

Youth on the Street

and Youth Involved with Child Welfare: Maltreatment, Mental Health and Substance Use

Youth who are homeless face a variety of adverse outcomes including concurrent mental health symptoms and substance use. Many come to the streets with a history of child maltreatment, and have left home to escape dysfunctional environments. Youth in child welfare face similar challenges and some are at risk of homelessness as they transition out of the child welfare system.

Study Highlights

Maltreatment

- **A proportion of youth who are homeless have experienced physical and/or sexual abuse.**

Study results found that youth who are homeless and who had previously been in the child welfare system were more likely to have experienced physical and/or sexual abuse when compared to those who are homeless who did not have previous child welfare involvement.

- **Young women who are homeless are more likely to report having been sexually abused.**

Among study participants, young women were more likely than young men to report sexual abuse.

Partner Violence

- **The likelihood of partner violence was similar across all youth.**

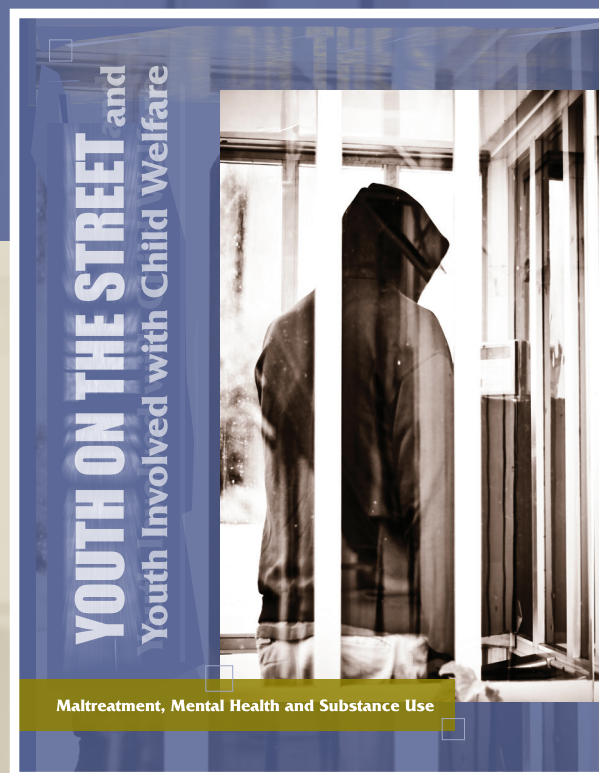
Study results found no significant differences between youth who are homeless and those who had been or are currently involved in child welfare, in terms of their likelihood of being involved in partner violence.

- **There is a relationship between partner violence and concurrent mental health symptoms and substance abuse.**

Youth who reported having been violent with their partners were more likely to have concurrent mental health symptoms and substance abuse.

Substance Use and Mental Health Symptoms

- Youth who are homeless with a history of child welfare involvement were more likely to report concurrent mental health symptoms with past month alcohol, cigarette smoking and marijuana use than those currently involved in child welfare.
- When compared to youth in child welfare, youth who are homeless (including those with no previous child welfare involvement) were



Goldstein, A.L., Amiri, T., Vilhena, N., Wekerle C., Thornton, T., & Tonmyr, L.

The study looked at a number of factors related to mental health and substance use in three groups of youth in Canada: those currently in child welfare; youth who are homeless with previous involvement in child welfare, and youth who are homeless who had never been involved in child welfare. The full report, including references, is available at: <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ncfv-cnivf/index-eng.php>.

much more likely to show "externalizing symptoms" (such as stealing, breaking into others' property), "internalizing symptoms" (such as depression or anxiety), to have problem drug use and to binge drink.

From Study Results to Practice, Policy and Research

Study results point to implications for practitioners, policy makers and researchers:

- Improve treatment for youth who are homeless and have mental health and substance use issues.
- Examine the reasons for early exit among youth involved in the child welfare system, and their readiness to exit.
- Prevent youth homelessness through early intervention.
- Increase research on the risk factors for homelessness, as well as on outcomes and interventions.