

# research snapshot

summarize mobilize



## Street youth are more likely than housed youth to be victims of crime

### What is this research about?

While all Canadians are at risk of being victims of crime, some people are more likely than others to be victims. For example, teenagers are more likely than the elderly to suffer from crime. First Nations peoples are also at a greater risk. Some neighbourhoods are more dangerous than others. Who you are, where you are, and the resources you have access to can have a huge impact on your risk of victimization. But to what extent are homeless youth – also known as ‘street youth’ – likely to become victims of crime? This is a useful question since street youth are often described as criminals – dangerous and delinquent young people who represent a threat to other citizens.

### What did the researchers do?

Researchers at York University and the University of Guelph, working with Justice for Children and Youth, interviewed 244 homeless youth in Toronto about life on the streets, including their experiences as victims of crimes.

### What did the researchers find?

Street youth are much more likely than housed youth to be victims of crime and violence. Housed youth tend to be victims of crime related to property, such as theft. But street

### What you need to know:

Being homeless exposes young people to dangerous people and places. It marginalizes youth and makes them more vulnerable to violence and victimization.

youth are more likely to experience violence. When they *are* victims of crime, their networks of support are weak. Being homeless also limits the ability of young people to protect themselves. This makes them more vulnerable to crime and victimization. In fact, the younger you are, and the earlier you leave home, the more vulnerable you are to becoming a victim of crime.

Young homeless women are much more likely than young homeless men to be victimized. They report high levels of sexual assault. They also report high rates of abuse from intimate partners. Among female street youth, black females, in particular, are very likely to experience sexual assault. Queer females make up the most victimized street youth population.

### How can you use this research?

The Canadian response to homelessness tends to rely too much on emergency services. Canadians are far less focused on preventing

homelessness and helping people transition out of homelessness. There is no strategic response to youth homelessness at the Federal, Provincial, or Municipal levels (in Toronto and most Canadian cities).

Homelessness is mostly just 'managed' through shelters and law enforcement.

The Government of Canada, as part of its Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS), must adopt a strategy to end youth homelessness. Led by the HPS and Status of Women in Canada, all levels of government must develop and put in place a strategy to respond to the needs of young homeless women. The Province of Ontario must develop a strategy to end youth homelessness that includes a focus on prevention. Young people should be allowed to stay involved with Children's Aid Societies longer.

The Province should also establish an inter-ministerial committee to develop a strategy to reduce the number of young people (ages 12-17) who wind up homeless and to ensure that they have access to the appropriate services. In general, regional health authorities across Canada and the mental health sector must develop strategies to deal with youth homelessness. The Government of Ontario must ensure ongoing funding and support for Justice for Children and Youth's Street Youth Legal Services (SYLS) program. The City of Toronto must also develop a strategy. It needs to support those street youth serving agencies that work to meet the needs of young people who are victims of crime.

The City should open separate shelters (with daytime programming) for young women who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Street youth serving agencies, in general, should be funded to remain open to young people twenty four hours a day. The City should partner with

these agencies to develop and host a series of workshops aimed at preventing intimate partner violence and criminal victimization. Toronto Police Services must establish a Youth Homelessness Safety Strategy.

### About the Researchers

Stephen Gaetz is Associate Dean, Research and Field Development at York University. Bill O'Grady is Professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Guelph. Kristy Buccieri is a PhD Candidate in the Faculty of Education at York University. Matthew Aaron is a consultant who has worked in the not-for-profit sector.

[sgaetz@edu.yorku.ca](mailto:sgaetz@edu.yorku.ca)

### Citation

Gaetz, S., O'Grady, B., & Buccieri, K. (2010). *Surviving crime and violence street youth and victimization in Toronto*. Toronto: Justice for Children and Youth and The Homeless Hub. Available online at <http://goo.gl/0zNb5>

### Keywords

*Homelessness, Street youth, Crime, Violence, Victim*

---

### Knowledge Mobilization at York

York's Knowledge Mobilization Unit provides services and funding for faculty, graduate students, and community organizations seeking to maximize the impact of academic research and expertise on public policy, social programming, and professional practice. It is supported by SSHRC and CIHR grants, and by the Office of the Vice-President Research & Innovation.

[kmbunit@yorku.ca](mailto:kmbunit@yorku.ca)  
[www.researchimpact.ca](http://www.researchimpact.ca)

