Chapter 3.2

Whose Safety Counts?
Street Youth, Social Exclusion,
and Criminal Victimization

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When homeless youth are discussed during public debates on crime, it is usually with reference to their role as perpetrators. This perspective, rooted in popular and enduring notions of delinquent street urchins, typically characterizes homeless youth as kids who are "bad" or "deviant" (or, more generously, troubled or misguided) and who leave home for fairly insignificant reasons. Once on the streets, they become involved in delinquent activities and, as a result, put the health and safety of the general public is at risk. It is "they" who are causing problems for ordinary citizens; it is "they" who are driving away tourists and making the streets unsafe. The persistent public focus on street youth as potential offenders overlooks the real possibility that they may disproportionately be victims of crime.

Understanding street youth victimization

Young people who are homeless experience much higher levels of criminal victimization than other Canadians. An emerging body of literature explores the complex factors that result in higher levels of victimization

among the homeless (Baron, 1997, 2003; Fitzpatrick et al., 1999; Tyler et al., 2000; Whitbeck et al, 1997, 2001; Whitbeck & Simons, 1990). As Fitzpatrick et al. argue, homelessness is "a stress-filled, dehumanizing, dangerous circumstance in which individuals are at high risk of being witness to or victims of a wide range of violent acts" (1999, p. 439). Much of this research, reflecting the broader findings of sociological and criminological research, identifies the significance of background variables and, in particular, the effects of previous victimization on future occurrences (Lauritsen & Quinet, 1995; Terrell, 1997; Tyler et al., 2000).

In the case of homeless youth, a consensus has emerged suggesting that a majority of street youth in Canada and the United States come from homes characterized by high levels of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse and neglect, compared with domiciled youth (Alder, 1991; Dematteo et al., 1999; Gaetz et al., 1999; Janus et al., 1987, 1995; Kufeldt & Nimmo, 1987; Whitbeck & Hoyt, 1999; Whitbeck & Simons, 1993). Rotheram-Borus et al. (1996) estimate that street youth are five times as likely as domiciled youth to report having been victims of sexual abuse as children. These young people are likely to experience low self-esteem, an impaired ability to form affective and trusting relationships with adults, higher rates of depression and suicide attempts, running away, or being kicked out of home (Beitchman et al., 1992; Tyler et al., 2000; Whitbeck et al., 1997).

There is also evidence to suggest that an abusive background characterized by coercive and aggressive parenting produces aggression in children and adolescents (Baron, 1997; Baron & Hartnagel, 1998; Fleisher, 1995; Patterson et al., 1984; Patterson et al., 1989; Whitbeck & Hoyt, 1999), who are also more likely to exhibit deviant peer associations and to engage in risky behaviours (Kral et al., 1997; MacDonald et al., 1994; Whitbeck et al., 1997, 2001). Youth cultural factors are important here as well. That is, the "informal rules" that develop on the streets are, in part, a result of such aggressive upbringing and may condition homeless youth to adopt more "violent" approaches to problem solving (Anderson, 1996; Baron et al., 2001; Terrell, 1997).

Similarly, background variables are also correlated with later victimization on the streets (Baron, 1997; Browne & Bassuk, 1997; Kipke et al., 1997; Tyler et al., 2000; Whitbeck et al., 1997), in part because the aggres-

sive behaviours produced by a violent upbringing may often lead to provocative interactions (Baron, 1997; Fleisher, 1995). In addition, there is evidence that victims of sexual abuse are at increased risk for sexual victimization and exploitation when they are older (Janus et al., 1987; Simons & Whitbeck, 1991).

While background factors help explain deviant and violent behaviour – as well as experiences of victimization – other factors must be taken into account (Whitbeck & Simons, 1990). In making sense of the criminal offending behaviour of homeless youth, Hagan and McCarthy (1997) effectively demonstrate the significance of situational factors. At the same time, lifestyle and routine activities theories highlight the contextual significance of environmental and situational factors in increasing one's exposure to the risk of criminal victimization (Cohen & Felson, 1979; Cohen et al., 1981; Hindelang et al., 1978; Miethe & Meier, 1990).

Routine activities theory suggests that three conditions increase the opportunity for a crime to occur: a motivated offender, a suitable target, and a lack of capable guardianship (Cohen & Felson, 1979). If one regularly frequents dangerous and poorly supervised locations or engages in delinquent behaviours, one's proximity to other criminal offenders places one at greater risk for victimization (Kennedy & Forde, 1990; Lauritsen et al., 1991).

For young people who are homeless, the implications are clear. Their lives are played out in spaces that bring them into contact with hostile strangers, potential offenders, other homeless people, and people with serious substance abuse issues or mental health problems. Their low level of guardianship (Miethe & Meier, 1994) limits their ability to protect themselves or to be protected, making them suitable targets.

An additional lifestyle factor to consider is that street youth, as a group, are more likely to engage in criminal and delinquent activities (Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; Inciardi et al., 1993). Criminological research suggests a link between criminal offending and victimization (Lauritsen et al., 1991). That is, many of the same factors that enable offending behaviours – dangerous locations, proximity to other offenders, weak guardianship – may also lead to victimization (Esbensen & Huizinga, 1991; Rapp-Paglicci & Wodarski, 2000; Rivara et al., 1995).

Social exclusion and victimization

Lifestyle and routine activities theories suggest that certain social and ecological conditions raise one's potential risk of personal victimization, both through increased exposure to potential offenders or dangerous situations and through a compromised ability to protect oneself, remove oneself from a dangerous situation, or rely on public safety resources such as the police. Such theories do not, however, explain how and why victimized persons wind up in such circumstances in the first place (Miethe & Meier, 1994; Sampson & Lauritsen, 1990). The notion of "lifestyles" suggests that individuals *choose* such environments, activities, or associations; and that by making different choices, potential victims could lessen their risk.

While not dismissing the significance of agency, one must take account of systemic factors that may profoundly limit choice and increase the risk of victimization. The concept of *social exclusion* allows one to extend routine activities theory by exploring the degree to which the personal histories of individuals intersect with social, political, and economic conditions that restrict people's access to spaces, institutions, and practices that reduce risk. Such an account begins with a recognition that marginalized groups and individuals are often socially, economically, and spatially separated from the people and places to which other citizens have access within advanced industrial societies (Mandanipour, 1998). Social exclusion is defined as

> the process of being shut out, fully or partially, from any of the social, economic, political or cultural systems which determine the social integration of a person in society. Social exclusion may, therefore, be seen as the denial (or non-realization) of the civil, political, and social rights of citizenship. (Walker & Walker, 1997, p. 8)

For young people who become homeless, social exclusion is experienced in terms of access to shelter and housing, employment, and a healthy lifestyle, for instance. It is also manifest in their restricted access to (and movement within) urban spaces and their limited social capital. In most cases, the process of social exclusion begins before street youth become homeless, but it intensifies through their experience living on the streets. This experience of social exclusion is cumulative, making it diffi-

cult to escape, particularly when constant exposure to risk compromises health, safety, and opportunity. As an outcome of their homelessness, street youth are typically pushed into places and circumstances that impair their ability to ensure their safety and security and, consequently, increase their risk of criminal victimization.

Being without secure shelter means that the day-to-day lives of homeless youth are played out in a public environment over which they have limited control and within which their freedom of movement is restricted. They spend a large amount of their time on the sidewalks and streets, and in the parks and alleyways, of large cities. Their "right" to inhabit many of these public spaces is often called into question; street youth regularly report being "kicked out" of street locations and parks by police in the past year (Gaetz, 2002). Their use of semi-public spaces such as shopping malls is also more constrained than most people's, as they are often denied service or asked to leave by security staff.

Homeless people are often forcibly removed from safer spaces in the city and relegated to spaces that are potentially more dangerous, where they have less control over whom they interact with. Street youth, whether they are working, resting, or enjoying social interactions, are continually exposed to other potential offenders. The fact that many of their peers are also homeless and more likely to adopt aggressive and violent behaviours as an adaptive strategy for life on the streets may also increase their likelihood of victimization.

The risks of proximity to other offenders cannot be reduced by retreating to a safe domicile. Even when they are tired, ill, or under the influence of alcohol or drugs, they cannot recover in a secure environment. The alternative is overcrowded social service environments where their health and safety are also jeopardized. Street youth are thus pushed into marginalized spaces where they are exposed to the ongoing risk of assault and property crime.

Recent research (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002) demonstrates that most homeless youth do not avoid work, but the vast majority face significant barriers to obtaining and maintaining employment. When they do find work, it is often in short-term, dead-end jobs or in unregulated work on the margins of the economy. As a result, they engage in risky money-making strategies, some of them illegal or quasi-legal, including the sex

trade, panhandling (begging), squeegeeing (cleaning car windshields), and criminal acts such as theft and drug dealing.

The subsistence strategies of the homeless affect their safety and the degree of risk they are exposed to (Russell & Robertson, 1998; Terrell, 1997; Tyler et al., 2000; Whitbeck et al., 1997). Street youth are more likely to be in contact with others who may be deviant or dangerous, and they may place themselves in a more vulnerable position relative to more powerful criminals (pimps, drug suppliers). Because their money-making activities are often highly visible (prostitution, panhandling, squeegeeing) and produce cash-in-hand on a daily basis, street youth present attractive targets, despite their seeming poverty.

A final manifestation of the social exclusion experienced by street youth stems from their weak guardianship and lack of protection. Their involvement in delinquent acts increases the likelihood of negative inter-actions with the police. Potential offenders thus may contemplate com-mitting acts of robbery or violence against homeless youth, knowing that the victim is less likely to seek the involvement of the police (Baron, 1997; Sparks, 1982).

The ability of street youth to avoid victimization is also limited by their weak social capital. Street youth cannot easily obtain support from authority figures (parents, teachers, the police) to protect them or their property or to assist them when they are victims of a crime. Street youth depend heavily on other street youth (whose social capital is likewise weak, and who may also be potential offenders) and the staff at street youth agencies to provide these resources. Unfortunately, alienation and difficulty in forming attachments and trusting relations with adults – and with other street youth, for that matter – may be one consequence of victimization, which, in turn, may increase risk.

Homeless youth, then, experience social exclusion in their inade-quate access to housing and employment, their restricted access to public and semi-public spaces, and their weak social capital. The data presented here highlight some of the consequences of this social exclusion. First, I demonstrate that street youth are much more likely than domiciled youth (aged 15-24) to be victims of a range of personal crimes, and that this cannot be explained merely in terms of their offending behaviour. Second, I argue that when street youth are victims of crime, they gener-

ally rely on a narrower set of social supports to help them deal with the consequences. Third, I explore the degree to which street youth are restricted in their ability to effectively engage in strategies to protect themselves. Finally, an effort will be made to examine how gender shapes the experience of social exclusion of street youth.

Method

The data presented here are part of a larger study of legal and justice issues facing street youth involving surveys and interviews with 208 homeless youth living in Toronto. Each person was asked to fill out a structured, self-administered questionnaire consisting of 55 questions. Those with literacy problems were assisted by our research team, which included several current and former street youth. Upon completing the questionnaire, each respondent was asked to sit for a structured interview (conducted privately) to provide qualitative data to supplement the survey questionnaire.

We conducted our research at eight agencies serving street youth throughout the city of Toronto during fall 2001. Those eligible to participate were between 15 and 24 years of age, had been homeless or without shelter during the previous year, and had demonstrated street involvement. Respondents who had been homeless for less than 30 days were excluded from analysis.

Where possible, we compared data from this study with recent and broader-based criminal victimization research in Canada − in this case, Statistics Canada's General Social Survey (GSS) (Statistics Canada, 1999). The GSS was conducted in 1999 through telephone interviews with approximately 26,000 Canadians, aged 15 or older, living in urban and rural areas across the country. The GSS excluded homeless people from the sample, since they cannot easily be contacted by telephone.

Results

Service providers estimate that on any given night, the population of homeless and under-housed youth in Toronto ranges between 1,200 and 1,700. Our sample was drawn from the street youth population living in shelters, visiting drop-ins and health services, and living on the streets in

the fall of 2001. The average age of young people in our sample was 20.1 years; the mean age at leaving home was 16.

Most research on street youth — whether conducted in Canada or elsewhere — suggests that certain key demographic features of this group distinguish it from the mainstream youth population. For instance, men typically outnumber women, often by a 2:1 ratio (Dematteo et al., 1999; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997). In this survey, 58.6 percent of the respondents were male, 38.7 percent were female, and 2.7 percent were transgendered. (Because the transgendered sample is so small (n = 5), these respondents have been excluded from analysis.) The street youth population is also characterized by the overrepresentation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered youth (O'Brien et al., 1994). Of our sample, 29.6 percent defined themselves as "non-straight"; 5 percent of these were lesbian or gay, and an additional 24.6 percent reported they were "bisexual," "bi-curious," or "not sure."

The vast majority (71.4 percent) of street youth in our sample were born in Canada, and more than half were from Toronto; 29.5 percent described themselves as "visible minorities," although the sample as a whole does not demonstrate the range of diverse ethnic origins found in the broader population of Toronto youth. Aboriginal youth (9.1 percent) and African-Canadian youth (17.7 percent) are overrepresented within the street youth population, while South Asian and East Asian youth are underrepresented.

Criminal victimization

The GSS reports that approximately 25 percent of Canadians are victims of crime in any given year (Statistics Canada, 1999), a figure that has remained relatively unchanged over the past decade. Generally, half of these incidents of victimization involve personal crimes (assault, robbery, sexual assault, theft) and about 35 percent involve household crimes − break and enter, motor vehicle/parts theft, theft of household property, and vandalism (Besserer & Trainor, 2000, p. 4). Young people aged 15 to 24 typically report higher levels of victimization (39.7 percent) than do adults and the elderly; 18 percent having been victimized on more than one occasion.

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In our survey, 81.9 percent of the street youth sampled reported having been victims of crime in the past year, while 79.4 percent reported two or more incidents. The vast majority of offences against street youth were personal crimes, since most household crimes (motor vehicle offences, theft of household property) are less likely to be experienced by homeless people with unstable housing and limited property.

Table 1 compares the rate of criminal victimization among street youth with that of domiciled youth aged 15 to 24; the latter statistics are drawn from the GSS (Statistics Canada, 1999). The categories and descriptions of offences are based on Canadian Criminal Code definitions. In virtually every category, the percentage of street youth who have experienced some form of personal crime is significantly greater than that of domiciled 15- to 24-year-olds in the general population, with respect to both property crime and assault. For instance, higher percentages of street youth (both male and female) report at least one incident of theft, robbery, or vandalism in the past year than do domiciled youth. Although homeless people have fewer and less valuable possessions, the experience of being homeless makes them more vulnerable to property crime, since they carry their cash or property with them at all times.

It is, however, the high percentage of street youth who report being victims of violent crimes (assault, robbery, sexual assault) that demonstrates most dramatically the extreme nature of their victimization. In particular, 31.9 percent of our street youth sample reported being victims of sexual assault in the past year.

Though men in the general population are slightly more likely to be victims of most crimes than women (the exception being sexual assault), the reverse is the case for homeless youth. While young men who are homeless are more likely to report being victims of robbery, female street youth are overall more likely to be victims of crime and, in particular, vandalism, break and enter, and sexual assault. Domestic assault is a particular problem: 25 percent reported being victims of partner abuse in the past year. Nevertheless, as Tanner and Wortley (2002) have noted, male street youth are still much more likely to be victims of sexual assault than are domiciled youth either male or female.

Offending behaviour

Criminological research suggests a linkage between criminal offending and victimization (Lauritsen et al., 1991). Research in Canada has consistently shown that the street youth population is generally more likely than domiciled youth to engage in deviant and delinquent behaviours (Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; Tanner & Wortley, 2002). Table 2 shows the frequency of involvement in certain criminal activities, including "assault," "theft" (both for personal needs and in order to sell), and "drug dealing." The range of delinquent and criminal offences listed here, though limited, represents indicators of degree of criminal involvement.

There is clearly a great deal of variation among the population of street youth. While the overall percentage of street youth involved in crime is high, 37 percent of those in our sample reported no involvement in any of the offence categories. The question is whether those street youth who are more criminally involved are also at greater risk of becoming victims of crime. An analysis of data determines that street youth who report no involvement in the criminal activities listed in Table 2 were only slightly less likely to report experiences of criminal victimization during the past year. The greatest differences were reported between those who frequently engaged in selling drugs (85 percent were victims of crime) and those who did not deal drugs (76.5 percent).

Homeless male youth are more likely than their female peers to be criminally involved, particularly in theft (for purposes of selling) and drug dealing, a difference that also reflects the gendered nature of street youth's money-making strategies. The relationship between criminal offending and victimization is complex, for female street youth are in general more likely to be victims of crime, but less likely to be offenders than males. Involvement in deviant and delinquent behaviours thus cannot alone explain the high rates of criminal victimization that street youth experience. The complex interplay of gender, crime, and criminal victimization suggests that young women who are homeless may experience social exclusion in profoundly different ways from young men.

Worst victimization experience

Street youth were asked what they considered the most serious crime committed against them in the past year. Incidents of assault (22.9 percent) and theft of personal belongings (21.1 percent) were mentioned most often. Women were more likely to identify sexual assault (F = 11.3 percent; M = 4.0 percent) and partner assault (F = 15.5 percent; M = 1.0 percent) as the most significant, while men were more likely to identify theft of personal belongings (M = 14.1 percent; F 8.5 percent) and fraudulent acts by employers (M = 14.1 percent; F = 7.0 percent).

Street youth were asked to identify whom they had told about the most serious episode of criminal victimization they had experienced in the previous year (see Table 3). Although it is not surprising that street youth are most likely to report negative experiences to their friends, given the profound significance of street friendships for homeless people, what is unusual is the number who say that they did not tell anyone about what happened to them (33.1 percent), a practice more characteristic of homeless men than of homeless women. According to the General Social Survey, on the other hand, only 7 percent of domiciled youth (15–24 years old) chose not to tell anyone when they were victims of crime (Besserer & Trainor, 2000, p. 9). This suggests that although street youth may emphasize the significance of "street" friendships, often using the language of "family" to describe such relationships, they often, at the same time, are socially isolated or have weak attachments to others and do not always trust those who are close to them.

Few street youth reported incidents of criminal victimization to members of their family or to adult authority figures such as teachers, social workers, or counsellors (including shelter staff), reflecting the estrangement of young people who are homeless, their weak guardianship, and their limited social capital. Women, however, were much more likely to confide in adult authority figures than men.

Only 12.2 percent of street youth reported their worst victimization experience to the police; and, in many of these cases, this did not necessarily reflect a personal decision (e.g., the police independently arrived at the scene of a crime). Many young people refrain from informing the police of criminal activities that they have experienced because they feel

that the incident is minor or there is little the police can do about it (Tanner & Wortley, 2002). Young people may also be concerned about being perceived as "snitches" and about retaliation by the offender. While these explanations may apply to street youth, the responses of a number of street youth reflect their profound alienation from the police, their lack of faith in them, and their desire to avoid them.

One of the main reasons our respondents cited for not reporting their victimization to the police was their belief that the police would not believe them anyway (36.5 percent), a view expressed even more strongly by male (42.7 percent) than by female youth (21.1 percent). In addition, 20.9 percent reported being unwilling to involve the police because they themselves were committing an illegal act at the time. The fact that young men (27.4 percent) are more likely than young women (10.5 percent) to give this reason, is likely related to their higher levels of criminal involvement.

Safety and preventive strategies

Table 4 shows the range of strategies street youth in our sample reported engaging in to enhance their personal safety, compared with those cited by domiciled youth in the General Social Survey.

In some ways, street youth engage in strategies that are typical of adolescents in general. For instance, the most common safety strategy of both street youth and domiciled youth is to change their routines and activities and avoid certain places they consider dangerous. Smaller percentages of street youth also reported engaging in strategies such as installing new locks (or security bars), taking self-defence courses, or obtaining a dog, all of which require an investment of resources.

However, without the guardianship of parents, street youth rely on safety strategies that more directly reflect their housing instability, their street involvement, and their constant exposure to risk in public spaces. A much higher percentage of street youth (30.4 percent) compared with domiciled youth reported having had to change their residence in order to ensure safety, and 27.8 percent also reported regularly carrying weapons to defend themselves. In addition, 44.1 percent of street youth reported carrying their possessions with them at all times. This strategy has the disadvantage of restricting their mobility and movement, limit-

ing their access to private services (restaurants, stores, shopping malls), and actually making them targets for robbery or assault on the streets.

More than 19 percent of street youth reported altering their appearance in order to "look as tough as possible" in order to ward off would-be attackers. Female youth (29.0 percent) were more than twice as likely as their male peers (12.2 percent) to deliberately adopt this strategy.

Discussion

Being young and homeless in Toronto means many things — among the most significant being that one's health and safety are jeopardized on a day-to-day basis and that this is not incidentally related to one's experience of social exclusion. Street youth are vulnerable to exploitation, whether by petty criminals, sexual predators, unscrupulous landlords or employers, or a whole range of other individuals who can wield power over them, because potential perpetrators recognize that young people who are homeless have few resources to defend themselves and little recourse to challenge them.

The high rate of criminal victimization experienced by street youth means that they are forced to live from day to day with the very real fear of theft and robbery, of being attacked or sexually assaulted. For some, this becomes just another hazard associated with life on the streets; for others, the trauma associated with victimization has a devastating effect and can present yet another barrier to moving successfully off the streets.

The circumstances that produce such high levels of victimization among homeless youth cannot be explained simply in terms of these youths' previous history of criminal victimization, nor by their own delinquent or offending behaviour. The argument here is that the vulnerability of street youth to crime is most acutely experienced when multiple dimensions of social exclusion intersect. The problematic backgrounds and difficult home lives of street youth can inhibit their ability to fully participate in society as teenagers and, later, as adults. Once they are on the streets, their exclusionary trajectory intensifies as their inadequate access to housing, limited educational and employment opportunities, and restricted access to public spaces increase their vulnerability to crime. For young women who are homeless, the severity of social exclusion and victimization is compounded.

Street youth adopt subsistence strategies that are quasi-legal (squeegeeing, panhandling, the sex trade) or illegal (theft, drug dealing) and expose them to a range of potentially dangerous and exploitive persons. An additional consequence of engaging in risky acts is that the willingness of street youth to turn to police for protection is impaired. Many street youth come to depend on one another for protection. Victimization that occurs as a result of involvement in illegal or quasi-legal activities may lead young people to believe that they have no recourse to the law — something the perpetrators of crimes against them no doubt consider.

Young men and women on the streets have different experiences of homelessness and, consequently, of victimization. The streets are a gendered space, one that has historically been colonized and defined as a "male" space, where particular forms of masculinity and femininity are produced and reproduced (Gardner, 1990; Hatty, 1996). Young women who are homeless face increased vulnerability to specific forms of violent crime, including sexual assault and partner assault (Browne & Bassuk, 1997; Hatty, 1996; Simons & Whitbeck, 1991). Homeless women therefore experience risk differently and adopt gendered personal safety strategies. Such risks may, for instance, lead them to establish partnering relationships that may provide shelter and income but also, inevitably, put them at greater risk of assault and exploitation (Maher et al., 1996; Tessler et al., 2001).

Street youth, then, are made vulnerable by their limited social capital, their exclusion from adequate housing and employment, their compromised physical and mental health, and their inability to provide protected spaces for themselves. They are therefore at increased risk for criminal assault or robbery. Alienation, distance, and vulnerability to crime can be considered, then, as both consequences and manifestations of social exclusion.

Conclusion

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

act. (Ontario Legislative Assembly, 1999)

The social exclusion of street youth puts them in the contradictory position of being at increased risk for criminal victimization, on the one hand, and the target of public efforts to control crime and deviance, on the other. One consequence is that street youth have been systematically excluded from discussions of "community" and public safety, and, by extension, this raises questions regarding citizenship.

Unfortunately, one of the clearest manifestations of this social exclusion is the degree to which, in public policy debates concerning safety, street youth and the homeless in general are cast not as real or potential victims (or members of the "public," for that matter) but, rather, as criminal offenders. Repressive enforcement measures to contain street youth delinquency are routinely enacted in the name of community and public safety. Street youth are regularly "moved on" from public spaces; the police are called on by politicians at various levels of government to "crack down" on squeegeeing and panhandling; and the visible presence of street youth is depicted by the media as having a negative impact on business. This has also resulted in punitive legislation aimed at the homeless. The passage quoted above is taken from a speech by Ontario Attorney General Jim Flaherty introducing 1999's *Safe Streets Act*, which essentially targeted street youth by making squeegeeing and most forms of panhandling illegal. Many other jurisdictions have passed laws criminalizing homelessness (Foscarinis, 1996; Kalien, 2001; Sossin, 1996).

A question to ask during public safety debates is this: To what degree are street youth conceptualized as part of the "community" or as citizens, and thus worthy of public safety measures? Evidence from research on homeless youth suggests that much of their criminal involvement is a product of their experience of being homeless (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997). Tactics that intensify the experience of social exclusion of street youth, such as criminalizing homelessness, should be avoided, as their likely effect is to further marginalize this population, increasing their risk of criminal victimization and creating barriers to their movement away from the streets.

A more effective long-term strategy for dealing with street youth criminality should focus on addressing the issues that produce and sus-

tain homelessness. Strategies that situate people who are homeless as part of the community – as persons who share rights and privileges with other citizens – could ameliorate some of the negative experiences of those whose lives are so profoundly characterized by the process of social exclusion. Public safety strategies, whether developed by governments, community groups, or the police, must thus consider the safety of all citizens, including those who are rightly or wrongly perceived to be dangerous, different, and "outside" the definition of community, such as the homeless.

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Table 1: Experiences of criminal victimization, comparing domiciled youth in the general public (15 to 24) with street youth

	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Assault (an attack, a face-to-face threat, or an incident with a weapon)	62.3% (186)	61.1% (108)	64.4% (73)	12.0% (3,384)	15.1%44* (1.645)	8.9%*[1] (1,739)
Theft (theft of personal or household property)	50.3% (186)	49.3% (108)	52.8% (73)	10.0% (3,386)	9.8% (1,646)	10.2% (1,740)
Robbery (face-to-face theft in which perpetrator uses force or threat of force)	36.1% (186)	45.4%*" (108)	23.39'0'4 (73)	3.0% (3.386)	3.7%* (1,646)	2.3%* (1,740)
Sexual assault (forced sexual activity; an attempt at forced sexual activity, or unwanted sexual touching. grabbing, kissing, or fondling	31.9% (186)	18.9%*""` (106)	51.4%*⁺⁺ (72)	3.8% (3,384)	0.9%***` (1,645)	6.6%*** (1,739)
Vandalism (willful damage of personal property)	30.4% (186)	25.9% (108)	35.6% (73)	5.7% (3.386)	6.3% (1.646)	5.2% (1,740)
Break and enter (illegal entry of household property)	15.5% (186)	12.0% (108)	19.2% (73)	4.6% (3,386)	4.3% (l ,646)	4.9% (1,740)
TOTAL reporting at least one crime incident	81.9% (186)	76.6%* (108)	91.5%* (73)	39.7% (3,421)	42.1% (1.660)	37.5% (1,761)

X^2 (significance of gender): * p < 0.05: ** p < 0.01; *** p < 0.001

Statistics relating to domiciled youth are derived from Statistics Canada's General Social Survey (1999).

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Table 2: Street youth involvement in delinquent and criminal activities (frequency = 3 or more times in the past 12 months)

In the past 12 months, have you engaged in any of the following?

Frequency		Total	Male	Female
Assault (for reasons other than self-defence) *(n:* male = 104; female = 69; total = 173)	Never	58.1%	51.9%	66.7%
	Once	10.5%	11.5%	10.1%
	More than once	31.4%	36.5%	23.2%
Shoplifting (stealing some-thing for your own use) *(n:* male = 107; female = 68; total = 175)	Never	47.1%	42.1%	54.4%
	Once	13.8%	12.1%	16.2%
	More than once	39.1%	45.8%	29.4%
Theft (stealing goods for the purpose of selling them) *(n:* male = 106; female = 69; total = 175)*	Never	62.6%	52.8%	76.8%
	Once	9.2%	9.4%	10.1%
	More than once	28.2%	37.7%	13.0%
Drug dealing *(n:* male = 101; female = 68; total = 170)*	Never	50.0%	40.6%	61.8%
	Once	8.3%	9.9%	7.4%
	More than once	41.7%	49.5%	30.9%

X^2 (significance of gender): * $p < 0.05$

Table 3: Street youth reporting of criminal victimization

W h o did you tell about the incident?	Total *(n)*	Male *(n)*	Female *(n)*
I didn't tell anyone	33.1% (151)	43.3%** (90)	18.0%** (61)
I told a friend	41.7% (151)	37.8% (90)	47.5% (61)
I told my partner (boyfriend, girlfriend. etc.)	17.2% (151)	7 . 8 % (90)	(61)
I told a social worker, teacher. or counsellor	12.6% (151)	3.3%*** (90)	26.2%** (61)
I talked to a lawyer about it	9.9% (151)	6.7% (90)	14.8% (61)
I told a member of my family	15.9% (151)	7.8%** (90)	27.9%** (61)
I told the police	12.2% (148)	4.6%** (87)	23.0%** (61)

X^2 (significance of gender): * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$
Note: Some respondents gave multiple answers.

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Table 4: Strategies to increase safety: Comparing street youth to domiciled youth (1 5-24)[1]

In order to protect yourself or your property from crime, do you or have you done any of these things in the last 12 months?

	Homeless youth			Domiciled Youth		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
(a) Changed your routine, activities or avoided certain places?	52.9% (170)	47.4% (97)	60.6% (71)	24.7% (3,391)	31.7%*** (1.646)	40.3%*** (1.745)
(b) Carried your possessions with you at all times?	44.1% (170)	41.2% (97)	49.3% (71)	N/A	N/A	N/A
(c) Installed new locks or security bars?	15.8% (169)	13.3% (98)	18.3% (71)	13.7% (3,390)	11.8%** (1,645)	15.4%** (1,745)
(d) Taken a self-defence course?	16.0% (169)	16.5% (97)	15.7% (70)	9.2% (3,396)	7.8%* (1.648)	10.5%* (1,748)
(e) Tried to look as tough as possible so people would leave you alone?	19.5% (169)	12.2%* (98)	29.0%* (69)	N/A	N/A	N/A
(f) Changed your phone number?	12.9% (170)	8.2%* (97)	19.7%* (71)	3.2% (3,396)	3.6%** (1,648)	4.7% (1,748)
(g) Obtained a dog?	7.6% (170)	10.2% (98)	4.3% (70)	3.2% (3,395)	2.6%* (1,647)	4.0%* (1,748)
(h) Carried a weapon regularly?	27.8% (169)	27.8% (97)	27.1% (70)	16.5% (3,396)	10.4%* (1,648)	22.2%*** (1,748)
(1) Changed residence or moved?	30.4% (171)	26.5% (987)	36.6% (71)	2.5% (3,396)	1.4%*** (1,647)	3.5%*** (1,749)

x^2 (significance of gender): * $p < 0.05$; $p < 0.01$; $p < 0.001$

1 Questions (b) and (e). not included in the original General Social Survey, were added
  to the survey of street youth to reflect strategies employed by homeless people.
Statistics relating to domiciled youth are derived from Statistics Canada's General Social Survey (1999).

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