopardizes their

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[9]   It should be noted that such structural analyses do not by definition mean that in every single case or in every relationship, power and domination play out in the same way. Statistical generalizations can not be used to explain individual events or cases, but rather, help us understand broader trends.

physical, psychological and economic security, and undermines their power" (METRAC, 2008:9)

On the other hand, poverty is often the outcome of domestic and interpersonal violence. Many women who flee domestic violence find themselves living in poverty, and a significant number become homeless for varying degrees of time (Novac et al., 2002). This includes both women with children (most homeless families are headed by women [10]), as well as unattached women. This is also true of street youth, where researchers have repeatedly found that young women who become homeless report a history of violence at home, including witnessing the abuse of their mothers (Cauce et al., 2000, Robertson & Toro, 1999; Rotherham-Boris, et al., 1996) as well as being victimized themselves by physical, sexual and emotional abuse (Novac, et al., 2002; O'Grady and Gaetz, 2004; Reid, Berman & Forchuk, 2005).

Yet the relationship between experiencing violence at home and becoming homeless is not so straight forward for young women. Fleeing an abusive and violent situation and as a result winding up absolutely homeless and living on the streets, or entering the shelter system is not always an easy or obvious course of action for young women, who are not unaware of the risks that they will face in those environments. A 2007 study by the YWCA highlights the degree to which women face a much greater fear of poverty and homelessness than do men, when attempting to leave violent relationships (Dale, 2007). Women are caught in a "cycle of repeated acts of severe violence within the context of subordination, lower wages, childcare responsibility and other limited options" (Dale, 2007).

For young women fleeing domestic violence, the fears of poverty and homelessness are not unfounded. Numerous studies indicate that when women do flee relationships characterized by violence and abuse, the risk of homelessness and food insecurity increases (Tolman & Rosen, 2001). This means that when experiencing violence and abuse, women are often forced into either becoming homeless or remaining in violent and abusive situations. Some will remain in, or return to, abusive relationships because of the consequences and/or fear of poverty and homelessness. In a recent METRAC report, the authors remind us that leaving "home and as a result winding up absolutely homeless and living on the streets, or entering the shelter system is not always an easy or obvious choice for young women, who are not unaware of the risks that

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[10] Families that experience homelessness are also more likely to be racialized (including Aboriginal, immigrants and or refugees)(Paradis, et al 2008, 2009).

they might face in those environments" (METRAC, 2008: 29). This partly accounts for the lower numbers of women who are visibly homeless, relative to men.

Research on street youth in Canada consistently shows that females account for about a third of the population (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002; Public Interest, 2009; McKay, 2009). While the research is consistent on this issue, the reasons why the numbers are lower are worth exploring. It has been argued that the streets, as a destination for those fleeing violence or otherwise problematic home lives, are a masculinised space, meaning that males (and male culture) tend to dominate these spaces (Huey & Berndt, 2008; Klodawsky, 2006; O'Grady and Gaetz, 2004;09). Women who are fleeing their homes may be less visible in the spaces we typically associate with homelessness (on the streets, in alleys, homeless shelters, etc.) because they are part of the 'hidden homeless' such as "squatting in an employer's empty house or exchanging sex for shelter" (Klodawsky, 2006:366), or they may move quickly to become more permanently housed by moving in with (male) partners. Even when the latter situation is unsafe or abusive, it is argued that many women will take this course of action ahead of winding up on the streets.

The perception that the streets are unsafe if you become homeless is of course not unfounded. This appears to be particularly true if you are young, homeless and female. One of the key findings of our research is that female street youth are more likely to report being victims of crime (85.9%) than young males (71.8%). These higher rates of victimization hold across all criminal code categories, including property crime and violent crime. Notably, 38.2% reported being victims of sexual assault.

Amongst female street youth, those who are racialized minorities were less likely to report being victims of crime, with one exception. Black females were much more likely to report sexual assault (47%) than were white females (33%). Sexual orientation was a significant factor in determining victimization, with queer female youth (lesbian, bisexual) more likely to report being victims of most forms of crime (including both property and violent crimes), and on more occasions. Sixty percent of queer female youth report being victims of sexual assault during the past year. We argue that this is perhaps the most victimized group of street youth.

As part of our research, we also explored the degree to which young women who are homeless have a have a history of abusive relationships, also known as intimate partner violence and

abuse (IPV). Interestingly, this is an issue that has not attracted attention of researchers in the past. We found that young women who are homeless also report extremely high levels of IPV; rates that are much higher than are found amongst the general population.   Over 55% report at least one incident of IPV (and of those, 79.5% reported more than one incident). Fifty three percent reported emotional abuse, and 35% reported violence. There is a need to further explore the relationship between interpersonal violence and homelessness, as such violence is clearly not only a cause of losing one's home, but is also an ongoing factor in intimate relationships while young women remain on the streets.

How homeless youth respond to being victims of crime is also related to their gender. While victimized homeless females are more likely to confide in others than are males, they also adopt different strategies and protective measures to reduce their risk of being victims of crime in the future.   Males are more likely to opt for carrying weapons. Females more often will report changing their routines, moving residences (shelters), changing their phone numbers, etc., suggesting that they are perhaps more likely to perceive their potential victimizers as known persons rather than strangers.   This is in part explained by the high rates of interpersonal violence that they experience.

The experience of violence and criminalization is central to the lives of young women who are homeless. Many have fled households and homes where they were victims of physical, sexual and emotional abuse; knowing that the streets, spaces and places that people who are homeless are forced to occupy are rarely safe, and that being a young women likely increases the risk of victimization. And it is worth pointing out that becoming homeless is not always, or even usually a personal decision. For young women fleeing violent and abusive situations who have no family or social supports available, the shelter system is the only 'choice' to be made. This means that young women who are homeless are often thrust into places, environments and situations over which they have little control, almost no privacy and a significantly reduced ability to protect themselves, their bodies, their health and well-being.

The strong evidence we have that young women who are homeless are exposed to such high levels of violence and criminal victimization is not only disturbing, but once again raises questions about our response to homelessness. We discuss several of these questions and concerns:

- ***How does the street youth services sector take up the issue of gender and violence against women in its service delivery models?***   While research consistently shows that around one third of homeless youth in Canada are unaccompanied young women, it is not clear the degree to which their needs and circumstances are addressed either at the systems level (in terms of a strategic response to youth homelessness), or agency level.

  What is the most appropriate response to the needs of young women who are homeless? Young women who are escaping homes characterized by violence and abuse must be able to imagine, experience and develop autonomous, safe and private spaces to live and grow into adulthood. A key question to be asked is whether the systems of shelters and drop-ins for homeless youth across Canada provide such spaces, places and supports. The needs of young women must be addressed not only at the level of how individual agencies operate, but also at the systems level. That is, a clearly articulated strategy to address youth homelessness, one that coordinates and integrates services, must articulate a response to the special needs and circumstances of young homeless women.

- ***Are there things the street youth sector can learn from the system to support women fleeing family violence?***   In response to the reality and prevalence of violence against *adult* women, there has developed an infrastructure to support women (and their children) who are fleeing such violence and abuse, including help lines, family resource centres, emergency shelters for abused women and transitional housing.   In the 2004 GSS survey, it was reported that one in ten women who were victims of domestic violence sought some kind of help or support from agencies with a mandate to help victims of crime. Interestingly, in many settings (including Toronto), this infrastructure has developed alongside the broader system of services (including emergency shelters) to support people who are otherwise homeless.

  The emergency system for women fleeing family violence (in Canada) accommodates around 6,000 women and children on any given night, according to a 2004 survey (Taylor-Butts, 2005). In 2008, approximately 100,000 women and children accessed shelters for abused women. This emergency shelter system often operates on principles different from other forms of emergency shelter. For a start, these services and supports are designed for women who are fleeing physical, emotional and sexual abuse. Recognition of such violence

is the reason for their existence, and policies, programs and service philosophy follow from that. For instance, in many cases, adult males are not permitted on the premises, in order to ensure the safety of the residents, but also in recognition that many are recovering from the trauma of assault associated with abuse at the hands of males. Are these approaches to service delivery transferrable to the street youth sector?

- ***Do mixed gender service delivery models in the street youth sector adequately meet the needs of young females, or do they create special challenges?*** In the past there was a single shelter in Toronto that served only young women. Stop 86 has since merged with Woodlawn Shelter (which provides a number of beds for single women under the age of 25), and there are several shelters for pregnant teens and young mothers. Today, the vast majority of street youth services (shelters, drop-ins, etc.) are open to both males and females, and few have gender-specific programming. While in the past there have been programs and services developed for young women (support groups, for instance), these have largely been ad hoc in nature.   The question of whether this provides young women adequate protection, or the support they need must be addressed. Is it appropriate for young women who have experienced violence at the hands of males (whether strangers, friends or partners) to spend much of their time in congregate settings with both males and females present? This is the situation in most street youth serving agencies.

- ***Are there adequate supports in place for young couples who are homeless?*** Most street youth services whether drop-ins, shelters or health services are oriented to the needs of the individual. That is, by and large the sector treats young people as unattached individuals, and provides service on that basis. The vast majority of emergency shelters (for people of any age) do not permit couples (gay or straight) to share a room and sleep together. Such forced separation may increase their vulnerability (some couples will avoid staying in shelters altogether), and undermines the development of healthy relationships. A service delivery model that treats street youth as lone, unattached individuals may undermine the development of healthy partnerships. Given the high levels of partner violence and abuse, and the fact that many street youth currently have (or have had in the past) partners, the role that agencies might play in supporting healthy relationships should be explored.

5

Conclusion and Recommendations

In introducing the Ontario Safe Streets Act legislation in 1999, then Attorney General Jim Flaherty proclaimed:

"Our government believes that all people in Ontario have the right to drive on the roads, walk down the street or go to public places without being or feeling intimidated. They must be able to carry out their daily activities without fear. When they are not able to do so, it is time for the government to act." (Ontario Legislative Assembly 1999)

At face value, this is a worthy sentiment. Striving to ensure safety is a call that all levels of government should heed.   However, the desire to address public fears without an assessment of real risk can lead to bad policy and a flawed approach to criminal justice. If some members of the public 'fear' others because of their skin colour, the fact they look different, wear different clothes, are visibly poor or are young, it is not incumbent upon government to enact laws or enforcement strategies that target such people. In fact, the very people we may fear are the ones who may be most at risk of being victims of crime. This is the case with young people who are homeless.

There can be little doubt that young people who are homeless are exposed to unimaginable and definitely unacceptable levels of violence and criminal victimization. This is a situation that should be alarming to most people, and is in need of response. Few groups in our society experience violence and criminal victimization at levels reported by our street youth sample. The existence of this problem raises serious questions about our Canadian response to homelessness, the lack of an integrated preventive strategy to address youth homelessness, and our use of law enforcement as a strategy to contain homelessness, rather than to keep homeless people safe.

There are ways in which we can protect the safety, health and well-being of homeless youth from reasonable threats. On one level this may involve changes in how our emergency services (shelters and drop-ins) operate. On another level, if we are truly concerned about the safety of street youth, we must address their homelessness. It is not merely the inadequacy of homeless services that accounts for criminal victimization. Rather, it is the fact that we allow young people to become homeless – and remain that way for a long time – that ultimately puts them at risk.

So, in framing recommendations for this report, it is important to state that the solutions to reducing and preventing violence against homeless youth do not lie at the feet of the homelessness sector alone, which is already overburdened with responsibility while also being chronically underfunded. The youth homelessness sector already carries too heavy a burden of responding to the weaknesses and failures of other sectors or systems, including child protection services, corrections, mental health and addictions, settlement services, education and housing, for instance.

Addressing violence against homeless youth means adopting a different approach to youth homelessness, one that is more strategic and comprehensive; one that frames prevention and rapid transitions out of homelessness as being as important as the provision of emergency supports and a law enforcement response. This is a responsibility of all levels of government in Canada.

The recommendations that follow have been formulated with this in mind. In the end, we must recognize that as long as we allow young people to be homeless, they will continue to be at risk.

Recommendations

1.   Government of Canada

1.1   The Government of Canada, as part of its Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS), must adopt a strategy to end youth homelessness.

A strategic response to youth homelessness must emphasize prevention and quick transitions out of homelessness, in addition to emergency services. The HPS should also require that all designated communities develop a similar strategy, and that sufficient funds be put in place to operationalize such plans. Of course, the development of such a plan must go hand in hand with a robust national effort (and investment) to boost the supply of affordable and social housing. A strategy to end youth homelessness will not be successful if the burden of dealing with youth homelessness falls on a chronically underfunded sector of agencies serving the homeless.

1.2   Led by the Government of Canada's Homelessness Partnering Strategy and Status of Women in Canada, all levels of government must develop and implement a strategy to respond to the needs of young women who are homeless.

Given what we now know about the extremely high levels of criminal victimization experienced by young females who are homeless, it becomes ever more clear that the needs of young women must be addressed not only at the level of how individual agencies operate, but also at the systems level. There is a need to develop a clearly articulated strategy that ensures young women are offered appropriate protection (including access to gender-specific services), supports for the development of healthy relationships, programs to prevent homelessness and supports to move quickly into safe, affordable and supportive housing.

2.   Provincial Government(s)

2.1   The Province of Ontario must develop a strategy to end youth homelessness that includes a focus on prevention.

The Government of Ontario is a major funder and provider of services for people who are homeless or who are at risk of homelessness, including health, housing, education, employment, child welfare services and corrections and justice. Nonetheless, it has not developed a strategic response to youth homelessness. Its strategy should not only include more direct support for emergency services, but should ensure a comprehensive approach that works across government departments and ministries.

2.2   The Child and Family Services Act should be amended to enable young people to continue their involvement with Children's Aid Societies to a more appropriate age.

Under current laws, many young people who have been receiving care and support from Children's Aid societies either leave care, 'age out' of the system, or are otherwise unable to continue accessing support. It is recommended that provincial laws be changed to ensure that:

- If you are in the care of a society before 16, you can continue to have support until you are 21 or otherwise living independently.

- If you voluntarily leave the care of CAS before turning 18, you will be entitled to re-enter care up to the age of 21.

- Young people age 16 or 17 should be able to access the support and services of a society voluntarily even though they cannot be apprehended.

2.3   The Province of Ontario should establish an inter-ministerial committee to develop an effective intervention strategy to reduce the number of young people between the ages of 12 and 17 who wind up homeless and to ensure seamless access to appropriate services.

There is clear evidence that people who become homeless at an early age are more likely to remain homeless longer, and are more vulnerable to criminal victimization. Working in concert with the homeless youth sector and the Provincial Child Advocate, an inter-ministerial agency would bring together key players from child welfare and community services, housing, health, corrections and education to address the problem of early youth homelessness. An effective intervention would focus on preventive strategies, would address problems in the current child welfare system that lead young people to flee care, and would include effective client-based interventions to help young people who wind up homeless to find the kinds of supports that meet their housing, health (including mental health), educational and developmental needs.

As part of a strategy to reduce the number of youth who wind up homeless at an early age, it is recommended that research be conducted to better understand the systemic conditions which cause youth to flee group homes.

2.4 Regional health authorities across Canada (in Ontario, the LHINs) and the mental health sector must, in partnership with the youth homelessness sector, develop and adopt a targeted strategy to address youth homelessness.

In responding to the trauma that is associated with being a victim of crime, street youth serving agencies require access to respectful and relevant community-based mental health supports for their clients, including in some cases crisis intervention support, therapy and in-patient treatment. The targeted strategy should include:

- ensuring there are adequate supports in place (including effective discharge planning) in order to prevent young people with serious mental health challenges from winding up in the homelessness sector. This includes the development of more effective respite supports for young people who are assessed or admitted to health care facilities because of mental health disorders.

- working collaboratively with the homelessness sector and community-based health care providers (such as Shout Clinic) to provide support for staff and clients who are dealing with trauma, depression and other mental health challenges.

- working with the City of Toronto to ensure adequate professional development training be made available to support workers in shelters and drop-ins to support victims of violence and trauma.

2.5 The Government of Ontario in partnership with Legal Aid Ontario, must ensure ongoing funding and support for Justice for Children and Youth's Street Youth Legal Services (SYLS) program.

Young people who are homeless routinely have to deal with complex legal and justice issues, including their own criminal victimization. These same young people are often reluctant to try to access conventional legal services if they are available. They may have previous bad experiences or may have mental health or addiction issues that interfere with the ability of conventional legal services to help.

SYLS has been helping these young people for 11 years and the affected young people and the agencies that serve them count on SYLS and its continued existence yet it has no stable funding and its future is always uncertain. It is a trusted and valued legal service whose future should not depend on project funding or private donations. In order to ensure that a homelessness strategy is accountable and works as intended, legal services for homeless youth must be certain and available. Street-involved youth are both poorer and more vulnerable than other Ontario populations; their legal needs are greater than other groups and are distinct to them; yet legal aid does not currently fund legal services specifically for them.

3. Municipal Government (City of Toronto)

3.1 The City of Toronto (and other municipal governments across Canada) must develop a strategy to end youth homelessness.

This will involve working collaboratively with the network of street youth serving agencies in Toronto to develop a comprehensive community plan and integrated service delivery model. This will also involve working with regional health networks, the mental health sector, Toronto police services and the Province to ensure a plan can be put in place that focuses on prevention and transitions out of homelessness.   This must include a range of options regarding safe, secure and supportive housing, real opportunities for education, and alternatives to dangerous and destructive income generating activities such as crime and survival sex.

Because the face of homelessness has changed dramatically over the past 20 years, such strategies must take account of diversity. While this report highlights the vulnerability of two sub-populations (females and young street youth), others also face risks and challenges because of their minority status, including people of colour and those who are sexual minorities. The City of Toronto, for instance, should ensure that LGBT youth have access to safe shelters, drop-ins and other services designed to meet their specific needs, and to offer them protection not only from criminal victimization per se, but from homophobia. Safety is not just defined by homelessness, but is also shaped by other factors related to discrimination.

3.2 The City of Toronto should support street youth serving agencies in developing strategies to meet the needs of young people who are victims of crime.

Street youth serving agencies provide most of the front line contact with young people who are homeless in the City of Toronto. Agencies should be given resources, training (See recommendation 3.5) and other supports in order to enable them to:

- provide ongoing support for young people who are victims of crime and who may be experiencing depression or trauma as a result;

- ensure that protective measures are in place for young people who are at risk of being victimized;

- provide appropriate referrals and supports;

- implement special provisions for youth with companion animals. Sometimes street youth acquire pets for safety. However, such animals are generally banned from shelters and social service agencies, forcing youth to choose between caring for their pet and obtaining shelter, food, and other necessities. Shelters should allow pets to stay overnight and provide bedside kennels for their safe boarding.

3.3   The City of Toronto should open separate shelters (with day time programming) for young women who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

In the past, the City of Toronto had a shelter for young homeless women run by the YWCA (Stop 86). Currently, the overwhelming majority of shelters and services for homeless youth are co-gendered, which is problematic for young women fleeing violence (including partner abuse), and may present a barrier for some women who come from ethno-racial or religious communities that do not look favourably upon such arrangements. A new shelter for young women should be established, with special targeted programs and supports that would give young women a credible alternative to using co-ed services. While this is a recommendation for the City of Toronto, all jurisdictions should strive to provide this service.

3.4   Street youth serving agencies should be funded to remain open to young people twenty four hours a day.

Most shelters close during day hours, and residents are forced to leave the premises. Allowing young people to stay in the shelter during the day because they fear for their safety, or because they require care to deal with trauma, is a humane approach to shelter provision.   The City should end per diem funding for shelters and move to a base funding model, to give shelters more flexibility to protect clients and develop appropriate programs (including day programs) to help them move forward with their lives. This approach has been adopted in several jurisdictions in the United States, including Columbus Ohio.

3.5   The City of Toronto should work with street youth serving agencies to develop and host a series of workshops aimed at preventing intimate partner violence and criminal victimization.

Funds provided by the City of Toronto should be used to create programs and workshops youth can take to reduce their chances of involvement in IPV and/or criminal victimization. This would involve gender-specific initiatives such as self-defence classes for young women and anger management workshops for young men. It would also involve a couple-specific program that teaches youth communication and problem-solving skills. Incentives should be offered for participating, for example movie passes that allow couples to enjoy an activity together.

3.6   Toronto Police Services must establish a Youth Homelessness Safety strategy.

As part of its approach to fair and equitable policing, the Toronto Police Services should work with a coalition of street-youth-serving agencies to develop a more positive

strategy for working with homeless youth in order to ensure that their safety becomes a priority. The strategy should include the development of a "homelessness community policing unit" with a mandate to work with the City of Toronto Shelter, Housing and Support administration and street youth agencies to develop strategies to enhance the safety of homeless persons, and to build stronger relationships with service providers and people who are homeless through addressing their concerns. This unit should also be responsible for investigating and responding to specific complaints regarding criminal victimization of homeless persons. The police should establish an ongoing 'homelessness community consultative committee' similar to those established for working with other marginalized communities.

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