

# Tyler's Troubled Life

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With targeted interventions, direct costs of up to \$1.2M can be averted in the life of a prototypical adolescent offender

## BACKGROUND

Studies have shown that the majority of Canadians engage in some form of delinquent behaviour during adolescence. While most people eventually outgrow these behaviours and go on to become responsible, productive members of society, a small portion of the population continues to commit crimes into adulthood.

Research tells us that certain characteristics increase a person's likelihood of becoming entrenched in crime. These characteristics are called risk factors. Researchers have identified a number of risk factors that have been shown to predict criminal offending later in life, such as early behavioural problems and family conflict (Piquero, Hawkins & Kazemian, 2012).

Not all individuals exposed to these factors become involved in crime. However, the more risk factors an individual presents, the greater the probability that he or she will become involved in crime. Fortunately, the identification of risk factors related to criminal offending allows us to develop and target effective interventions to reduce an individual's overall risk of becoming involved in crime.

## METHOD

To illustrate the compounding influence of risk factors on the pathway to criminal offending, a fictional account of a young man, named Tyler, was developed. The narrative does not depict any real persons or events, but serves as an illustrative example of a prototypical adolescent offender in Canada. Tyler's experiences are used to highlight the most common risk factors that affect Canadian youth who become involved in crime, the high costs associated with chronic offending, and how such costs can be avoided if proper interventions are in place. Tyler's life path represents one of many possible outcomes commonly seen in adolescent offenders.

Costs associated with the behaviours of Tyler are sourced from various costing studies in Canada, the

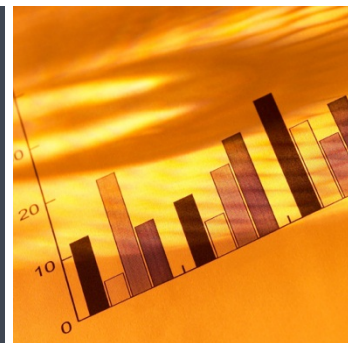
United States, and Australia. The events are affixed an average cost and tallied for a grand total cost of his crimes. The costs associated with Tyler's life of crime range from a court appearance by police with an approximate cost of \$239 CAD to a 5-year federal prison sentence at a total cost of over \$550,000 CAD. All listed costs are calculated in 2015 dollars except the Australian cost studies where only 2014 inflation data was available at the time of publication. The cost estimates considered in Tyler's narrative include only the tangible (direct) costs of crime, including criminal justice, health care, and social services costs. The intangible (indirect) costs due to pain and suffering, decreased quality of life and psychological distress are not included in the estimates due to a lack of available data.

Experiencing trouble at home, in school, and in social situations, by the age of 30, Tyler will have spent more than 10 years of his life in custody. The direct costs of his crimes total \$1.4 million (M).

Tyler could have benefited from targeted, evidence-based interventions at numerous points in his life. Three possible interventions are provided in the narrative to illustrate potential cost savings by investing in crime prevention at critical junctures during Tyler's youth. These interventions include: Stop Now and Plan (SNAP®) at age 10, which could have averted a total of \$1.2M in costs; the Youth Inclusion Program (YIP) at age 14, which could have averted a total of \$1.1M in costs; and, Multisystemic Therapy (MST), which could have averted a total of \$0.9M in costs.

## IMPLICATIONS

Intervening early and often in the life of disadvantaged or at-risk youth significantly disrupts one's criminal career path and proves a sound investment over the long-term. This is especially true in the narrative of Tyler, whose crimes are likely undervalued as they only include the true societal impact of crime.



## SOURCE

Community Safety and Countering Crime Branch, Research Division. (2016). *Tyler's Troubled Life*. Ottawa, ON: Public Safety Canada.

## ADDITIONAL SOURCES

Piquero, A. R., Hawkins, J. D., & Kazemian, L. (2012). Criminal Career Patterns. In R. Loeber & D. P. Farrington (Eds.), *From Juvenile Delinquency to Adult Crime: Criminal Careers, Justice Policy, and Prevention* (pp. 14-46). New York: Oxford University Press.

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