

It's Not What You Think:

Sexually Exploited Youth in British Columbia



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



*It's Not What You Think:
Sexually Exploited Youth in British Columbia*

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Only professional stock photos were used in this report in order not to re-exploit youth.

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Introduction

The images of sexual exploitation of youth in Canada are pervasive and stereotyped, most commonly depicting an older teen girl in a short skirt and high heels standing on a street corner.

The stereotypes of sexually exploited youth are wrong.

The research in this report shatters some of the myths about sexual exploitation among youth in BC: what it is, and who is experiencing it. That girl on the street corner does exist, and she is being exploited, but her story is not the only one, or even the most common one. Our study is drawn from surveys of youth in multiple cities across the province over the past several years. Our results document the experiences of more than 500 youth who have been sexually exploited during their teens, comparing their lives with youth in similar circumstances who have not been exploited.

To our knowledge, this represents the largest study of sexually exploited youth and their experiences across multiple cities in British Columbia, possibly in Canada. Why hasn't such a study been done before? Population research about sexual exploitation is not easy, because exploitation is illegal, it is stigmatized, and youth who experience exploitation are often hidden and hard to reach. Worse, the stereotypes about what sexual exploitation is and who is exploited make it harder for young people to recognize when they are being exploited, to acknowledge it and to reach out for help.

We hope this study will help shed light on the hidden experiences of sexually exploited youth in British Columbia, change perspectives about their lives and their choices, and provide evidence for ways we can help prevent further exploitation of young people.



At a glance

This study draws on responses from 1,845 youth who participated in 5 different youth health surveys conducted by McCreary Centre Society in cities across British Columbia between 2000 and 2006. Three of the surveys were with street-involved and marginalized youth in 10 different cities, and two were among youth in the custody centres located throughout the province.

The surveys included questions about sexual exploitation, which occurs when youth under age 19 trade sexual activities in exchange for resources such as money, drugs, food, shelter, transportation, clothes, and similar things. Sexual exploitation is not a job; it is illegal to exploit youth, and it is a form of sexual abuse.

Key findings

- More than 1 in 3 street-involved and marginalized youth have been sexually exploited, as have 1 in 5 youth in custody.
- Males were just as likely to be sexually exploited as females. Among younger street-involved youth (ages 12-18), a greater percentage of males were exploited (34% vs. 27% of females in 2006). Among older street-involved youth (ages 19-25), a higher percentage of females reported sexual exploitation (53% females vs. 32% males).
- Among street-involved youth as well as youth in custody, gay, lesbian and bisexual teens were more likely to have been sexually exploited than their heterosexual peers. Fewer than half of sexually exploited street-involved youth identified as heterosexual.
- Aboriginal youth were disproportionately among those who were sexually exploited; one-third to one-half of sexually exploited youth identified as Aboriginal.
- While youth were most commonly exploited in exchange for money or drugs, they also exchanged sex to meet their basic needs: More than 1 in 3 youth were exploited in exchange for shelter, up to 1 in 4 for transportation, and up to 1 in 5 for food or clothing.
- Both men and women sexually exploit youth. Although the majority of youth (70%) had been exploited by males, half of youth (50%) had also been exploited by females.

- Sexually exploited youth may not recognize they are being exploited, or that it is a form of abuse. Youth did not always think exchanging sex for things like transportation or shelter was the same as exchanging sex for money or goods, and while all sexually exploited youth could have said yes they were sexually abused, a large number did not.
- Among younger street-involved youth, 1 in 5 were living at home when they were first sexually exploited; females were more likely to be sexually exploited while living with family than males were.
- However, for the majority of street-involved youth, sexual exploitation came after running away, being kicked out, or becoming street-involved; 3 out of 4 youth first left home at a younger age than first being sexually exploited.
- Sexually exploited youth reported more sexual and physical violence from a greater number of people than non-exploited youth.
- Exploited youth were 2 to 3 times more likely to have seriously considered or attempted suicide in the past year than non-exploited youth.
- Across the 5 cities that were surveyed in both 2000 and 2006, there were few changes between years. The percent of males being exploited decreased slightly (37% to 31%) and the percent of females has increased slightly (23% to 25%). Aboriginal females had the greatest increase, up from 16% to 23%.
- The age of first being exploited has gotten slightly older between 2000 and 2006. In 2000, the average age was 13.8 years, while in 2006 it was 14.8 years.
- The majority of sexually exploited youth in all the surveys said their communities needed more safe, affordable housing, and education, job training and work experience programs.
- Among older street-involved sexually exploited youth, only 25% had ever had a legal job, but more than 75% of them wanted a job. These youth thought that more education (43%), work experience and job training (35%), and help with a job search and resume (24%) would help them gain employment. Only 15% of sexually exploited youth who wanted employment thought they could do it on their own.
- Despite challenging life experiences, most sexually exploited youth were hopeful for the future. When asked where they saw themselves in 5 years, more than half of exploited youth expected to have a job, just under half expected to have a family (42-44%) and 44-58% expected to have a home of their own.

Methods

About the surveys

This report about sexually exploited youth is based upon the results of 5 different surveys of vulnerable youth, conducted since 2000, with youth who were street involved or marginalized, experiencing homelessness, or were in custody in British Columbia.

Each survey was conducted by the McCreary Centre Society, a non-profit organization concerned with youth health in British Columbia. Three of the five youth health surveys involved street-involved youth in 2000, 2001, and 2006. The other two surveys were of youth in the provincial youth custody centres during 2000 and 2004.

All 5 surveys were adapted from the McCreary's province-wide school-based BC Adolescent Health Survey (BC AHS). These surveys ask youth about their life experiences, including physical and emotional health issues, risks they have been exposed to, healthy behaviours and those that can create health challenges, as well as supports in their lives. Although the questions vary slightly between surveys, many of the same questions were asked, allowing for comparisons between the different groups.

The street-involved and marginalized youth surveys

2000 Street Youth Survey (SY 2000)

In 2000, the McCreary Centre Society conducted a survey of street-involved youth age 12 to 19 years in six different communities: Vancouver, Victoria, Abbotsford/Mission, Surrey/White Rock/Langley, Prince Rupert, and the Sunshine Coast (Powell River). Community organizations that supported vulnerable youth were actively involved in advising the study. Youth were recruited by staff members from youth-serving programs and agencies. In most communities, the surveys were also conducted by youth agency staff, but in some communities, McCreary youth research assistants also helped with the survey. The study took place from June to December in 2000. The pencil and paper surveys were completed by the youth anonymously; the survey questions were read aloud by the research team to help youth who might have reading problems. A total of 523 youth completed the survey. The results of this survey are summarized in the McCreary report, *No Place to Call Home: A profile of Street Youth in British Columbia* (McCreary Centre Society, 2001).

2001 Older Street Youth Survey (SY 2001)

In 2001, the McCreary Centre Society conducted a survey in Vancouver with 180 older street-involved youth, meant to be ages 19 to 24 years, although the survey included 6 youth who were 18, and 1 who was 25. The survey had many of the same questions as SY 2000. Local agencies in Vancouver were again involved in the project, and served as some of the places to recruit the youth, although youth were also approached on the streets and in public places where street-involved and homeless youth regularly hung out. Researcher teams conducted the surveys in pairs, for the most part; each team consisted of a youth agency worker or university student and a currently or formerly street-involved youth. The results of this survey are briefly summarized in *Between the Cracks: Homeless Youth in Vancouver* (McCreary Centre Society, 2002).

2006 Street Youth Survey (SY 2006)

In 2006, a similar strategy was used to survey younger marginalized and street-involved youth ages 12 to 18, across BC. The 762 youth represented in this survey were from 9 different communities: Vancouver, Victoria, Abbotsford/Mission, Surrey, Prince Rupert, Nanaimo, Prince George, Kamloops and Kelowna. As with SY 2001, research teams in each community included both experiential youth and staff or volunteers from local youth-serving agencies. The survey was conducted at various times and locations in the communities to help reach most marginalized youth. This survey was also read aloud by researcher teams. The first results of this survey are reported in *Against the Odds: A Profile of Marginalized and Street-Involved Youth in BC* (Saewyc, Smith, Albert, MacKay, Northcott & the McCreary Centre Society, 2007).



The youth in custody surveys

2000 Youth In Custody Survey (CUST 00)

In 2000, the McCreary Centre Society conducted youth health surveys in all nine of BC's youth custody centres. A total of 243 youth, ages 12 to 19, agreed to participate. The survey included many questions from the BC AHS and the SY 2000, but added questions focused on experiences of the justice system. The surveys were administered in small groups, read aloud by a McCreary researcher. The results represent a picture of the entire youth in custody population, and are summarized in: *Time Out: A Profile of BC Youth in Custody* (McCreary Centre Society, 2001).

2004 Youth In Custody Survey (CUST 04)

In 2004, the McCreary Centre Society repeated the survey among youth being held in the BC youth custody centres. New legislation governing young offenders, the Youth Criminal Justice Act, came into effect on April 1, 2003. This legislation encouraged moderate sentences and alternatives to imprisonment for less serious crimes. As a result, there were only 137 youth surveyed within the 3 remaining custody centres in 2004, and only a small percentage of them were female. The survey was conducted in the same way as the previous one. The results are summarized in *Time Out II: A Profile of BC Youth in Custody* (Murphy, Chittenden & the McCreary Centre Society, 2005).

McCreary Datasets

	SY 2000	SY 2001	SY 2006	CUST 2000	CUST 2004
Number of youth surveyed	523	180	762	243	137
Age range	12-18	18-25	12-18	13-19	14-19
Average age	16	21	16	16	16
Males (%)	278 (53%)	121 (68%)	367 (49%)	193 (79%)	123 (90%)
Females (%)	239 (46%)	57 (31%)	383 (51%)	50 (21%)	14 (10%)

Note: due to the small number of females in the CUST 2004 data, gender differences are not included.



What do we mean by “sexually exploited”?

...it also includes what some people call “survival sex,” or providing sex for a place to sleep, or for a meal, or for a ride.

Sexual exploitation occurs when youth under age 19 trade sexual activities in exchange for resources, like money, drugs, gifts, food, services, shelter, transportation, or anything similar. This can include commercial sex work in brothels or for escort services, pornography, and internet sex, but it also includes what some people call “survival sex,” or providing sex for a place to sleep, or for a meal, or for a ride.



Sexual exploitation is not employment or chosen occupation, it is a form of sexual abuse. While some youth under age 19 may feel they are not being exploited, that they have willingly chosen to exchange sex for resources, the law is clear that adults who have sex with them for any form of consideration are exploiting them.

What about youth age 19 and older in our surveys? Older youth who engage in sex work are not considered sexually exploited under BC law; however, since the majority of those in the older street-involved youth survey of 2001 reported first exchanging sex before age 19—indeed, the average age was between 14 and 15 years—they have been sexually exploited in the past, and their experiences are also worth documenting.

The analyses

In this report we compare the experiences of sexually-exploited youth with the experiences of their non-sexually exploited but vulnerable peers.

This report was guided by 5 main research questions:

- 1) What are the experiences of sexual exploitation reported by street-involved and marginalized youth within our province?
- 2) What are the gender differences in these experiences?
- 3) Which comes first: being sexually exploited, or risk behaviours that are linked to sexual exploitation?
- 4) How have experiences changed, if at all, for sexually exploited youth in 2006 compared to 2000?
- 5) What are supportive services that sexually exploited youth use, find helpful, or feel they need in their communities?

Who is not in this report—exploited youth in other venues

Sexual exploitation does not just happen on the streets, or among homeless youth. Because it is illegal, sexual exploitation is often hidden, and some youth who are exploited may be extremely hard to reach. For example, very young teens who are exploited by an adult for profit, or who are kept in a brothel, may not be allowed out in public places alone, and so they would not be reached by these surveys. Similarly, young people who are living at home but are sexually exploited, whether because they are currently being exploited by their families, or they are exploited by someone outside their family, including internet sex or pornography, but going home at night, also might not be reached to participate in these surveys.



Sexual exploitation does not just happen on the streets, or among homeless youth. Because it is illegal, sexual exploitation is often hidden...

The surveys took place in the daytime and the evenings, but not late at night, so sexually exploited youth who are only out on the streets late at night would have been missed. Similarly, the surveys only took place in public places or youth service settings; they were not able to recruit youth from massage parlors, bath houses, or strip clubs. If youth who worked in such places did not also access youth service agencies, hang out on the streets, or identify themselves as street-involved, then they might not have participated. However, some youth who were surveyed did report having exchanged sex in those kinds of places.

Some teens have been trafficked from other countries for the purpose of sexual exploitation; they may not speak English, and because of their undocumented status, they may be afraid to talk to others. These too, would not have been included in the surveys.

Thus, although these 5 surveys provide a window into the experiences of many sexually exploited youth in BC, they cannot represent all sexually exploited youth, or all types of sexual exploitation.

Terminology

A number of terms are used throughout this report to describe the experiences of sexually exploited youth. Some of these terms were used in the original surveys but now may be outdated or convey stereotypical ideas concerning exploitation. Below, we wish to clarify the terminology used.

Sexually exploited youth	Youth under 19 years old who are given money, goods, or other consideration such as transportation or shelter, in exchange for sexual activities. Sexual exploitation of youth is illegal in British Columbia.
Older street-involved youth	These are youth, age 18-25 years old, from the 2001 street-involved youth survey of Vancouver.
Younger street-involved youth	These are youth, 12-19 years old, from the 2000 and 2006 street-involved youth surveys across the province.
Street-involved youth	Marginalized youth who may be homeless or in precarious living situations, such as couch-surfing or living on the street, or who may be involved in street-based activities, such as buying or selling drugs, panhandling, etc. Street involvement can be short-or long-term.
Pimp	A person (male or female) or a group (gang) who profits from the sexual exploitation of others. Pimp tends to convey a single individual (generally male) and does not always reflect the experiences of exploited youth. In some cases, exploited youth may consider the person who profits from their exploitation a friend or



romantic partner. However, 'pimp' was used in the wording of many of the original surveys.

Prostitution

A term commonly used to describe commercial sexual activities (i.e., in exchange for money or drugs). This term has a lot of negative connotations and currently is considered stigmatizing, and many people have shifted to the term "sex work" or "sex trade". Any of these terms should be used, if at all, only about adults, because commercial sexual activities with youth are sexual exploitation, and are illegal. The term was used in some places in the surveys, however, because youth understood the term more easily than the term sexual exploitation.

Trick or date

Slang for someone who pays for sex, usually with money or drugs. The term was used in most of the original surveys.



Who are sexually exploited youth?

Youth do not always know the law, and may not recognize that what has happened to them is sexual exploitation. Further, sexual exploitation is very stigmatizing and youth may not want to identify as exploited. Therefore, several different questions were asked in the surveys, and mostly used the more neutral terms “exchanging sex” or “trading sex.” For example, in the 2006 survey, only 19% said yes, they had ever exchanged sex for money or goods. However, when asked in further questions whether they had traded sex for shelter, food, transportation, clothes, etc. in the past year, more than 30% reported that they had. Additional youth responded to other questions that indicated they had experienced sexual exploitation in some form.

None of the questions in the surveys referred to sexual exploitation. Instead, youth were asked:

- if they ever “exchanged sex for money or goods” with males or with females
- if they traded sex for food, clothing, shelter, transportation, money, drugs or alcohol, or other items
- if they “engaged in sexual activity” for “a pimp, escort agency, to support a friend, partner, or relative”
- the types of places where they exchanged sex, such as hotels, clubs, trick pads, or on the street.
- how old they were when they first traded sex
- where they were living when they were first traded sex.

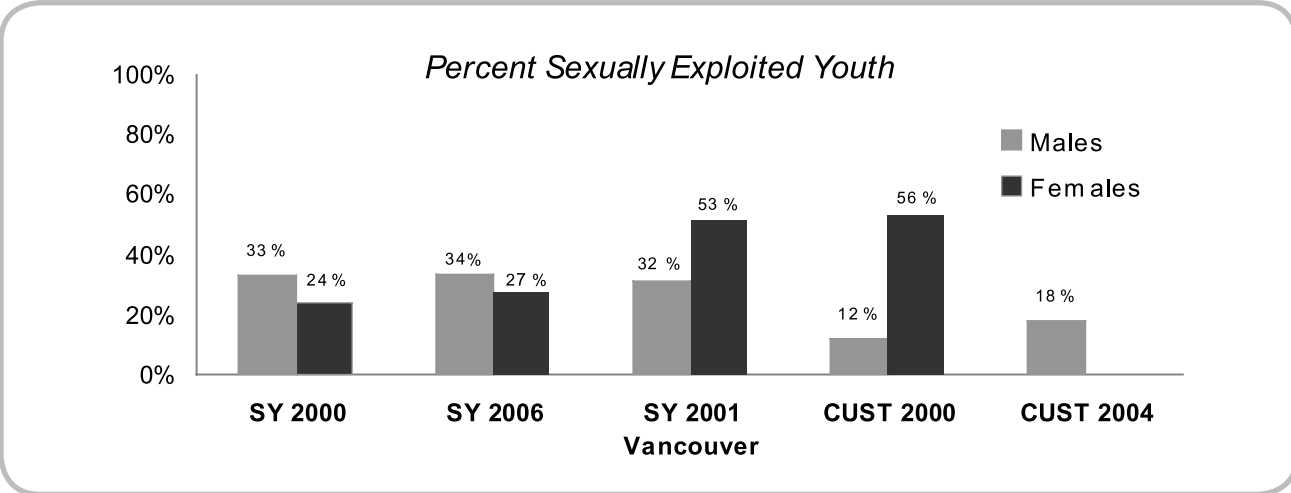
Youth who answered yes to any of the above question were identified as sexually exploited in this report.

There is a common perception that sexual exploitation happens mostly or only to females, but street-involved males were just as likely to be exploited as females.

Depending on the survey, between 18% and 39% of the youth identified as sexually exploited. There is a common perception that sexual exploitation happens mostly or only to females, but street-involved males were just as likely to be exploited as females.

Around 1 in 3 street-involved youth indicated they were sexually exploited. Among the younger street-involved youth in both surveys, a higher percentage of males than females were sexually exploited (33% males vs. 24% females in 2000, 34% males vs. 27% females in 2006). In contrast, among the older street-involved youth in 2001 in Vancouver, a higher percentage of females identified as exploited (53% vs. 32% males).

Compared to street-involved youth, fewer youth in custody reported exploitation. Even so, up to 1 in 5 youth in custody (18% to 21%) reported being sexually exploited. For youth in custody in 2000, 56% of females and 12% of males reported they had ever been exploited, while in 2004, 18% of males were exploited. It should be noted that only 21% of youth in custody in 2000 were female, and more than half of them had been exploited.





...two of the street youth surveys show a higher percent of exploited males.

Age

The sexually exploited youth in the surveys ranged from 12 to 25 years of age, with an average age of 16 among all youth surveyed.

Ethnicity and place of origin

One-third to more than one-half of all sexually exploited youth in each survey identified as Aboriginal. Although in most survey years, this percent was similar to the percent of Aboriginal street-involved and marginalized youth that were surveyed overall, this is still a much higher percent of Aboriginal youth than are in the general population of BC.

In the street-involved youth surveys, 88% to 93% of youth reported they were born in Canada, but this was not different between sexually exploited and non-exploited youth.

Demographic Characteristics of Sexually Exploited Youth across 5 Surveys

		SY 2000	SY 2001	SY 2006	CUST 2000	CUST 2004
Sample Size		523	180	762	243	137
Sexually Exploited	Overall	29%	39%	30 %	21%	18%
	Males	34%	32%	34%	12%	18%
	Females	24%	53%	27%	56%	*
	Transgendered	33%	100%	83%	n/a	n/a
	Aboriginal	34%	46%	57%	46%	46%

*Note: n/a question not asked in these surveys. A very low number of street-involved youth identified as transgendered. * Unreleasable due to sample size*

Sexual orientation

Lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth are disproportionately found among street-involved and homeless populations, in part because some youth who disclose their orientation to their families are rejected, and may even face violence. A number of lesbian, gay, and bisexual teens “come out,” only to be kicked out; others run away to escape the rejection and conflict in their families.



Among sexually exploited youth, the percent who identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) was even higher than the percent among street-involved youth in general, and far higher than among youth in the general population. Fewer than half of all sexually exploited youth identified as exclusively heterosexual, and more than 1 in 4 sexually exploited youth indicated they were gay, lesbian or bisexual.

Among street-involved and marginalized youth:

- 42% to 48% of sexually exploited youth identified as 100% heterosexual
- 16% to 18% identified as mostly heterosexual
- 26% to 30% identified as gay, lesbian or bisexual
- 6% to 17% of sexually exploited youth were unsure about their sexual orientation

Among youth in custody in 2004, all of the sexually exploited males identified as 100% heterosexual. However, the sexual orientation responses were more diverse among youth in custody in the 2000 survey. In 2000, exploited youth were less likely to identify as heterosexual, and more likely to identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, than their non-exploited peers. In particular, 27% of exploited males identified as gay or bisexual, but only 1% of non-exploited males did.

Among youth in custody in 2000:

- 53% of sexually exploited youth identified as 100% heterosexual
- 10% identified as mostly heterosexual
- 31% identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual
- 6% of sexually exploited youth were unsure about their sexual orientation

Experiences of sexual exploitation

It is important to understand the context of first experiences of sexual exploitation, as this may provide some clues as to where best to intervene to prevent the abuse. The surveys asked a variety of questions about youth experiences of exploitation, whether their first experiences or more recent circumstances.

Age when first exploited

Although the common stereotype of sexual exploitation is a girl between 16 and 18 years of age, our results document a far more troubling reality. The average age youth were first exploited was between 13 and 15 years of age in the surveys that asked this question. Up to 1 in 3 of the sexually exploited youth in the street-involved youth surveys reported first being exploited before age 14.

1 in 5 youth were living with their families when they were first exploited.

Percent who report age at first being sexually exploited

Survey	13 or younger	14 to 16 years	17 or 18 years	19 or older
SY 2000	33%	47%	15%	5%
SY 2001	28%	29%	14%	29%
SY2006	35%	37%	39%	--

Where youth were living when they were first sexually exploited

All three street-involved youth surveys asked where youth were living when they first traded sex for money or goods. An alarming 12% to 20% of youth reported they were living with their families when they were first sexually exploited. This percentage was even higher for females (20% to 38% in the different surveys). As well, more than 1 in 10 were living in care when they were first exploited. This does not necessarily mean they were being exploited by their families or by their foster parents; it is possible the youth were living at home, but were being exploited by someone else without their family or foster parents being aware of it.

Where youth were living when first sexually exploited

	SY 2000	SY 2001	SY 2006
With family	15%	12%	20%
Foster or group home	14%	10%	12%
Friend/boyfriend/girlfriend	15%	24%	10%
Own place	7%	21%	4%
Streets	9%	31%	13%
Nowhere in particular	8%	17%	n/a
Shelter	n/a	n/a	5%
Hostel, hotel, or motel	n/a	n/a	3%
Couch surfing	n/a	n/a	5%

n/a = question not asked in surveys

Among older street-involved youth, the largest percent said they had been living on the streets when they were first exploited, while among younger street-involved youth, the largest percents had been living with family, or in care, or with a boyfriend or girlfriend.

What youth received for being sexually exploited

Youth identified what they received in return for being sexually exploited. Common stereotypes focus on commercial exchanges for money, or perhaps for drugs, but the youth in these surveys report other experiences as well. Many of the youth were exploited for basic survival needs, such as food, shelter, clothing, and transportation.

Street-involved youth

Money, drugs and shelter were the top three items street-involved youth reported exchanging sex for. More than 1 in 3 younger street-involved youth received money and drugs or alcohol in exchange for being sexually exploited, but 1 in 4 also reported exchanging sex for shelter, and more than 1 in 10 traded sex for other basic survival needs like food or transportation. More than 2 out of 3 older street-involved youth received money in exchange for being exploited, but more than 1 out of 3 exchanged sex for shelter, and 1 out of 4 for food, transportation, or clothing.

The percents were mostly similar for both males and females, with a few notable differences: In the street-involved youth surveys of 2001 and 2006, a higher percent of females traded sex for drugs or alcohol than males did (64% of females vs. 31% of males in 2001; 46% of females vs. 29% of males in 2006).

What youth received in exchange for being sexually exploited

	SY 2000	SY 2001	SY 2006	CUST 2000	CUST 2004
Money	33%	69%	34%	59%	43%
Drugs/Alcohol	35%	48%	38%	52%	38%
Shelter	25%	38%	23%	21%	5%
Transportation	17%	24%	16%	21%	5%
Food	13%	24%	17%	10%	0%
Clothing	12%	24%	17%	13%	14%

Note: Youth could choose more than one answer

Youth in custody

Youth in custody similarly reported exchanging sex most often for money, drugs, shelter or transportation. More than half of these youth received money and drugs or alcohol in exchange for being exploited; 1 in 5 also exchanged sex for shelter and for transportation. In 2000, 3 out of 4 females in custody traded sex for money, compared to only 1 out of 3 males in custody.

Who has sexually exploited our youth?

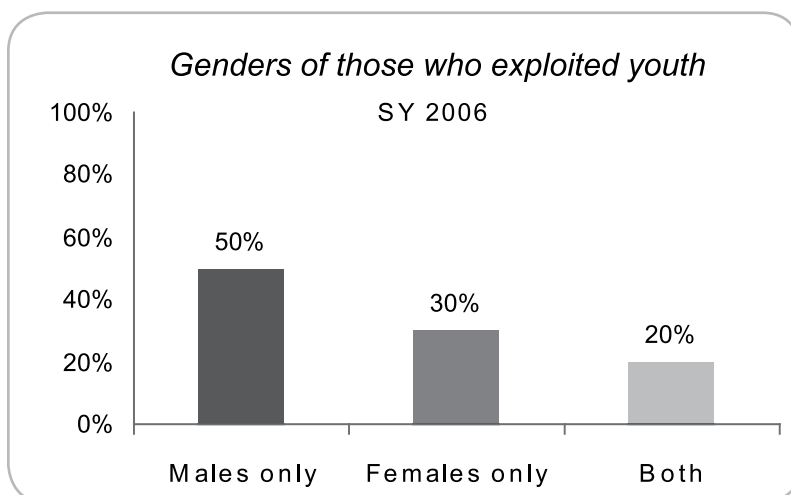
All three street-involved youth surveys asked youth for whom they had traded sex (youth could indicate more than one answer). Although about 1 in 4 reported trading sex for a pimp, the most common response was youth traded sex so they could support a romantic partner, a friend or a relative. This raises the question of whether some young people were identifying their exploiters as romantic partners rather than as pimps. Other research has shown that people who sexually exploit teens may manipulate them emotionally to get them to engage in sexual activity with others for money. The results from our surveys suggest that some youth may be experiencing this kind of emotional manipulation.

Who did sexually exploited youth trade sex for?

	SY 2000	SY 2001	SY 2006
Pimp	23%	29%	17%
Escort agency manager	17%	28%	8%
To support a friend/ partner/relative	34%	53%	26%

Gender of exploiters

The 2006 survey of younger street-involved and marginalized youth asked two questions about exchanging sex for money or goods: about whether youth had ever exchanged sex with a male, and with a female. Just under half of respondents chose to answer those two questions (49%), but among those who did answer, contrary to common stereotypes, the results showed both men and women sexually exploit youth. Youth of any gender were still most likely to be



exploited by males (70%), but half (50%) of sexually exploited youth who answered the questions reported that they had exchanged sex for money or goods with females. Around 1 in 5 youth had been exploited by both men and women, nearly 1 in 3 had been exploited only by women, and half only by men.



Where have youth been sexually exploited?

The street-involved youth surveys also asked about the different places in which youth had traded sex. Youth most commonly reported being exploited on the streets: 18% to 25% of younger street-involved youth and more than half of older youth had been exploited on the streets in the communities where they lived. The risk of violence can be high for both males and females when they exchange sex on the streets (see section below on abuse and other violence).

In 2006, youth were also as likely to have been exploited in hotels as on the streets (18%). Nearly 1 in 10 were exploited in trick pads, nightclubs or bars, and 5% were exploited through the internet. Only a small percent of the youth surveyed had exchanged sex in massage parlours or bathhouses, but this may have been because youth exploited in such places weren't reached by the 2006 survey.

Where youth were exploited

	SY 2000	SY 2001	SY 2006
Street	25%	51%	18%
Escort agency	18%	22%	n/a
Trick pad	16%	19%	12%
Nightclub/ bar	n/a	29%	8%
Hotel	n/a	n/a	18%
Internet	n/a	n/a	5%
Bathhouse	n/a	n/a	3%
Massage parlour	n/a	n/a	4%

n/a = question not asked on survey. Youth could choose more than one answer.

Do youth recognize they are being exploited? Questions about sexual abuse and the people who have abused them

Sexual exploitation is sexual abuse, but many youth do not seem to recognize that what is happening to them is abuse. For example, although 100% of those who were sexually exploited could have indicated they were sexually abused, only 21-60% of sexually exploited youth did so. The underreporting of sexual abuse suggests that youth may have been manipulated or coerced into thinking that what has happened to them is acceptable—or at least, that it is not abuse.

Perpetrators of Sexual Abuse

Sexually exploited youth reported sexual abuse by family members, friends, romantic partners, foster parents, police, pimps, tricks or dates, acquaintances, and strangers.

More than 1 in 4 sexually exploited street-involved youth said they had been sexually abused by a relative or caregiver, including parents, step-parents, other relatives, and foster parents. Within all three street-involved youth surveys, sexually exploited females were more likely than exploited males to have been sexually abused by non-parental family members, friends, romantic partners and strangers.

Perpetrators of sexual abuse reported by exploited youth

	SY 2000	SY 2001	SY 2006	CUST 2000	CUST 2004
Relative or Caregiver	27%	29%	34%	29%	13%
Friend/Acquaintance	27%	21%	15%	16%	8%
Romantic Partner	25%	25%	11%	22%	8%
Stranger	19%	22%	12%	32%	8%
Trick/Date/Pimp/ Agency Manager	15%	18%	10%	-	-

Gender differences in experiences of exploitation

While there are many similarities among youth's experiences of sexual exploitation, there were significant gender differences in some areas. These are summarized below.

Prevalence of exploitation

Males and females were just as likely to be exploited. Two of the surveys showed more sexually exploited males than females: older street-involved youth in 2001 and youth in custody in 2000 have a higher percentage of identified exploited females than identified exploited males. More than half of the females in custody in 2000 were sexually exploited whereas 12% of males were exploited. In contrast, the surveys with younger street-involved youth in 2000 and 2006 showed a higher percent of exploited males compared to exploited females: in 2000, 33% of males and 24% of females were exploited, while in 2006, 34% of males were exploited compared to 27% of females.

Sexual orientation

Although lesbian, gay, and bisexual teens were over-represented among sexually exploited youth, a higher percent of sexually exploited females than males identified as LGB among the younger street-involved youth surveys. In 2000, 1 in 3 sexually exploited females identified as lesbian or bisexual (34%), but only 1 in 5 males identified as gay or bisexual (19%). Similarly in 2006, 43% of sexually exploited females identified as lesbian or bisexual, while only 17% of males identified as gay or bisexual.

Males and females were just as likely to be exploited.

Age of first exploitation

Among street-involved youth, there were no gender differences in the average age of first being exploited. Males and females first exchanged sex at similar ages (between 14 to 15 years). This question was not asked of youth in custody.

Where youth were they living when they were first exploited

In the SY 2000 and 2006 surveys, females were nearly twice as likely as males were to be living with their families when they were first exploited. Females in 2006 were also 3 times more likely than males to be living with a friend, boyfriend or girlfriend when they first traded sex.

What youth received for being sexually exploited

Males and females listed many of the same items they received in exchange for sex, such as money, drugs, and shelter. Exchanging sex for shelter, money, food, and clothing represent basic survival needs. However, there were some differences between genders in some surveys.

Among street-involved youth in 2001 and 2006, significantly more females than males traded sex for drugs or alcohol (64% females vs. 31% males in 2001; 46% females vs. 31% males in 2006). Among street-involved youth in 2000, a greater percentage of males than females reported exchanging sex for food. More than 3 out of 4 females in custody in 2000 reported being exploited for money compared to only 1 in 3 males.

Who exploited youth

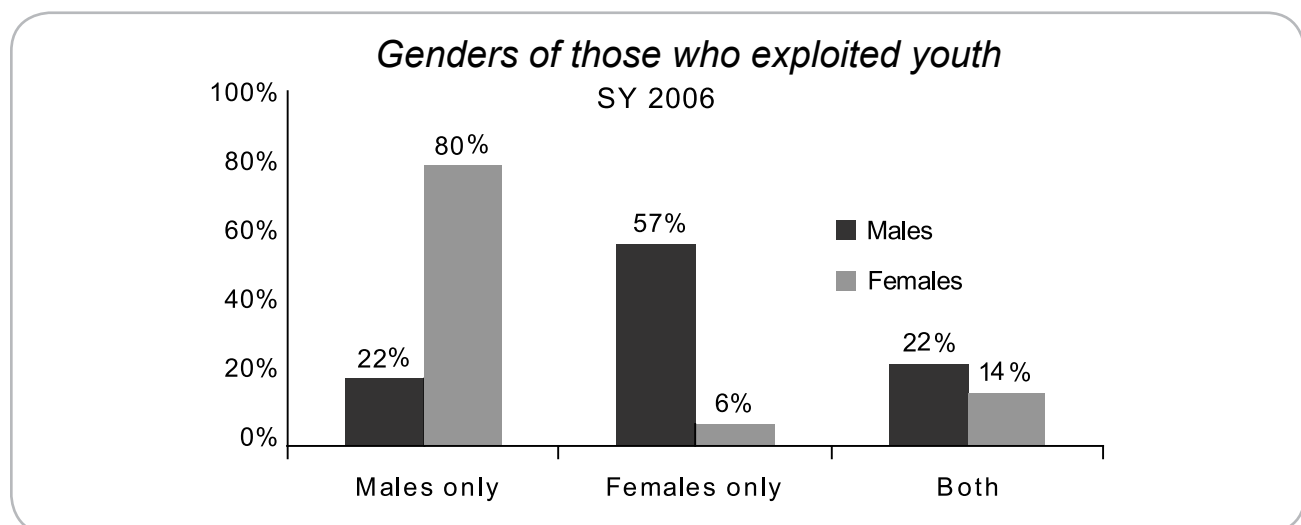
In 2001, sexually exploited females were nearly three times more likely than males to trade sex for a pimp. In 2006, one third of exploited females traded sex to support a partner, friend, or relative, compared to less than 20% of exploited males. In 2006, females were more likely than males to trade sex to support a partner, friend or relative than males (33% vs. 26%).

Gender of exploiters

Common stereotypes suggest males are overwhelmingly the most frequent exploiters of both male and female teens; thus, the stereotype suggests sexually exploited males are most likely experiencing same-gender exploitation. While most exploited females did report being exploited by men (94%), and nearly half of sexually exploited males (44%) had also been exploited by men, some youth of each gender were also exploited by women. Indeed, more than 3 out of 4 sexually exploited males reported exchanging sex for money or goods with a female (79%). As well, although a large percent of exploited youth identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual, youth were most likely to report opposite-gender sexual exploitation.

Where youth have been sexually exploited

Females were more likely than males to trade sex in the streets in 2001 and 2006. In 2006, more than twice the percent of females reported being exploited in a hotel as males.



Which comes first? Patterns of entry into sexual exploitation

A number of risky behaviours or experiences are associated with sexual exploitation. The challenge is trying to determine the pattern of these experiences. For example, exploited youth often report heavy alcohol and drug use—but does that alcohol and drug use eventually force them into exploitation as a way to support their use, or do they turn to alcohol and drugs to cope with the shame and distress of being exploited? Did they get kicked out or run away and find themselves an easy target for exploitation on the street? Or were they exploited at home, and ran away to escape? Or maybe, after they had been exploited for a long time, did they eventually end up on the street?

While the surveys cannot answer these questions with complete confidence or great detail, a number of the questions in the surveys do ask about the age at which the youth first experienced certain activities, such as leaving home, substance use, street involvement, and being exploited. By comparing these ages, we can determine how many youth reported they were exploited first, how many experienced the other risk first, and how many were

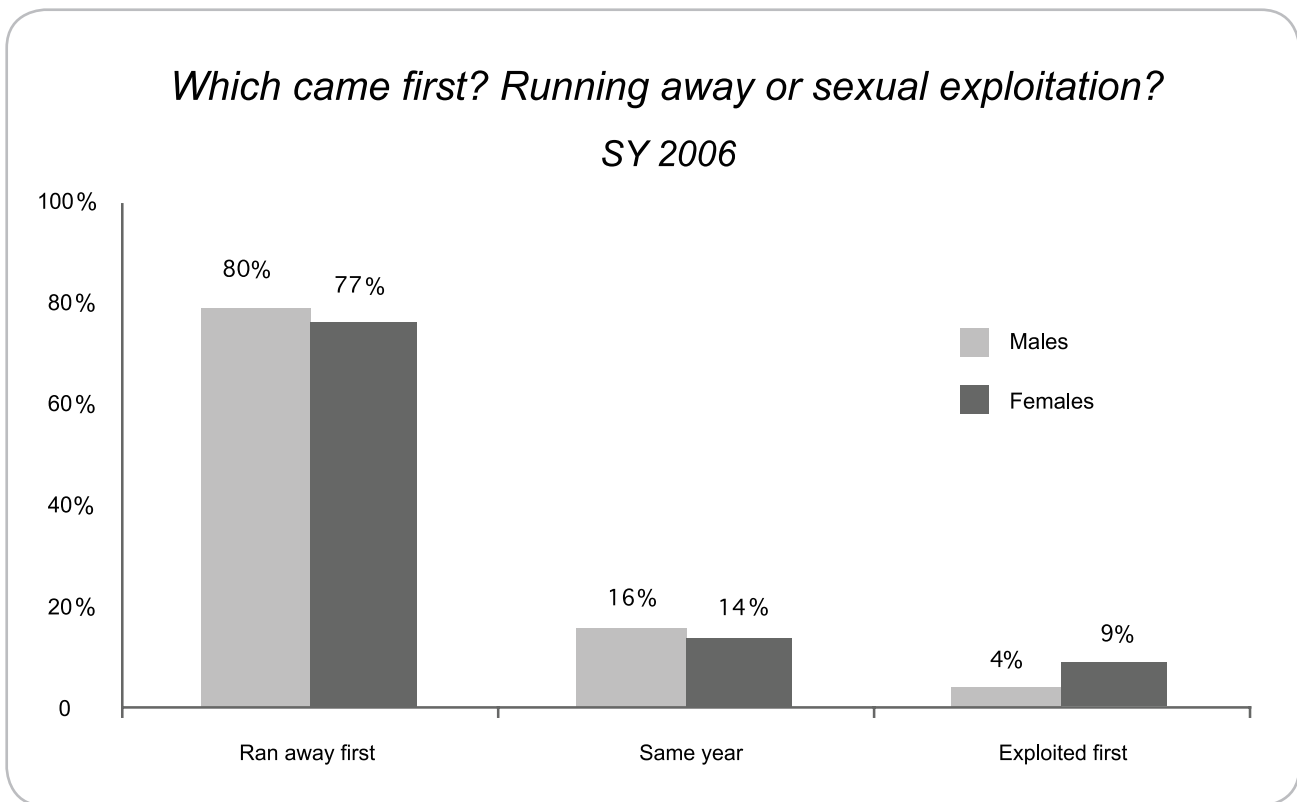
This will give us some clues about the most common patterns and potentially suggest strategies for preventing sexual exploitation.

exploited and experienced the other risk during the same year. This will give us some clues about the most common patterns and potentially suggest strategies for preventing sexual exploitation.

This section only reports results from the street-involved and marginalized youth surveys of 2000, 2001, and 2006, because the surveys of youth in custody did not have as many questions that asked about the age of first experiences, and where they did, they mostly collapsed categories into two years, rather than one. Some of the questions were not asked in every street-involved youth survey, and this is noted below where necessary.

Leaving home and street involvement

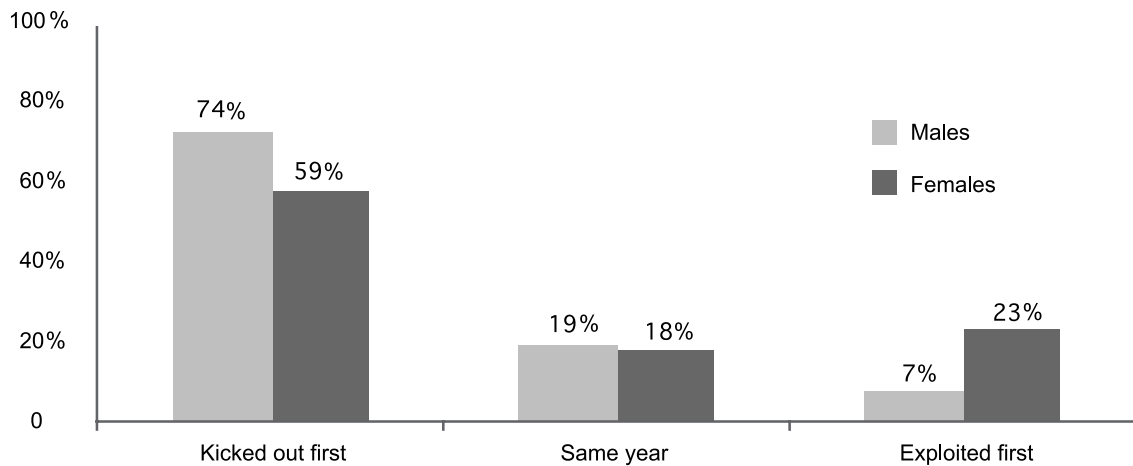
Among the sexually exploited youth in the street-involved youth survey of 2006, far more youth reported running away or being kicked out happened before they became exploited. (SY 2000 and SY 2001 did not ask about the age of first running away or first being kicked out). Males and females were just about equally likely to report they ran away before being exploited (80% males, 77% females), and very few reported exploitation happened before they ran away (4% males, 9% females).



Similarly, the majority of youth reported being kicked out before being exploited, but the actual percentages differed between genders. Males were significantly more likely than females to be kicked out before being sexually exploited (74% males vs. 59% females), although similar percentages reported exploitation and being kicked out in the same year (19% males, 18% females). However, females were 3 times as likely as males to report being exploited first, then being kicked out (23% females vs. 7% males).

Which came first? Being kicked out or sexual exploitation?

SY 2006



Both the 2001 older street-involved youth survey and the 2006 younger street-involved youth survey included a question about the age of first becoming street involved. While the highest proportion of youth became street-involved before being sexually exploited in both surveys, those percentages were quite different. Two-thirds of the younger youth were street-involved before being exploited (66% in the 2006 survey) but less than half of the older youth reported being street involved first (46% in the 2001 survey). In contrast, nearly 1 in 3 older youth (32%) were exploited first, then became street involved, compared to only 9% of youth from the 2006 survey. This may be because older youth were more likely to Similarly, the overwhelming majority of sexually exploited street-involved youth first tried marijuana at a younger age than when they were first exploited (74% in 2000, 77% in 2001, 85% in 2006). Another 1 in 10 first tried marijuana the same year as they were sexually exploited, while 10% of youth in 2000, 7% in 2001, and 4% in 2006 were exploited first. There were no differences between the percentage of males and females who first used alcohol or marijuana before being exploited. This may be because older youth were more likely to report living in their own apartment or with friends when they were first exploited.

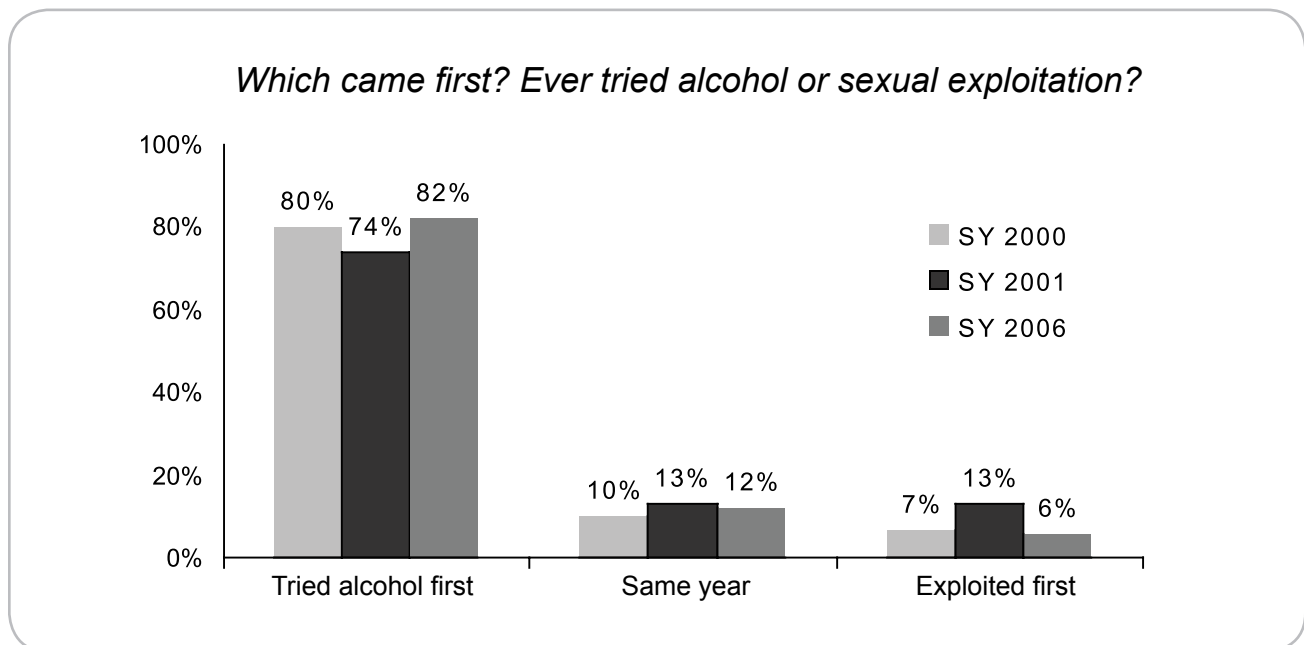
Which came first? Street involvement or sexual exploitation?

	SY 2001		SY 2006	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
Street involved first	41%	52%	71%	62%
Both in the same year	22%	22%	22%	28%
Sexually exploited first	37%	26%	7%	10%



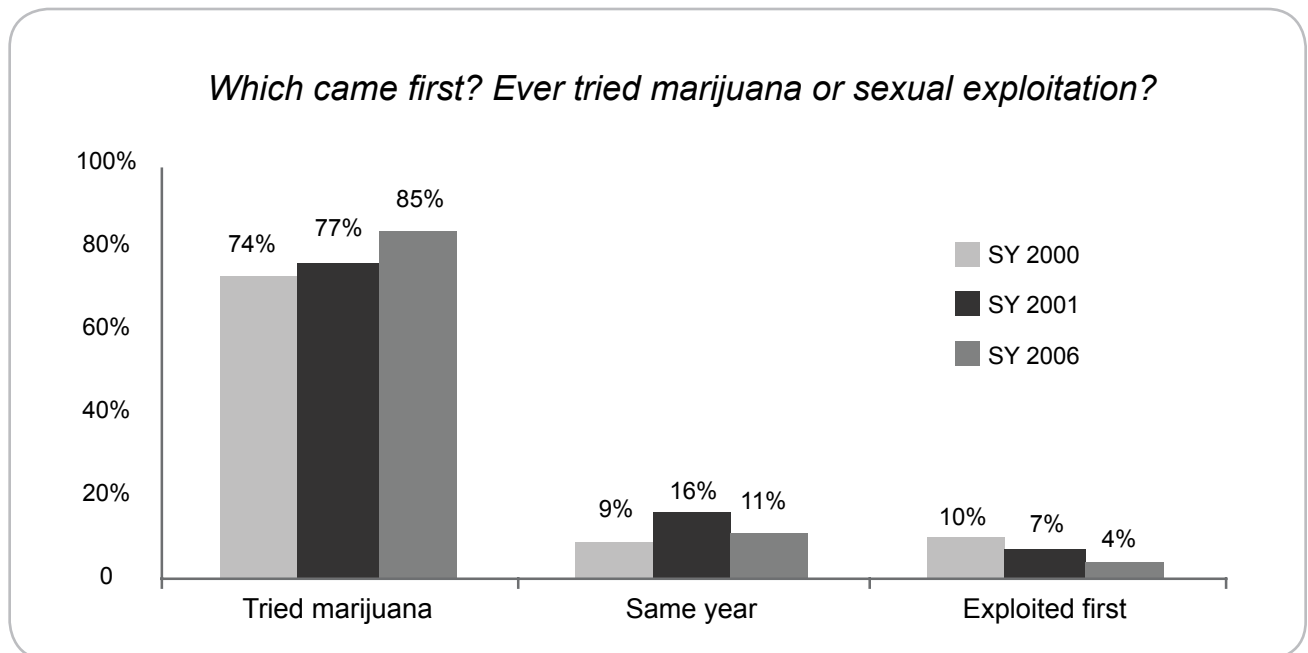
Exposure to alcohol and marijuana

As with leaving home and becoming street involved, most sexually exploited youth reported being exposed to alcohol and marijuana at a younger age than being sexually exploited. These questions were asked in all three surveys of street-involved and marginalized youth. More than 3 out of 4 youth in each survey reported first drinking alcohol before being sexually exploited: 80% in 2000, 74% in 2001, and 82% in 2006, while only about 1 in 10 youth were exploited before first drinking alcohol (7% in 2000, 13% in 2001, 6% in 2006).



There were no differences between the percentage of males and females who first used alcohol or marijuana before being exploited.

Similarly, the overwhelming majority of sexually exploited street-involved youth first tried marijuana at a younger age than when they were first exploited (74% in 2000, 77% in 2001, 85% in 2006). Another 1 in 10 first tried marijuana the same year as they were sexually exploited, while 10% of youth in 2000, 7% in 2001, and 4% in 2006 were exploited first. There were no differences between the percentage of males and females who first used alcohol or marijuana before being exploited.



What differentiates exploited youth from those who are not exploited?

Possible risks for and consequences of sexual exploitation

Street-involved youth and those in custody represent marginalized and vulnerable populations, yet sexually exploited youth in these groups may be even more vulnerable to the kinds of risk exposures that can create health problems. Understanding who is more likely to be exploited, and the different risks and health issues they may face, can help us develop the best interventions to address their needs.

Some of the elements that differ between exploited and non-exploited youth suggest who is more at risk of being exploited:

- Lesbian, gay or bisexual youth were 2 to 5 times more likely to be exploited than heterosexual youth, females more than males.
- In some of the surveys, Aboriginal youth were more likely to be exploited than non-Aboriginal peers, while in other surveys, the rates were about the same in both groups—yet Aboriginal youth made up a greater percent of street-involved and marginalized youth, as well as of youth in custody, than in the general population of youth in BC.
- Youth with a physical or mental health condition that limits their activities were more likely to be exploited.
- Youth who have experienced sexual abuse by family members were more likely to be sexually exploited.
- Youth who were ever in government care were more likely to be exploited than those who had not been in care.



Other elements that differ between exploited and non-exploited youth may be risks for exploitation, or may be consequences from having been exploited; for example, does dropping out of school increase the risk of sexual exploitation, or do sexually exploited youth have more difficulty staying in school? Does serious drug use lead to exchanging sex for drugs, or do youth who have been exploited turn to drugs to cope with their exploitation? While we cannot say for sure in our surveys, because we do not ask which came first or why people do things, the following differences between sexually exploited and non-exploited youth are possible consequences of their exploitation:

- Exploited youth experienced more physical and sexual violence by more kinds of people than non-exploited youth.
- Exploited youth were more likely to harm themselves than non-exploited youth.
- Exploited youth were more likely to have considered and attempted suicide.
- Exploited youth were no more likely to have used alcohol or marijuana at young ages, but they were significantly more likely to have used other drugs than non-exploited youth, including heroin and cocaine.
- Exploited youth were less likely to be attending school, but just as likely to be living in precarious housing as non-exploited youth.

Each of these differences is discussed below.

Sexual orientation

Sexually exploited youth were more likely to identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB) than their non-exploited peers. Approximately one third of exploited youth identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. Exploited street-involved youth were more likely to identify as LGB (29% - 30% for exploited youth, compared to 8%- 18% for non-exploited youth). In 2000, exploited youth in custody were over 7 times more likely to identify as LGB than non-exploited youth (31% compared to 4%). However, in 2004, none of the the males surveyed in custody identified as gay or bisexual (all stated they were heterosexual).

Aboriginal youth

Among younger street-involved youth in 2006, the percent of Aboriginal youth who reported being sexually exploited was no different than non-Aboriginal youth. However, among older street-involved youth in 2001, more than half of Aboriginal youth were sexually exploited, compared to only one-third of non-Aboriginal youth.

Chronic physical and mental health conditions

Youth were asked if they had any health conditions such as diabetes or asthma or physical or mental disabilities that kept them from doing activities that other youth are able to do. Youth were also asked if they had ever been told by a health professional that they had a mental or cognitive disorder. These measures are not the most reliable, as youth may not have been told when they were diagnosed with a condition, or they may not remember it accurately. It is also likely that many disorders go undiagnosed.

However, sexually exploited street-involved youth were more likely than non-exploited to have reported a health condition or disability: 38% to 45% of exploited youth reported having disabilities compared to 22%-27% of non-exploited youth.

Younger sexually exploited street-involved youth were more likely than their non-exploited peers to report they had been told they had a learning disability, epilepsy, fetal alcohol syndrome, schizophrenia, depression, bipolar disorder, chronic anxiety disorder or panic attacks, or alcohol and drug addictions.

Among older street-involved youth in 2001, sexually exploited and non-exploited youth were equally likely to report they had been told by a health professional they had mental or cognitive disorders. However, sexually exploited youth were more likely to report learning disabilities, or alcohol or drug addictions, compared to non-exploited youth.

In 2000, sexually exploited youth in custody were 7 times more likely than non-exploited youth to have said they were told by a health professional they had mental or emotional disorder. In 2000, 1 in 3 sexually exploited youth in custody had been diagnosed with major depression or bipolar disorder, compared to only 1 in 10 non-exploited youth. Chronic anxiety disorder and panic attacks appeared to be diagnosed more commonly among exploited youth in custody in 2000 compared to their non-exploited peers.

In 2004, both sexually exploited and non-exploited youth in custody reported similar rates of health conditions or physical disabilities. However, exploited youth were more likely to report they had been diagnosed with a learning disability, schizophrenia or addiction problems than were youth who had not been exploited.

Youth in care

In three of the surveys, sexually exploited youth were significantly more likely to have been in care than their non-exploited peers. Among younger street-involved youth in 2006, 44% of sexually exploited youth had been in care, compared to 33% of non-exploited youth. Similarly, among older street-involved youth in 2001, 66% of exploited youth had been in care, compared to 41% of non-exploited youth. Youth in custody in 2000 had even higher rates: 75% of sexually exploited youth had been in care, while 59% of non-exploited youth had been in care.

This does not necessarily mean that youth were sexually exploited by the foster care parents, or even that they were living in care when they were exploited. Some of the same risk factors that differentiate exploited and non-exploited youth also increase the odds that a youth will be in care at some point in their life—for example, youth who are abused are more likely to end up in care, and they are also more likely to be sexually exploited.

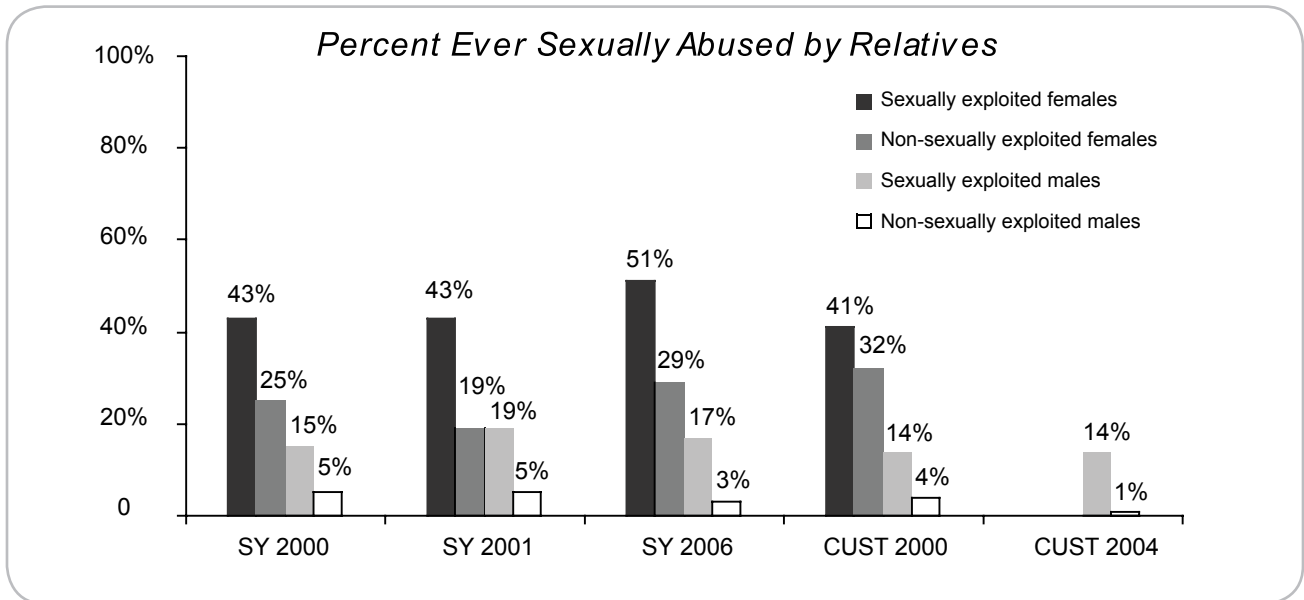
Abuse

Sexual and physical abuse rates are high among vulnerable populations such as street-involved and youth in custody. Within this already vulnerable population of marginalized youth, those who were sexually exploited experienced higher rates of both physical and sexual abuse than their peers.

Sexual Abuse

Sexual exploitation is one form of sexual abuse, but a few studies suggest that sexual abuse by family members during childhood or early adolescence increases a teen's vulnerability to being sexually exploited. Youth who experience incest may run away to escape the abuse, and once on the street, may be more easily exploited, in part because their personal boundaries have already been violated by trusted adults.

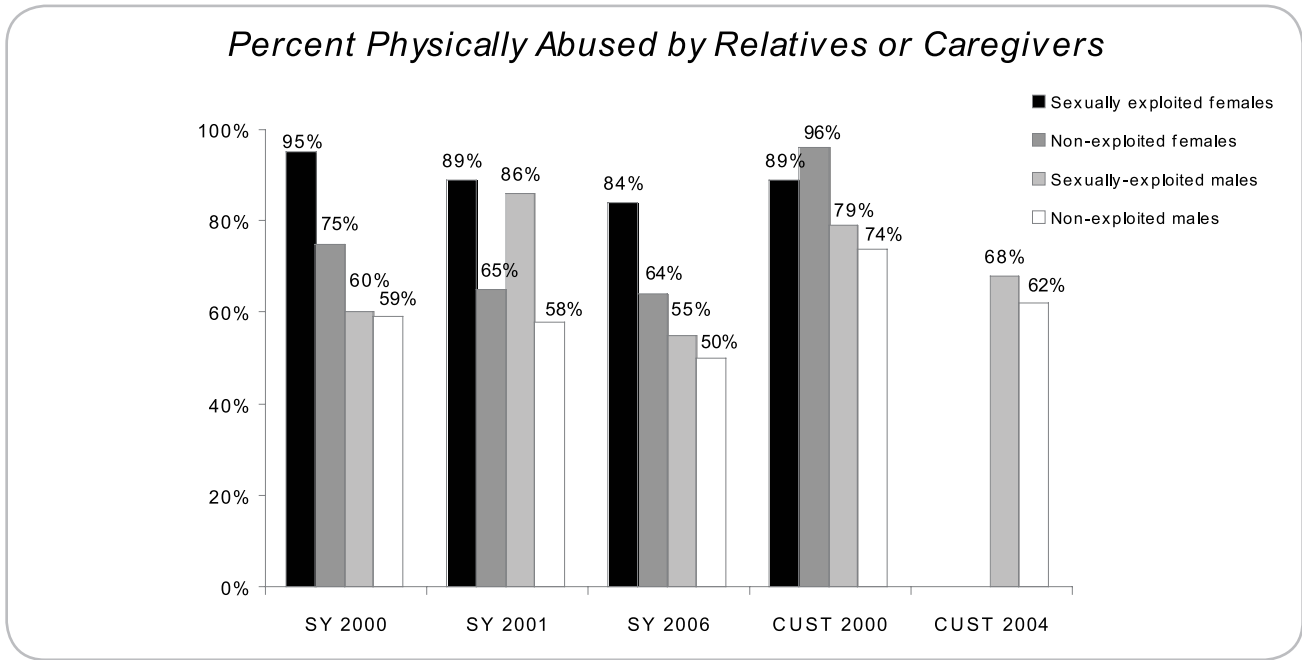
Across all surveys, sexually exploited youth were more likely to report sexual abuse by family members, relatives or caregivers than their non-exploited peers. Among street-involved youth, more than 1 in 4 youth who were sexually exploited reported being sexually abused by a relative or caregiver. Sexually exploited youth in custody also experienced sexual abuse by a relative or caregiver more commonly than non-exploited youth did. In all surveys, exploited females were more likely to report family sexual abuse than exploited males.



Physical Abuse

The overwhelming majority of street-involved youth and youth in custody reported experiences of violence. This was especially true for youth who had been sexually exploited. The street-involved youth surveys showed sexually exploited youth were more likely to report physical abuse than their non-exploited peers in all three surveys. Sexually exploited females report higher rates of physical abuse and maltreatment than non-exploited females across all 3 street youth surveys; as many as 95% of sexually exploited street-involved females had been physically abused, compared to 75% of non-exploited females. Sexually exploited males were less likely than females to experience physical abuse, but only in the 2001 survey of older street-involved youth were exploited males more likely to report physical abuse (86%) than non-exploited males (58%).

Like other vulnerable youth, youth in custody experienced a high degree of physical abuse and maltreatment. Between 71% and 84% of exploited youth in custody reported having experienced physical abuse, but non-exploited youth reported similar rates.



Perpetrators of physical abuse

Exploited youth experienced higher rates of relative and family physical abuse than non-exploited across all three street youth surveys. Sexually exploited younger street-involved females were 2 to 4 times more likely to be physically abused by a boyfriend or girlfriend than sexually exploited males were. Exploited youth in the 2000 survey were also more likely to report abuse by a stranger than non-exploited youth (41% compared to 24%).

Sexually exploited street-involved females in the 2001 survey in Vancouver were 10 times more likely to be physically abused by a pimp or agency manager than exploited males. They were also 4 times more likely to be physically abused by a trick or date.

Although youth in custody also reported high prevalence of physical abuse by family members and caregivers (65% in 2000 and 50% in 2004) this was similar to the percent of non-exploited youth who reported physical abuse (61% in 2000 and 50% in 2004). In 2000, more than twice as many sexually exploited females in custody reported physical abuse by a romantic partner than sexually exploited males (69% females vs. 27% males).



Perpetrators of Physical Abuse

	SY 2000	SY 2001	SY 2006	CUST 2000	CUST 2004
Relative or Caregiver	59%	63%	58%	65%	50%
Friend/Acquaintance	34%	28%	23%	43%	14%
Romantic Partner	37%	35%	22%	50%	5%
Stranger	34%	37%	20%	13%	14%
Trick/Date/Pimp/ Agency Manager	21%	25%	10%	-	-

Other violence exposure

The street-involved surveys asked youth about verbal insults or harassment, threats, and physical assaults in the past 12 months. For all street-involved youth, the rates of exposure to violence and threatening behaviours were high.

In the most recent street-involved youth survey in 2006, youth who were sexually exploited were more likely than non-exploited youth to have been threatened (64% compared to 49% of non-exploited youth) or physically assaulted (50% compared to 36% of non-exploited youth).

Suicide and Self-Harm

The surveys asked a number of questions about suicide and self-harm. Youth were asked whether they had thought about, planned, or actually attempted suicide in the past 12 months. Additionally, youth were asked if they had ever deliberately cut or injured themselves. The findings show that sexually exploited youth were at a greater risk for suicide and self-injury than their non-exploited peers.

Street-involved and marginalized youth

Half of all sexually exploited, street-involved youth had deliberately harmed themselves, and non-exploited youth also experienced high rates of self-harm (43%).

Across all three street surveys, exploited youth were more likely to have considered suicide in the past 12 months (37%-48% for exploited youth compared to 22%-35% for non-exploited youth).

Among younger youth who were sexually exploited, females were far more likely than males to have thought about suicide in the past year (63% vs. 37% in 2000, and 50% vs. 37% in 2006). Younger sexually exploited youth were also more likely than non-exploited youth to have made a plan about how they would attempt to kill themselves.

Across all three street-involved youth surveys, exploited youth were more likely to have attempted suicide in the past year. Approximately one third of exploited youth had attempted suicide.

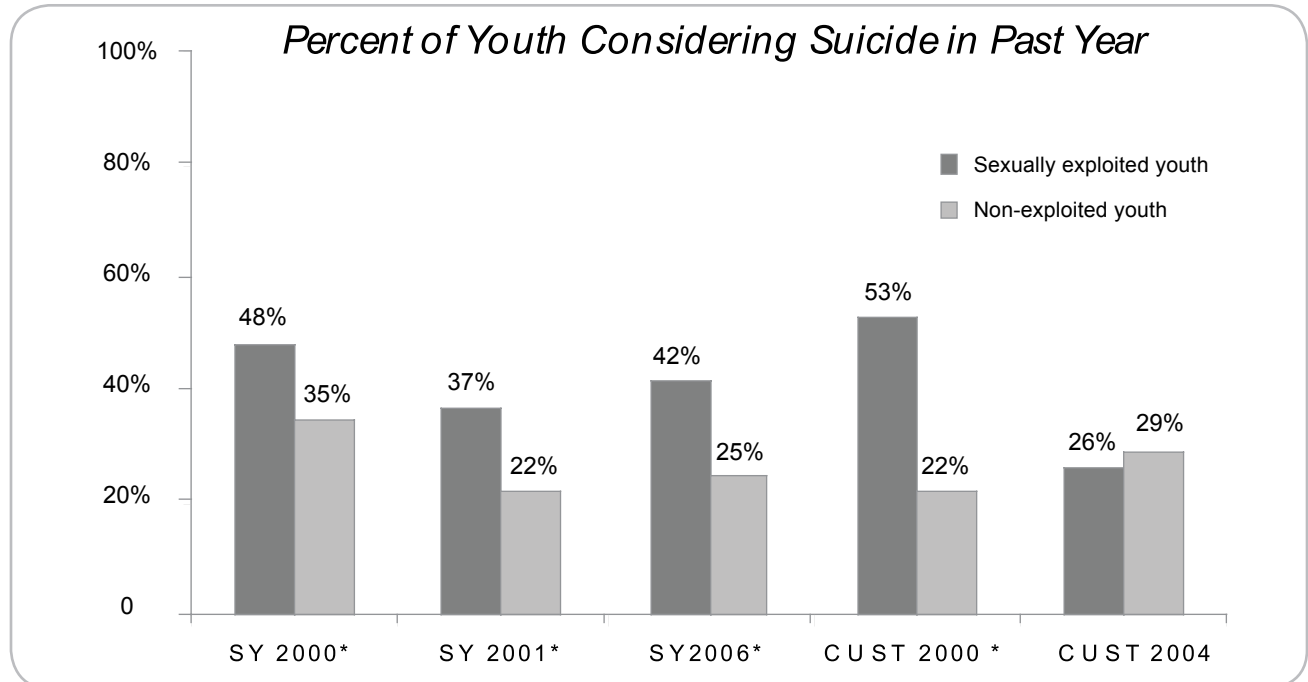


Youth in custody

Similarly, sexually exploited youth in custody had higher prevalence rates of self-injury than non-exploited youth, both while living in the community and during their time in custody. Between two to three times as many sexually exploited youth than non-exploited youth reported they had deliberately cut or injured themselves.

In 2000, more than half of sexually exploited youth in custody (53%) had considered suicide in the past year, compared to only 22% of non-exploited youth. In 2004, more than 1 in 4 sexually exploited youth had suicidal thoughts in the past year (26%). Twice as many exploited as non-exploited youth had made a suicide plan that year.

Of great concern, more than half of sexually exploited youth in custody had made a suicide attempt in the past 12 months. This was more than three times the percent of non-exploited youth in custody who had attempted suicide in the past year.



** indicates a significant difference between exploited and non-exploited youth*



Substance use

All five surveys asked questions about substance use. Sexually exploited youth and non-exploited youth did not differ in the average age of first marijuana use, age of first alcoholic drink, or in binge drinking in the past month (defined as having more than 5 drinks of alcohol in a row). Both exploited and non-exploited youth were exposed to marijuana and alcohol at an early age, on average, before 13 years for marijuana and before 12 years of age for first alcohol use.

Street-involved youth

Contrary to experiences with alcohol and marijuana, sexually exploited street-involved youth were more likely than non-exploited to have ever used heroin or other injection drugs. Exploited youth were also more likely than those not exploited to have ever used cocaine, hallucinogens, and amphetamines (including crystal meth). Inhalant, mushroom, and steroid use was more common among exploited youth than non-exploited youth only in 2000.

Twice as many sexually exploited older street-involved youth had ever used injection drugs or prescription pills without a doctor's order (60% for both) compared to non-exploited youth (29% for both). More than two-thirds of older sexually exploited youth had used heroin (68%) compared to only 43% of non-exploited older youth.

Youth in custody

From the 2000 survey, exploited youth in custody were more likely to report they had ever used heroin, injection drugs, and prescription pills than their non-exploited peers. For example, 63% of sexually exploited youth in custody had ever used heroin versus 35% of non-exploited youth. Sexually exploited youth in custody in 2000 were also nearly 4 times more likely than non-exploited teens to have ever used injection drugs.

Among youth in the 2004 custody survey, exploited youth were more likely to have used cocaine, hallucinogens, inhalants, amphetamines, and prescription pills than non-exploited youth. More than twice as many exploited youth (27%) versus non-exploited youth (11%) had used inhalants. Similarly, 83% of exploited youth had used prescription pills, as had 43% of non-exploited youth. In contrast, sexually exploited females in 2000 reported significantly less binge drinking than their non-exploited counterparts.

The frequency of serious drug use was also higher for sexually exploited youth in custody in 2000. Nearly two thirds of sexually exploited youth (63%) reported they had used cocaine more than 10 times in their life, compared to fewer than half of non-exploited youth (42%). In addition, 12 times as many exploited youth in custody had used injection drugs more than 10 times compared to non-exploited youth (12% vs. 1%).

Percent of Lifetime Drug Use by Sexually Exploited Youth

	SY 2000	SY 2001	SY 2006	CUST 2000	CUST 2004
Cocaine	64	89	73	92	96
Hallucinogens	77	83	64	84	83
Mushrooms	80	85	72	88	92
Inhalants	40	46	45	20	27
Heroin	46	68	48	63	35
Injection drugs	32	60	46	25	20
Steroids	24	23	34	10	
Prescription pills	24	23	34	54	83
Amphetamines & Crystal Meth	61	75	65	43	88

Education

Sexually exploited youth from the earlier street-involved youth surveys in 2000 and 2001 were no more or less likely than non-exploited youth to have been currently attending school. 58% of exploited youth in 2000 were attending school (compared to 63% of non-exploited youth). Not surprisingly, a lower percent of youth were attending school in the 2001 survey of older youth.

However, in 2006, sexually exploited youth were less likely to be attending school than their non-exploited peers. Of those surveyed that year, 66% of non-exploited youth were currently attending school, but only 57% of sexually exploited youth were in school. This was particularly true for females: in 2006, 76% of non-exploited females were attending school, but only 60% of sexually exploited, street-involved females were going to school.

Housing

The surveys of street-involved youth ask a number of questions as to where the youth were currently living, as well as where they had lived in the past year. The questions identify a number of precarious housing situations that do not offer long-term stability. These included living on the street, shelters, transition houses, hotels, squats, abandoned buildings, couch surfing, tents and cars.

Among younger youth, those who were sexually exploited were more likely to have lived in precarious housing in the past year (34%-44%). In addition, between one half to three quarters of sexually exploited youth reported having ever lived in precarious housing.

Older youth (both exploited and non-exploited) reported similar rates of unstable housing: approximately 50% lived in precarious housing in the past year and about 95% had ever lived in precarious housing.



What has changed since 2000?

Five of the same cities participated in the street-involved and marginalized youth surveys in both 2000 and 2006: Abbotsford/Mission, Prince Rupert, Surrey, Vancouver and Victoria. As a result, it is possible to compare whether the percent of youth reporting various sexual exploitation experiences has improved or worsened since 2000 in those cities. To compare the two groups, we needed to remove 19-year-olds from the 2000 survey analyses, and remove the extra cities from the 2006 survey data, leaving 410 youth in 2000, and 504 in 2006. We then compared the results for each year with special statistical tests you must use when you can't combine datasets directly. Although the original report *Against the Odds* (Smith et al. 2007) explored a number of trends between youth in both years, we conducted further analyses focused only on the experiences of sexually exploited youth in 2000 and in 2006.

What has changed? Very little. The percentage of street-involved teens overall in 2006 who indicated any kind of sexual exploitation was virtually unchanged (30% in 2000, 29% in 2006). However, the percent declined slightly for males (37% in 2000 vs. 31% in 2006) and increased slightly for females (23% in 2000 vs. 25% in 2006). Aboriginal females had a greater increase than others, from 16% in 2000 to 23% in 2006.

A closer look at the age that young people report first being exploited shows slight improvements for both genders. It appears the average age may be getting older. In 2000, the average age of first exchanging sex was 13.8 years (13.9 for males, 13.6 for females), but in 2006, the average age increased to 14.8 years (14.7 for males, 14.8 for females).

Most experiences showed little to no change. The percent of youth who reported receiving money, drugs, or necessities as part of their exploitation was not significantly different between 2000 and 2006. Money and drugs were still the most common things they received, followed closely by shelter, then food, and transportation. Receiving clothes in exchange for sex was least common in both years. Where youth were living when they were first exploited was not significantly different between 2000 and 2006 in the 5 cities that were part of both surveys.



What do exploited youth say they need?

Services they used and people they found the most helpful

In the street-involved survey in 2006, youth were asked which available services they used and if they found these services helpful or not. The surveys from other years did not ask these questions. The responses in this section reflect this most recent survey, and the most current services available in the different communities.

Top 5 available services exploited youth accessed in 2006

Youth Clinic	41%
Food bank	38%
Shelter	36%
Soup kitchen	36%
Street nurses	32%

Sexually exploited youth most commonly accessed survival and health services. Over two-thirds of the youth accessed services for food. Safe houses and transitional housing were accessed by fewer than 1 in 4 sexually exploited youth (23% and 21.4% respectively). This may reflect the requirements some service providers place on youth who try to access these services, such as being drug-free, that may create added barriers for sexually exploited youth in trying to leave their exploiters.

Both the 2000 and 2006 street-involved youth surveys also had questions about whether young people had asked people for help in the past 12 months, and if these people were helpful. The list included professionals in ten categories of service group such as social workers, youth outreach workers, and street nurses, but also included family and friends in 2006, two categories that were not options in the 2000 survey.

Sexually exploited youth in 2000 were most likely to report youth outreach workers and health care providers as helpful. When given the additional options in 2006, exploited youth also reported friends and family as important social supports, confirming that contact often continues between youth and their family, even when they are street-involved.

Top 5 helpful people youth accessed in 2000

Doctor/Nurse	46%
Youth Outreach worker	36%
Street Nurse	31%
Social worker	24%
Alcohol and Drug Counselor	23%

Top 5 helpful people youth accessed in 2006

Friends*	42%
Youth Outreach Worker	36%
Social Worker	33%
Family*	32%
Doctor/Nurse	31%

*Categories not provided in 2000

What exploited youth said their communities need

Street-involved youth in all three surveys were also asked which services or programs their communities needed more of. The top 5 services chosen by the greatest percent of sexually exploited youth are listed below. Low rent apartments/affordable housing, work experience and job training were consistently chosen as needed by the most youth in all three surveys. Up to 2 out of 3 younger exploited youth said their communities needed more safe or affordable housing, and more than 4 out of 5 older youth also said their communities needed affordable housing.

Top 5 Most needed or wanted services 2000

Low rent apartment	64%
Job training	63%
Work experience	59%
School program for street youth	53%
Safe house	50%

Top 5 Most needed or wanted services 2001

Low rent apartment	83%
Dental Services	80%
Work experience	68%
Job training	67%
Alcohol and drug counseling	64%

Top 5 Most needed or wanted services 2006

Safe house	44%
Shelter	43%
Job training	42%
Affordable housing	37%
Work experience	36%

Work experience and training was important for older exploited youth; more than 2 out of 3 said their community needed more work experience or job training opportunities. Among exploited older street-involved youth, more than 75% were interested in getting a job. These youth thought that more education (43%), work experience and job training (35%), and help with a job search and resume (24%) would help them gain employment. Only 15% of sexually exploited youth who wanted employment thought they could do it on their own.

More than 80% of older exploited youth said their communities need more dental services. This may be because street-involved youth generally cannot afford dental care, and toothaches and oral health problems may take time to become so serious that they affect young people's overall health and ability to work.

More than half of sexually exploited youth in 2000 and 2001 wanted school programs for street youth, but only 31% of exploited youth in 2006 wanted these programs. This may be because 2 out of 3 street-involved and marginalized youth in 2006 were already attending school, a higher percent than among the earlier surveys. These findings indicate a desire and hope for their future.

Things that would make life better

The older street-involved youth in 2001 were asked what would make their life better. Housing was at the top of the list for sexually exploited youth. Other things they thought would improve their lives included work, education, getting clean, counselling, and enough money to live.

In 2006, younger street-involved youth were asked, "If you could change anything in your community to help street youth, what would that be?" Sexually exploited youth wrote in things like less violence, more shelters and drop-in centers, safe and affordable housing, and opportunities for work and education.

Hope for the Future

Both youth in custody surveys and the 2006 street-involved youth surveys asked youth where they see themselves in 5 years. Across all three surveys, youth most often expected to have a job.

However, sexually exploited youth were less optimistic than their non-exploited peers. In 2006, sexually exploited youth were twice as likely as non-exploited youth to think they would be dead (15% vs. 7%) or in prison (10% vs. 5%). They were also less likely than non-exploited youth to think that they would have a home of their own. However, 45% of sexually exploited youth expected to have a job in 5 years.

Among youth in custody, more than half of those who had been sexually exploited saw themselves working in 5 years, but more than three-quarters of non-exploited youth expected to be employed in 5 years. Just under half of exploited youth expected to have a family (42-44%) and 44-58% expected to have a home of their own. More than 12% of exploited youth in custody believed they would be in prison, and 8% to 14% believed they would be dead.

In 2001, older street-involved youth were also asked what special talents or qualities they had. Exploited youth listed the same types of things most youth did, such as art, basketball, writing, skateboarding, music, being a good listener, and being a good friend. Despite difficult life experiences, sexually exploited youth reported interests and talents to feel good about.



Final word

The experiences of the 508 sexually exploited youth in our study, from several different communities across BC between 2000 and 2006, offer a set of challenges. They challenge common ideas and stereotypes about sexual exploitation. They challenge us to do more prevent exploitation, and to think of new ways to help those who are being exploited. They challenge us to listen to them when they say what is needed in their communities, and who they find helpful. We see a number of implications from the results of our study.

Challenging the stereotypes

One of the most compelling issues in our study is the number of youth who do not even recognize they are being exploited. Obviously those who exploit youth and profit from them don't want young people to realize that what is happening to them is exploitation and it is illegal. We need to increase awareness about exploitation among youth, helping them see exploitation for what it is, and recognize who is at risk.

The stereotypes about what exploitation is, and who is exploited, also help keep communities from recognizing and reaching out to exploited youth who don't fit the stereotypes. As many males as females reported sexual exploitation, yet how many services for sexually exploited youth focus only on girls and young women? Similarly, less than half of sexually exploited teens identified as exclusively heterosexual, but to what extent do agencies provide LGB-friendly care?

Stereotypes about the people who exploit youth affect law enforcement strategies and interventions to reduce demand. Although men are the most common exploiters, women also sexually exploit youth in BC communities. One intervention for perpetrators is known as "John School," a program to teach first-time offenders about the costs of their exploitation—yet our research suggests it should also be "Jane School," and law enforcement may need to consider additional approaches to identifying exploitation by all genders.

Intervening early to prevent exploitation

Certain life experiences were significantly more common among sexually exploited youth than among their non-exploited peers. Youth who had experienced sexual and physical abuse from family members, and those with chronic health problems, including mental and emotional health conditions, appeared to be more vulnerable to being exploited. The majority of sexually exploited youth first ran away, were kicked out, or became street involved before they were first exploited, often as young as age 13. And among these younger street involved youth, many reported exchanging sex for shelter, for food, and for transportation in the past year.

This suggests there may be a window of time in which we could intervene with those at highest risk to prevent sexual exploitation—when younger teens first begin running away or are first on the street. By structuring services to provide safe shelter and basic necessities, and by working with them and their families when young teens are first having problems, we may help reduce their vulnerability to being exploited.

Opportunities and services to help sexually exploited youth

Sexual exploitation increases the health problems young people face. They experienced more violence on the streets and from family and romantic partners than non-exploited youth. They were more likely than their non-exploited peers to use drugs, including injecting drugs, and this puts them at high risk for HIV and hepatitis C. They were more likely to have thought about or to have attempted suicide in the past year. They were less likely than non-exploited youth to be in school, and less likely to have ever held a legal job, yet they recognized the potent barriers to their ability to become employed, even when the majority of them wanted to.



Many of the sexually exploited youth in these surveys had clear messages of what was needed in their communities to help them: safe, affordable housing, job training and work experience, and health care services that included dental care, and alcohol and drug counseling. They identified the people they felt were helpful, and who they trusted: the most commonly identified professionals they found helpful included health care providers, youth outreach workers, social workers, and drug and alcohol counselors. This suggests the importance of creating opportunities for access to the most needed services—affordable housing and job training—through the most accessed and trusted youth-serving professionals.

Youth should not have to be sexually exploited in order to obtain the basic necessities for survival. Some of the ways services for youth are currently set up may make it harder for them to escape exploitation. For example, overnight shelters and transitional housing programs often require youth to be drug free, yet sexually exploited youth may face greater problems of substance use and abuse, and so may not be able to access those programs; this in turn may force them to continue exchanging sex for shelter, and in turn, using drugs to cope with their exploitation. Job training programs may not have the links to drug and alcohol treatment programs, or mental health services, which may be needed to help sexually exploited youth address potent barriers to successful employment. Health care services may focus on physical and mental health problems, such as sexually transmitted infections, but not help address the other determinants of health, such as shelter, food, and education. By fostering better links between sectors such as health care, social services, housing, education and employment, by reducing the barriers and gatekeepers to accessing the different services, we may be able to make it easier for sexually exploited youth to find a way to exit their current circumstances.

Recognizing their strengths and fostering their hopes

Sexually exploited youth have hopes and dreams like other teens. They have skills and talents they have used to survive challenging life experiences. They deserve our respect as much as our caring, support for who they are and what they're going through. Research has consistently demonstrated that a strengths-based approach to connecting with youth, fostering positive life goals and supporting their healthy choices, can help heal trauma and promote long-term health. Sexually exploited teens deserve the chances to heal, to grow, and to thrive, not just survive.

Resources and links

Assistant Deputy Minister's (ADM) Committee on Prostitution and the Sexual Exploitation of Youth

www.pssg.gov.bc.ca/community_programs/exploitation/index.htm

Ministry of Children and Family Development

www.gov.bc.ca/mcf/

BC Representative for Children & Youth

www.rcybc.ca

1-800-476-3933

Help Line for Children

310-1234 (anywhere in BC)

Sexual Assault and Family Crisis Line

Victim Information 1-800-563-0808

Sexual Exploitation Toolkit, Justice Institute of British Columbia

www.jibc.ca/seytoolkit

Community Initiative for Health and Safety: Tools for Change Tool Kit

www.livingincommunity.ca/toolkit/

SOLOS (Safe On-Line Outreach Society)

www.safeonlineoutreach.com

Children of the Street

www.childrenofthestreet.com

Prevention, public awareness, and information about sexual exploitation.

PLEA Community Services Society--ONYX program

www.plea.bc.ca/vancouver_coastal.htm

1-877-411-PLEA (7532)

Support services for sexually exploited youth

NOW (New Opportunities for Women) Canada

www.nowcanada.ca/

Programs, support services, counseling, and shelter for sexually exploited youth in BC (Kelowna) and Canada.

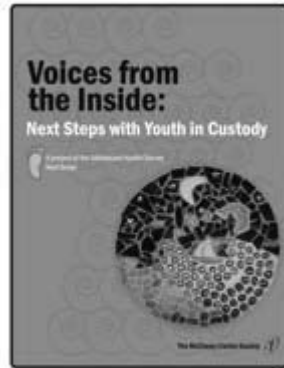
PEERS (Prostitutes Employment Education and Resource Society)

Vancouver Outreach ph# 778-846-8546 www.peersvancouver.org

Victoria www.peers.bc.ca

Counseling, programs, and exiting support.

Related reports available at www.mcs.bc.ca



Voices from the Inside



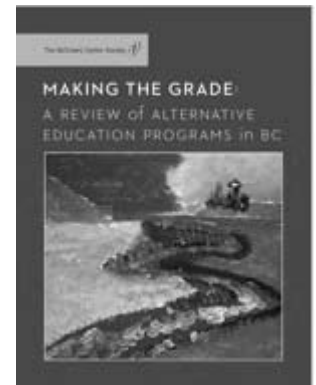
Time Out 2



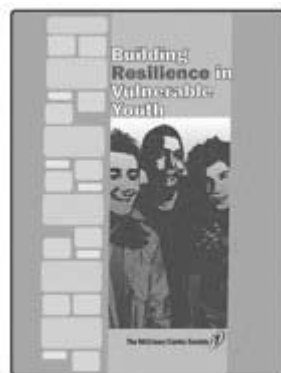
Against the Odds



Improving the Odds



Making the Grade



Building Resilience in Vulnerable Youth



Not Yet Equal

