PATHWAYS AND TRANSITIONS OF PERSISTENT YOUTH OFFENDERS IN ALBERTA:

FINAL REPORT

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Prepared By:

Leslie MacRae-Krisa, M.A.
Lorne D. Bertrand, Ph.D.
Joanne J. Paetsch, B.A.
Lena Rinquist, M.A.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

This report summarizes the findings of a four-year study of pathways and transitions of persistent youth offenders in Alberta. The overall objectives of the study are to understand the factors that differentiate persistent youth offenders who offend into adulthood from persistent youth offenders who desist, understand these factors in a developmental context, and provide focussed information to develop and improve multi-sectoral prevention and intervention initiatives.

The following research questions were addressed in the final report:

(1) What are the known life-course trajectories for persistent youth offenders as established in the literature?

(2) What individual, family, peer, school, and community risk factors can be identified among a sample of persistent youth offenders?

(3) What characterizes the offending behaviour of the sample of persistent youth offenders?

(4) What is the nature and extent of persistent youth offenders' involvement with the youth justice system?

(5) What are the patterns in risk factors and offending behaviour that can be identified, and how do these patterns predict offending behaviour in adulthood?

Methodology

To address these research questions, a cohort of 170 persistent youth offenders born between September 1, 1992 and September 1, 1994 was selected. Persistent youth offenders were defined as youth who had *Criminal Code* or *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act* convictions on five or more different occasions. All of the youth in the sample had their last court appearances before being selected into the study in Calgary (n=80) or Edmonton (n=90).

A number of sources of data were used for this report. First, data collected from probation file reviews conducted on all 170 youth from October 1, 2010 to August 31,

2011 and life history interviews conducted with 52 youth during the same time period were used to create a retrospective social profile of the youth in the sample. Further, data obtained from the Child and Family Services Division of Alberta Human Services on 38 youth provided supplemental data on child welfare involvement. Finally, police occurrence data obtained from the Calgary and Edmonton Police Services and charge, conviction and sentencing data from Alberta's Justice Online Information Network (JOIN) were obtained and analyzed to create an understanding of the youths' criminal histories.

Discussion

Overall, the Canadian Research Institute for Law and the Family's four-year study yielded a rich collection of data on the 170 persistent youth offenders in the sample, resulting in a number of meaningful findings about persistent youth offenders in Alberta and for some preliminary conclusions to be drawn about pathways to desistance. Though the literature suggests defining desistance as a process rather than simply the termination of offending, for this study, given the small sample size and data limitations, desistance was defined as the absence of contact with the justice system (i.e., police contact, justice system contact). It is notable that of the 170 youth in the study, only 28 were identified as desisters; however, given the follow-up period for the study was only two years, those who reoffended beyond the two-year follow-up period would not be captured, nor would non-desisters who stopped offending beyond the two-year follow-up.

The presence of multiple individual, family, peer, school, and community risk factors throughout childhood and adolescence has a potentially negative effect on the individual and social capital that is required for persistent youth offenders to desist from offending in adulthood. Findings from the interviews were in line with the literature suggesting that persistent youth offenders tend to display impulsiveness, low self control, low morality (Farrington, 2005; Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Pauwels et al., 2011) as well as hyperactivity and aggression (e.g., Leschied et al., 2008; MacRae et al., 2011; Rabiner et al., 2005; Broidy et al., 2003; Chen, 2009). However, these factors were not significantly related to desistance.

Similar to findings in the literature (Day et al., 2008; DeGusti et al., 2009), a large proportion of the persistent youth offenders in the sample were found to have a mental health diagnosis, pointing to the importance of interventions and supports in this area. Addiction issues were particularly apparent, with almost half having a history of drug or alcohol abuse. Findings also revealed a particularly low average age of onset for drug and alcohol use (age 12.2 and 11.6, respectively). Though these factors were not

significant predictors of desistance, as these youth enter the transition to adulthood, mental health and addiction may serve as barriers to successful transitions and criminal desistance.

The literature identifies a number of critical family risk factors that lead to persistent youth offending. Of particular importance are child maltreatment and the experience of inter-parental conflict (Lemmon, 2006; Leschied et al., 2008; Smith et al., 2005). A majority of youth in the sample experienced child maltreatment and neglect. Though data limitations prevented more thorough analyses, future research examining the experience of family violence in the context of development will be important to assess the long-term impact on offending (Currie & Covell, 1998; Tyler et al., 2008; Widom, 2010).

Family disruption is an important consideration in examining persistent, life course offending (Schroeder et al., 2010). Well over half of the study sample had parents who were either separated or divorced. On average, family breakdown occurred when youth were five years of age. Only one-third of the youth lived with one parent, and only a tenth of the sample lived with both parents. Some youth lived with extended family or on the street. Though these absence of these factors were not significant predictors of desistance on this study, studies of offending trajectories (e.g., Ward & Day, 2010) suggest that youth who experience family disruption during childhood are likely to follow a moderate trajectory of offending.

Parental criminality has been linked to a moderate to high offending trajectory in the literature (Ward & Day, 2010), and was significantly related to desistance in the current study. Two-thirds of the study sample had at least one parent charged with a crime and when the relationship to desistance was examined, youth who desisted were significantly less likely to have at least one parent who was charged with a crime. This suggests that the absence of this negative influence may increase the likelihood that a youth is able to desist from offending as they enter adulthood.

The trajectory literature (e.g., Ward & Day, 2010) suggest that youth who have a history of alternative care in childhood or adolescence have greater odds of a higher rate of offending. A majority of youth in this study were found to be involved with the child welfare system in some capacity and many were heavily involved for a long period of time. Though the absence of child welfare involvement was not a significant predictor of desistance for the study population (likely due to the sample size), the transition to adulthood literature (e.g., Bosick & Gover, 2010) suggests that aging out of the child welfare system makes the transition particularly difficult for these youth, given that the resources provided are no longer available.

Peer factors are an important consideration in examining the course of persistent youth offending, with significant evidence in the literature pointing to the detrimental effect of negative peer association (Farrington, 2005; Jennings et al., 2009; Mears & Field, 2002; Mellin & Fang, 2010). Nearly all of the youth in the sample had a history of associating with delinquent peers, and a large proportion engaged in criminal activity with friends. Importantly, this study also showed that gang involvement is a highly significant risk factor for persistent youth offenders, similar to a previous study of the Institute's on youth reoffending (MacRae et al., 2009). One-third of the youth in this sample had known gang involvement and another one-third had friends that were gang members. Further, youth who desisted were significantly less likely to have been a member of gang, pointing to the potentially detrimental impact of gang involvement on long-term criminal involvement.

The importance of gang influence as a risk factor extends to gang presence in the community, with nearly half of the youth interviewed reporting gangs in their school and over half reporting gangs in their community. One-third of youth reported carrying a weapon in the community, and nearly all of these youth reported using it. This is especially important given the findings from the Institute's 2009 study, suggesting that having carried a weapon in the community is a significant predictor of future offending (MacRae et al., 2009). In this study, having had a firearm prohibition resulting from their first conviction and having more firearm prohibitions as youth were predictors of non-desistance, with the latter proving to be a significant predictor in the logistic regression models. This suggests that youth who did not desist displayed behaviours that necessitated a firearm prohibition very early in their criminal careers. It also suggests that the group of non-desisters may have displayed more anti-social behaviour early on.

When considering the importance of social capital as youth transition to adulthood, school risk factors are of particular importance, especially given the role that post-secondary education plays in emerging adulthood (Settersten & Ray, 2010). A majority of youth were below average in school performance, and many struggled with behavioural issues in school and weak school attachment. Further, a large majority of youth had negative school experiences, including being bullied, bullying others, and getting into fights. Importantly, just over half the youth interviewed had taken a weapon to school, which MacRae et al. (2009) found to be a significant predictor of future offending. However, none of these factors was significantly related to desistance in this study.

Charge, conviction, and sentencing data allowed for a thorough analysis of the influence of criminal behaviour. A number of offending characteristics were examined. First, age of first offence is an important consideration given that the literature suggests that the earlier youth begin offending, the greater the likelihood they will continue to offend into adulthood (Mullis et al., 2005). The average age of first charge for the youth in the sample was 13.8 years, and was 14.8 years for first conviction. Given findings in the trajectory literature related to the relationship between age of onset of criminal activity and offending trajectory (e.g., Livingston et al., 2008), it was somewhat surprising that when examined in relation to desistance and non-desistance, age at first offence and conviction were not found to be significant predictors. However, this might be explained by the homogenous nature of the sample, which was selected based on similarities in the youths' criminal histories.

Discussions of offending trajectories in the literature focus predominantly on frequency of offending (e.g., Day et al., 2008; Chung et al., 2002; Moffitt et al., 2002). The data obtained for this study allowed for a thorough examination of offending frequency. The 170youth in the sample were convicted on nearly 11,000 charges, but the range was as low as five convictions upward to 445 convictions. Youth who desisted had significantly fewer total convictions over the course of their criminal careers and this proved to be the most significant predictor of desistance of all the offence-related variables. Thus, this study supports findings in the literature related to offending frequency and desistance.

According to the literature, another important characteristic in distinguishing offending trajectories is type of offences committed (Fergusson et al., 2000; Weisner & Capaldi, 2003). Police occurrence and JOIN data revealed a wide range of offences committed by the youth in the sample, however, only subtle differences between desisters and non-desisters were found when tests of significance were conducted. Youth who desisted were convicted of significantly more *Youth Criminal Justice Act* charges their first conviction than youth who did not desist. This may suggest that youth who desist may have had a less serious start to their criminal careers.

Analysis of the effect of sentencing on persistent youth offenders revealed that secure custody was the second most common sentence among the group, received by a large majority of the sample. The unintended consequences of incarceration identified by Clear et al. (2001), such as stigma, financial issues, struggles with identity, and deficits in community relationships, are important considerations in relation to offending trajectories. Youth who desisted received significantly fewer secure custody sentences and spent significantly less time in custody. The number of secure custody sentences proved to be a significant predictor in the sentence model logistic regression.

This is an important finding considering that even though non-desisters spent more time in custody, they were still more prolific than desisters.

Another significant finding related to sentencing was the relationships of the Intensive Support and Supervision Order (ISSO) made available to the court in the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* to desistance. Youth who desisted were significantly more likely to receive an ISSO on first conviction and overall desisters spent more time on ISSO sentences over the course of their careers than non-desisters. Thus, although ISSOs were made infrequently, they were a significant predictor of desistance for the youth who received them. Overall, findings related to sentencing suggest that the ISSO, and its increased access to community supports and supervisions, has had a significant positive effect on persistent youth offenders. Sentencing to secure custody is related to an intensification of offending behaviour.

One very interesting finding related to age at last conviction prior to turning 18. Findings from the logistic regressions suggest that being younger at last conviction prior to turning age 18 is a significant predictor of desistance. On average, youth who desisted were 16.7 at the time of their last conviction before turning 18, compared to 17.5 for non-desisters. This suggests that the desisters in this sample stopped offending well before their 18th birthday, providing some evidence for the adolescence-limited offending trajectories observed by Moffitt (1993) and others (Day et al., 2008; Van der Gest et al., 2009).

Though a number of the research questions were answered with the data that were obtained, the limitations of the study prevented the researchers from exploring developmental pathways and transitions of youth offending to the extent that the objectives of the study necessitated. Specifically it was intended that follow-up interviews be conducted with the youth who consented (n=40) in order to assess those social factors which influenced the youths' pathways of offending. However, it was not possible to locate and interview many of the sample for follow-up interviews. Thus, a major limitation of the study was that there was no longitudinal life course data, other than police contact, charges, convictions, and sentences, to meaningfully assess those social factors that lead to desistance. The examination of social factors was limited to the influence of historical events on future pathways and transitions and offending behaviour. In addition, the nature of the life history data available created methodological issues in that there were too few interviews to use those data in the predictive models, and the third-party nature of the file review data resulted in a large amount of missing data as well as issues related to reliability. Though the study benefited from the acquisition of child welfare data from Alberta Human Services, too few youth consented to the release of this data for them to be useful in the predictive

models. Further, the study would have benefited from a longer follow-up period to gain a more accurate and reliable idea of desistance among the sample. Future studies would benefit from a longer follow-up period; however, given the unpredictable nature of many of their lives, persistent youth offenders are a challenging population to study longitudinally.

Despite these limitations, the fact this study is one of the first of its kind to examine persistent youth offenders in Alberta is important for future research and policy in the province. Findings related to individual, family, peer, community, and school risk factors make a convincing argument for the importance of early intervention programs and opportunities for at-risk and vulnerable youth. Programs that have been developed to address children and youth at risk, such as Gateway for first time offenders, Multi-Agency School Support Teams (MASST) for at-risk youth, and the Youth At Risk Development (YARD) Program for youth at risk of gang involvement, have the potential to make a real difference in the lives of children and youth who may continue on a path to persistent youth offending. These early intervention programs may not only lead to healthier children and youth but may well lead to a long-term decrease in demand for resources in various systems, including justice, health, and social services. In addition, findings related to risk factors may also inform the development of more accurate risk assessment tools for youth in Alberta.

The results have important implications with regard to youth sentencing. The fact that non-desisters spent more time in custody *and* had considerably more convictions suggests that these youth may require more support and assistance than a secure custody sentence can provide. The findings also suggest a positive impact of the ISSO on future desistance, and increased resources dedicated to this sentence may lead to long-term benefits in multiple systems.

The literature stresses that the transition to adulthood is a critical time that is marked by the formation of relationships, building social capital, and making decisions that affect an individual's future (Osgood et al., 2010). For youth at risk, this period of transition may be marked by problematic events and a lack of the resources and supportive relationships that are essential to successful transition. Support through the transition to adulthood is likely to contribute to desistance, particularly for youth offenders who have been involved in the child welfare system or those who have been incarcerated (Bosic & Gover, 2010; Clear et al., 2001; Leadbeater et al., 2008).

Continued efforts to study at-risk youth are vital to evidence-based decision-making with regard to policy and programming. A longitudinal study with a longer follow-up period would provide for more conclusive findings with regard to long-term

desistance, and would allow desistance to be examined as a process as opposed to simply the termination of offending. Future studies may also benefit from shorter and more regular periods of follow-up with the youth so that researchers might keep track of them and their movements. Further, the ability to contact youth in custody or through adult probation may also lead to greater success. In addition, future studies would greatly benefit from a larger sample size. This would likely allow for more life history interviews (and ultimately decreased reliance on third-party life history information as provided in probation files), potentially more follow-up interviews, and an increased ability to draw reliable conclusions from predictive models.

Recommendations

The results of this four-year study of pathways and transitions of persistent youth offenders in Alberta have yielded the following recommendations:

(1) Future research is required to more closely examine the trajectories of different types of offenders and the impact of risk factors at various stages of development. This information would allow for a more targeted approach to prevention and early intervention. To be successful, these studies would benefit from a larger sample size, a longer period of follow-up, and more frequent contact with the youth to ensure long-term life course data is collected.

(2) Future research is required to examine more closely the interaction between child welfare involvement and persistent youth offending. Findings reported from this study suggest that persistent youth offenders are heavily involved in the child welfare system, though it is unclear exactly what impact child welfare involvement has on the youths' developmental trajectories. Preliminary analyses of the data collected from Alberta Human Services suggested that longer periods of time in care may be related to desistance, though this finding was not reported due to the small sample size. It is important that future studies more thoroughly examine the developmental role that the child welfare system plays in the lives of at-risk children and youth.

(3) Findings from this study point to a number of individual, family, peer, school, and community risk factors experienced by children who become persistent offenders. These findings support the development of early intervention programs that target children who are at-risk due to family breakdown, parental criminality, mental health issues, addiction, poverty, gang involvement, and other factors. Given persistent youth offenders are committing offences at a very young age, these programs would likely have the most impact during childhood.

Though there are a number of examples of early intervention programs in Alberta, evaluation of these programs is critical to inform best practice in other communities.

(4) Similar to previous studies, gang involvement was found to be significantly related persistent offending. This finding supports the continued development of Alberta's Gang Reduction Strategy, as well as prevention and intervention programs.

(5) This study suggests that the Intensive Support and Supervision Order provided under the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* may have a significant impact on the pathways of persistent youth offenders, increasing the likelihood of desistance. A closer examination of the use of the ISSO in Canada is needed in order to better understand its short- and long-term impact.

(6) Findings from this study suggest that a majority of persistent youth offenders continue offending into adulthood. Given many of the supports available to this population are only available to age 18, this speaks to the importance of extending social supports beyond age 18 to foster a more successful transition to adulthood.

(7) Similar to the Institute's previous study of youth offending (MacRae et al., 2009), findings from this study suggest that a majority of crime committed by persistent youth offenders occurs during the day, and that many of these youth are not well engaged in school. This points to the importance of structured daily activity and the development of initiatives to keep youth engaged and interested in school or work.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

In 2010, with funding from Alberta Justice and Solicitor General's Safe Communities Innovation Fund, the Canadian Research Institute for Law and the Family (the Institute) began a four-year longitudinal study examining the pathways and transitions of persistent youth offenders in Alberta. The study was developed in response to the need to expand on existing research regarding risk and protective factors for offending, as recognized in Alberta's *Crime Prevention Framework* (Government of Alberta, 2011). With an improved understanding of the risk and protective factors on the pathways to becoming persistent offenders, particularly during the transition to adulthood, policy and practice may be developed to more effectively support youth, decreasing the likelihood of becoming persistent adult offenders, resulting in safer Alberta communities.

Guided by a 2009 study by the British Columbia Representative for Children and Youth and the Provincial Health Officer (2009) examining child protection, youth justice, education, and income assistance data for a cohort of B.C. youth to early adulthood, the Institute developed a similar study that would examine the developmental backgrounds of persistent youth offenders in Alberta. Using a multi-disciplinary approach, the study was developed in partnership with a number of key youth-serving agencies, including the Calgary Police Service, the Edmonton Police Service, the City of Calgary, Edmonton Youth Probation, and Alberta Justice and Solicitor General. The overall purpose of the project was to conduct a four-year study of the pathways and transitions of a cohort of persistent youth offenders in Calgary and Edmonton. The objectives of the study were to:

(1) Establish a better understanding of the factors that differentiate persistent youth offenders who continue to offend into adulthood from those who do not. These factors may include developmental risk factors (family violence/neglect, child protection involvement, gang affiliation, etc.), critical life events, and maturation;

(2) Understand these factors in a developmental context so that child protection, education, justice, and other relevant agencies may better combine and concentrate their efforts on particular developmental phases and/or events, before youth become entrenched in the justice system; and

(3) Provide focussed information to develop and improve multi-sectoral prevention and intervention initiatives for persistent youth offenders, in order to decrease the likelihood of life-course persistent offending and victimization, and the associated costs to the youth and adult systems.

Research activities for first year of the four-year study identified a cohort of persistent youth offenders who were approaching adulthood, and collected data on individual, family, peer, community, and school factors, as well as offending history (MacRae-Krisa, Bertrand, Rinquist & Paetsch, 2013). The subsequent two years of the study collected follow-up offending data to determine whether youth continued offending into adulthood or desisted, and what life course factors differentiated offending trajectories. Follow-up interviews with the youth were also planned to collect information on changes in social factors that may influence offending trajectories. The current report revisits the data on risk and protective factors reported in year one of the study, and updates the profiles using newly acquired data, reports on the follow-up data collected in the subsequent years of the study, and offers a model to describe youth offending trajectories.

1.2 Purpose of the Current Report

The purpose of the current report is to present findings from the four-year longitudinal study. The objectives of the report are as follows:

(1) To establish an understanding of the risk factors for persistent offenders and youth offending trajectories by re-visiting and updating the relevant literature;

(2) To re-visit the retrospective profile of individual, family, peer, community and school factors for a sample of persistent youth offenders in Alberta as established in MacRae-Krisa et al. (2013) and update this profile using data acquired from Alberta Children and Youth Services;

(3) To present findings from the retrospective and follow-up offending data and establish patterns of persistence and desistance as the youth in the sample transitioned to adulthood; and

(4) To develop a model that uses risk and protective factors to explain the pathways and transitions of persistent youth offenders in Alberta.

1.3 Organization of the Report

The following chapter will describe the methodology for the four-year longitudinal study. Chapter 3.0 provides an updated review of the relevant literature related to risk factors for persistent youth offending and offending trajectories. Chapter 4.0 revisits the findings presented by MacRae-Krisa et al. (2013) on individual, family, peer, community, and school risk and protective factors for the offenders in the sample. Chapter 5.0 presents findings from the police occurrence data and Chapter 6.0 summarizes findings on court activity for the youth in the sample. Chapter 7.0 presents the pathways model for persistent offending, and Chapter 8.0 summarizes the findings, and discusses implications for policy and programming in Alberta.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

To meet the study objectives, the Institute employed a four-year prospective longitudinal study. As described in MacRae et al. (2013), the first year of the study established comprehensive retrospective profile of 170 persistent youth offenders in Calgary and Edmonton, establishing life course social and behavioural characteristics using multiple sources of information, including probation, justice, and self-report data. This information gathered in the first year of the study provided the foundation to examine pathways and trajectories associated with future offending behaviour into adulthood. Research activities planned for the subsequent years of the study included the collection of follow-up offending data to establish patterns of persistence and desistence and follow-up data on life course social and behavioural patterns.

Prior to the start of the research, the Institute applied to the Provincial Court of Alberta under Section 119(1)(s) of the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* for access to youth records for research and statistical purposes. This application was granted in June of 2010.

2.1.1 Research Questions

The following research questions are addressed in this report:

(1) What are the known life-course trajectories for persistent youth offenders as established in the literature?

(2) What individual, family, peer, school, and community risk factors can be identified among a sample of persistent youth offenders in Alberta?

(3) What characterizes the offending behaviour of the sample of persistent youth offenders?

(4) What is the nature and extent of persistent youth offenders' involvement with the youth justice system?

(5) What are the patterns in risk factors and offending behaviour that can be identified, and how do these patterns predict offending behaviour or desistance of offending behaviour in adulthood?

2.2 Profile of Study Participants

2.2.1 Participants

Given the main objective of the study, to identify pathways and transitions of persistent youth offenders as they enter adulthood, a cohort of age-appropriate persistent youth offenders was required. Through a research agreement with Alberta's Justice Online Information Network (JOIN) Operations, a cohort of 275 persistent youth offenders born between September 1, 1992 and September 1, 1994 was identified in October 2010. The range of birthdates ensured that the youth would turn 18, the age of majority in Alberta, at some point during the study. This would allow the researchers to examine the effect of transition to the adult justice system on persistent youth offending trajectories. Youth were selected as persistent youth offenders if they had been convicted of *Criminal Code* or *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act* (CDSA) charges on at least five different occasions, and had their last youth court appearance in Calgary or Edmonton.

Through a research agreement with Alberta Solicitor General and Public Security, and partnerships with City of Calgary Youth Probation and Edmonton Youth Probation, the Institute identified those youth from the list who were active with probation, ensuring probation files could be accessed and youth could potentially be interviewed. The Institute identified 170 youth, 90 in Edmonton and 80 in Calgary, who fit this criterion. The list of youth identified for the study was provided to the respective Youth Probation offices in Calgary and Edmonton, as well as the Calgary and Edmonton Young Offender Centres (CYOC; EYOC), to facilitate access to youth records and to youth for interviews. Orientation sessions were conducted at Youth Probation Offices, CYOC, and EYOC to ensure the research processes were clearly communicated to probation officers and young offender facility staff. Information sheets on the study were also provided.

2.2.2 Data Sources

A number of sources of data were used to identify profiles of individual, family, peer, school and community risk and protective factors: probation file reviews; Alberta Child and Family Services historical data; and life history interviews. It was intended that follow-up interviews be conducted two years following the original life history interview, but due to problems with contacting the young adults in the study sample, the researchers were unable to get an appropriate sample of interviews to include in this report.

A probation file review form was developed based on the Institute's past study involving youth probation file reviews (MacRae et al., 2009) (see Appendix A). The file review acted as the primary source of social data for each youth, collecting demographic, familial, social, and offending information. Researchers conducted the file reviews at youth probation offices in Calgary and Edmonton from October 1, 2010 to August 31, 2011. Youth probation officers facilitated access to the file. Researchers examined each probation file and filled out the electronic review form with the necessary information. Completed electronic file review forms were encrypted prior to departure from the youth probation offices to ensure secure transport. A total of 170 file reviews were conducted.

Life history interviews (n=52) were conducted from October 1, 2010 to August 31, 2011 with a sub-sample of the youth selected for the study who consented to be interviewed. The interview gathered in-depth experiential information on a number of risk factors, including peer experiences, gang involvement, self-reported crime, education, and family relations, among others (see Appendix B). Youth were recruited for interviews with the assistance of youth probation officers in Calgary and Edmonton, as well as the Calgary and Edmonton Young Offender Centres. All of the youth identified for the study were approached by their Youth Probation Officers, who provided them with an information sheet on the project (see Appendix C). If youth were willing to participate, the youth probation officer arranged an interview to be conducted by the researcher in a private area at the youth probation office, coinciding with their next probation visit if possible. The probation officer informed the researcher of the scheduled interview, and the researcher attended the probation office on the designated day. All interviews were conducted in a private space.

The list of study youth was also provided to a contact at the Calgary and Edmonton Young Offender Centres. If a youth was sentenced to custody, researchers liaised with the Centre representatives regarding potential interviews. The Centre representative approached the youth, and if they expressed interest in the study, arranged a suitable day for the researcher to attend the centre. On the designated day, the researcher attended the Centre and conducted the interview in a private space.

Prior to each interview, the researcher explained the study to the youth, describing the records that would be accessed for the purposes of the project (e.g., Justice Online Information Network (JOIN) records; Calgary/Edmonton City Police records) and the nature of the interview. The researcher then went through a written consent form for the interview with the youth, asked if there were any questions or concerns, and then asked him or her to sign the consent form if he or she was interested

in participating (see Appendix D). Once the youth provided informed consent, the interview was conducted, lasting 45 minutes to one hour. Following the interview, the youth was asked to consent to a possible follow-up interview in two years' time. If the youth consented to the follow-up interview, he or she was asked to provide personal contact information (e.g., telephone number, email address) as well as contact information for a friend or family member who would know how to get in touch with the youth at that time (in the event that the youth's contact information would no longer be valid). In addition, the researcher requested consent for the release of Alberta Children and Youth Services and Alberta Education information in order to obtain more detailed historical and prospective child protection and education data (see Appendix E). Participants were also provided with the Institute's contact information and were informed that they could revoke their consent at any time. Youth were paid $20 to compensate them for their time and travel; since youth in CYOC or EYOC cannot receive the payment while in custody, this sum was left with his/her probation officer to be given to the youth after release. In total, 37 interviews were conducted in Calgary and 15 were conducted in Edmonton.

Of the 52 interviews conducted, 38 youth consented to the release of their Alberta Children and Youth Services file records. In early 2014, a request was submitted to the Child and Family Services Division of Human Services for access to the youths' child welfare history. Following submission of the study's proposal, ethics review, and the youths' consent forms, access to the data was granted. Data on the youths' involvement with the child welfare system including duration of involvement, type of intervention and placement history was provided in Excel format in March 2014.

2.2.3 Data Analysis

Interviews and file reviews were coded, with quantitative information being converted to SPSS format and qualitative coding stored in Excel. For the purposes of the offender profiles, analysis of the interview, file review, and child welfare data was conducted descriptively, with the goal of establishing defining characteristics for the group of offenders. Probation file review data and child welfare data were used as the primary sources of information, with interview data being used in a supplementary capacity.

2.2.4 Limitations

Some limitations related to the youth offender profile data should be noted. First, though the overall sample size (N=170) was relatively large, the number of life history interviews conducted, particularly in Edmonton, was lower than expected.

Though efforts were made to increase the number of interviews, the challenges associated with connecting with high risk youth offenders (e.g., transiency, lack of stability) limited the researchers' abilities to do so. Further, administrative changes at Edmonton Youth Probation occurring at the time of data collection limited the Probation Officers' ability to support the research. The lack of interviews limits the generalizability of this information.

The offender profile data were also limited by the information contained in the paper probation file. While some files were a rich source of information, others contained very little detail, resulting in missing data. Given efforts in recent years to convert probation files to primarily electronic records, the lack of information found in some of probation files may be expected.

Forty youth consented to be contacted for a follow-up interview, providing their email address, phone number, and alternative contact person and their phone number. Researchers used all contact information provided and made multiple attempts to contact the youth for a follow-up interview. Unfortunately, a majority of the email addresses and phone numbers provided were no longer in service. In cases where contact was made with the youth or their alternate contact, they were unwilling to participate, were in custody or were out of contact with their designated alternate contact. Ultimately, only one youth participated in an interview. This is a major limitation in the study in that the researchers are unable to account for changes in life circumstances that may influence the youths' offending trajectories.

2.3 Offending Profiles

2.3.1 Participants

To develop offending profiles for the youth in the sample, both retrospectively and longitudinally, offending data were collected for all 170 youth in the sample from multiple sources. These sources included the Calgary Police Service Police Information Management System (PIMS), Edmonton Police Service database, Justice Online Information Network (JOIN) database, and the Canadian Police Information Centre (CPIC) database.

2.3.2 Data Sources

As part of the Institute's research agreement with Alberta Justice, JOIN Operations provided the Institute with retrospective charge, conviction, and sentencing data for all youth in the sample to August 31, 2011. Subsequently, charge conviction

and sentencing data were provided in early 2013 for the period September 1, 2011 to August 31, 2012 and in early 2014 for the period September 1, 2012 – August 31, 2013. Data were provided to the Institute in Excel format.

Data on alleged criminal occurrences involving the 170 youth who were selected for this study were provided by Edmonton Police Service (EPS) and Calgary Police Service (CPS). An occurrence was defined as a contact with police by a youth that may or may not have resulted in a criminal charge. Historical data were obtained from the point of a youth's first criminal occurrence through August 31, 2011. Data on criminal occurrences during two additional periods were also provided: September 1, 2011 – August 31, 2012 and September 1, 2012 – August 31, 2013. Data that were provided by both EPS and CPS included the date and time of occurrence, the most serious alleged offence involved in the occurrence, whether charges were laid, reasons why charges were not laid, and whether a weapon was involved in the occurrence. Data were provided to the Institute in Excel format.

One of the goals of the present project was to identify a cohort of young offenders who desisted from offending as they transitioned into adulthood. To accomplish this, participants who had no occurrences in either the EPS or CPS data after they had turned 18 years of age were identified. Because it is possible that some of these individuals had been involved in offences outside of the EPS and CPS jurisdictions, a check on these individuals was conducted on the Canadian Police Information Centre's (CPIC) database. CPIC contains information on adult criminal convictions throughout Canada and thus three individuals who had convictions on CPIC were eliminated from the pool of desisters. In addition, one individual who appeared in the CPIC database as deceased was also removed from the group of desisters.

2.3.3 Data Analysis

The JOIN data were converted to SPSS format prior to analyses. The data were cleaned and restructured prior to analysis. A descriptive analysis was conducted to determine the types of charges youth had and how these charges were resolved. A bulk of the analyses examined convictions to establish patterns of persistence and desistance, as well sentences they had received.

It is important to note that the analysis revealed that youth in the sample had a high number of charges, though a large proportion of these charges were withdrawn, dismissed, or stayed. Further examination of the data revealed that youth were often charged with an offence, had the charge withdrawn, and were re-charged with the same

offence – thereby inflating the number of charges. Background research into this pattern revealed a number of possible explanations. If the Crown wishes to add another accused charged with the same offences or add charge counts to the offence, a new information must be prepared and the old one must be withdrawn. Further, the police may lay charges but the information is not sworn before the court date, leading to a second group of charges (the old ones being withdrawn).

Police occurrence data provided by EPS and CPS were also converted to SPSS and were cleaned and restructured prior to analysis. Five of the participants in the total sample (N=170) did not have any occurrence data in either the EPS or CPS databases. This suggests that occurrences in which these youth were involved took place outside of the jurisdiction of both police services. Thus, occurrence data were available for 165 of the youth in the initial sample. Data were analyzed descriptively to examine the most serious alleged offence involved in the occurrence, whether charges were laid, reasons why charges were not laid, whether a weapon was involved in the occurrence, and the date and time of occurrence.

2.3.4 Limitations

The JOIN data provided a wealth of information regarding offending patterns among the study youth. However, the structure in which it was provided limited the analysis to using charge, as opposed to incident (e.g., all charges pertaining to the same person and same offence date), as the unit of analysis. Due to differences in the databases used by EPS and CPS, the data obtained were not, in all cases, directly comparable. Data cleaning involved extracting the comparable elements which were then analyzed for the present report.

2.4 Pathways Model

One goal of the present study was to examine the life course trajectories of a group of prolific youth offenders as they transition into adulthood. Of particular interest was what factors might distinguish young offenders who desist from offending as they enter adulthood from those who continue to offend. To accomplish this, a cohort of "desisters" was created based on the following criteria: (1) no police occurrence data identified by either Edmonton Police Service or Calgary Police Service after their 18th birthday; (2) no charge, conviction, or sentencing data identified in JOIN following their 18th birthday; (3) no periods of incarceration identified in JOIN after the age of 18 years; and (4) no conviction data identified in the Canadian Police Information Centre (CPIC) database after their 18th birthday. Based on these criteria, a group of 28 desisters was identified.

The cohort of desisters was compared with the group of study participants who continued to offend after turning the age of 18 on a number dimensions such as family and personal characteristics, educational experiences, social life, and offending history to determine which factors might be most strongly predictive of desistance. Factors were initially examined individually to determine which were related to desistance; those factors that were most strongly associated with desistance were then examined using logistic regression analyses to develop a predictive model of desistance.

2.5 Security Considerations

Given the sensitive nature of the data, a number of security measures were taken to guarantee that anonymity and confidentiality were preserved. Personal identifying information was essential to identify the youth for the interview, link their historical and prospective file data, and subsequently track their offending behaviour through various data sources. As such, all data are handled in a secure fashion, with electronic records with identifying information being kept on password protected personal computers on closed networks, and paper records kept in locked file cabinets in locked Institute offices. Once records were matched, the research participants were assigned a research identification number, and are identifiable by this number only. A master list linking the research number with the participants' name is kept in a securely locked cabinet and only Institute staff holding Secret Security Clearance have access. At the conclusion of the project all individual identifiers and personal information will be destroyed. Any findings based on the data are reported anonymously in aggregate form only.

3.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a review of the literature on the transitions and trajectories of persistent youth offenders from childhood to adulthood. It begins with a discussion of the risk factors for youth offending, followed by a discussion of the major theoretical frameworks used in the literature to explain persistent youth offending. This chapter also examines the available literature on youth offending trajectories, the transition to adulthood, and desistance, and discusses policy and practice implications for high-risk youth.

3.1 Risk Factors for Youth Offending

An important step in understanding pathways to persistent youth offending is to understand risk factors. Typically, risk factors are discussed within five domains: individual; family; peer; school/employment; and community.

Individual risk factors for persistent offenders often include demographic characteristics (age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status), personality traits, and behaviours. Demographic factors have been thoroughly examined in the literature, with gender being perhaps the most consistently examined. It has been well established that males are more likely to become chronic or persistent offenders than females (Benda & Tollett, 1999; Chung et al., 2002; Howell, 2003; Turner, Hartman, & Bishop, 2007). While the literature continues to reinforce this finding, studies have demonstrated that females are increasingly being represented in this population (Haapanen, Britton, & Croisdale, 2007; Howell, 2003). In addition, recent longitudinal studies (Trulson, Marquart, Mullings, & Caeti, 2005; Tyler, Johnson, & Brownridge, 2008) have shown that risk factors predicting recidivism among male chronic offenders may in fact differ for female chronic offenders. With regard to ethnicity and socioeconomic status, research suggests that low socioeconomic status and ethnic minority youth are more likely to become involved in offending (Benda & Tollett, 1999; Livingston, Stewart, Allard, & Ogilvie, 2008; Trulson et al., 2005). However, the predictive ability of these factors, particularly in examinations of chronic youth offending, is consistently questioned (McMurtry & Curling, 2008; Mullis et al., 2005). The influence of ethnicity and socioeconomic status at various stages of development is also under investigation (Howell, 2009).

Individual propensities such as aggression, impulsiveness, low self-control, and hyperactivity figure as prominent individual risk factors studied in the literature. In

Broidy et al.'s (2003) review of the developmental course of physical aggression in childhood, the authors determined that chronic physical aggression has long-term implications on the life course of an individual. Specifically, Broidy et al. (2003) contend that those who display chronic physical aggression in elementary school are at an increased risk of not only physical violence in adulthood but also participation in other, nonviolent, forms of offending later in life. Chen (2009) expands on this conclusion by noting that juvenile offenders are more likely to be involved in violent altercations. The author explains that, compared to their non-delinquent peers, youth who participate in offending activities are more likely to be violently victimized.

The link between chronic offending and impulsiveness or lack of self-control has been an increasingly popular line of inquiry. Unfortunately, as Farrington (2005) points out, there is little consensus as to the constructs that constitute impulsiveness. Farrington explains that poor ability to control one's behaviour has been explored in the literature as: "impulsiveness, hyperactivity, restlessness, clumsiness, not considering consequences before acting, a poor ability to plan ahead, short term horizons, low self-control, sensation seeking, risk-taking, and a poor ability to delay gratification" (p. 179). Further, inability to delay immediate gratification in favour of long-term rewards has garnered increasing attention in the literature.

According to Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990), one of the strongest predictors of offending is low self-control. Many studies have sought to better understand the nature of this relationship. In examining post-parole data on nearly 4,000 youth offenders in California, Piquero at al. (2005) determined that while different risk factors contribute to differences in the types of offences committed by individuals, their underlying low levels of self-control united the chronic offenders in their sample. The authors explain that while social risk factors such as neighbourhood and peers may impact the nature of the offence committed, it is the individual's lack of self-control that impacts the likelihood of committing the offence.

The relationship between self-control and offending behaviour was further explored by Pauwels, Weerman, Bruinsma, and Bernasco (2011). Unlike Piquero et al. (2005) and Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990), Pauwels et al. (2011) determined that the relationship between offending and self-control is far more complex than a direct causal relationship. The authors found that while self-control is an important factor for determining lower levels of offending, higher levels of offending are better explained by weak morality. Specifically, they determined that those who morally disapprove of a specific offence, like assault or vandalism, are more likely to be strongly influenced by the perceived severity of the sanctions.

Wikström and Svensson (2010) also explored the relationship between self-control, morality, and offending. The authors concluded that young people with strong (law-relevant) morality do not engage in crime, regardless of their ability to exercise self-control. However, among those with a weaker morality, the ability to exercise self-control is an important predictor of criminal behaviour.

Additional research has demonstrated a link between hyperactivity and offending behaviour. Rabiner et al. (2005) conducted a longitudinal analysis of over 600 youth to determine predictors of aggressive offending. They contend that persistent offenders were more likely to have displayed symptoms of Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) than the remainder of the sample. Similarly, a study of Calgary young offenders found that having a diagnosis of ADD/ADHD was significantly related to reoffending (MacRae, Bertrand, Paetsch, & Hornick, 2011). Leschied, Chiodo, Nowicki, and Rodger (2008) also determined that behavioural concerns such as attention problems, motor restlessness, and attention seeking are important predictors of offending behaviour.

An association between mental health concerns and chronic offending is also present in the literature. In an analysis of Calgary youth, DeGusti, MacRae and Hornick (2008) determined that the majority of serious and chronic offenders had been diagnosed with at least one mental health concern. A study of Toronto young offenders found that of the 248 youth who were seen by a psychiatrist, 82% were diagnosed with at least one psychiatric disorder (Day et al., 2008). Cottle, Lee, and Heilbrun (2001) found that one of the strongest individual predicators of early contact with the law is a history of non-severe pathology, while Loeber et al. (2001) concluded that children who demonstrate psychopathy traits were the most frequent and severe offenders in their sample of youth. Lynam et al. (2009) provide additional insight to the relationship between mental health and youth offending by concluding that juvenile psychopathy is an important risk factor for predicting future antisocial behaviour. There is also increasing evidence that neuropsychological conditions, such as Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, are strongly linked to chronic offending (MacRae et al., 2009; Verbugge, 2003).

Unfortunately, as Chitsabesan et al. (2006) conclude, many youth with mental health problems who are involved in the justice system are not provided sufficient access to services. The assertion that mental health needs of youth are not fully met by the justice system was advanced by Schroeder, Guin, Chaisson, and Houchins (2004). The authors observed that the justice system is not equipped to meet the needs of those with mental health difficulties, and as a consequence many youth with mental health difficulties become deeply entrenched in the justice system as adults. Shroeder et al.

(2004) contend that without sufficient understanding of the relationship between mental health and offending, many opportunities for intervening with at-risk youth are missed.

Similar concerns have been raised over youth offenders with substance abuse issues. In a study of incarcerated youth offenders by Hussey, Drinkard, and Flannery (2007), findings suggested that though two-thirds of the sample recognized that they needed treatment for substance abuse issues, only 19% had received treatment in the past. The study also revealed that 65% of youth had comorbid mental health and substance abuse issues, with female offenders being at greater risk. In a study by Welte et al. (2005) examining the trajectory of offending among a group of young males (aged 16-19), alcohol dependence was found to be related to an early start and faster increase in offending among those in the sample whose offending was increasing. Regarding drug use, though it was not found to be predictive early on in delinquent careers, it was found to be a strong predictor of increasing patterns of increasing delinquency, and was associated with a slower decline in offending among those whose offending had been declining. Thus, the authors concluded that substance use is related to a delay in maturing out of delinquency, and is also associated with higher rates of offending.

Risk factors in the family domain often include family breakdown and criminality, abuse and family violence, and involvement in the child welfare system. Maltreatment by parents or other caregivers has emerged as one of the strongest risk factors for youth offending. In an analysis of over 600 youth, Lemmon (2006) reported that the recurrence of maltreatment among at-risk youth is a significant predictor of not only initiation into offending, but also the continuation and severity of the offending. Smith, Ireland, and Thornberry (2005) presented similar findings regarding the relationship between maltreatment and offending. The authors found that individuals who experience substantiated maltreatment during adolescence are more likely to be arrested, participate in violent offending, and use illicit drugs in early adulthood.

When the different dimensions of maltreatment (e.g., neglect and abuse) are looked at individually, important insight into youth offending emerges. Currie and Covell (1998) noted that when youth offenders are compared to their non-offending counterparts, youth offenders, especially those who commit violent crimes, are more likely to have a history of both physical and sexual abuse by their parents. The authors also reported that "a lack of parental involvement and supervision, inadequate and inconsistent discipline, parental rejection, and alcohol abuse," were also more common among youth offenders than non-offenders (p. 134). In a review of the impact of abuse and neglect on the wellbeing of youth, Wilson and Widom (2010) reported that youth who had experienced abuse and neglect are at an increased risk of all problem behaviour except for drug use. Tyler, Johnson, and Brownridge (2008) argued that

while childhood neglect is related to victimization, sexual abuse was associated with poorer wellbeing.

Additional information regarding how different forms of maltreatment can be used to explain specific offending behaviours of individuals is provided by Sigurdsson, Gudjonsson, Asgeirsdottir, and Sigfusdottir (2010). They argue that while sexual abuse, in isolation from other factors, does not explain sexual predation by young males, when sexual abuse is analyzed in conjunction with violence in the home, poor sexual self-regulation, and delinquent peers, sexual offences committed by juveniles are better explained. An article by Stewart, Livingston, and Dennison (2007) demonstrates the importance of timing in the relationship between maltreatment and youth offending. The authors illustrate that youth who experienced maltreatment during adolescence, both through childhood and into adolescence or limited to adolescence, were more likely to offend as juveniles when compared to youth whose maltreatment was limited to childhood.

The family environment is another important predictor of offending behaviour. In a meta-analysis of 38 studies, Leschied et al. (2008) determined that family disruptors, such as "a variety of negative parenting strategies including coerciveness, authoritarian behaviours, lack of child supervision, and family structure variables such as witnessing violence, inter-parental conflict, family stressors and poor communication" were important predictors of youth offending (p. 436). These findings were corroborated by Johnson, Giordano, Manning, and Longmore (2011) who found that early monitoring of problematic behaviour and ongoing parental support is linked to lower offending behaviours of at-risk youth.

The structure of the family environment is an additional indicator of youth offending. Schroeder, Osgood, and Oghia (2010) observe that there are claims in the literature that youth with separated parents are more likely to participate in offending than those living with both of their parents due to weaker parental control and supervision; however, they argue that this assertion is misleading. Using data from a longitudinal analysis, they determined that a family disruption is associated with increases in offending behaviour, and that this increase is likely attributable to changes in family time and parental attachment.

Parental imprisonment has been identified as a risk factor for youth offending. In an investigation of the effect of parental imprisonment in the Netherlands and the UK of the effect of parental imprisonment, Besemer et al. (2011) found that in England there is a relationship between the number of parental imprisonments and male juvenile offending. Specifically, the authors found that the effect of parental

imprisonment is significant for male youth only when it occurs following their seventh birthday. In the Netherlands, however, there appeared to be no relationship between parental imprisonment and youth offending.

Familial poverty is another important risk factor. McAlister (2008) argues that poverty and social exclusion are often overlooked risk factors of youth offending. Mullis et al. (2005) also acknowledged the effect of familial income on youth offending. In their analysis of the developmental, contextual, and intervention characteristics of youth offending, they conclude that familial poverty proves to be one of the most consistent characteristics of the youth offenders in their sample. Galloway and Skardhamar (2010), however, argue that this relationship is far more complex. Although they found a strong bivariate relationship between parental income and youth offending, when an in-depth analysis of this relationship was conducted, the results proved to be spurious. The authors found that parental education was a far stronger predictor of youth offending than simply socioeconomic status.

When the analysis of risk factors associated with youth offending extends beyond the individual and the family environment, important insights emerge. Peer association is a particularly important risk factor for youth offending. There is significant evidence in the literature that negative peer association is positively linked to offending behaviour. Farrington (2005) asserts that associating with delinquent friends is a strong predictor of an individual's delinquency. Mears and Field (2002) provide further insight by suggesting that increased exposure to negative peers has an impact on the inclination of youth to engage in offending behaviour. Further, in an overview of delinquency among female adolescents, Mellin and Fang (2010) found that peer group affiliation was the strongest predictor of youth offending in their research. Jennings, Maldonado-Molina, and Komro (2009) also found that regardless of gender, negative peer association was one of the strongest factors that differentiated low/non-risk offenders from youth on moderate-high risk offending trajectories.

Additional insight into the role of peers in youth crime can be drawn from the literature on gang affiliation. Huebner, Varano, and Bynum (2007) explain that young males who were affiliated with a gang prior to incarceration were more likely to reoffend upon release to the community than those not associated with a gang. Likewise, in their study of Calgary young offenders, MacRae et al. (2011) found that significant predictors of the extent of reoffending were whether youth had friends who belonged to a gang, and whether gangs were present in the community. Taylor, Peterson, Esbensen, and Freng (2007) documented that gang members were more likely to experience violent victimization than non-gang affiliated youth with similar records of offending.

The influence of parenting children and partners has suggested to be a social factor of significance, particularly as a protective factor. Persistent youth offenders in Barry's (2010) qualitative study in Scotland revealed that children and stable intimate relationships were among the reasons for their desistance from offending, particularly among young women.

School is an important domain in youth development, one where a number of early warning signs of future chronic offending might be identified. A number of studies (Arnull et al., 2005; MacRae et al., 2009; Mullis et al., 2005) have identified truancy as a common issue among chronic youth offenders. For example, Mullis et al.'s (2005) study of chronic offenders reported that over 60% of the study sample could be described as truant. Studies have also shown a history of problems in school, including disciplinary, attainment, and learning issues, among chronic youth offenders (Arnull et al., 2005; MacRae et al., 2008; Mullis et al., 2005). Arnull et al.'s U.K. study (2005) reported that low educational attachment, attendance, and attainment were marked predictors of persistent offending among the study sample. Frequent school transitions (changing schools often) have also been noted as common among this offender population (Mullis et al., 2005).

A key area of risk factor analysis for researchers studying youth offending relates to community. Kling, Ludwig, and Katz (2005) provide an interesting analysis of the effect of neighbourhood on offending. By studying "The Moving Opportunity," a lottery-based relocation service provided to youth entrenched in the justice system, the authors were able to determine if youth from a disadvantaged neighbourhood desist from offending when moved to a more affluent neighbourhood with a lower crime rate. The authors conclude that the neighbourhood effect on offending differed significantly by gender; females experienced large reductions in both property and violent crime, and males experienced reductions in violent crime, but it was proportionally smaller than those of women. While Grunwald, Lockwood, Harris, and Mennis (2010) concluded that neighbourhood-level factors influence drug offence recidivism, much of the literature on the effect of the neighbourhood on youth offending remains inconclusive. Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn (2000) illustrate that the effect of a youth's neighbourhood only accounts for 5% of the total variance in offending. Chauhan and Reppucci (2009) reported that the effect of a neighbourhood on offending is largely subjective. The authors contend that other factors, such as the familial environment, work to mediate the effect of the neighbourhood.

3.2 Theoretical Frameworks for Persistent Youth Offending

A number of theoretical frameworks have been offered to explain persistent youth offending trajectories. According to the literature, two basic trajectories emerge when analyzing the transition to adulthood among youth offenders: persistent offending and adolescent limited offending (Moffitt, 1993; Patterson, DeBaryshe, & Ramsey, 1989). While most persistent youth offenders desist by late adolescence (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990), there is another, smaller, group of chronic offenders who continue to offend past adolescence into adulthood, becoming life-course persistent offenders (DeGusti, MacRae, Vallée, Caputo, & Hornick, 2009). A key issue for understanding the pathways of persistent offending is distinguishing life-course persistent offenders from youth who desist offending during late adolescence. According to Moffitt (1993), during adolescence, persistent offenders and adolescence-limited offenders exhibit similar offending patterns and are largely indistinguishable from one another. It is only when a sample of youth is examined in adolescence and again in adulthood, via longitudinal analysis, that distinguishing factors emerge. It is anticipated that with greater knowledge of the unique pathways and transitions of this cohort, intervention initiatives can be better focused to decrease the likelihood of life-course persistent offending among at-risk youth offenders.

Although many theoretical frameworks have attempted to explain persistent youth offending (Farrington, 2003; Patterson et al., 1989), three frameworks have prominently emerged in developmental life course literature: Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) general theory of crime; Sampson and Laub's (1993) age-graded theory of informal social control; and Moffitt's (1993) theory of adolescence-limited and life-course-persistent antisocial behaviour.

3.2.1 General Theory of Crime

Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) general theory of crime, or self-control theory, suggests that the propensity to commit crime can be attributed to one underlying construct: self-control, defined as the ability to delay immediate gratification for long-term rewards. They argue that criminal acts are the result of the inability of the participant to exert self-control in a given situation, or in their words, offenders appear to have:

> [L]ittle control over his or her own desires. When such desires conflict with long-term interests, those lacking self-control opt for the desires of the moment, whereas those with greater self-control are governed by the

> restraints imposed by the consequences of acts displeasing to family, friends, and the law. (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990, p. xv)

Gottfredson and Hirschi's general theory of crime represents a departure from the other criminological theories presented in this section, in that it is decidedly anti-developmental (Farrington, 2003). Unlike other theories that stress the importance of social factors, such as peers, family, neighbourhood, and education, Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) assume that self-control is largely stable over time. They assert that self-control is established early in childhood, mainly by parental socialization, and remains constant as one ages. Put simply, the effectiveness of self-control socialization in early childhood has long-term consequences on offending behaviour of individuals.

When Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) theory is examined along with the age-crime curve, a problem arises: if self-control remains constant, how does it account for the desistance from crime that generally occurs when individuals transition into adulthood? The authors attribute the desistance in criminal behaviour as individuals age not to a decrease in the desire to participate in criminal behaviour – they argue that individual differences in the likelihood of participating in criminal behaviour remain constant – but to the "inexorable aging of the organism" (p. 141). Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) contend that as individuals mature, they are less likely to commit crime because self-control tends to increase with age.

3.2.2 Age-Graded Theory of Informal Social Control

What differentiates Sampson and Laub's (1993) theory of age-graded social control from other criminological theories is their emphasis on stability and change in deviant behaviours. Using the age-crime curve to ground their theory, they argue that there have been significant limitations to previous criminological research, contending that there has been an overemphasis in the literature on the peak period of offending, namely late adolescence. They contend that by focusing on this specific age period, previous research has neglected "the theoretical significance of childhood characteristics and the link between early childhood behaviors and later adult outcomes" (Sampson & Laub, 1993, p. 6). Using psychological research as evidence, the authors found that there is significant stability in offending behaviour over the life course, and a strong relationship between displays of antisocial behaviour in childhood and later chronic offending.

Though Sampson and Laub (1993) stress the theoretical significance of the stability of antisocial traits, they contend that the analysis of singular individual traits (e.g., self-control) conceals a paradox within the age-crime curve: "although…antisocial

behaviour in children is one of the best predictors of antisocial behaviour in adults, most antisocial children do not become antisocial as adults" (p. 12). Thus, if there is stability in antisocial traits from childhood to adolescence, then the question remains as to why all children who display antisocial traits do not become entrenched in the criminal justice system as adults. Sampson and Laub (1993) argue that in order to understand this paradox, it is necessary to look beyond individual traits to the social experiences of individuals over their life course to determine why and how some individuals are able to desist from offending upon entering adulthood.

Using a comprehensive longitudinal data set collected by Glueck and Gleuck (1950; 1968, as cited in Sampson & Laub, 1993), Sampson and Laub (1993; 2003b) sought to link social history and social structure to the offending behaviour of 1,000 Boston youth. They found that while individual traits were important predictors of the onset of offending, social ties and bonds to society were key determinants of desistance from crime. Using social control as an organizing principle, Sampson and Laub concluded that "crime and deviance are more likely to occur when an individual's bond to society is weak or broken" (Sampson & Laub, 2003b, p. 305). They further emphasized the importance of the role of informal social controls, citing that it is the notion of "role reciprocities" that tie individuals to the greater society. When adolescents or young adults have strong interpersonal bonds that link them to both other members of society and larger social institutions, such as family, school, work, or their community, they are less likely to engage in behaviours that could compromise the strength of their social bonds. While strong social bonds work to discourage individuals from engaging in antisocial behaviours, weak social bonds, in turn, encourage antisocial behaviour. Sampson and Laub (2003b) contend that those entrenched in the justice system have much weaker bonds to their greater society than their non-offending counterparts; without social bonds to discourage offending, these individuals are more likely to continue to engage in criminal behaviours.

To provide greater insight into the relationship between social bonds and the life course of individuals, Sampson and Laub (1993) introduced the concepts of trajectories and transitions. They define a "trajectory" as "a pathway or line of development over the life span, such as work life, marriage, parenthood, self-esteem, or criminal behaviours" (p. 189) – essentially, long-term behavioural patterns. "Transitions," on the other hand, are defined as "marked life events (such as first job or first marriage) that are embedded in trajectories and evolve over shorter time spans" (p. 189). When analyzed together, trajectories and transitions produce "turning points" in individuals' lives. Thus, while childhood experiences and behaviours influence the trajectory of an individual's life, various transitions (e.g., the assumption of adult roles) can work as turning points in an individual's life. These turning points have the potential to redirect

trajectories in either a positive or a negative way. Thus, Sampson and Laub's notion of turning points is integral in accounting for why some individuals continue to offend into adulthood, while most desist from offending during the transition to adulthood.

Like other researchers (Barry, 2007; Leadbeater, Smith, & Clark, 2008; Reid & Dudding, 2006), Sampson and Laub (1993) emphasized the importance of a successful transition into adulthood. The authors concluded that job stability and marital attachment are significant factors in explaining adult crime. Specifically, Sampson and Laub (1993) illustrated that those who are able to successfully assume these adult roles were more likely to abstain from antisocial behaviour in adulthood. Thus, the stronger the attachment an individual creates to their employment and their intimate partner the less likely they are to engage in criminal behaviour. The authors also pointed to key turning points in the lives of individuals who have successfully desisted from crime after an adolescence characterized by antisocial behaviour: (1) employment; (2) marriage; and (3) military service. They argue that these three life events are crucial for understanding continuity and desistance in offending behaviour.

3.2.3 Adolescence-limited and Life-Course-Persistent Antisocial Behaviour

Moffitt's (1993) theory of adolescence-limited and life-course persistent behaviour has emerged as the leading developmental life-course theory (Farrington, 2003). Moffitt contends that the incongruity of the incline and desistance of offending visible in the age-crime curve and the relative stability of criminal behaviour among chronic offenders cannot be explained by one overarching theory of criminal behaviour. Instead of attempting to explain criminal behaviour in terms of cause-and-effect in the general population, the author argues that the population of offenders must be viewed in terms of two distinct and separate groups: adolescence-limited (AL) and life-course-persistent (LCP) offenders. Moffitt (1993) contends that the offending behaviour of each group is unique; the causes of offending by AL offenders are distinct from LCP offenders and, as such, the manifestations of these effects lead to different patterns in offending behaviour.

Moffitt (1993) explains that the difference between adolescence-limited and life-course-persistent offenders can be attributed to biological and social influences. She suggests that criminal behaviour can be explained by either neuropsychological deficit, as is the case with LCP offenders, or due to inconsistencies in biological development and social expectations, as is the case with AL offenders. Moffitt elaborates that LCP offenders can be identified by the continuity of their behaviour. Unlike the general population of youth offenders who desist in late adolescence, LCP offenders continue to exhibit antisocial behaviours into adulthood. What is important to note about LCP

offenders is that their behaviours are heterotypic in nature, as Moffitt (1993, p. 6) explains:

> Across the life course, these individuals exhibit changing manifestations of antisocial behaviour: biting and hitting at age 4, shoplifting and truancy at age 10, selling drugs and stealing cars at age 16, robbery and rape at age 22, and fraud and child abuse at age 30.

Thus, as LCP offenders are exposed to different life events, their offending behaviour changes to accommodate their new situations; thus the manifestation of antisocial behaviour changes as the individual moves through life course transitions.

Moffitt (1993) argues that the underlying antisocial disposition of life-course-persistent offenders can be linked to neuropsychological disruptions that occurred either during the prenatal phase or early in childhood. Although not all individuals with neuropsychological impairments exhibit antisocial behaviour, Moffitt contends that children with neuropsychological impairments born into dysfunctional environments are most likely to become life-course-persistent offenders. She observes that learning pro-social behaviour at an early age can curb difficult behaviour for many youth. Unfortunately, however, youth born into dysfunctional environments with parents who exhibit inconsistent and harsh discipline are more likely to continue demonstrating antisocial behaviour throughout their lives.

Adolescence-limited offenders, on the other hand, are likely to have benefited from both normal psychological development and pro-social familial environments. Moffitt (1993) holds that the offending behaviour of AL offenders can be attributed to the delayed transition to adulthood. She contends that a maturational gap exists when an individual enters adolescence; biologically they have the maturity of an adult, but socially they are still considered youth. Because of this discrepancy, Moffitt explains that youth often turn to illegal or antisocial means of attaining adult roles before they are socially permitted. The author concludes that as youth enter adulthood, most of them desist from offending because they now have legitimate means of attaining adult roles.

It is important to note, however, that there is a significant convergence between adolescence-limited and life-course-persistent offenders during adolescence. Moffitt (1993) claims that AL offenders often look to LCP offenders for guidance in learning antisocial behaviour. Because LCP offenders have lengthy experience displaying antisocial behaviour by the time they reach adolescence, they often impart their knowledge of offending behaviour to the less experienced AL youth. Moffitt asserts

that adolescence is typically the only time in the life course that LCP and AL offenders associate with one another as peers. As a result of their relationship during adolescence, both LCP and AL offenders closely resemble one another. Therefore, it is exceedingly difficult to differentiate between AL and LCP offenders during adolescence without knowledge of their childhood history and psychological impairment.

3.3 Youth Offending Trajectories

Since Moffitt's publication of *Adolescence-limited and Life-Course-Persistent Antisocial Behaviour: A Developmental Taxonomy* in 1993, many studies have attempted to test her theoretical assertion that the general population of offenders can be differentiated by two distinct trajectories: adolescence-limited and life-course persistent. Although some research has broadly supported Moffitt's dual-taxonomy (Wiesner, Capaldi & Kim, 2007), the majority of the trajectory studies reviewed show little agreement on the number of offending trajectories among youth. As Yessine and Bonta (2009) indicate, the lack of consensus among researchers as to the number of offending trajectories in the general population "suggests that the dual-taxonomic system overlooks the presence of other possible offending trajectory types" (p. 438).

Indeed, while Moffitt (1993) herself initially proposed two distinct offending trajectories, in her later co-authored work, *Males on the Life-Course Persistent and Adolescence-limited Antisocial Pathways: Follow-up at Age 26 Years,* Moffitt, Caspi, Harrington, and Milne (2002) identified three distinct trajectories in their sample of over 1,000 youth followed to age 26. Although the authors found support for the dual-taxonomy, they extended the theoretical framework to include a group of low-level chronic offenders. This group of offenders differentiated itself from the dual-taxonomy by exhibiting aggressive behaviour as children but largely desisted from offending behaviour by adolescence. The authors note that although this third group does not participate in offending behaviour in adulthood, they do demonstrate various antisocial behaviours including difficulties with finances and problems at work, and tend to suffer from anxiety, depression, and social isolation.

Moffitt et al.'s (2002) addition of a third trajectory is supported by Livingston et al. (2008), who also identified a third group of offenders: late onset chronic offenders. The authors illustrate that this third group commenced offending at the age of 15 and continued offending into adulthood. This conclusion is at odds with previous theories, which posited that those most likely to persist offending into adulthood are those who begin demonstrating antisocial behaviours in childhood (Farrington, 2003).

A Canadian study examined a sample of 378 youth offenders who had served an open custody sentence in Toronto (Day et al., 2008). The criminal trajectories of the youth were tracked for an average of 12.1 years from early adolescence into adulthood. Day et al. (2008) identified four groups: low-rate offenders who committed relatively few offences (57.4%); high-rate offenders whose trajectories peaked in adulthood (7.7%); high-rate offenders whose offending was primarily during adolescence (5.3%); and moderate-rate offenders whose offending was steady but moderate over time (29.6%).

Other research has identified additional trajectory groups within populations of offending youth. Van der Geest, Blokland, and Bijleveld (2009) reported five trajectories among a population of offending youth: adolescence-limited serious offenders; low-frequency desisters; late-blooming offenders; high-frequency desisters; and high-frequency chronic offenders. Marshall (2005) reported six trajectories within a sample of youth offenders: very low desisters; very low persisters; moderate late; moderate early; high chronic; and, very high chronic.

The literature on trajectories of offending becomes increasingly complex when researchers look beyond offenders to youth from a broader population. Woodruff and Lee (2011) followed a group of youth involved in child welfare services from age 4 to age 10. The authors identified that while most youth displayed low/normal problem behaviours (61%), approximately one tenth of the youth (12%) followed a persistent offending trajectory. The remainder of the youth displayed a moderate level of problematic behaviours and were categorized as either improving (23%) or worsening (4%) by the authors.

Fergusson, Horwood, and Nagin's (2000) longitudinal study of a birth cohort of 900 New Zealand children identified four trajectory groups in their analysis. Similar to Woodruff and Lee (2011), they reported a significant group of non-offenders (55%), along with three other offending trajectories: moderate risk offenders (31%); adolescent onset offenders (8%); and high-risk offenders (6%). White, Bates, and Buyske (2001) also identified four offending trajectories in their analysis. Following a random sample of males from the general population from age 12-31, the authors identified trajectories of non-delinquents, adolescent limited delinquents, adolescent-to-adulthood-persistent delinquents, and escalating delinquents.

Although there appears to be significant support for three to four trajectories in the literature, other research suggests that it is necessary to consider additional trajectories to capture the complexity and diversity inherent in youth offending. Chung et al. (2002) identified five offending trajectories: non-offenders, late onsetters, desisters, escalators, and chronic offenders. Wiesner and Capaldi (2003) identified six

trajectories: chronic high-level, chronic low-level; decreasing high-level; decreasing low-level; rare; and non-offenders. Loeber et al. (1998) reported the greatest number of offending trajectories. Through following a group of over 1,500 inner-city young males from first to seventh grade, the authors differentiated seven trajectories: stable non-delinquents; early starters; stable moderates; escalators; stable highs; de-escalators; and, desisters.

A recent Canadian study examined the trajectories of younger delinquents and the risk and protective factors associated with those trajectories to inform the development of early risk assessments and targeted prevention and intervention programs (Craig, Petrunka, & Khan, 2011). The researchers identified early trajectories of delinquency for 842 children at age 8 (Grade 3), age 11 (Grade 6) and age 14 (Grade 9) using longitudinal data from the *Better Beginnings, Better Futures* study (Peters, Petrunka, & Arnold, 2003). Six delinquency trajectory groups were identified. Two groups had very low ratings of delinquency across time, two groups showed a pattern of decreasing levels of delinquency over time (moderate desisters and highest desisters), one group (escalators) had very low levels of reported delinquency at Grade 3 followed by a marked increase in delinquency over time, and the final group (high delinquency) had moderate levels of delinquency at Grade 3, and the highest levels of delinquency at Grades 6 and 9 of all the trajectory groups.

A significant limitation of the trajectory literature lies in the homogeneity of many of the samples. Because of the difficulty inherent to longitudinal studies, namely cost and attrition, few studies have followed youth past early adulthood. White et al. (2001) and Van der Geest et al. (2009) studied the trajectories of offending behaviour of individuals from youth until their 30s. Both studies reported that those deemed escalating or chronic continued non-trivial offending past the age of 30. Piquero, Farrington, Nagin, and Moffitt (2010) also followed individuals from youth until adulthood, studying the developmental trajectories of 411 males from ages 8 to 48. The authors concluded that there is a relationship between offending in the first 40 years of life and the success individuals experience in their lives. The authors found that, controlling for individual and environmental risk factors, those who exhibit offending behaviour from youth to middle age are more like to experience life failure as evidenced by difficulties with accommodation, employment, and mental health.

Sampson and Laub (2003a) present the findings from arguably one of the longest longitudinal studies of criminal behaviour and desistance. The authors analyzed the offending trajectories of a sample of Boston males from age 7 to 70 to determine if crime rates remain stable throughout the life course, or if individual differences or social factors influence offending behaviour. In contrast to much of the trajectory research,

the authors found that the offending behaviour of the individuals in the sample declined with age, even among life-course persisters. They further concluded that childhood prognoses are not accurate predictors of offending trajectories.

Another significant limitation of the trajectory literature lies in the relative neglect of demographic variables. Few studies have focused on gender differences in offending trajectories, in spite of the increasing numbers of females participating in offending behaviour (Colman, Kim, Mitchell-Herzfeld & Shady, 2009; Farrington, 2003). The most common forms of trajectory analyses that include gender as a variable are comparative studies. Fergusson and Horwood (2002) sought to better understand trajectories via a comparative analysis and found that while females and males exhibit similar trajectories, females are more likely to exhibit low-risk or early onset adolescence-limited offending compared to their male counterparts. Odgers et al. (2008) reported similar results in their analysis of gender differences in offending trajectories. In addition to reporting that males and females have similar offending trajectories, Odgers et al. (2008) reported that the causes of offending differ by gender and that female life-course persistent offenders experience more consequences of their offending in adulthood compared to the remainder of the sample. D'Unger, Land, and McCall (2002) also reported that while the trajectories of offending are similar for both males and females, females were more likely to begin offending later and desist from offending earlier than their male counterparts.

In a departure from popular male-to-female comparative analysis, Colman et al. (2009) conducted a study of nearly 500 girls to better understand the offending trajectory of females. The authors found four distinct offending paths: rare/non offending; low chronic offending; low rising offending; and high chronic offending. Colman et al. (2009) concluded that low chronic offenders and low rising offenders were responsible for a disproportionate amount of adult arrests than the remainder of the sample.

3.3.1 Risk Factors and Offending Trajectories

Identifying the risk factors that account for different trajectories in offending has become increasingly prominent in the literature. In an early trajectory analysis of youth offenders, Loeber et al. (1998) conducted a longitudinal analysis of over 1,500 young males. The authors determined that various risk factors were associated with different offending trajectories, namely: lack of guilt; low educational achievement; poor parental supervision; poor parent-boy communication; familial welfare reliance; broken family; and living in a high crime neighbourhood. They also concluded that the probability of delinquency escalated with increasing numbers of risk factors. Thus, the greater the

number of risk factors an individual is exposed to, the greater the likelihood that they will participate in delinquent activities.

Later studies of the relationship between risk factors and offending trajectories have sought to better understand if specific risk factors are associated with certain trajectories of youth offenders. Fergusson et al. (2000) concluded that an individual's exposure to psychosocial adversity is related to membership in a specific trajectory. The authors explain that chronic offenders are likely to have been exposed to high levels of adversity, specifically social disadvantage, family adversity including abuse and emotional neglect, and individual difficulties in childhood when compared to those in low-level offending trajectories. White et al. (2001) presented similar findings stating that when persistent offenders are compared to adolescence-limited offenders, differing patterns emerge from the data. In a longitudinal analysis of nearly 700 young males, the authors determined that five effects differentiate these two groups of offenders: higher disinhibition, impulsivity, parental hostility, lower harm avoidance, and a less intact family structure.

Important information is revealed when childhood-onset delinquents are compared to adolescent-onset delinquents. In an analysis of males followed to age 26, Moffitt et al. (2002) found that childhood-onset delinquents displayed "higher psychopathic personality traits, mental-health problems, substance dependence, numbers of children, financial problems, work problems, and drug-related and violent crime, including violence against women and children" (p. 179). Adolescence-limited delinquents, on the other hand, displayed many of the same features but not as serious in nature. Moffitt et al. (2002) explained that adolescent-onset delinquents displayed "elevated impulsive personality traits, mental-health problems, substance dependence, financial problems, and property offences" (p. 179).

In contrast to Moffitt et al. (2002), Van der Geest et al. (2009) provide evidence that the age of onset for chronic offenders has a significant relationship to the nature of offending in adulthood. The authors contend that while the offending behaviour of high-frequency chronic offenders can largely be attributed to social factors, namely a criminogenic social environment, the offending behaviour of late bloomers, or adolescent-onset delinquents, is more likely to be attributed to psychological factors. Van der Geest et al. (2009) explain that late bloomers were likely to be characterized by psychopathology, propensity for risk-taking behaviour, and poor social skills. Further, these researchers concluded the onset of offending behaviour can be linked to the likelihood of participating in certain offending behaviours, stating that late bloomers are more likely to become increasingly violent over time.

Building on the work of Day et al. (2008), Ward and Day (2010) examined the predictors and protective factors of four criminal trajectory groups comprised of young offenders from Toronto. Retrospective file reviews were conducted on 362 young male offenders, and risk and protective factors were coded from the individual, family, peer, and school domains during childhood and adolescence. Ward and Day (2010) found that youth who experienced contact with alternative care (e.g., child welfare) in childhood or adolescence were at increased likelihood of having a high rate trajectory of offending. Youth who experienced a broken home or other family transition during childhood were more likely to follow a moderate trajectory of offending, while youth who experienced this factor during adolescence were at increased odds for a lower rate of offending. During adolescence, youth who had criminal family members (e.g., a parent or sibling) were more likely to be placed in a moderate to high rate trajectory of offending. According to Ward and Day (2010, p. iii):

> With better knowledge of the factors linked to the onset and maintenance of criminal careers and their effects at different developmental stages, preventative and intervention efforts may be more appropriately matched with the youth's needs, thereby providing more effective treatment and reducing the devastating effects of delinquency and criminal recidivism.

Similarly, a Canadian longitudinal study examining children at risk for delinquency found that the groups identified as most at risk for delinquency (high delinquency, escalators, moderate desisters, highest desisters) scored significantly higher on 17 of the 31 individual, family, peer, and neighbourhood risk factors than the groups identified as the least at risk (Craig, et al., 2011). Children in the high-risk trajectory groups exhibited more negative behaviours (e.g., hyperactive, oppositional-defiant, physical aggression) and had various family risk factors (e.g., single parenthood, low parental education, public housing, and hostile-ineffective parenting). In addition, children in the high delinquency and escalators group had significantly more emotional/behavioural, health, criminal, and school functioning problems at Grade 9 than the other four trajectory groups. The researchers concluded that there are early indicators to the developmental pathways to delinquency that can be identified as early as Grade 3, and that these can be used to inform the development of risk assessment and screening tools, as well targeted prevention and intervention programs.

Gender differences in risk factors associated with offending trajectories are also examined in the literature. Although the offending behaviour of females differs significantly from males (Colman et al., 2009; Moffitt, Caspi & Rutter, 2001), trajectory analyses that include gender as a variable find little support for differential risk factors for male and female offenders. D'Unger et al. (2002) and Fergusson and Horwood

(2002) concluded that females and males share similar offending trajectories, differing only in duration and severity. Moffitt and Caspi (2001) further determined that trajectories of offending for males and females display similar patterns, stating that when compared with adolescent-onset females, childhood-onset females were more likely to have come from a high-risk background.

3.3.2 Desistance

Although most analyses of offending trajectories focus on identifying risk factors associated with offending trajectories, factors that predict desistance are also very important to the study. Studying desistance, however, as noted by Laub and Sampson (2001), is fraught with conceptual, definitional and measurement issues. Desistance is not an event that happens, but rather the absence of criminal activity. Since it is well documented in the literature that crime declines with age, the concept of desistance is confounded with aging. Defining desistance is also problematic. According to Loeber and LeBlanc (1990), there are four components to desistance: (1) a decrease in the frequency of offending; (2) a reduction in the types of offending; (3) a reduction in the seriousness of offending; and (4) remaining at a certain level of seriousness without escalation (i.e., reaching a ceiling). Laub and Sampson (2001) recommend distinguishing termination of offending from the concept of desistance. While termination is the time at which criminal activity stops, desistance is the process that supports termination. Desistance begins prior to termination, and continues after termination to maintain the continued state of non-offending.

Measurement problems are related to the definitional issues (Laub & Sampson, 2001). Does the absence of an observation of criminal activity indicate a true cessation of offending? How long does an offender need to abstain from criminal activity to be called a desister? Criminological studies, unlike medical studies, tend to have fairly short follow-up periods of six months to one or two years. To address these conceptual, definitional and measurement issues, Laub and Sampson (2001, p. 12) "urge researchers to make their definitions more explicit and provide details regarding the measurement of these concepts." Farrington (2007) suggests that both official and self-report data should be used as data sources for understanding the desistance process in order to capture reported and unreported criminal behaviours.

As previously discussed, Sampson and Laub (1993; 2003b) argue that social ties and bonds to society (e.g., family, school, work, community) are key predictors of the process of desistance, and that key transitions or turning points (e.g., marriage, securing stable employment) may affect a youth's criminal trajectory. The transition to adulthood (discussed below) has been found to be a key factor in influencing criminal

trajectories toward desistance as youth assume adult roles (Barry, 2007; Leadbeater et al., 2008; Reid & Dudding, 2006; Sampson & Laub, 1993). For example, Barry (2010) found that having children and stable intimate partner relationships are related to desistance, particularly among females. Chung et al. (2002) suggested that as youth enter adulthood they tend to have less exposure to social risk factors such as negative peer association. More simply, it has also been suggested that age and maturity are the best predictors of desistance (Sampson & Laub, 2003a).

3.4 Transition to Adulthood and Persistent Youth Offending

3.4.1 Transition to Adulthood

A growing body of literature has examined the significance of the transition to adulthood, offering important considerations for discussions of pathways and transitions of persistent youth offenders. The period following the end of high school through to the 20s is an eventful time of enormous consequence for future well-being as an adult (Osgood, Foster & Courtney, 2010). As individuals make the transition from adolescence to adulthood, they may complete their formal education, obtain full-time employment, become financially independent, establish an independent household, enter marriage, and, for many, become parents (Clark, 2007; Settersten & Ray, 2010; Smith, 2005). By the end of this time, most individuals will have made life choices that will have an enduring impact on the shape and direction of the remainder of their lives (Arnett, 2000).

Due to the significance of the life events that occur as one enters adulthood, it is critically important that individuals successfully negotiate this transition. Settersten and Ray (2010) highlight that youth who have a supportive relationship with their parents, go on to post-secondary education, and delay marriage and child bearing, are more likely find success as adults. Osgood et al. (2010) contend that those who experience problematic events during the transition to adulthood, such as participation in crime, becoming a parent before marriage, tumultuous romantic relationships, or becoming addicted to drugs will have greater difficulty securing financial stability and creating satisfying relationships with family members and romantic partners.

With changing economic, educational, demographic, and social conditions, there has been a tendency to extend this transitional stage for a longer period of time than in previous generations. Arnett (2000) argues that significant demographic changes have occurred over the past century that have made the transition to adulthood shift from a brief period of time following high school to a distinct period of the life course of individuals, which he termed "emerging adulthood." He contends that many

individuals are choosing to "delay adulthood" into their early 30s due to the significant number of life decisions that need to be made as one becomes an adult. In a later article, Arnett (2007) asserts that the period of transition from youth to adulthood, or emerging adulthood, is an individualistic time for self-development, where young people can focus on obtaining the educational and occupational skills they will need for their adult life, and experiencing a series of intimate relationships before choosing a spouse.

Arnett's (2010) conceptualization of emerging adulthood is evidenced by significant demographic changes that have occurred in the United States since the 1970s. He notes that there has been an increase in the median age for marriage and first childbirth, and an increase of enrolment in post-secondary institutions. Clark (2007) reported similar demographic shifts in Canada. Clark notes, "on average, a 25-year-old in 2001 had gone through the same number of transitions as a 22-year-old in 1971" (p. 14), suggesting that Canadian youth are taking longer to enter adulthood than the generation that preceded them.

While Arnett (2007) emphasizes the functional role that emerging adulthood provides in the lives of young adults, allowing for a period of self-discovery and freedom, other researchers contend that larger social trends are responsible for this shift. According to Furstenberg (2010), the delay in the transition from youth to adulthood is largely attributable to shifts in the North American and European economies since the end of the Second World War. He concludes that accelerated transition from youth to adulthood in the 1950s was a reflection of the economic prosperity in industrialized nations, notably in the manufacturing sector. As the number of well-paying unskilled or semi-skilled jobs available to youth declined, education became more important. Youth remained in school longer, delayed getting married, and started families later.

Due to the increasing importance of gaining an increasingly sophisticated skill set required to assume adult responsibilities and secure employment, youth are increasingly dependent upon external support during their transition. Reid and Dudding (2006) identified eight key areas that help determine a successful transition to adulthood: education; housing; relationships; life skills; identity; youth engagement; emotional healing; and financial support. What is important to note, however, is that these key areas are not evenly distributed among the general population. Barry (2007) documented that individuals from upper-to-middle class backgrounds are more likely to have support in these key areas. Youth from more vulnerable demographics are, on the other hand, less able to access support in these key areas. The consequences of the

inability of vulnerable youth to have support in these key areas places them at a disadvantage as they transition into adulthood.

3.4.2 Transitions of Vulnerable Youth

Vulnerable youth face a myriad of challenges as they transition into adulthood. While it is possible to identify the factors that enable youth to successfully transition to adulthood, identifying the factors that inhibit a successful transition is more challenging. Individuals who have been involved with government services during childhood and adolescence seem to have especially difficult transitions into adulthood. Osgood et al. (2010) illustrate several populations that are especially vulnerable during the transition to adulthood: youth in the mental health system; youth in the child welfare system; youth in the juvenile justice system; youth re-entering the community from the justice system; youth in special education; youth with physical disabilities and chronic illness; and runaway and homeless youth. The authors argue that these groups face exceptional challenges for successfully transitioning into adult roles such as employment, higher education, marriage, and parenthood.

The challenges facing vulnerable youth as they transition to adulthood are emphasized by Reid and Dudding (2006). They observe that youth involved with child welfare services are "more likely to leave school before completing their secondary education; become a parent at a younger age; be dependent on social assistance; be unemployed or underemployed; be incarcerated/involved with the criminal justice system; experience homelessness; have mental health problems; and be at higher risk for substance abuse problems" (p. 1). Since many of these challenges coincide with the transition to adulthood, many vulnerable youth are forced to assume adult roles before they are able to gain the skill set necessary for a successful transition.

One of the most identifiable challenges facing vulnerable youth as they transition to adulthood is related to the discrepancy of services available to youth compared to those available to adults. When a youth involved with child welfare services turns 18, or 19 in some provinces, they experience what is commonly referred to as "aging out" of the system (Reid & Dudding, 2006). Leadbeater et al. (2008) explain that many youth experience a gap in services as they transition to adulthood. Further, youth who are not involved in the child welfare system lose access to some "children's services" at the age of 16 years, without gaining full adult status at 18 or 19 years. Many youth become responsible for gaining access to the adult services intended to replace those used in adolescence, most notably mental and physical health services, without adequate support. Due to the difficulty in attaining adult services, many vulnerable youth enter adulthood with inadequate government support.

3.4.3 Criminal Persistence and Desistence in the Transition to Adulthood

The difficulties vulnerable youth face as they transition into adulthood can lead to involvement in the criminal justice system. According to Barry (2007), because vulnerable youth are often required to assume adult roles with little preparation, many turn to illegitimate means to gain the social capital they require. The author argues that while most youth are exposed to offending via their peer groups during childhood and early adolescence, the majority of youth desist from offending once they gain socially recognized means of assuming adult roles. Barry (2007) maintains that the youth who continue to offend from adolescence into adulthood are those who are lacking the socially recognized means of attaining adult roles. Due to their inability to draw on social and economic support from their family, and failure to obtain secure employment, disadvantaged youth will often view offending as a means of attaining markers of adulthood. In a later article, Barry (2010) argues that if more legitimate opportunities are provided to vulnerable youth, desistance from offending is more likely to occur.

The notion that inadequate support during the transition to adulthood can contribute to offending was also put forward by Abel and Fitzgerald (2008). In a study of street-based sex workers in New Zealand, the authors found that those who were unable to gain support from either their family or the government during their transition to adulthood found that working in the sex industry proved to be the most viable option to secure financial support. They argue that those who experience unsupported transitions, characterized by limited legitimate employment options, often turned to prostitution as a means of gaining the economic capital to ensure their livelihood. It should also be noted that the authors found that those most lacking familial and governmental support during the transition to adulthood were also those who were involved in the most high-risk areas of the sex industry in New Zealand.

Involvement in the criminal justice system during adolescence also proves to be an important risk factor for successfully negotiating the transition to adulthood. According to Clear, Rose, and Ryder (2001), aside from the punishments imposed on individuals while incarcerated, there are significant unintended consequences of incarceration on youth. They highlight four unintended consequences of incarceration on offenders: incarceration and stigma; financial impact of incarceration; incarceration and the problem of identity; and incarceration and the dynamics of community relationships. What is important to note about these consequences is that they are not limited exclusively to the lives of offenders. Clear et al. (2001) argue that incarceration proves to be challenging not only for gaining the skill set necessary for becoming a self

supporting adult, but that it also jeopardizes the relationships offenders have with non-incarcerated individuals which, in turn, exacerbates the difficulty offenders face when they re-enter the community. When these unintended consequences of incarceration are examined in conjunction to the seminal period of the transition to adulthood, incarceration has long-term repercussions on success in assuming adult roles.

As a consequence of the difficulties incarcerated youth face during the transition to adulthood, there is increasing attention in the literature on facilitating a successful re-entry of incarcerated youth offenders into the community. Bosick and Gover (2010) examined the effect of incarceration during the transition to adulthood. While the authors support Clear et al.'s (2001) assertion that there are many unintended consequences of incarceration on both the individual offender and the broader community, they stress the importance of creating correctional programming in jails that focus on maintaining and strengthening pro-social relationships between offenders and their social support network in the community. Bosick and Gover (2010) contend that by ensuring that pro-social relationships exist when youth re-enter their community, previously incarcerated youth are less likely to reoffend.

Abrams (2006) corroborated the importance of strengthening social support networks with youth exiting correctional institutions. Through in-depth interviews with youth recently released from a correctional institution, the author found that the most significant risk youth face when they re-enter the community is the influence of negative peer group association. Abrams asserts that vulnerable youth are more likely to desist from offending when a pro-social support network is established prior to exiting the correctional institution. The work of Abrams (2006), Clear et al. (2001), and Bosick and Gover (2010) highlight the need for youth custody institutions to facilitate the creation of pro-social support networks for vulnerable youth who lack familial support during the transition to adulthood.

Farrington (2003) argues that there are three important and widely accepted conclusions regarding the transition to adulthood and persistent offending: first, that the age of onset of offending peaks between the ages of 8 and 14; second, offending peaks in late teenage years – between age 15 and age 19 and that the age of desistance from offending peaks between the ages of 20 to 29; and third, that the age of onset is an important predictor of the length of the criminal career and the number of offences. Thus, the earlier a youth begins offending, the greater likelihood they will continue offending into adulthood and will commit a greater number of offences when compared to their counterparts who do not begin offending until mid-adolescence (Mullis et al., 2005).

With these three conclusions, Farrington (2003) is referring to the age-crime curve. Numerous studies have shown that in relation to the general population, late adolescence and early adulthood are a stage of life with a temporary and dramatic increase in not only the actual number of offences, but also the number of individuals involved in criminal behaviour (Yessine & Bonta, 2008). Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) maintain that regardless of time, place, demographic group, or type of crime, a distinct pattern persists between age and crime distribution. Specifically, Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) point out that even though population arrests may change in absolute magnitude over time and place, "the same pattern has persisted for the relative magnitudes of the different age groups, with fifteen- to seventeen-year-olds having the highest arrest rates per population of any age group" (p. 124). For this reason, if one examines the relative shape of the age-crime curve, it becomes evident that the arrest rate peaks at the age of 18, and quickly descends as individuals age.

The desistance from criminal activity that typically begins around the age of 18 is of great analytic interest for criminological and life-course researchers alike. As previously discussed, the transition to adulthood is characterized by the assumption of adult roles by adolescent individuals. As Clark (2007) identified, the transition to adulthood can be identified by five key life events: leaving school; leaving the parental home; possessing a full-time full-year employment; entering a conjugal relationship; and having children. Sampson and Laub (2003a) believe that the desistance from offending in adulthood, as visible in the age-crime curve, is strongly linked to the assumption of adult roles.

Even though the age-crime curve is a powerful tool for explaining broad demographic trends in offending behaviour, it conceals two, potentially incongruous, facts regarding offending behaviour (Moffitt, 1993). Researchers have observed that while there is significant continuity in offending and antisocial behaviour as individuals transition from childhood to adulthood, the prevalence of offending increases dramatically during late adolescence (Farrington, 2003; Moffitt, 1993; Patterson, DeBaryshe & Ramsey, 1989). It is suggested that while relative individual propensities to engage in deviant activities can remain constant throughout one's life, there is a huge increase – as much as 10-fold – in offending during adolescence (Moffitt, 1993).

3.5 Policy and Practice Implications

Understanding the risk and protective factors associated with the trajectories of young offenders is important for improving responses to youth offending for two reasons: to identify youth who are at risk for criminal behaviour; and to inform development of targeted prevention and intervention programs (Craig et al., 2011).

Moreover, the type and intensity of interventions can be individualized depending on the trajectory group to which the individual belongs (Ward et al., 2010).

Likewise, understanding the factors associated with the process of desistance is important and has policy implications for improving responses to youth offending. According to McNeill, Farrall, Lightowler, & Maruna (2012), better understandings of how and why people stop offending aids in the development of better criminal justice practices, processes and institutions. In their review of the research evidence in the United Kingdom about the process of desistance from crime, McNeill et al. (2012, p. 1) identified eight principles for youth justice practice:

- Being realistic about the complexity and difficulty of the process;
- Individualising support for change;
- Building and sustaining hope;
- Recognising and developing people's strengths;
- Respecting and fostering agency (or self-determination);
- Working with and through relationships (both personal and professional);
- Developing social as well as human capital;
- Recognising and celebrating progress

Recognizing that desistance is a social process as much as a personal one, McNeill et al. (2012, p. 8) state that "ultimately, the pathways to desistance are through repaired relationships – within families, within communities, within the state -- and not just through 'correction' of the individual."

Citing the literature on desistance theories, and particularly the work of Sampson and Laub (1993, 2003a, 2003b), Devers (2011) argues that policymakers in the United States need to alter current policies on incarceration. She argues that incarceration may actually increase offender recidivism on release because it harms the basic institutions that promote social control, namely the family, school, and job stability. Devers recommends that prisons incorporate treatment, focusing on job training and employment, education, family counseling, and reconnecting individuals to the community. She further states (2011, p. 1) that "essentially, parole officers, community supervision officers, and service providers who have had desistance training will ultimately help offenders in the reentry process and reduce future involvement in crime."

The view that placement in a youth correctional facility can exclude high-risk youth from interventions that would better protect public safety is also shared with

Skeem, Scott and Mulvey (in press). They state that by institutionalizing youth, "an opportunity to exploit what may be a critical period for effective intervention would be missed, at best. At worst, exposure to criminogenic environments during this sensitive period of social-affective development could entrench patterns of criminal behavior." In their recent American study, Skeem et al. synthesized the research relevant to justice policy for high-risk youth. They found that although risk assessment is becoming standard practice, the results of the assessments rarely are used to inform risk reduction efforts. A study by Mulvey, Schubert and Chassin (2010), for example, found that only 44% of serious juvenile offenders with substance abuse disorders received any treatment over a three-year follow-up period. Further, a study by Redpath and Brandner (2010) found that almost half of 57 juvenile programs failed to provide service to youth classified as high-risk.

In summarizing the research on high-risk youth, Skeem et al. (in press) concluded that while high-risk youth are by definition at greater risk for re-offending than other youth, they do not have unique qualities that distinguish them from other offenders, and evidence suggests that high-risk youth can change with appropriate, intensive treatment that adequately engages them. Using this research, the authors developed the following guidelines for legal policies to deal fairly with high-risk youth while reducing crime and protecting public safety (Skeem et al., in press, pp. 44-45):

> First, interventions should be structured to respond to the developmental needs of adolescents.
>
> Second, programs should target risk factors for recidivism in individual youths.
>
> Third, correctional interventions should be in the community, except a) when the juvenile poses a threat to public safety that cannot be managed outside of a secure facility, or b) residential placement is necessary to either protect the youth's mental health or welfare or provide intensive services that are impossible to deliver in the community.
>
> Fourth, developmentally responsive risk reduction programs should be an integral part of facility-based dispositions.
>
> Fifth, evidence-based programming should continue during reentry into the community.

The authors state that the most important guideline is to systematically evaluate risk reduction efforts with high-risk youth. In terms of future research, Skeem et al. (in press) recommend two strategies for addressing high-risk youth: (1) exploring novel modes of service delivery (e.g., computerized treatment) to be able to reach more high-risk youth; and (2) articulating how and when to intervene to achieve maximum impact. They emphasize the importance of intervening early and intensively, and recognize that "a more multifaceted and developmental approach requires broad intervention in multiple realms of the young offender's life, whether pursed in the community or an institutional setting" (p. 46).

3.6 Summary

Chapter 3.0 presents a wealth of relevant information, providing important context for the current study. Risk factors for offending are well established in the literature, and researchers have increasingly examined the pathways and trajectories that characterize persistent or chronic youth offending, and the factors and events that may lead to persistence and/or desistance as youth enter adulthood. This literature is important to guiding the current research in that a number of risk factors in key domains will be examined, including:

- Individual: demographic characteristics; individual propensities (aggression, impulsiveness, low self-control, hyperactivity); mental health concerns; and addiction;

- Family: family composition (e.g., parental separation/divorce, living arrangements); child welfare involvement; maltreatment and neglect; family criminality; and family poverty;

- Peer: negative peer association; gang affiliation and involvement; and intimate relationships;

- School: school attachment (e.g., truancy, suspensions); educational attainment; and school behaviour;

- Community: neighbourhood composition; neighbourhood crime; and community gang presence.

Theoretical models have been valuable in guiding this research, each contributing important elements to understanding offending persistence and desistance. Perhaps most relevant to the current study is Moffitt's (1993) and others'

work on pathways of offending and the identification of adolescence-limited offending versus life-course persistent offending. While a number of offending trajectories have been identified in a number of studies, it is important to understand these trajectories in the context of "transitions," "turning points," and social bonds as observed by Sampson and Laub (1993). Recent Canadian research by Ward and Day (2010) stresses the importance of understanding the particular influence of various risk and protective factors at different stages of the life course, particularly during the transition to adulthood, to ensure proper interventions are in place at critical times, in an effort to prevent or intervene in criminal careers.

4.0 PROFILE OF STUDY PARTICIPANTS

This chapter presents the findings of the probation file reviews and interviews conducted with the sample of youth offenders from Edmonton and Calgary. A total of 170 files were reviewed and in-person interviews were conducted with 52 of these youth. The file reviews were used as the primary source of data; data collected from the interviews are presented where they contain supplementary or additional information than what was available in the probation files.

4.1 Demographic Characteristics

Table 4.1 presents selected demographic characteristics of study participants according to data collected from the file reviews (N=170) compared to the demographic characteristics of the sub-sample who were interviewed (n=52). Among the full sample of youth, slightly more file reviews were completed in Edmonton (n=90) than in Calgary (n=80). The sample was comprised primarily of males (81.2%) while approximately one-fifth were female (18.8%). The majority of youth were 17 years of age at the beginning of the project (60.6%); over one-third (37.6%) were aged 16 when the study began, and only 1.8% were 18 years of age. With regard to the ethnic background of the study participants, of the cases where this information was available in the files, slightly less than one-half (47.4%) were Caucasian and over one-third were Native (27.3%) or Métis (9.1%). Additionally, Afro-Canadian (6.5%), Middle Eastern (3.9%), and East Indian (1.9%) ethnicities were also represented. "Other" ethnicities (3.9%) included Mulatto, Asian, Hispanic, and Eurasian. A substantial majority of youth were born in Canada (89.9%).

When comparing the demographic characteristics of the sub-sample of youth who were interviewed, findings indicate that the interviewed youth are a relatively good representation of the overall sample. Like the overall sample, the majority of interviewed youth were male (90.4%), while 9.6% of interviewed youth were female. The majority of youth were 17 years of age at the time of the interview (63.5%), though unlike the overall sample, almost equal proportions were aged 16 (19.2%) and 18 (17.3%) when interviewed. The greatest difference between the study sample and the interviewed sample was that almost three-quarters of interviewed youth (71.2%) were based in Calgary. Similar to the overall sample, just over one-half of interviewed youth identified themselves as Caucasian (51.9%), however, fewer identified themselves as Native or Métis (27%, compared to 36.4%). The next most common ethnicities were Afro-Canadian (7.7%), and Middle Eastern (3.8%). The substantial majority of interviewed youth were also Canadian-born (86.5%).

Table 4.1

Demographic Characteristics of Total Study Sample and Interview Sample[1]

Characteristic	Total Study Sample (N=170)		Interview Sample (n=52)	
	n	%	n	%
Location				
Edmonton	90	52.9	15	28.8
Calgary	80	47.1	37	71.2
Total	170	100.0	52	100.0
Gender				
Male	138	81.2	47	90.4
Female	32	18.8	5	9.6
Total	170	100.0	52	100.0
Age at Start of Study				
16	64	37.6	10	19.2
17	103	60.6	33	63.5
18	3	1.8	9	17.3
Total	170	100.0	52	100.0
Ethnicity				
Caucasian	73	47.4	27	51.9
Native	42	27.3	7	13.5
Metis	14	9.1	7	13.5
Afro-Canadian	10	6.5	4	7.7
Middle Eastern	6	3.9	2	3.8
East Indian	3	1.9	0	0.0
Other	6[2]	3.9	5[3]	9.6
Total	154	100.0	52	100.0
Country of Birth				
Canada	151	89.9	45	86.5
Sudan	4	2.4	2	3.8
Iraq	2	1.2	0	0.0
Afghanistan	2	1.2	1	1.9
United States	1	0.6	1	1.9
Italy	1	0.6	1	1.9
Russia	1	0.6	0	0.0
Kuwait	1	0.6	0	0.0
Philippines	1	0.6	1	1.9
Liberia	1	0.6	0	0.0
Sierra Leone	1	0.6	1	1.9
Swaziland	1	0.6	0	0.0
Zambia	1	0.6	0	0.0
Total	168	100.0	52	100.0

Source of Data: Youth Probation File Review

[1]Missing cases on: "Ethnicity"=16; "Country of Birth"=2.

[2]Other includes Mulatto (n=2), Asian (n=2), Hispanic (n=1), and Eurasian (n=1)

[3]Other includes Mulatto (n=2), Hispanic (n=1), Filipino (n=1), and Italian (n=1)

4.2 Family Characteristics

4.2.1 Family Demographics

Family characteristics of the youth as identified from their probation file reviews are presented in Table 4.2. Of the 143 files that contained information on parents' marital status, the majority were separated (31.5%) or divorced (30.1%). Equal proportions of parents were currently married (16.1%) or had never lived together (16.1%). Of participants whose parents had separated or divorced, the average age of the youth at the time of the marital breakdown was 4.7 years (range = 0-15 years).

Table 4.2

Family Characteristics of Total Study Sample[1]

Characteristic	n	%
Parents' Marital Status		
Married	23	16.1
Common Law	4	2.8
Never Lived Together	23	16.1
Separated	45	31.5
Divorced	43	30.1
Widowed	5	3.5
Total	143	100.0
Youth's Living Arrangements		
Both Parents	17	10.6
One Parent	55	34.4
Extended Family	11	6.9
Foster/group Home	22	13.8
Shelter/On Street	7	4.4
Incarcerated	28	17.5
Other[2]	20	12.5
Total	160	100.0
Mother Employed		
Yes	45	54.9
No	37	45.1
Total	82	100.0
Father Employed		
Yes	39	73.6
No	14	26.4
Total	53	100.0

Source of Data: Youth Probation File Review

Total N=170

[1]Missing cases on: "Parents' Marital Status"=27; "Youth's Living Arrangements"=10; "Mother Employed"=88; "Father Employed"=117.

[2]Examples of "Other" living arrangements include with a roommate, with a spouse/partner, with friends, and alone.

Information regarding the youths' living arrangements was available in 160 files. Over one-third of the participants (34.4%) were living with one biological parent; 10.6% of youth were living with both biological parents. Almost one-fifth of youth (17.5%) were incarcerated at the time their file was reviewed, and 13.8% were living in a foster or group home pursuant to child welfare legislation. Information on the employment status of the youths' parents was available in relatively few probation files; where this information was available, it indicated that mothers were employed in 54.9% of cases and 73.6% of fathers were employed.

4.2.2 Relationship with Parents

File review data regarding the nature of participants' relationship with their parents are provided in Table 4.3. Of youth for whom information was available, just over one-half (52.7%) had a relationship with their father and just over three-quarters (76.1%) had a relationship with their mother.

Approximately equal proportions of youth reported that they had a positive (49.4%) or negative (50.6%) relationship with their father, as identified by information collected by the probation officer. Relationships with mothers were more likely to be positive: in 65.3% of cases the relationship was positive and a negative relationship was reported in 34.7% of files.

Information collected by the probation officers indicated that the majority of youth for whom data were available had run away from home at least once (58.1%). On average, youth were 11.6 years old when they first ran away from home, and they had run away from home an average of 8.1 times. Over one-third of youth (36.8%) reported that they had been "kicked out" of their home at least once. Participants who had been kicked out of their home were, on average, 13.6 years old the first time this happened, and they had been kicked out of home an average of 2.8 times.

4.2.3 Exposure to Family Violence/Neglect

Information regarding exposure to family violence was available in youth probation files, and these data are summarized in Table 4.4. Over three-quarters of youth for which this information was available had experienced family violence in some form (77.1%). Over one-half (58.8%) had been a victim of family violence, 28.2% had been a witness to family violence, and 9.4% had been a perpetrator of family violence. Almost two-thirds of the youth had experienced some form of neglect (62.8%).

Almost one-quarter of participants had been exposed to sexual abuse (24.1%): 14.7% had been a victim of sexual abuse, 4.1% witnessed sexual abuse, and 4.7% were perpetrators of sexual abuse.

Table 4.3

Nature of Youths' Relationship with Parents[1]

Characteristic	n	%
Has Relationship with Father		
Yes	79	52.7
No	71	47.3
Total	150	100.0
Nature of Relationship with Father[2]		
Positive	38	49.4
Negative	39	50.6
Total	77	100.0
Has Relationship with Mother		
Yes	118	76.1
No	37	23.9
Total	155	100.0
Nature of Relationship with Mother[2]		
Positive	77	65.3
Negative	41	34.7
Total	118	100.0
Ever Run Away from Home		
Yes	72	58.1
No	52	41.9
Total	124	100.0
Ever Kicked out of Home		
Yes	42	36.8
No	72	63.2
Total	114	100.0

Source of Data: Youth Probation File Review

Total N=170

[1]Missing cases on: "Has Relationship with Father"=20; "Nature of Relationship with Father"=2; "Has Relationship with Mother"=15; "Ever Run Away from Home"=46; "Ever Kicked out of Home"=56.

[2]Data on the nature of the relationship with mother and father are only presented for youth who have a relationship with their mother and father.

Table 4.4

Proportion of Youth Experiencing Family Violence/Neglect[1]

Nature of Experience	n	%
Exposed to Family Violence		
Yes	111	77.1
No/Unknown	32	22.2
Suspected	1	0.7
Total	144	100.0
Victim of Family Violence		
Yes	100	58.8
No/Unknown	70	41.2
Total	170	100.0
Witness to Family Violence		
Yes	48	28.2
No/Unknown	122	71.8
Total	170	100.0
Perpetrator of Family Violence		
Yes	16	9.4
No/Unknown	154	90.6
Total	170	100.0
Experienced Neglect		
Yes	86	62.8
No/Unknown	51	37.2
Total	137	100.0
Exposed to Sexual Abuse		
Yes	27	24.1
No/Unknown	77	68.8
Suspected	8	7.1
Total	112	100.0
Victim of Sexual Abuse		
Yes	25	14.7
No/Unknown	145	85.3
Total	170	100.0
Witness to Sexual Abuse		
Yes	7	4.1
No/Unknown	163	95.9
Total	170	100.0
Perpetrator of Sexual Abuse		
Yes	8	4.7
No/Unknown	162	95.3
Total	170	100.0

Source of Data: Youth Probation File Review

Total N=170

[1]Missing cases on: "Experienced Family Violence"=26; "Experienced Neglect"=33; "Experienced Sexual Abuse"=58.

4.2.4 Criminal Involvement of Family Members

File information regarding the involvement of the youths' parents and siblings in criminal activity is presented in Table 4.5. In over two-thirds of cases with valid data (68.3%), the probation file indicated that at least one of the participant's parents had been charged with a crime at least once; in almost one-half of cases (48%), a sibling of the participant had been charged.

In 85.7% of cases in which a parent had ever been charged with a crime, at least one parent had been incarcerated. Similarly, in 93.3% of cases in which a sibling had been charged with a crime, at least one sibling had ever been incarcerated.

Table 4.5

Involvement of Immediate Family Members in Criminal Activity[1]

Type of Involvement	n	%
Parent Ever Charged with a Crime		
Yes	71	68.3
No	33	31.7
Total	104	100.0
Sibling Ever Charged with a Crime		
Yes	36	48.0
No	36	48.0
Not Applicable	3	4.0
Total	75	100.0
Parent Ever Incarcerated[2]		
Yes	48	85.7
No	8	14.3
Total	56	100.0
Sibling Ever Incarcerated[3]		
Yes	28	93.3
No	2	6.7
Total	30	100.0

Source of Data: Youth Probation File Review

Total N=170

[1]Missing cases on: "Parent Ever Charged with a Crime"=66; "Sibling Ever Charged with a Crime"=95; "Parent Ever Incarcerated"=15; "Sibling Ever Incarcerated"=6.

[2]Data are only presented for cases in which a parent had ever been charged with a crime (n=71).

[3]Data are only presented for cases in which a sibling had ever been charged with a crime (n=36).

4.2.5 Involvement with Child Welfare

Child Welfare Involvement from the Youth Probation File Review

Information regarding participants' involvement with the child welfare system is provided in Table 4.6. Of the 157 youth probation files containing information regarding child welfare involvement, over two-thirds of youth (70.1%) had been involved with child welfare at some point. The average age of first involvement was 8 years. Over one-third of youth (34.9%) had a current guardianship order in place at the time of the file review.

A substantial proportion of youth had been in foster care at some point in their lives (39.9%). In addition, one-half of participants (50.7%) had been in a group home at least once.

Table 4.6

Involvement of Youth with the Child Welfare System[1]

Type of Involvement	n	%
Ever Involved with Child Welfare Services		
Yes	110	70.1
No	47	29.9
Total	157	100.0
Current Child Welfare Guardianship Order		
Yes	53	34.9
No	99	65.1
Total	152	100.0
Ever Been in Foster Care		
Yes	61	39.9
No	92	60.1
Total	153	100.0
Ever Been in a Group Home		
Yes	77	50.7
No	75	49.3
Total	152	100.0

Source of Data: Youth Probation File Review

Total N=170

[1]Missing cases on: "Ever Involved with Child Welfare Services"=13; "Current Guardianship Order"=18; "Ever Been in Foster Care"=17; "Ever Been in a Group Home"=18.

Child Welfare Involvement from Child and Family Services Division of Human Services Alberta

As part of obtaining consent from youth for the life history interviews, participants were asked if the researchers could access data regarding their involvement with the child welfare system from Alberta Children and Youth Services (now Child and Family Services Division of Human Services). Of the 52 youth interviewed, 38 (73.1%) consented to the release of this information. In early 2014, a request was submitted to the Child and Family Services Division of Human Services for access to these data, which were provided to the Institute in March 2014. Three of the 38 youth who consented did not have any child welfare information on file with Human Services and were dropped from the analyses reported in this section. Since this sample is a subset of the total number of youth involved in the project, the data should not be assumed to be representative of all youth in the study.

Child welfare involvement can include interventions under one or more of four legal authorities: Family Enhancement; Child Protection; Post-intervention Supports; or through the Protection of Sexually Exploited Children Act (PSECA). Youth who had involvement with the child welfare system but did not receive intervention under any of these legal categories had data provided for their front-end involvement with the system, which includes an initial intake screening or investigation.

Table 4.7 presents the type of legal category under which youth received interventions. A youth could receive interventions under one or more legal categories. Nine individuals (25.7%) did not have an intervention under a legal authority and only received front-end child welfare services. The most common intervention was the Family Enhancement Program (68.8%), under which children and youth receive services while remaining in their guardian's care. The second most common legal category used was Child Protection (51.4%), in which children and youth are deemed to be at higher risk and a determination is made that they are in need of a placement or court intervention. Post-intervention supports (14.3%) include additional supports provided following another intervention, and interventions under PSECA (2.9%) may be provided to youth who are at risk of sexual exploitation (i.e., juvenile prostitution).

The nine youth who only received front-end services and did not have any further interventions were involved with the child welfare system for an average of 119.4 days (range = 19-265 days).

Table 4.7

Type of Child Welfare Involvement

Type of Involvement	n	%[1]
Front-end involvement only – Investigation but no continuing involvement	9	25.7
Family Enhancement Program	24	68.8
Child Protection	18	51.4
Post-intervention Supports	5	14.3
Protection of Sexually Exploited Children Act	1	2.9

Source of data: Child and Family Services Division of Human Services Alberta
Total n=35
[1]A youth could have more than one type of involvement; therefore, percentages do not sum to 100.

Youth may receive interventions under one or more legal category over the course of their involvement with the child welfare system. Of the 26 study participants who received interventions under a legal category, 34.6% (n=9) received interventions under one category, 46.2% (n=12) had interventions under two categories, and 19.2% (n=5) had interventions under three legal categories.

Children and youth who receive child welfare services through a legal category can receive one or more specific types of intervention either in their homes or while in care. Ten youth (38.5%) received intervention services in their homes while 16 youth (61.5%) received interventions while in care.

Interventions for the 26 youth who received child welfare services are presented in Table 4.8. The most common type of service was group care, which was received by 50% of youth in the sample, followed by residential treatment (42.3%), foster care (38.5%), placement in a *Youth Criminal Justice Act* (YCJA) facility (34.6%), and supported independent living (26.9%). Other services were each received by less than one-quarter of youth.

The 26 youth who received child welfare services were further examined to determine the length of time they received services from child welfare and the total length of time they spent in interventions. These youth received child welfare services for an average of 1021.8 days (range = 33-3956 days) and were in child welfare interventions an average of 654.8 days (range = <1- 3087 days). The 16 youth who received interventions out of their homes were in care for an average of 1064 days (range = 38-3087 days).

Table 4.8

Type of Service for Youth Who Received Child Welfare Services

Type of Intervention	n	%
Group Care	13	50.0
Residential Treatment	11	42.3
Foster Care	10	38.5
YCJA Facility	9	34.6
Supported Independent Living	7	26.9
Independent Living	6	23.1
Secure Services	4	15.4
Agency Foster Care	2	7.7
Extended Family	2	7.7
PSECA Protective Safe House	2	7.7
Behavioural Adaptation Therapy	1	3.8
Kinship Care	1	3.8
Secure Treatment	1	3.8
Significant Other	1	3.8
View to Adopt	1	3.8
Interim Placement Other than Above	2	7.7

Source of data: Child and Family Services Division of Human Services Alberta
Number of youth who received intervention under a legal authority=26
[1]A youth could have more than one type of intervention; therefore, percentages do not sum to 100.

4.3 Personal Characteristics

4.3.1 Personality

Interviewed youth were asked several questions regarding their patterns of responding in certain situations, as well as whether they consider themselves a risk taker. Responses to these questions are presented in Table 4.9. The overall pattern of responses indicates that the majority of these youth feel that they are able to think carefully before acting (61.5%) and in stressful situations (53.8%), and that they are able to keep their feelings under control (63.5%). However, over half of youth also reported that they have difficulty paying attention for long periods of time (53.8%). The substantial majority of youth also reported that they would break the rules in order to enjoy new and exciting experiences (84.6%) and that they consider themselves a "risk taker" (84.6%).

Table 4.9

Self-reported Personality Characteristics of Interviewed Youth

Characteristic	n	%
Think Carefully before Acting		
Yes	32	61.5
No	20	38.5
Total	52	100.0
Think Carefully in Stressful Situations		
Yes	28	53.8
No	24	46.2
Total	52	100.0
Keep Feelings Under Control		
Yes	33	63.5
No	19	36.5
Total	52	100.0
Difficulty Paying Attention for Long Periods of Time		
Yes	28	53.8
No	24	46.2
Total	52	100.0
Enjoy New and Exciting Experiences, Even if They Involve Breaking the Rules		
Yes	44	84.6
No	8	15.4
Total	52	100.0
A Risk Taker		
Yes	44	84.6
No	8	15.4
Total	52	100.0

Source of Data: Youth Interviews
Total N=52

4.3.2 Psychological Characteristics

The probation files contained considerable information regarding participants' mental health status, including whether they had ever received psychological services and the presence of a diagnosis of various mental health disorders. Table 4.10 presents the proportion of youth who had ever received a psychological assessment and/or treatment. Just over one-half of youth with valid data had received a psychological assessment (54.4%), and a similar proportion of youth had ever received counselling or psychological treatment (54%).

Table 4.10

Youths' Psychological Assessment/Counselling History[1]

Type of Intervention	n	%
Ever Had a Psychological Assessment		
Yes	87	54.4
No	73	45.6
Total	160	100.0
Ever Had Counselling/Treatment		
Yes	67	54.0
No	57	46.0
Total	124	100.0

Source of Data: Youth Probation File Review

Total N=170

[1]Missing cases on: "Ever Had a Psychological Assessment"=10; "Ever Had Counselling/Treatment"=46.

Table 4.11 provides the proportion of youth who had ever received a diagnosis of various psychological disorders based on the file data. The most common disorder was attention deficit disorder/attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADD/ADHD) (42.9%), followed by conduct disorder (33.7%). The files indicated that 81.7% (n=49) of youth who had received a diagnosis of ADD/ADHD had ever been prescribed medication for this disorder. Interviewed youth were also asked if they had ever received a diagnosis of ADD/ADHD and 41.8% (n=25) stated that they had. Of these, 92% (n=23) indicated that they had ever been prescribed medication for this disorder: however, of these, only 30.4% (n=7) said that they were currently taking medication at the time of the interview.

Table 4.11

Youths' Diagnoses of Psychological Disorders[1]

Diagnosis	n	%
Attention Deficit Disorder/Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder		
Yes	60	42.9
No	80	57.1
Total	140	100.0
Conduct Disorder		
Yes	55	33.7
No	108	66.3
Total	163	100.0
Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder		
Yes	31	19.0
No	132	81.0
Total	163	100.0

Continued

Table 4.11 Continued

Diagnosis	n	%
Oppositional Defiant Disorder		
Yes	29	17.8
No	134	82.2
Total	163	100.0
Learning Disability		
Yes	21	12.9
No	142	87.1
Total	163	100.0
Depressive Disorder		
Yes	21	12.9
No	142	87.1
Total	163	100.0
Post-traumatic Stress Disorder		
Yes	10	6.1
No	153	93.9
Total	163	100.0
Anxiety Disorder		
Yes	8	4.9
No	155	95.1
Total	163	100.0

Source of Data: Youth Probation File Review

Total N=170

[1]Missing cases on: "Attention Deficit Disorder/Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder"=30; "Conduct Disorder"=7; "Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder"=7; "Oppositional Defiant Disorder"=7; "Learning Disability"=7; "Depressive Disorder"=7; "Post-traumatic Stress Disorder"=7; "Anxiety Disorder"=7.

Almost one-fifth of study participants had been diagnosed with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (19%). The least common psychological diagnoses were post-traumatic stress disorder (6.1%) and anxiety disorder (4.9%).

4.3.3 Alcohol and Drug Use

Both the file reviews and interviews collected data on the participants' history of using and abusing alcohol and drugs. Table 4.12 contains information on alcohol and drug use collected from the probation files. Almost all youth with valid data (97.3%) had ever used alcohol and almost three-quarters (74.4%) had a history of alcohol abuse. Similarly, 96% of youth had ever used drugs and 80.8% had a history of drug abuse. The substantial majority of participants had ever bought illegal drugs (88.7%) and one-half (50%) had ever sold illegal drugs.

Table 4.12

Youths' History of Involvement with Alcohol and Drugs[1]

Substance Use	n	%
Ever Used Alcohol		
Yes	143	97.3
No	4	2.7
Total	147	100.0
History of Alcohol Abuse		
Yes	99	74.4
No	34	25.6
Total	133	100.0
Ever Used Drugs		
Yes	144	96.0
No	6	4.0
Total	150	100.0
History of Drug Abuse		
Yes	105	80.8
No	25	19.2
Total	130	100.0
Ever Bought Illegal Drugs		
Yes	102	88.7
No	13	11.3
Total	115	100.0
Ever Sold Illegal Drugs		
Yes	37	50.0
No	37	50.0
Total	74	100.0

Source of Data: Youth Probation File Review

Total N=170

[1]Missing cases on: "Ever Used Alcohol"=23; "History of Alcohol Abuse"=37; "Ever Used Drugs"=20; "History of Drug Abuse"=40; "Ever Bought Illegal Drugs"=55; "Ever Sold Illegal Drugs"=96.

Table 4.13 presents the proportion of youth who had ever used various drugs according to information contained in their probation files. The most common drug was marijuana (92.4%), followed by ecstasy (57.6%), mushrooms (35.4%), and cocaine (34.7%). The least commonly used drugs were speed (1.4%), inhalants (0.7%), and heroin (0.7%).

Table 4.13

Proportion of Youth Who Have Used Various Drugs

Drug[1]	n	%[2]
Marijuana	133	92.4
Ecstasy	83	57.6
Mushrooms	51	35.4
Cocaine	50	34.7
Crack	28	19.4
LSD	17	11.8
Crystal Methamphetamine	11	7.6
Ketamine	8	5.6
Speed	2	1.4
Inhalants	1	0.7
Heroin	1	0.7

Source of Data: Youth Probation File Review

Total N=170

[1]Multiple response data

[2]Percentages are based on the number of youth who had ever used drugs (n=144).

Participants' self-reported experience with alcohol use as collected during the interviews is summarized in Table 4.14. All youth reported that they had used alcohol, and all but two respondents indicated that they had consumed five or more alcoholic drinks at one time on at least one occasion (96.2%). When asked how old they were when they first tried alcohol, responses ranged from 6 to 16 years of age, with an average age of 11.6 years. Participants were also asked how old they were when they first consumed five or more alcoholic drinks on one occasion: responses ranged from 9 to 17 years of age with an average age of 13.2 years.

Four-fifths (80%) of youth stated that they had consumed five or more alcoholic drinks on at least one occasion within the past year. When youth who had consumed five or more drinks on one occasion within the past year were asked how often they did this, 19.5% responded daily, 41.5% stated that they did this weekly, and 26.8% indicated that this was a monthly occurrence for them. A small proportion of respondents indicated that they did this rarely (4.9%).

Almost one-third of interviewed youth said that they had been addicted to alcohol at some point (31.4%). Of those who reported an alcohol addiction, four-fifths (81.3%) said that they had previously sought treatment for alcohol addiction.

Table 4.14

Pattern of Self-reported Alcohol Use among Interviewed Youth[1]

Alcohol Use	n	%
Ever Tried Alcohol		
Yes	52	100.0
No	0	0.0
Total	52	100.0
Ever Had 5 or More Alcoholic Drinks at One Time		
Yes	50	96.2
No	2	3.8
Total	52	100.0
Had 5 or More Alcoholic Drinks at One Time in the Past Year[2]		
Yes	40	80.0
No	10	20.0
Total	50	100.0
Frequency of Having 5 or More Alcoholic Drinks at One Time[2]		
Daily	8	19.5
Weekly	17	41.5
Monthly	11	26.8
Bi-monthly	1	2.4
Annually	1	2.4
Rarely	2	4.9
No longer drinks	1	2.4
Total	41	100.0
Ever Been Addicted to Alcohol		
Yes	16	31.4
No	35	68.6
Total	51	100.0
Ever Treated for Alcohol Addiction[3]		
Yes	13	81.3
No	3	18.8
Total	16	100.0

Source of Data: Youth Interviews

Total N=52

[1]Missing cases on: "Frequency of Having 5 or More Alcoholic Drinks at One Time"=9; "Ever Been Addicted to Alcohol"=1.

[2]Questions were only asked of youth who had ever had 5 or more alcoholic drinks at one time (n=50).

[3]This question was only asked of youth who indicated that they had ever been addicted to alcohol (n=16).

Data regarding respondents' self-reported drug use are provided in Table 4.15. Almost all youth (96.2%) indicated that they had ever used drugs and, of those, a similar proportion (90%) had used drugs within the past year. When asked how old they were when they first used drugs, responses varied from 7 to 16 years of age, with an average age of 12.2 years. When asked how often they use drugs, the most common responses were daily (40%) or weekly (35.6%). Few youth indicated that they only used drugs occasionally (2.2%).

Table 4.15

Pattern of Self-reported Drug Use among Interviewed Youth[1]

Drug Use	n	%
Ever Used Drugs		
Yes	50	96.2
No	2	3.8
Total	52	100.0
Used Drugs in the Past Year[2]		
Yes	45	90.0
No	5	10.0
Total	50	100.0
Frequency of Drug Use[2]		
Daily	18	40.0
Weekly	16	35.6
Monthly	6	13.3
Bi-monthly	1	2.2
Annually	2	4.4
Occasionally	1	2.2
No longer uses drugs	1	2.2
Total	45	100.0
Types of Drugs Used[3]		
Marijuana	48	96.0
Ecstasy	38	76.0
Mushrooms	30	60.0
Cocaine	26	52.0
Someone else's prescription drugs	20	40.0
LSD	19	38.0
Crack	10	20.0
Ketamine	9	18.0
Crystal methamphetamine	6	12.0
Heroin	3	6.0
PCP	3	6.0
Ever Been Addicted to Drugs[2]		
Yes	18	36.0
No	32	64.0
Total	50	100.0
Ever Treated for Drug Addiction[4]		
Yes	14	82.4
No	3	17.6
Total	17	100.0

Source of Data: Youth Interviews; Total N=52

[1]Missing cases on: "Frequency of Drug Use"=5; "Ever Sought Treatment for Drug Addiction"=1

[2]These questions were only asked of youth who had ever used drugs (n=50).

[3]Multiple response data. Percentages are calculated out of the number of youth who reported ever using drugs (n=50).

[4]This question was only asked of youth who stated that they had ever been addicted to drugs (n=18).

Table 4.15 also contains the proportion of participants who reported using various drugs. Similar to the data collected from the file reviews, the most commonly used drug was marijuana (96%), followed by ecstasy (76%), mushrooms (60%), and cocaine (52%). A substantial proportion of youth also reported that they had used someone else's prescription drugs (40%). The least commonly reported drugs were heroin (6%) and PCP (6%). When asked if they had ever been addicted to drugs, over one-third (36%) indicated that they had; when these youth were asked if they had ever sought treatment for drug addiction, the substantial majority (82.4%) responded affirmatively.

Youth were also asked several questions regarding their drug buying and selling behaviour, and their responses are provided in Table 4.16. All but three respondents (94.2%) stated that they had ever bought drugs and, of these youth, over three-quarters (77.1%) had bought drugs within the past year. When youth who had bought drugs within the past year were asked how often they did this, the most common response was weekly (45.9%), followed by daily (24.3%) and monthly (21.6%).

When asked if they had ever sold drugs, two-thirds (67.3%) of the interviewed youth indicated that they had; of these youth, one-half (51.4%) had sold drugs within the past year. Of youth who had sold drugs within the past year, the substantial majority stated that they do this daily (88.2%).

Table 4.16

Self-reported Buying and Selling of Drugs among Interviewed Youth[1]

Activity	n	%
Ever Bought Drugs		
Yes	49	94.2
No	3	5.8
Total	52	100.0
Bought Drugs in the Past Year[2]		
Yes	37	77.1
No	11	22.9
Total	48	100.0
Frequency of Buying Drugs[3]		
Daily	9	24.3
Weekly	17	45.9
Monthly	8	21.6
Once	2	5.4
Does not buy anymore	1	2.7
Total	37	100.0

Continued

Table 4.16 Continued

Activity	n	%
Ever Sold Drugs		
Yes	35	67.3
No	17	32.7
Total	52	100.0
Sold Drugs in the Past Year[4]		
Yes	18	51.4
No	17	48.6
Total	35	100.0
Frequency of Selling Drugs[5]		
Daily	15	88.2
Once	1	5.9
Does not sell anymore	1	5.9
Total	17	100.0

Source of Data: Youth Interviews

Total N=52

[1]Missing cases on: "Bought Drugs in the Past Year"=1; "Frequency of Selling Drugs"=1.

[2]This question was only asked of youth who had ever bought drugs (n=49).

[3]This question was only asked of youth who had bought drugs within the past year (n=37).

[4]This question was only asked of youth who had ever sold drugs (n=35).

[5]This question was only asked of youth who had sold drugs within the past year (n=18).

4.4 Educational Experiences

4.4.1 School Characteristics

Probation file data were available regarding a number of school characteristics and experiences and these are summarized in Table 4.17. Almost two-thirds of the youth (62.6%) were attending high school at the time of the file review, while two participants were pursuing post-secondary education (1.6%). File data regarding school proficiency indicated that, for cases where this information was available, the majority of youth (73.3%) were below average in school performance; only 5.3% were rated above average.

Almost all youth (98.6%) had a history of school truancy, and over one-half (57.9%) of youth with available data had dropped out of school at some point. Most youth had a history both of being bullied (81.4%) and of bullying others (88.7%), although there were a large number of missing cases on these variables, so these results should be interpreted with caution. Almost all participants with valid data had a history of fighting with others at school (93.2%). Finally, although file data were only available for 46 cases, of these, 58.7% had taken a weapon to school.

Table 4.17

School Characteristics of Total Study Sample[1]

Characteristic	n	%
Currently Attending High School/Post-secondary		
High School	77	62.6
Attending post-secondary	2	1.6
Not attending	44	35.8
Total	123	100.0
School Proficiency		
Above average	7	5.3
Average	28	21.4
Below average	96	73.3
Total	131	100.0
History of Truancy		
Yes	143	98.6
No	1	0.7
Not applicable – home schooled	1	0.7
Total	145	100.0
Dropped Out of School		
Yes	66	57.9
No	48	42.1
Total	114	100.0
History of Being Bullied at School		
Yes	57	81.4
No	13	18.6
Total	70	100.0
History of Bullying Others at School		
Yes	55	88.7
No	7	11.3
Total	62	100.0
History of Fighting with Others at School		
Yes	69	93.2
No	5	6.8
Total	74	100.0
Taken a Weapon to School		
Yes	27	58.7
No	19	41.3
Total	46	100.0

Source of Data: Youth Probation File Review; Total N=170

[1]Missing cases on: "Currently Attending High School"=47; "School Proficiency"=39; "History of Truancy"=25; "Dropped Out of School"=56; "History of Being Bullied"=100; "History of Bullying Others"=108; "History of Fighting with Others at School"=96; "Taken a Weapon to School"=124.

Interview participants were asked a number of questions regarding their school performance, and their responses are provided in Table 4.18. When asked if they were currently attending high school, 71.2% of respondents indicated that they were. When

the students who were not attending high school were asked if they had graduated, only one stated they had.

Table 4.18

Self-reported School Performance among Interviewed Youth[1]

School Characteristic	n	%
Currently Attending High School		
Yes	37	71.2
No	15	28.8
Total	52	100.0
Graduated High School[2]		
Yes	1	7.7
No	12	92.3
Total	13	100.0
School Proficiency		
Above average	17	32.7
Average	24	46.2
Below average	10	19.2
Unsure	1	1.9
Total	52	100.0
Enjoy School		
Yes	26	50.0
No	18	34.6
Neutral	8	15.4
Total	52	100.0
How Much Schooling Expect to Complete		
High school	14	26.9
Technical/trade school	22	42.3
College	4	7.7
University	11	21.2
Do not expect to complete high school	1	1.9
Total	52	100.0

Source of Data: Youth Interviews

Total N=52

[1]Missing cases on "Graduated High School"=2.

[2]This question was only asked of youth who were not currently attending high school (n=15).

Interestingly, participants' reports of their school proficiency were considerably more positive than the data collected from the file reviews would suggest. One-third of interview respondents (32.7%) reported that they were performing above average, while only 19.2% rated their performance as below average. When asked if they enjoyed school, one-half (50%) said that they did, while 34.6% indicated that they did not and 15.4% were neutral. Youth were asked how much school they expected to complete, and the most common response was technical/trade school (42.3%), followed by high school (26.9%) and university (21.2%).

4.4.2 Weapons at School

Table 4.19 presents the responses of interviewed youth to questions regarding their experiences with weapons at school. Just over one-half of youth (51.9%) stated that they had ever taken a weapon to school, which is similar to the data obtained from the file review. When asked how often they took a weapon to school, the most common response was all of the time (37%), followed by occasionally (25.9%) and rarely (22.2%).

Table 4.19

Self-reported Weapon Possession and Use at School

Weapon Possession and Use	n	%
Taken a Weapon to School		
Yes	27	51.9
No	25	48.1
Total	52	100.0
How Often Weapon Taken to School[1]		
All of the time	10	37.0
Most of the time	4	14.8
Occasionally	7	25.9
Rarely	6	22.2
Total	27	100.0
Ever Used Weapon at School[1]		
Yes	9	33.3
No	18	66.7
Total	27	100.0
Weapons Taken to/Used at School[1,2]		
Knife	18	66.7
Pepper/bear spray	12	44.4
Club/bat/baton	9	33.3
Metal knuckles	6	22.2
Handgun	4	14.8
Exacto blade	2	7.4
Homemade weapon	1	3.7
Sword	1	3.7
Pellet/BB/airsoft gun	1	3.7

Source of Data: Youth Interviews; Total N=52

[1]These questions were only asked of youth who reported that they have taken a weapon to school (n=27).

[2]Multiple response items. Percentages are out of the number of youth who had ever taken a weapon to school (n=27).

One-third of youth (33.3%) who said that they had ever taken a weapon to school indicated that they had ever used a weapon at school. When youth who had ever taken a weapon to school were asked the type of weapon, the most common responses were knives (66.7%), pepper or bear spray (44.4%), clubs, bats or batons (33.3%), and metal

knuckles (22.2%). Four students (14.8%) indicated that they had taken a handgun to school at some point.

4.5 Social Life

4.5.1 Characteristics of Social Life

Probation files contained information on the youths' friends, romantic relationships, and history of engaging in criminal activity with peers. These data are summarized in Table 4.20.

Table 4.20

Social Life Characteristics of Total Study Sample[1]

Characteristic	n	%
Age of Friends		
Same age	15	21.4
Mostly older	11	15.7
Mostly younger	1	1.4
Vary in age	43	61.4
Total	70	100.0
History of Delinquent Peers		
Yes	135	97.8
No	3	2.2
Total	138	100.0
Engage in Criminal Activity with Peers		
Yes	127	91.4
No	12	8.6
Total	139	100.0
Currently in a Romantic Relationship		
Yes	16	33.3
No	32	66.7
Total	48	100.0
Engage in Criminal Activity with Girlfriend/Boyfriend[2]		
Yes	4	44.4
No	5	55.6
Total	9	100.0
Involved in Structured Activities		
Yes	28	18.4
No	124	81.6
Total	152	100.0

Source of Data: Youth Probation File Review; Total N=170

[1]Missing cases on: "Age of Friends"=100; "History of Delinquent Peers"=32; "Engage in Criminal Activity with Peers"=31; "Currently in a Relationship"=122; "Engage in Criminal Activity with Girlfriend/Boyfriend"=7; "Involved in Structured Activities"=18.

[2]Data on engaging in criminal activity with a girlfriend/boyfriend are only presented for youth who were in a relationship (n=16).

For cases with valid data, the age of the youths' friends was varied in the majority of cases (61.4%); in 21.4% of cases most of the youth's friends were the same age as the youth and in 15.7% of cases the youths' friends tended to be older. In only one case were the majority of friends younger. According to information contained in the files, almost all youth had a history of associating with delinquent peers (97.8%), and a substantial majority also had a history of engaging in criminal activity with their peers (91.4%). Of the 48 cases with valid data, one-third (33.3%) were currently in a romantic relationship; of these youth, 44.4% had a history of engaging in criminal activity with their girlfriend/boyfriend. Relatively few youth (18.4%) were involved in structured activities with adult leadership such as coached sports or extracurricular lessons.

Interviewed youth were asked what activities they engage in during their leisure time and their responses are provided in Table 4.21.

Table 4.21

Self-Reported Leisure Time Activities of Interviewed Youth

Activities[1]	n	%
Play video games	22	42.3
Non-coached sports	17	32.7
Surf the internet	12	23.1
Hang out with friends	11	21.2
Watch movies	8	15.4
Adult coached sports	6	11.5
Do drugs	6	11.5
Work out	5	9.6
Lessons in music, art or dance	4	7.7
Drink alcohol	3	5.8
Go to bars/clubs	2	3.8
Drive around	2	3.8
Watch television	2	3.8
Skateboard	2	3.8
Listen to music	1	1.9
Steal cars	1	1.9
Play musical instrument	1	1.9
Be with family	1	1.9
Read	1	1.9
Automotive mechanics	1	1.9
Crime	1	1.9
Work	1	1.9
Hang out with girls	1	1.9
Hang out with girlfriend	1	1.9
None/no spare time	1	1.9

Source of Data: Youth Interviews; Total N=52

[1]Multiple response data.

The most commonly mentioned leisure time activity was playing video games (42.3%), followed by participating in non-coached sports (32.7%), surfing the internet (23.1%), hanging out with friends (21.2%), watching movies (15.4%); participating in adult coached sports (11.5%), and doing drugs (11.5%). The remaining activities were mentioned by fewer than 10% of participants.

4.5.2 Friendships

Youth who participated in an interview were asked a number of questions about their friends and responses are presented in Table 4.22. When asked about the age of their closest friends, one-half of the youth (50%) said that they were the same age as themselves; one-third (32.7%) said that most of their friends were older and 17.3% said that the age of their close friends varied. No respondents stated that most of their close friends were younger than themselves. On average, youth stated that they had 15.7 close friends.

Table 4.22

Self-reported Characteristics of Friendships among Interviewed Youth

Characteristics	n	%
Age of Close Friends		
Same age	26	50.0
Mostly older	17	32.7
Vary in age	9	17.3
Total	52	100.0
How Often See Friends		
Everyday	30	57.7
Every weekend	4	7.7
A few times a week	9	17.3
Less than once a week	9	17.3
Total	52	100.0
Parents Approve of Friends		
No	20	38.5
Yes	9	17.3
Some yes, some no	19	36.5
Parents don't know friends	1	1.9
Don't know	3	5.8
Total	52	100.0
Close Friends been in Trouble with Police		
Yes	47	90.4
No	5	9.6
Total	52	100.0
Get in Trouble with Friends		
Yes	39	75.0
No	13	25.0
Total	52	100.0

Continued

Table 4.22 Continued

Characteristics	n	%
Where Youth Meet Friends[1]		
At school	34	65.4
In the neighbourhood	17	32.7
Through other friends	17	32.7
At parties	12	23.1
In custody	8	15.4
On the street	6	11.5
Playing sports	2	3.8
Through gangs	2	3.8
Through using drugs	2	3.8
In social services placement	1	1.9
At leisure centre	1	1.9
Through family	1	1.9
At the mall	1	1.9
In group home	1	1.9

Source of Data: Youth Interviews
Total N=52
[1]Multiple response data.

The majority of youth (57.7%) stated that they see friends every day, while equal proportions (17.3%) said that they see their friends a few times a week or less than once a week. When asked if their parents approve of their friends, the most common response was no (38.5%), followed by their parents approve of some of their friends and disapprove of others (36.5%). Only 17.3% of youth stated that their parents approve of their friends.

Almost all participants (90.4%) said that their close friends have been in trouble with the police, and three-quarters (75%) said that they get in trouble with their friends. When asked where they tend to meet their friends, the most common response was at school (65.4%), followed by in their neighbourhood (32.7%), through other friends (32.7%), at parties (23.1%), in custody (15.4%), and on the street (11.5%).

4.5.3 Romantic Relationships

Youth who participated in an interview were asked a series of questions regarding relationships with boyfriends/girlfriends and the data are provided in Table 4.23. One-half of youth (50%) stated that they currently have a steady boyfriend or girlfriend. On average, participants involved in a relationship had been together with their boyfriend/girlfriend for 12.1 months. Unlike the findings with respect to their friends, when asked if their parents approve of their boyfriend/girlfriend, almost all indicated that they do (96.2%).

Table 4.23

Self-reported Characteristics of Romantic Relationship among Interviewed Youth

Characteristics	n	%
Have a Steady Boyfriend/Girlfriend		
Yes	26	50.0
No	26	50.0
Total	52	100.0
Parents Approve of Boyfriend/Girlfriend[1]		
Yes	25	96.2
Unknown	1	3.8
Total	26	100.0
Boyfriend/girlfriend Ever Been in Trouble with Police[1]		
Yes	8	30.8
No	18	69.2
Total	26	100.0
Ever Been in Trouble with Police When with Boyfriend/girlfriend[1]		
Yes	3	11.5
No	23	88.5
Total	26	100.0
Has Offending Changed Since Relationship with Boyfriend/ girlfriend[1]		
Decreased	20	76.9
Stayed the same	6	23.1
Total	26	100.0

Source of Data: Youth Interviews

Total N=52

[1]These questions were only asked of youth who reported that they had a steady boyfriend or girlfriend (n=26).

When asked if their boyfriend/girlfriend had ever been in trouble with the police, 30.8% indicated that they had; however, only 11.5% of respondents said that they had ever been in trouble with the police while they were with their romantic partner. Participants were asked if their own offending behaviour had changed since becoming involved with their boyfriend/girlfriend, and over three-quarters (76.9%) stated that it had decreased and 23.1% said that it had stayed the same. No respondents said that their offending behaviour had increased since becoming involved in their relationship.

4.5.4 Religiosity

The interview contained a few questions regarding respondents' involvement in religion and the findings are outlined in Table 4.24. When asked if they are spiritual or religious, just over one-third (36.5%) indicated that they are. When these youth were asked about their religious affiliation, the most common response was Christian

(42.1%), followed by spiritual – non-denominational (21.1%), Buddhist (10.5%), and Aboriginal spiritualism (10.5%). Less than one-half of youth (42.1%) who indicated that they are religious or spiritual reported attending religious services regularly, and relatively few stated that they belong to a spiritual or religious club (10.5%).

Table 4.24

Self-reported Religiosity of Interviewed Youth

Religiosity	n	%
Spiritual or Religious		
Yes	19	36.5
No	33	63.5
Total	52	100.0
Type of Religion/Spiritual Beliefs[1]		
Christian	8	42.1
Spiritual – non-denominational	4	21.1
Buddhist	2	10.5
Aboriginal spiritualism	2	10.5
Catholic	1	5.3
Muslim	1	5.3
Stoner	1	5.3
Total	19	100.0
Attend Worship or Spiritual Service Regularly[1]		
No	11	57.9
Yes	8	42.1
Total	19	100.0
Belong to Spiritual or Religious Club[1]		
No	17	89.5
Yes	2	10.5
Total	19	100.0

Source of Data: Youth Interviews
Total N=52
[1]These questions were only asked of youth who reported that they were spiritual or religious (n=19).

4.6 Community

4.6.1 Neighbourhood Characteristics

Youth were asked questions regarding the characteristics of their neighbourhood and responses are summarized in Table 4.25. When asked their impressions of the socio-economic status of their neighbourhood, the majority of respondents indicated that it is middle class (78.8%). Approximately equal proportions of youth rated their neighbourhood as wealthy (9.6%) and poor (11.5%). One-half of youth (50%) stated that their neighbourhood is well maintained; an additional one-third (36.5%) said that their

neighbourhood is moderately maintained and 13.5% indicated that their neighbourhood is poorly maintained.

Table 4.25

Neighbourhood Characteristics as Reported by Interviewed Youth

Characteristic	n	%
Socio-economic Status		
Wealthy	5	9.6
Middle class	41	78.8
Poor	6	11.5
Total	52	100.0
Maintenance of Neighbourhood		
Well maintained	26	50.0
Moderately maintained	19	36.5
Poorly maintained	7	13.5
Total	52	100.0
Ethnic Diversity of Neighbourhood		
Multicultural	30	57.7
White	13	25.0
Native	2	3.8
Native and white	1	1.9
Native and black	1	1.9
Middle Eastern	1	1.9
Unsure/Unknown	4	7.7
Total	52	100.0
Neighbourhood Safe		
Yes	45	86.5
No	6	11.5
Unsure	1	1.9
Total	52	100.0

Source of Data: Youth Interviews
Total N=52

When asked about the ethnic diversity of their neighbourhood, the majority of youth (57.7%) indicated that it is multicultural and an additional 25% said that it is predominantly white. The substantial majority stated that they think their neighbourhood is safe (86.5%) while 11.5% indicated that their neighbourhood is unsafe.

4.6.2 Weapons in the Community

Table 4.26 presents youths' responses to a number of interview questions regarding carrying and using weapons in their community. Over one-third of respondents (39.2%) reported that they have ever carried a weapon in their community.

When these youth were asked how often they carried a weapon in their community, the most common response was all the time (50%), followed by occasionally (30%), most of the time (15%), and rarely (5%).

Table 4.26

Self-reported Weapon Possession and Use in the Community[1]

Weapon Possession and Use	n	%
Carry a Weapon in Community		
Yes	20	39.2
No	31	60.8
Total	51	100.0
How Often Weapon Carried in Community[2]		
All of the time	10	50.0
Most of the time	3	15.0
Occasionally	6	30.0
Rarely	1	5.0
Total	20	100.0
Ever Used Weapon in Community[2]		
Yes	16	94.1
No	1	5.9
Total	17	100.0
Weapons Carried/Used in Community[2,3]		
Knife	16	80.0
Pepper/bear spray	14	70.0
Club/bat/baton	9	45.0
Sword/machete	8	40.0
Handgun	7	35.0
Metal knuckles	4	20.0
Homemade weapon	2	10.0
Pellet/BB/airsoft gun	2	10.0
Shotgun	2	10.0
Imitation	1	5.0
Taser	1	5.0
Throwing stars	1	5.0

Source of Data: Youth Interviews
Total N=52
[1]Missing cases on "Carry a Weapon in Community"=1; Missing cases on "Ever Used Weapon in Community"=3.
[2]These questions were only asked of youth who reported that they carry a weapon in the community (n=20).
[3]Multiple response items. Percentages are out of the number of youth who reported that they had ever carried a weapon in their community (n=20).

The most common weapons carried in the community were knives (80%), pepper/bear spray (70%), clubs/bats/batons (45%), swords/machetes (40%), and

handguns (35%). When youth who had ever carried a weapon in their community were asked if they had ever used it, the substantial majority who responded indicated that they had (94.1%).

4.7 Self-reported Delinquency

4.7.1 Property-related Delinquency

During the interviews, youth were asked whether they had ever engaged in several forms of property-related delinquency and, for those who had, whether they had done so within the past year (see Table 4.27). A substantial proportion of participants (85.4%) stated that they ever had damaged or destroyed someone's property on purpose; of those who had done this at some point, 41.5% said they had engaged in this behaviour within the past year.

Table 4.27

Self-reported Property-related Delinquency among Interviewed Youth[1]

Type of Incident			n	%
Damaged/Destroyed Someone's Property on Purpose				
	Ever	Yes	41	85.4
		No	7	14.6
		Total	48	100.0
	Past Year[2]	Yes	17	41.5
		No	24	58.5
		Total	41	100.0
Arson				
	Ever	Yes	32	65.3
		No	17	34.7
		Total	49	100.0
	Past Year[2]	Yes	7	21.9
		No	25	78.1
		Total	32	100.0
Broken into a Home				
	Ever	Yes	34	69.4
		No	15	30.6
		Total	49	100.0
	Past Year[2]	Yes	8	25.8
		No	23	74.2
		Total	31	100.0

Continued

Table 4.27 (Continued)

Type of Incident		n	%
Stolen Something Worth Less Than $50			
Ever	Yes	34	69.4
	No	12	24.5
	Never stolen anything	3	6.1
	Total	49	100.0
Past Year2	Yes	15	45.5
	No	18	54.5
	Total	33	100.0
Stolen Something Worth More Than $50			
Ever	Yes	45	90.0
	No	2	4.0
	Never stolen anything	3	6.0
	Total	50	100.0
Past Year[2]	Yes	24	54.5
	No	20	45.5
	Total	44	100.0
Stolen a Car or Motorcycle			
Ever	Yes	38	76.0
	No	9	18.0
	Never stolen anything	3	6.0
	Total	50	100.0
Past Year[2]	Yes	14	36.8
	No	24	63.2
	Total	38	100.0
Stolen Something with a Group of Friends			
Ever	Yes	39	78.0
	No	8	16.0
	Never stolen anything	3	6.0
	Total	50	100.0
Past Year[2]	Yes	16	41.0
	No	23	59.0
	Total	39	100.0

Source of Data: Youth Interviews

Total N=52

[1]Missing cases on: "Damaged/Destroyed Someone's Property on Purpose – Ever"=4; "Arson – Ever"=3; "Broken into a Home – Ever"=3; "Broken into a Home – Past Year"=3; "Stolen Something Worth Less Than $50 – Ever"=3; "Stolen Something Worth Less Than $50 – Past Year"=1; "Stolen Something Worth More Than $50 – Ever"=2; "Stolen Something Worth More Than $50 – Past Year"=1; "Stolen a Car or Motorcycle – Ever"=2; "Stolen Something with a Group of Friends – Ever"=2.

[2]Past year percentages are based on the number of youth who reported that they had ever engaged in the activity.

When asked how often they had damaged or destroyed someone's property on purpose, responses ranged from 1 to 100 times, with an average of 16.8 occurrences. Respondents stated that they were, on average, 12.2 years of age the first time they engaged in this behaviour.

Almost two-thirds (65.3%) of youth said that they had ever committed arson and 21.9% of these youth had done so within the past year. On average, respondents were 12 years of age the first time they committed arson, and stated that they had engaged in this behaviour an average of 7 times (range = 1 to 100). Over two-thirds of interviewed youth (69.4%) had ever broken into a home, and one-quarter of these (25.8%) had done so within the past year. The number of times youth said they had committed housebreaking ranged from 1 to 50, with an average of 10.5 incidents. The average age of first breaking into a home was 13.3 years.

Over two-thirds of participants (69.4%) reported that they had ever stolen something worth less than $50, and almost one-half of these youth (45.5%) had done so within the past year. When asked how often they had stolen something worth less than $50, responses ranged from 1 to 400 times, with an average of 50.7 occurrences. The average age at which youth stated that they had first stolen anything was 11.2 years. Almost all youth (90%) said that they had ever stolen something worth more than $50 and, of these, over one-half (54.5%) had done so within the past year. The number of times youth reported stealing something worth more than $50 ranged from 1 to 400, with an average of 54.4 occurrences. A substantial proportion of youth (76%) also indicated that they had ever stolen a car or motorcycle with 36.8% of these stating they had done so within the past year. The number of times they said they had stolen a car or motorcycle ranged from 1 to 200, with an average of 27 occurrences.

When asked if they had ever stolen something with a group of friends, over three-quarters (78%) of respondents indicated that they had; of these youth, 41% had engaged in this behaviour within the past year. The number of times youth stated that they had stolen with a group of friends ranged from 1 to 800, with an average of 54.7 occurrences.

4.7.2 Person-related Delinquency

Table 4.28 presents interview participants' self-reported person-related delinquent behaviour. When asked if they had ever stolen something using force or threat of force, 72.3% of youth indicated that they had; of these, 41.2% had done this within the past year. Respondents reported stealing something using force or threat of force an average of 14.2 times (range = 1 to 80 times).

Table 4.28

Self-reported Person-related Delinquency among Interviewed Youth[1]

Type of Incident		n	%
Stolen Something Using Force/Threat of Force			
Ever	Yes	34	72.3
	No	13	27.7
	Total	47	100.0
Past Year[2]	Yes	14	41.2
	No	20	58.8
	Total	34	100.0
Harassed, Threatened or Bullied Someone			
Ever	Yes	39	79.6
	No	10	20.4
	Total	49	100.0
Past Year[2]	Yes	18	47.4
	No	20	52.6
	Total	38	100.0
Threatened Someone with a Weapon[3]			
Ever	Yes	31	79.5
	No	8	20.5
	Total	39	100.0
Past Year[2]	Yes	17	58.6
	No	12	41.4
	Total	29	100.0
Assaulted or Hurt Someone			
Ever	Yes	46	93.9
	No	3	6.1
	Total	49	100.0
Past Year[2]	Yes	30	65.2
	No	16	34.8
	Total	46	100.0
Assaulted or Hurt Someone with a Weapon[4]			
Ever	Yes	32	69.6
	No	14	30.4
	Total	46	100.0
Past Year[2]	Yes	11	35.5
	No	20	64.5
	Total	31	100.0

Continued

Table 4.28 (Continued)

Type of Incident		n	%
Assaulted Someone with Friends[4]			
Ever	Yes	33	71.7
	No	13	28.3
	Total	46	100.0
Past Year[2]	Yes	17	51.5
	No	16	48.5
	Total	33	100.0
With a Group of Friends, Fought Others			
Ever	Yes	35	71.4
	No	14	28.6
	Total	49	100.0
Past Year[2]	Yes	14	40.0
	No	21	60.0
	Total	35	100.0

Source of Data: Youth Interviews

Total N=52

[1]Missing cases on: "Stolen Something Using Force/Threat of Force – Ever"=5; "Harassed, Threatened or Bullied Someone – Ever"=3; "Harassed, Threatened or Bullied Someone – Past Year"=1; "Threatened Someone with a Weapon – Past Year"=2; "Assaulted or Hurt Someone – Ever"=3; "Assaulted or Hurt Someone with a Weapon – Past Year"=1; "With a Group of Friends, Fought Others – Ever"=3.

[2]Past year percentages are based on the number of youth who reported that they had ever engaged in the activity.

[3]Data are only presented for youth who reported that they had ever harassed, threatened or bullied someone (n=39).

[4]Data are only presented for youth who reported that they had ever assaulted or hurt someone (n=46).

Four-fifths of youth (79.6%) indicated that they had ever harassed, threatened or bullied someone, and 47.4% of these had done so within the past year. The number of times participants reported engaging in this behaviour ranged from 1 to 300, with an average of 33.9 occurrences. Respondents were, on average, 12.2 years of age the first time they harassed, threatened, or bullied someone. When these respondents were asked if they had ever threatened someone with a weapon, four-fifths (79.5%) indicated that they had done this; 58.6% of these youth had done this within the past year. Youth indicated that they had threatened someone with a weapon from 1 to 200 times, with an average of 24.3 occurrences. The average age of first engaging in this behaviour was 12.9 years.

Almost all youth (93.9%) indicated that they had ever assaulted or hurt someone, and two-thirds of these youth (65.2%) had done so within the past year. The number of times that participants reported that they had assaulted or hurt someone ranged from 1 to 100, with an average of 23.2 occurrences. Youth reported that they began assaulting others at an average age of 11.1 years. When asked if they had ever assaulted or hurt someone with a weapon, over two-thirds (69.6%) of these youth indicated that they had, and 35.5% had engaged in this behaviour within the past year. Respondents reported that they had assaulted someone with a weapon an average of 10.3 times (range = 1 to 60). In addition, over two-thirds of youth who had ever assaulted or hurt someone (71.7%) stated that they had ever assaulted someone with a group of friends; 51.5% of these youth had done so within the past year. The number of times youth reported assaulting someone with a group of friends ranged from 1 to 50, with an average of 13.2 occurrences.

Finally, when youth were asked if they had ever fought others with a group of their friends, 71.4% indicated that they had ever done this; 40% had done this within the past year. Participants reported fighting others with a group of friends from 1 to 40 times, with an average of 9.6 occurrences. Youth were an average of 13.8 years of age the first time they engaged in this behaviour.

4.8 Knowledge of and Experience with Gangs

Probation files contained some limited information regarding youths' experience with gangs and this information is summarized in Table 4.29. Of cases with valid data, 28.9% of youth had either known or suspected gang involvement. An additional two youth were gang associates, and one had been recruited into a gang but had not joined. With regard to gang involvement of friends and acquaintances, 37.2% of youth had friends or acquaintances who were either known or suspected gang members.

Of cases with non-missing data, 50% of youth who had ever been a gang member were current gang members at the time of the file review. In terms of gang composition, the most commonly reported ethnic background of gang members was Aboriginal (54.5%), followed by White supremacist (18.2%). It should be noted, however, that information on gang composition was only available for a few cases, so these data should be interpreted with caution.

Table 4.29

Probation File Reported Characteristics of Youths' Experience with Gangs[1]

Characteristic	n	%
Ever Been Involved with a Gang		
Known involvement	19	18.3
Suspected involvement	11	10.6
Associate	2	1.9
Recruited but did not join	1	1.0
No known gang involvement	71	68.3
Total	104	100.0
Current Friends/Acquaintances Gang Members		
Known members	26	24.8
Suspected members	13	12.4
Associate members	1	1.0
No gang involvement	65	61.9
Total	105	100.0
Current Gang Involvement[2]		
Yes	6	50.0
No	6	50.0
Total	12	100.0
Gang Composition[3]		
Aboriginal	6	54.5
White supremacist	2	18.2
African	1	9.1
East Indian	1	9.1
Multicultural	1	9.1
Total	11	100.0

Source of Data: Youth Probation File Review

Total N=170

[1]Missing cases on: "Ever Been Involved with a Gang"=66; "Current Friends/Acquaintances Gang Members"=65; "Current Gang Involvement"=7; "Gang Composition"=19.

[2]Data on Current Gang Involvement are only presented for youth who ever had known gang involvement (n=19).

[3]Data on gang composition are only presented for youth who ever had known or suspected gang involvement (n=30).

Table 4.30 presents information on gangs collected during the youth interviews. When asked if there are gangs at their school, 40.8% of respondents said that there are. A somewhat higher proportion of youth (58%) stated that there are gangs in their community. It is notable that self-reports have quite similar rates of gang involvement to those found in probation files. Over two-thirds of participants (68%) said that they have friends who are gang members.

Table 4.30

Self-reported Knowledge of and Experience with Gangs among Interviewed Youth[1]

Knowledge/Experience	n	%
Gangs at School		
Yes	20	40.8
No	29	59.2
Total	49	100.0
Gangs in Community		
Yes	29	58.0
No	21	42.0
Total	50	100.0
Friends Belong to a Gang		
Yes	34	68.0
No	16	32.0
Total	50	100.0
Gang Tried to Recruit Respondent		
Yes	34	68.0
No	16	32.0
Total	50	100.0
Ever Been a Member of a Gang		
Yes	19	38.8
No	30	61.2
Total	49	100.0
Current Member of a Gang[2]		
Yes	5	27.8
No	13	72.2
Total	18	100.0
Gang Members Belong to Same Ethnic Group[2]		
Yes	4	25.0
No	12	75.0
Total	16	100.0

Source of Data: Youth Interviews

Total N=52

[1]Missing cases on: "Gangs at School"=3; "Gangs in Community"=2; "Friends Belong to a Gang"=2; "Gang Tried to Recruit Respondent"=2; "Ever Been a Member of a Gang"=3; "Current Member of a Gang"=1; "Gang Members Belong to Same Ethnic Group"= 3.

[2]These questions were only asked of youth who had ever been a gang member (n=19).

When asked if a gang had ever tried to recruit them, 68% of youth responded affirmatively. However, a substantially lower proportion (38.8%) stated that they had ever been a member of a gang. Of the youth who had ever been in a gang, 27.8% were current members at the time of the interview. One-quarter of youth (25%) who had ever been in a gang indicated that the gang members belonged to the same ethnic group.

4.9 Future Goals

Table 4.31 presents youths' responses to a number of interview questions regarding their future goals and aspirations. When asked if they want to stop offending in the future, almost all youth (94%) said that they do. In addition, a substantial majority of youth (86%) indicated that they have specific career plans. When youth who said that they have specific career plans were asked if they thought that their plan is a possibility, almost all (95.2%) stated that they think it is.

Table 4.31

Self-reported Future Goals of Interviewed Youth[1]

Goals	n	%
Want to Stop Offending		
Yes	47	94.0
No	3	6.0
Total	50	100.0
Have Specific Career Plans		
Yes	43	86.0
No	7	14.0
Total	50	100.0
Think Career Plan is a Possibility[2]		
Yes	40	95.2
No	2	4.8
Total	42	100.0
Want to Get Married		
Yes	32	64.0
No	10	20.0
Unsure	8	16.0
Total	50	100.0
Want to Have Children		
Yes	44	88.0
No	3	6.0
Unsure	3	6.0
Total	50	100.0

Source of Data: Youth Interviews; Total N=52

[1]Missing cases on: "Want to Stop Offending"=2; "Have Specific Career Plans"=2; "Think Career Plan is a Possibility"=1; "Want to Get Married"=2; "Want to Have Children"=2.

[2]This question was only asked of youth who stated that they have specific career plans (n=43).

Finally, youth were asked about their family aspirations. When asked if they want to get married, almost two-thirds (64%) said that they do; 20% said that they do not want to get married and 16% were unsure. A higher proportion of youth said that they want to have children (88%), while 6% each responded that they do not want children or were unsure.

5.0 POLICE OCCURRENCE DATA

The Edmonton Police Service (EPS) and Calgary Police Service (CPS) provided data on alleged criminal "occurrences" involving the 170 youth who were selected in this study. An "occurrence" was defined as a contact with police by a youth that may or may not have resulted in a criminal charge. At the start of the study, historical data were obtained from the point of a youth's first criminal occurrence through August 31, 2011. Data on criminal occurrences during two additional periods were also provided: September 1, 2011 – August 31, 2012 and September 1, 2012 – August 31, 2013. Since all participants involved in the project were turning 18 years of age at some point in the study, the resulting database includes occurrences involving both youth and adult alleged offenders. Data provided included the date and time of occurrence, the most serious alleged offence involved in the occurrence, whether charges were laid, reasons why charges were not laid, and whether a weapon was involved in the occurrence.

Five of the participants in the total sample did not have any occurrence data in either the EPS or CPS databases. This suggests that occurrences in which these youth were involved took place outside of the jurisdiction of both police services. Thus, occurrence data were available for 165 of the youth in the initial sample.

5.1 Background Information

Data were available for a total of 4435 occurrences involving the 165 participants in the study during the period from their first contact with either EPS or CPS to August 31, 2013. The total number of occurrences per participant ranged from 1 to 141, with an average of 26.9 per individual. The majority of occurrences were reported in Edmonton (n=2725; 61.4%), with 1710 occurrences (38.6%) reported in Calgary.

The sample of participants with police-reported occurrences in either Edmonton or Calgary was comprised primarily of males (n=136; 82.4%); less than one-fifth of the sample was female (n=29; 17.6%). A similar breakdown by gender was observed with the occurrence data with 86% of occurrences (n=3812) involving males and 14% (n=623) involving females.

The majority of reported occurrences fell into the period from first police contact through August 31, 2011 (n=3603; 81.2%); 448 occurrences (10.1%) were reported during the period September 1, 2011 through August 31, 2012 and 384 occurrences (8.7%) were reported from September 1, 2012 through August 31, 2013.

5.2 Characteristics of Occurrences

Table 5.1 presents the age of the alleged offender in the 4435 occurrences. Ages ranged from 6 through 20 years, with an average of 15.6 years. The majority of occurrences involved alleged offenders aged 15 (19.6%) or 16 (19.3%) years. The majority of occurrences involved alleged youth offenders (under 18 years of age) (n=3534; 79.7%) while in 901 occurrences (20.3%) the alleged offender was an adult (18 years of age and older).

Table 5.1

Age of Alleged Offender at Time of Occurrence

Age	n	%
6	11	0.2
7	8	0.2
8	*12*	0.3
9	17	0.4
10	27	0.6
11	31	0.7
12	121	2.7
13	385	8.7
14	632	14.2
15	871	19.6
16	855	19.3
17	564	12.7
18	493	11.1
19	317	7.1
20	91	2.1
Total	**4435**	**100.0**

Source of data: Edmonton Police Service and Calgary Police Service occurrence data
Total N of occurrences=4435

Data were available on the primary (i.e., most serious) offence alleged to have been committed in each occurrence (see Table 5.2). The most common offences were property-related (28.4%) and other *Criminal Code* violations (e.g., mischief, arson,

disorderly conduct, escape and failure to comply, bail violations) (19.2%). Person offences were involved in 15% of all occurrences. Almost one-tenth of all occurrences (9.6%) involved alleged traffic offences. Drug-related offences were relatively uncommon, and were the primary alleged offence in only 2.7% of occurrences.

Table 5.2

Type of Alleged Primary Offence during Each Occurrence

Alleged Offence	n	%
Person offences	666	15.0
Property offences	1256	28.4
Drug offences	120	2.7
Traffic offences (CC/HTA/MVAA)	426	9.6
Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA) offences	267	6.0
Other *Criminal Code* offences	849	19.2
Other Municipal/Provincial violations	450	10.2
Other Federal violations	37	0.8
Warrant execution	297	6.7
Mental Health Act	11	0.2
Other	50	1.1
Total	**4429**	**100.0**

Source of data: Edmonton Police Service and Calgary Police Service occurrence data
Total N of occurrences=4435
Missing cases=6

Offence data were also examined by whether the alleged offender was a youth (under 18 years of age) or an adult (18 years of age or older) at the time of the occurrence (see Table 5.3). Property offences were considerably more common in occurrences where the alleged offender was a youth (31.3%) than in occurrences involving alleged adult offenders (17.1%). Person offences were slightly higher in occurrences allegedly involving youth (16%) than in occurrences involving adults (11.1%). Traffic offences were more common in occurrences with alleged adult offenders (18%) than in those with youth offenders (7.5%). Occurrences related to warrant executions were also more likely when the alleged offender was an adult (13%) than when an alleged youth offender was involved (5.1%).

Table 5.3

Type of Alleged Primary Offence during Each Occurrence by Age of Alleged Offender

Alleged Offence	Alleged Offender under 18[1]		Alleged Offender 18 or Older	
	n	%	n	%
Person offences	566	16.0	100	11.1
Property offences	1103	31.3	153	17.1
Drug offences	83	2.4	37	4.1
Traffic offences (CC/HTA/MVAA)	264	7.5	162	18.0
Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA) offences	238	6.7	29	3.2
Other *Criminal Code* offences	642	18.2	207	22.9
Other Municipal/Provincial violations	371	10.5	79	8.8
Other Federal violations	37	1.0	0	0.0
Warrant execution	180	5.1	117	13.0
Mental Health Act	6	0.2	5	0.6
Other	38	1.1	12	1.3
Total	**3528**	**100.0**	**901**	**100.0**

Source of data: Edmonton Police Service and Calgary Police Service occurrence data
Total N of occurrences=4435
[1]Missing cases=6

Data were also available regarding whether a weapon was alleged to have been involved in an occurrence. Weapons were alleged to have been involved in 282 occurrences (6.4%) and the types of weapons are presented in Table 5.4. The most common weapons by a substantial margin were knives (40.1%). Other weapons such as clubs/blunt objects (6.7%), handguns (6%), pepper spray (3.9%), and other piercing or cutting instruments (3.5%) were alleged to have been involved in relatively few occurrences.

Table 5.4

Type of Weapon Present during Occurrences

Weapon	n	%
Knife	113	40.1
Club/Blunt object	19	6.7
Handgun	17	6.0
O/C spray	11	3.9
Other piercing or cutting instrument	10	3.5
Baton	7	2.5
Explosives	7	2.5
Other type of firearm	5	1.8
Vehicle	5	1.8
Fire	1	0.4
Other type of weapon	87	30.9
Total	**282**	**100.0**

Source of data: Edmonton Police Service and Calgary Police Service occurrence data
Total n of occurrences with weapons present=282

5.3 Outcome of Occurrences

In approximately three-quarters of occurrences (n=3408; 76.9%), the alleged offender was charged, while charges were not laid in 1026 occurrences (23.1%). For occurrences that did not result in charges being laid, Table 5.5 presents the reasons for not laying charges. The most common reason was that the investigation was completed and a determination was made that the occurrence was non-criminal in nature (41.7%), followed by the alleged offender was involved in other incidents and was likely charged in those (17.5%), and that there was insufficient evidence to lay a charge (16.9%). Other reasons for not charging were each listed in fewer than 10% of occurrences.

Table 5.5

Reason Why Alleged Offender Was Not Charged

Reason	n	%
Complete – solved (non-criminal)	422	41.7
Cleared other – involved in other incidents	177	17.5
Insufficient evidence	171	16.9
Departmental discretion	73	7.2
Young person measures (extrajudicial measures)	53	5.3
Complainant declined	53	5.2
Under 12 years of age	25	2.5
Young person sanctions (extrajudicial sanctions)	21	2.1
Alternative measures (under YOA, pre-2003)	7	0.7
Complete - unsolved	7	0.7
Serving sentence	3	0.3
Total	**1012**	**100.0**

Source of data: Edmonton Police Service and Calgary Police Service occurrence data
Total n of occurrences where alleged offender was not charged=1026
Missing cases=14

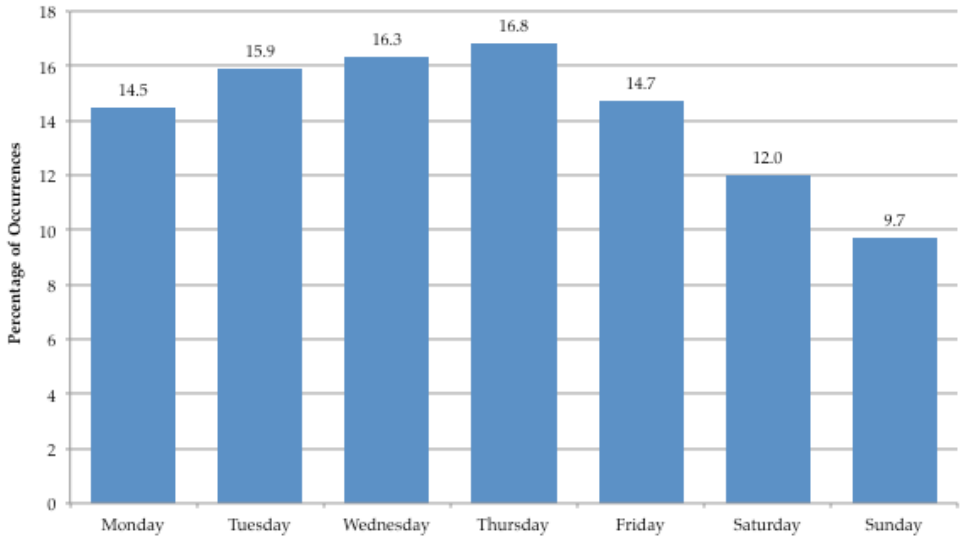
5.4 Timing of Occurrences

Data were available regarding the timing of occurrences, and Figure 5.1 presents the day of the week that occurrences took place. Occurrences were most likely to take place on Tuesdays (15.9%), Wednesdays (16.3%), and Thursdays (16.8%). Occurrences were least frequent on weekends, with 12% of occurrences happening on Saturdays and 9.7% happening on Sundays.

Figure 5.2 presents the time of day when occurrences took place. Incidents were most likely to happen in the early afternoon from noon to 3:00 pm (16.8%) and in the late evening from 9:00 pm to midnight (16.3%). Relatively few occurrences were reported during the early morning periods of 3:00 am to 6:00 am (5.4%) and 6:00 am to 9:00 am (9.2%).

Figure 5.1

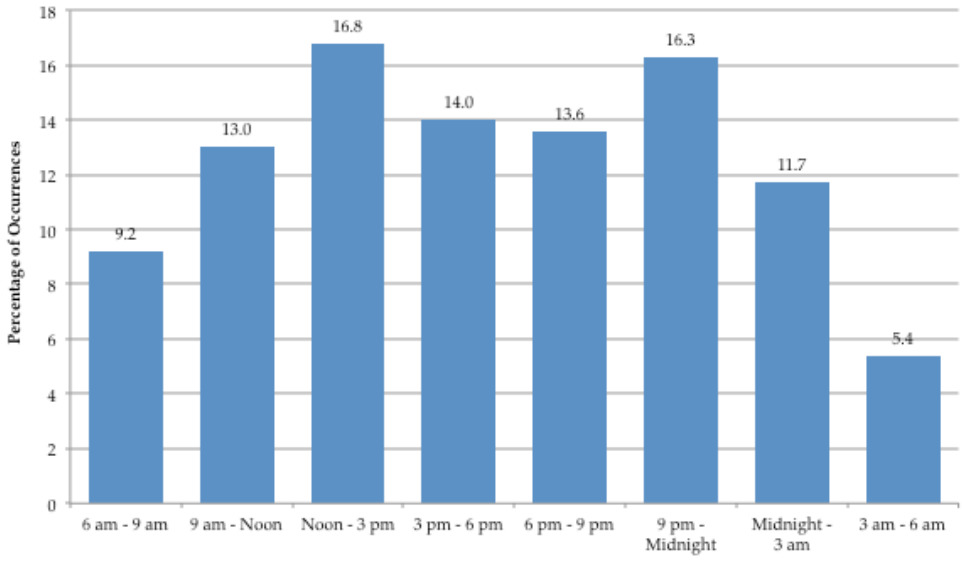
Day During Which Occurences Took Place



Source of data: Edmonton Police Service and Calgary Police Service occurrence data
Total N=4,435

Figure 5.2

Time During Which Occurrences Took Place

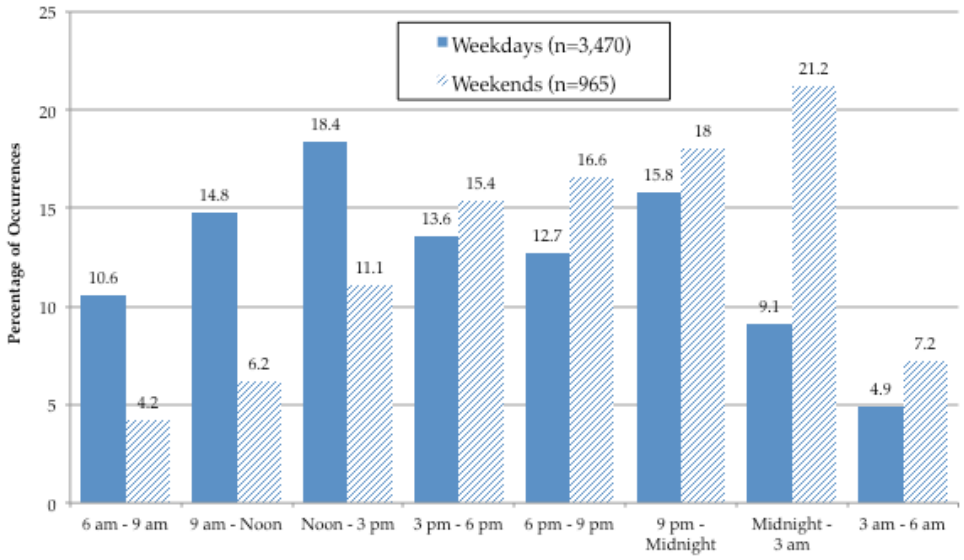


Source of data: Edmonton Police Service and Calgary Police Service occurrence data
Total N=4,435

Figure 5.3 examines the timing of occurrences by whether they happened on a weekday or weekend. Occurrences that were reported during the day were more likely to have happened on a weekday than on a weekend. For example, 14.8% of weekday occurrences were between 9:00 am and noon compared to 6.2% of weekend occurrences. Similarly, 18.4% of occurrences during weekdays happened between noon and 3:00 pm compared to 11.1% of weekend occurrences. Conversely, weekend occurrences were more likely to happen during the evening hours and overnight. For example, 16.6% of weekend incidents happened between 6:00 pm and 9:00 pm compared to 12.7% of weekday incidents. Incidents occurring between midnight and 3:00 am were considerably more common on weekends (21.2%) than on weekdays (9.1%).

Figure 5.3

Time During Which Occurrences Took Place, by Weekdays and Weekends



Source of data: Edmonton Police Service and Calgary Police Service occurrence data
Total N=4,435

5.5 Number of Occurrences per Alleged Offender

As noted in Section 5.1 above, the total number of police occurrences per alleged offender ranged from 1 to 141, with an average of 26.9 per individual. Table 5.6 presents the number of study participants who fell into each of six categories of number of occurrences. The most frequent number of occurrences was 11-20 (36.4% of participants), followed by 21-30 occurrences (19.4%). However, one-tenth of participants were allegedly involved in more than 50 occurrences (10.3%).

Table 5.6

Total Number of Occurrences per Alleged Offender

Number of Occurrences	Number of Alleged Offenders	
	n	%
1-10	21	12.7
11-20	60	36.4
21-30	32	19.4
31-40	20	12.1
41-50	15	9.1
More than 50	17	10.3
Total	**165**	**100.0**

Source of data: Edmonton Police Service and Calgary Police Service occurrence data
Total N of alleged offenders with occurrence data = 165

Since all participants in the study were turning 18 years of age at some point during the project, they potentially were involved in occurrences as both young offenders and adults. The number of alleged police occurrences in Edmonton and Calgary that study participants were involved in as youth ranged from 1-132, with an average of 21.4 occurrences per individual. Table 5.7 presents the number of alleged offenders who fell into each youth occurrence category. The most common number of youth occurrences was 11-20 (40.6% of all participants), followed by 1-10 occurrences (21.2%) and 21-30 occurrences (20%). Ten participants (6.1%) were allegedly involved in more than 50 occurrences while they were under the age of 18 years.

The number of alleged police occurrences in Edmonton and Calgary that study participants were involved in as adults ranged from 0-44, with an average of 5.5 occurrences per individual. The number of adult occurrences in which study participants were allegedly involved is shown in Table 5.8. The most common number of occurrences was 1-10 (63.6% participants), followed by 11-20 occurrences (7.9%).

Table 5.7

Total Number of Youth Occurrences per Alleged Offender

Number of Youth Occurrences	Number of Alleged Offenders	
	n	%
1-10	35	21.2
11-20	67	40.6
21-30	33	20.0
31-40	14	8.5
41-50	6	3.6
More than 50	10	6.1
Total	**165**	**100.0**

Source of data: Edmonton Police Service and Calgary Police Service occurrence data
Total N of alleged offenders with occurrence data = 165

Table 5.8

Total Number of Adult Occurrences per Alleged Offender

Number of Adult Occurrences	Number of Alleged Offenders	
	n	%
0	38	23.0
1-10	105	63.6
11-20	13	7.9
21-30	5	3.0
31-40	3	1.8
41-50	1	0.6
More than 50	0	0.0
Total	**165**	**100.0**

Source of data: Edmonton Police Service and Calgary Police Service occurrence data
Total N of alleged offenders with occurrence data = 165

Thirty-eight alleged offenders (23%) were not involved in any occurrences in Edmonton or Calgary as adults. This group represents the potential cohort of desisters in the present study: those individuals who had a substantial history of offending as youth but ceased offending as they transitioned into adulthood. It should be noted, however, that treating this group as desisters presents some potential difficulties. It is possible, for example, that individuals have persisted in offending, but were not apprehended by police. It must also be kept in mind that police occurrence data were only available from Edmonton and Calgary Police Services: if a participant in the study was involved in an occurrence outside of the jurisdiction of these police agencies, they would not be captured in the available database. Further, there is a possibility that some participants do not have any occurrences as adults because they were incarcerated for a substantial period of time after they turned 18 years of age and thus were not in a position to offend in the community.

To address these potential limitations, the offending histories of the 38 potential desisters were cross-referenced with data available from JOIN. Since JOIN data are province-wide, offences occurring elsewhere in Alberta other than Edmonton and Calgary would be captured. This cross-reference indicated that six of the potential desisters had convictions recorded in JOIN after turning 18 years of age and thus were removed from the group of desisters.

JOIN also contains data on sentences received; thus, it was possible to cross-reference the group of potential desisters to determine if they were incarcerated after they turned 18 years of age. Based on this analysis, it was determined that five study participants were incarcerated after they transitioned to adulthood. These individuals were already included in the group of six who had convictions recorded in JOIN after turning 18 years of age; thus, after removing these individuals, a total of 32 individuals were included in the sample who were believed to have stopped offending after turning 18 years of age.

The Canadian Police Information Centre (CPIC) contains data on adult convictions across Canada. A search of the CPIC database was conducted to determine if any of the 32 potential desisters in this study had criminal convictions after they turned 18 years of age. This search revealed that three individuals did have convictions and that one was deceased. These four study participants were also removed from the group of potential desisters, leaving a total of 28 individuals in this cohort, which represents 17% of the 165 individuals examined in this chapter.

The number of alleged youth police occurrences were examined for the group of desisters and non-desisters. Results indicated that the desisters had an average of 14.6 alleged youth occurrences (range 1-49) while the non-desisters had an average of 22.8

youth occurrences (range 1-132). Thus, while individuals in both of these groups all had a substantial record of offending as youth, it appears that the group of desisters, on average, did not have as lengthy a record as the non-desisters. Out of the 4435 occurrences attributed to the individuals in this study, 410 (9.2%) were alleged to have involved individuals in the desister group.

6.0 JUSTICE ONLINE INFORMATION NETWORK (JOIN) DATA

Offending data on the 170 youth in the sample were provided by Alberta Justice's JOIN (Justice Online Information Network) Operations. Specifically, the JOIN data provide information regarding charges, charge outcomes, and sentences. JOIN data were provided for three periods: all JOIN entries for each youth up to August 31, 2011; JOIN entries for all participants for the period of September 1, 2011 to August 31, 2012; and finally, JOIN entries for all participants for the period of September 1, 2012 to August 31, 2013. The data were combined to form one database, which includes both youth and adult offences given all of the participants turned 18 at some point in the data collection period.

The first part of the chapter discusses charges and outcomes, while the balance of the chapter discusses convictions and sentences.

6.1 Charges and Outcomes

Charge data were categorized into person, property, drug, traffic, *Youth Criminal Justice Act* (YCJA), other *Criminal Code*, and other provincial/municipal offences. A total of 33,324 charges were laid against the youth in the sample. A large majority of charges (90.5%; n=30171) were laid against males, while less than 10% (n=3,153; 9.5%) were laid against females. Data were analyzed to determine whether charges occurred prior to age 18 or after the youths' 18th birthday. Given a majority of the data collected represented the sample's youth offences, it is not surprising that over three-quarters (83.7%; 27,897) occurred prior to the youths' 18th birthday, while 16.3% (n=5,427) were adult charges.

Table 6.1 examines the charges by type and outcome. The youth in the sample had a total of 2,965 charges for person offences. While a large proportion of these charges (51%) were ultimately withdrawn, dismissed or stayed, in 41.8% of cases the outcome was a conviction. Other charges were still outstanding in the courts (5.6%), had a not guilty verdict following trial (0.6%), or had other outcomes (1.1%).

With regard to property offences, 4,441 charges were laid. In 39% of cases, charges were withdrawn, dismissed or stayed. However, nearly half (49.2%) of property offence charges resulted in conviction and 10.2% were still outstanding in the courts. Only 0.4% of property offence charges resulted in a not guilty finding, and 1.2% had another outcome.

Table 6.1

Outcome of Charges, by Offence Type

Outcome	n	%
Person	**2,965**	**100.0**
Convicted	1,238	41.8
Withdrawn, dismissed, stayed	1,511	51.0
Found not guilty	18	0.6
Other Outcome[1]	33	1.1
Outstanding	165	5.6
Property	**4,441**	**100.0**
Convicted	2,186	49.2
Withdrawn, dismissed, stayed	1,731	39.0
Found not guilty	19	0.4
Other Outcome	54	1.2
Outstanding	451	10.2
Drug	**480**	**100.0**
Convicted	208	43.3
Withdrawn, dismissed, stayed	199	41.5
Found not guilty	0	0.0
Other Outcome	17	3.5
Outstanding	56	11.7
Traffic (CC/HTA/MVAA)	**1,591**	**100.0**
Convicted	521	32.7
Withdrawn, dismissed, stayed	913	57.4
Found not guilty	6	0.3
Other Outcome	18	1.1
Outstanding	133	8.4

Continued

Table 6.1 Continued

Outcome	n	%
Youth Criminal Justice Act	**12,041**	**100.0**
Convicted	3,318	27.6
Withdrawn, dismissed, stayed	6,458	53.6
Found not guilty	13	0.1
Other Outcome	106	0.8
Outstanding	2,146	17.8
Other *Criminal Code*	**11,556**	**100.0**
Convicted	3,452	29.9
Withdrawn, dismissed, stayed	6,610	57.2
Found not guilty	25	0.2
Other Outcome	173	1.5
Outstanding	1,296	11.2
Other Municipal/Provincial	**250**	**100.0**
Convicted	58	23.2
Withdrawn, dismissed, stayed	183	73.2
Found not guilty	0	0.0
Other Outcome	0	0.0
Outstanding	9	3.6

Source of data: Justice Online Information Network (JOIN);
Total n of charges: 21,768
[1]Other outcome includes: case quashed; conditionally stayed; nullity; order transferred in; ordered to stand trial; sentence appeal dismissed; stay of proceedings plea/found guilty; and waived out of province.

A total of 480 drug-related charges were laid against the participants in the study. In 43.3% of cases, the outcome was a conviction and in 41.5% of cases, the charge was withdrawn, dismissed or stayed. In 11.7% of cases, the charge was still outstanding, and 3.5% of charges had another outcome. With regard to traffic offences, 1,591 charges were laid of which just over half (57.4%) were withdrawn, dismissed or stayed. Nearly one-third of charges (32.7%) resulted in conviction, and 8.4% were still outstanding. Only 0.3% of charges resulted in a not guilty verdict following trial, and 1.1% had other outcomes.

Youth in the sample were charged with 12,041 *Youth Criminal Justice Act* (YCJA) offences. Just over half (53.6%) were withdrawn, dismissed or stayed, and just over

one-quarter (27.5%) resulted in conviction. Of the remaining YCJA charges, 17.8% were still outstanding in the courts, 0.8% had other outcomes, and only 0.1% resulted in a finding of not guilty following trial.

Youth in the sample were charged with 11,556 other *Criminal Code* offences, which include weapons offences, attempted *Criminal Code* offences, disorderly conduct, misleading justice, escape and failure to comply, and conspiracy, among others. Over half (57.2%) of the charges were withdrawn, dismissed or stayed, while 29.9% resulted in conviction. Only 0.2% resulted in a not guilty verdict following trial and 1.5% had other outcomes. Just over one-tenth (11.2%) were still outstanding and had not been resolved.

A total of 250 other provincial/municipal infractions were charged to the youth in the sample. Nearly three-quarters (73.2%) were withdrawn, dismissed or stayed, while nearly one-quarter (23.2%) resulted in conviction. Only 3.6% of these charges were still outstanding.

6.2 First Offence

Basic descriptive analysis was conducted to examine the youths' first offences recorded in JOIN. Though youth often had contact with the police prior to being formally charged and processed, the following information describes their first formal contact with the youth court system in Alberta. Age at first offence, as well as charge types and charge outcomes were examined.

The JOIN data analysis revealed that the average age of first offence was 13.8, with a range of 11.3 to 16.9.[1] Table 6.2 summarizes the types of crimes youth were charged with on their first offence. Given some youth had multiple charges on their first offence, they could have more than one charge type. Nearly two-thirds (63.5%) of the youth were charged with a property offence while nearly one-third (32.9%) were charged with a person offence. Other *Criminal Code* offences were first offences for 10.0% of the youth. Drug offences, traffic violations, other provincial/municipal offences, and YCJA offences[2] were charged as first offences in only a small percentage of cases (2.4%, 0.6%, 0.6 % and 1.2%, respectively).

[1] One youth was charged with a sexual offence that spanned over four years, and allegedly began at 11.3 years.

[2] It is unusual that a youth would have a YCJA charge on their first offence given most YCJA charges relate to failing to comply with a youth order. For these youth, it could be that they were convicted of an offence outside of Alberta but were serving their sentence in Alberta when they received the YCJA charge.

Table 6.2

Types of Offences Charged on First Offence

Charge Type	n	%
Person Offence	56	32.9
Property Offence	108	63.5
Drug Offence	4	2.4
Other *Criminal Code* Offence	17	10.0
Traffic (CC/HTA/MVAA) Offence	1	0.6
Other provincial/municipal Offence	1	0.6
Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA) Offence	2	1.2

Source of Data: JOIN
Total N=170

The majority of youth (90.6%) had only one type of charge on their first offence. However, 7.6% had two charge types, and 1.8% had three charge types. While a majority of youth (70.6%) had only one charge on their first offence, 20% had two to five charges and 9.4% had more than five charges.

Table 6.3 summarizes the various types of outcomes of first offence charges. Given some youth had more than one charge on their first offence, multiple outcomes on first offence charges are possible. Nearly one-third of the youth (64.1% of the sample) had convictions on first offence charges, while 35.9% of youth had at least one charge withdrawn, dismissed or stayed. A total of 15.3% of youth had charges withdrawn due to alternative or extrajudicial measures. A small proportion of youth (2.9%) had charges that resulted in other outcomes.

Table 6.3

Charge Outcomes for First Offence

Charge Outcome	n[1]	%
Guilty/Sentenced	109	64.1
Withdrawn/Dismissed/Stayed	61	35.9
Withdrawn (Alternative or Extrajudicial Measures)	26	15.3
Other	5	2.9

Source of Data: JOIN
Total N=170
[1]The n for charge outcomes is greater than the total sample size (N) because each first offence could have multiple charges, and multiple charge outcomes.

Analysis of the age of first conviction revealed that the youth in the sample were, on average, 14.8 at first conviction, ranging from 12.3 to 17.6 years. On average, nearly one year (.95 years) passed between when a youth was first charged and when he/she was convicted of an offence.

6.3 Convictions

Overall, the 170 youth in the sample received 10,981 convictions. On average, the participants had 64.6 charges that resulted in conviction, ranging from 5 to 445. Table 6.4 presents the frequencies of convictions using seven categories.

Table 6.4

Total Number of Charges Convicted per Participant

Number of Charges Convicted	n	%
1-25	35	20.6
26-50	54	31.8
51-75	35	20.6
76-100	18	10.6
101-150	15	8.8
151-200	10	5.9
More than 200	3	1.8
Total	**170**	**100.0**

Source of data: Justice Online Information Network

Nearly one-third of participants (31.8%) had 26-50 charges convicted while 20.6% had 1-25 and 51-75, respectively. Just over one-tenth (10.6%) of participants had 76-100 charges convicted. The remainder of the participants had 101-150 charges convicted (8.8%), 151-200 charges convicted (5.9%) and three participants had over 200 charges convicted.

A large majority of convictions (87.0%; n=9,549) were against males, while 13% (n=1,432) were against females. Analyses were conducted to determine the distribution of charges convicted by age at conviction, and the results are presented in Table 6.5. A very small proportion of convictions occurred at age 12 (0.04%) and 13 (1.5%), and 7.3% occurred at age 14. A majority of convictions occurred at ages 16 (24.0%) and 17 (25.3%), while 13.3% occurred at age 15 and 16.3% occurred at age 18. Only 0.7% occurred at age 21.

Table 6.5

Distribution of Charges Convicted by Age at Conviction

Age	n	%
12	4	.04
13	170	1.5
14	807	7.3
15	1,456	13.3
16	2,640	24.0
17	2,782	25.3
18	1,791	16.3
19	926	8.4
20	326	3.0
21	79	0.7
Total	10,981	**100.0**

Source of data: Justice Online Information Network

Conviction data were further examined to determine whether convictions occurred as a youth or adult. The 170 individuals in the sample averaged 55.6 youth convictions, ranging from 5 to 399. With regard to adult convictions, 96 youth registered adult convictions according to the JOIN data. Those with adult convictions averaged 16 convictions, ranging from 1 to 191.

Table 6.6 presents the overall conviction data by offence type. The greatest proportion of convictions that occurred prior to age 18 were for YCJA offences (32.8%), followed by other *Criminal Code* offences (28.9%). Property offences accounted for 20.4% of convictions prior to age 18, and person offences accounted for 11.5%. Drug offences (1.9%), traffic offences (4.1%) and other municipal/provincial violations (0.4%) accounted for only a small proportion of convictions.

Among those convictions that occurred when the alleged offender was age 18 or older, other *Criminal Code* offences accounted for nearly half of the convictions (47.3%). Though YCJA offences accounted for 14.4%, these were likely for violations of youth sentence conditions that continued past age 18. Property and person offences accounted for 17.2% and 10.0% of convictions, respectively, while traffic offences accounted for 8.5% of convictions. The remainder of the convictions were for drug offences (1.7%) and other municipal/provincial violations (0.9%).

Table 6.6

Type of Charge by Age of Alleged Offender

Alleged Offence	Alleged Offender under 18		Alleged Offender 18 or Older	
	n	%	n	%
Person offences	1,085	11.5	153	10.0
Property offences	1,923	20.4	263	17.2
Drug offences	182	1.9	26	1.7
Traffic offences (CC/HTA/MVAA)	390	4.1	131	8.5
Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA) offences	3,097	32.8	221	14.4
Other *Criminal Code* offences	2,727	28.9	725	47.3
Other Municipal/Provincial violations	44	0.4	14	0.9
Total	**9,448**	**100.0**	**1,533**	**100.0**

Source of data: Justice Online Information Network (JOIN)
Total N of convictions=10,981

6.4 Sentence Profile

Data were analyzed descriptively to determine the types of sentences that participants received and the total length or amount of these sentences they were ordered to serve or pay from the beginning of their contact with the justice system to August 31, 2013. Figure 6.1 illustrates the number of participants who received various types of sentences.

The most common sentence among the sample was probation, with all but one of the youth (99.4%) having received probation at least once. A large majority of the sample (94.1%) had received at least one secure custody sentence, while nearly three-quarters (72.3%) had received community supervision. Over two-thirds (68.8%) of the sample received at least one community service sentence and 61.8% received a firearm prohibition at least once. Just over half (51.8%) received at least one fine, while just under half (47.1%) received attendance as a sentence. Deferred custody and supervision and open custody sentences were received at least once by 45.9% and 44.7% of the sample, respectively. Less commonly sentenced were restitution (19.4%), conditional discharges (15.3%) and Intensive Support and Supervision (13.5%). The least common sentences among the sample were reprimands (7.6%), suspended sentences (5.9%), absolute discharges (2.3%) and intensive custody (1.2%).

Figure 6.1

Number of Youth Receiving Various Sentences, by Sentence Type

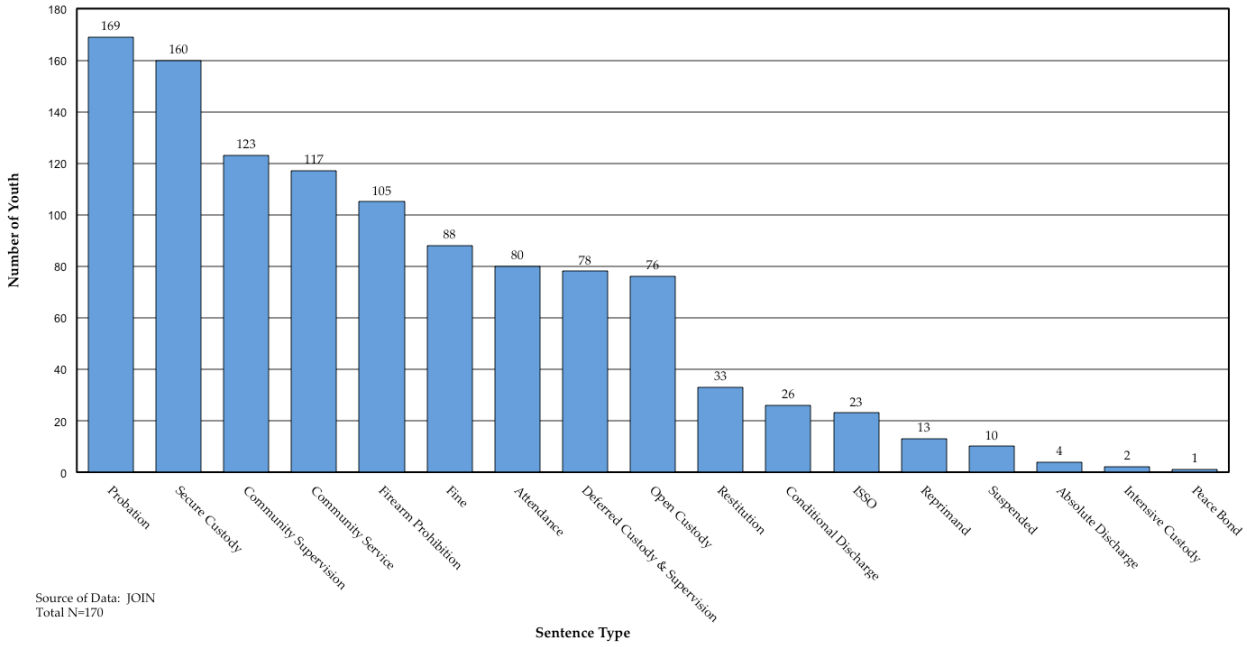


Table 6.7 presents data on the total time and amounts of various sentences that the youth received. Both the median and mean are reported as outliers influenced the means in a number of cases. On average, youth were sentenced to a total of 8.9 months in secure custody, ranging from .03 months to 133.39 months. The median total amount of secure custody sentenced was approximately half the average (4.5 months), suggesting the maximum secure custody length was unusually high.[3] On average, youth were sentenced to a total of 3.7 months in open custody, ranging from .33 months to 17.3 months, with the median amount of open custody sentenced being 2.6 months.

The total amount of time spent on the community supervision portion of custody and supervision orders averaged 7.1 months, with the median being slightly lower at 5.8 months.[4] Total amount of time spent on community supervision orders ranged from .10 to 37.7 months.

[3] This does not account for youth who were sentenced to time already served, or those who did not serve their sentence in custody.

[4] Community supervision is the mandatory last one-third of a secure custody sentence. However, in the data provided by JOIN these sentences were entered distinctly and therefore were analyzed as distinct sentences.

The total number of months that the 23 youth who received an Intensive Support and Supervision Order (ISSO) ranged from 4.6 to 25.0 months, averaging 13.6 months. The median ISSO sentence was slightly lower, at 12.1 months.

Table 6.7

Total Sentence Time and Amounts, by Sentence Type

Sentence	Minimum	Maximum	Median	Mean
Length of Sentence				
Secure custody Time (months) (n=116)[1]	.03	133.9	4.5	8.9
Open Custody Time (months) (n=76)	.33	17.3	2.6	3.7
Intensive Support and Supervision Order Time (months) (n=23)	4.6	25.0	12.0	13.6
Community Supervision Time (months) (n=123)	.10	37.7	5.8	7.1
Probation Time (months) (n=169)	6.0	123.6	30.0	32.0
Attendance Time (hours) (n=80)	10.0	245.0	40.0	51.4
Community Service Time (hours) (n=117)	5.0	220.0	40.0	49.1
Amount of Sentence				
Fine Amount ($) (n=88)	.50	3,025.00	337.50	565.7
Restitution Amount ($) (n=33)	74.00	4,185.00	400.00	662.78

Source of Data: JOIN
Total N=170
[1]Secure custody time is not presented for 44 cases because the sentence was deferred, or it was served in open custody, intensive support and supervision, attendance, or community supervision.

On average, the youth in the sample spent 32 months on probation, with the median being only slightly lower at 30.0 months. The total amount of time spent on probation ranged from 6 months to 123.6 months.

Attendance centre and community service sentence lengths are also reported. On average, the total hours sentenced to attendance centre ranged from 10 hours to 245 hours, having a mean of 51.4 hours. The median attendance centre order was much lower, at 40.0 hours, suggesting that the 245-hour maximum was unusually high. With regard to community service, total hours sentenced ranged from 5.0 to 220 hours, with a median of 40.0 hours. The average amount of time spent in community service was 49.1 hours.

Overall, youth were ordered to pay an average of $565.7 in fines, ranging from $.50 to $3,025. The median fine amount was $337.50, indicating that the maximum of

$3,025 was unusually high. Similarly, the youth were ordered to pay an average of $662.78 in restitution, ranging from $74 to $4,185. However, the median was $400.00, suggesting that the maximum of $4,185 was unusually high.

7.0 PREDICTORS OF DESISTANCE FROM OFFENDING

One goal of the present study was to examine the life course trajectories of a group of prolific youth offenders as they transition into adulthood. Of particular interest was what factors might distinguish young offenders who desist from offending as they enter adulthood from those who continue to offend. To accomplish this, a cohort of "desisters" was created based on the following criteria: (1) no police occurrence data identified by either Edmonton Police Service or Calgary Police Service after their 18th birthday; (2) no charge, conviction, or sentencing data identified in JOIN following their 18th birthday; (3) no periods of incarceration identified in JOIN after the age of 18 years; and (4) no conviction data identified in the Canadian Police Information Centre (CPIC) database after their 18th birthday.

Based on these criteria a group of 28 desisters was identified. It should be noted that at most two years had passed between a participant's 18th birthday and the cut off for the final wave of data collection for this study (August 31, 2013). Thus, a relatively narrow window for determining desistance was available. It is certainly possible that more of the study participants will desist from offending as they move further into adulthood or that some of the desisters will reoffend later in adulthood.

The cohort of desisters was compared with the group of study participants who continued to offend after turning the age of 18 on a number dimensions, such as family and personal characteristics, educational experiences, gang involvement, and offending history to determine which factors might be most strongly related to desistance. Factors were initially examined individually using chi-square analyses to determine which were statistically significantly related to desistance; those factors that were significantly associated with desistance were then examined using logistic regression analyses to develop a predictive model of desistance. The file reviews and JOIN were the two data sources used for the analyses presented in this chapter since they contained data on the complete sample of 170 youth who participated in this study.

7.1 Family Characteristics

A number of family factors were examined to determine if they were statistically significantly related to desistance from offending. Table 7.1 presents findings related to parental marital status and the youths' living arrangements at the time of the file review. Neither of these factors was significantly related to desistance.

Table 7.1

Family Characteristics of the Study Sample by Whether Participants Desisted from Offending as Adults

Family Characteristic	Desisted from Offending					
	Yes		No		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Parents' Marital Status						
Married/Common Law	1	3.7	26	96.3	27	100.0
Never Lived Together	4	17.4	19	82.6	23	100.0
Separated/Divorced	18	20.5	70	79.5	88	100.0
Youths' Living Arrangements						
With Family Members	12	14.5	71	85.5	83	100.0
Other[1]	7	12.3	50	87.7	57	100.0

Source of data: Youth Probation File Review; Total N=170

Missing cases on: "Parent's Marital Status"=32; "Youths' Living Arrangements"=30.

[1]"Other" includes foster home, group home, shelter, on the street, and incarcerated.

Table 7.2 shows the relationship between family involvement in criminal activity as indicated in the youth probation files and desistance from offending. Whether one of their parents had ever been charged with a crime was significantly related to desistance and indicated that 12.7% of youth whose parent(s) had been charged desisted from offending after turning 18 years of age. In comparison, 30.3% of youth whose parent(s) had never been charged desisted from offending. This finding suggests that parental criminality can be used to predict ongoing criminal activity of their children as they enter adulthood. However, whether they had a sibling who had been charged with a crime was not significantly related to desistance from offending.

Table 7.2

Involvement of Family Members in Criminal Activity by Whether Participants Desisted from Offending as Adults

Involvement	Desisted from Offending					
	Yes		No		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Parent Ever Charged with a Crime[1]						
Yes	9	12.7	62	87.3	71	100.0
No	10	30.3	23	69.7	33	100.0
Sibling Ever Charged with a Crime						
Yes	6	16.7	30	93.3	36	100.0
No	8	22.2	28	77.8	36	100.0

Source of data: Youth Probation File Review; Total N=170

Missing cases on: "Parent Ever Charged with a Crime"=66; "Sibling Ever Charged with a Crime"=95. Three participants did not have siblings and were removed from the analysis.

[1]$X^2(1) = 4.69$, $p < .05$

Table 7.3 provides the relationship between a youth's involvement with the child welfare system and desistance from offending in adulthood. Four indices of child welfare involvement were examined: ever involved with child welfare; under a current child welfare guardianship order; ever been in foster care; and ever been in a group home. None of these factors was significantly related to desistance from offending in adulthood.

Table 7.3

Involvement of Youth with the Child Welfare System by Whether They Desisted from Offending as Adults

Type of Involvement	Desisted from Offending					
	Yes		No		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Ever Involved with Child Welfare Services						
Yes	18	16.4	92	83.6	110	100.0
No	8	17.0	39	83.0	47	100.0
Current Child Welfare Guardianship Order						
Yes	10	18.9	43	81.1	53	100.0
No	16	16.2	83	83.8	99	100.0
Ever Been in Foster Care						
Yes	8	13.1	53	86.9	61	100.0
No	17	18.5	75	81.5	92	100.0
Ever Been in a Group Home						
Yes	13	16.9	64	83.1	77	100.0
No	12	16.0	63	84.0	75	100.0

Source of data: Youth Probation File Review; Total N=170

Missing cases on: "Ever Involved with Child Welfare Services"=13; "Current Child Welfare Guardianship Order"=18; "Ever Been in Foster Care"=17; "Ever Been in a Group Home"=18.

7.2 Personal Characteristics

The relationship between a number of personal characteristics and desistance from offending in adulthood was examined. Youths' history of psychological assessments and counseling and its relationship to desistance is presented in Table 7.4. No significant findings emerged, indicating that whether youth had ever received a psychological assessment or ever had counseling or treatment were not related to desistance from offending in adulthood.

Table 7.5 shows the relationship between desistance from offending and the presence of several psychological disorders including: attention deficit disorder/attention deficit hyperactivity disorder; conduct disorder; fetal alcohol spectrum disorder; oppositional defiant disorder; learning disability; and depressive disorder. None of these disorders was found to be significantly related to desistance.

Table 7.4

Participants' Psychological Assessment/Counselling History by Whether They Desisted from Offending as Adults

Type of Intervention	Desisted from Offending					
	Yes		No		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Ever Had a Psychological Assessment						
Yes	17	19.5	70	80.5	87	100.0
No	9	12.3	64	87.7	73	100.0
Ever Had Counselling/Treatment						
Yes	12	17.9	55	82.1	67	100.0
No	9	15.8	48	84.2	57	100.0

Source of data: Youth Probation File Review; Total N=170

Missing cases on: "Ever Had a Psychological Assessment"=10; "Ever Had Counselling/Treatment"=46.

Table 7.5

Diagnosis of Psychological Disorders by Whether Participants Desisted from Offending as Adults

Diagnosis	Desisted from Offending					
	Yes		No		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Attention Deficit Disorder/Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder						
Yes	10	16.7	50	83.3	60	100.0
No	11	13.8	69	86.3	80	100.0
Conduct Disorder						
Yes	7	12.7	48	87.3	55	100.0
No	19	17.6	89	82.4	108	100.0
Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder						
Yes	5	16.1	26	83.9	31	100.0
No	21	15.9	111	84.1	132	100.0
Oppositional Defiant Disorder						
Yes	7	24.1	22	75.9	29	100.0
No	19	14.2	115	85.8	134	100.0
Learning Disability						
Yes	4	19.0	17	81.0	21	100.0
No	22	15.5	120	84.5	142	100.0
Depressive Disorder						
Yes	3	14.3	18	85.7	21	100.0
No	23	16.2	119	83.8	142	100.0

Source of data: Youth Probation File Review; Total N=170

Missing cases on: "Attention Deficit Disorder/Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder"=30; "Conduct Disorder"=7; "Ever Been in Foster Care"=17; "Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder"=7; "Oppositional Defiant Disorder"=7; "Learning Disability=7; "Depressive Disorder"=7.

The relationship between youths' experience with alcohol and illegal drugs at the time of their file review and subsequent desistance from offending in adulthood is shown in Table 7.6. No statistically significant relationships were obtained between youths' experiences with alcohol and drugs and subsequent desistance from offending behaviour.

Table 7.6

Involvement with Alcohol and Drugs by Whether Participants Desisted from Offending as Adults

Substance Use	Desisted from Offending					
	Yes		No		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
History of Alcohol Abuse						
Yes	17	17.2	82	82.8	99	100.0
No	4	11.8	30	88.2	34	100.0
History of Drug Abuse						
Yes	17	16.2	88	83.8	105	100.0
No	3	12.0	22	88.0	25	100.0
Ever Bought Illegal Drugs						
Yes	17	16.7	85	83.3	102	100.0
No	3	23.1	10	76.9	13	100.0
Ever Sold Illegal Drugs						
Yes	7	18.9	30	81.1	37	100.0
No	6	16.2	31	83.8	37	100.0

Source of data: Youth Probation File Review
Total N=170
Missing cases on: "History of Alcohol Abuse"=37; "History of Drug Abuse"=40; "Ever Bought Illegal Drugs"=55; "Ever Sold Illegal Drugs"=96.

7.3 School Characteristics

The relationship between school characteristics contained in youth probation files and desistance from offending in adulthood is shown in Table 7.7. School factors examined included whether the youth had dropped out of school, whether they had a history of being bullied in school and their overall school proficiency. None of these school characteristics had a statistically significant relationship with subsequent desistance from offending.

Table 7.7

School Characteristics by Whether Participants Desisted from Offending as Adults

Characteristic	Desisted from Offending					
	Yes		No		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Dropped Out of School						
Yes	8	12.1	58	87.9	66	100.0
No	7	14.6	41	85.4	48	100.0
History of Being Bullied						
Yes	15	26.3	42	73.7	57	100.0
No	1	7.7	12	92.3	13	100.0
School Proficiency						
Average/Above Average	4	11.4	31	88.6	35	100.0
Below Average	17	17.7	79	82.3	96	100.0

Source of data: Youth Probation File Review; Total N=170

Missing cases on: "Dropped Out of School"=56; "History of Being Bullied"=100; "School Proficiency"=39.

7.4 Experience with Gangs

Youth probation files contained information regarding participants' history of involvement with youth gangs and whether their friends and acquaintances were involved in gangs. The relationship between these factors and subsequent desistance from offending is provided in Table 7.8.

Table 7.8

History of Involvement with Gangs by Whether Participants Desisted from Offending as Adults

Involvement	Desisted from Offending					
	Yes		No		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
History of Gang Involvement[1]						
Known/Suspected Involvement	2	6.3	30	93.8	32	100.0
No Involvement	17	23.9	54	76.1	71	100.0
Friends/Acquaintances Gang Members						
Known/Suspected Involvement	6	15.0	34	85.0	40	100.0
No Involvement	14	21.5	51	78.5	65	100.0

Source of data: Youth Probation File Review; Total N=170

Missing cases on: "History of Gang Involvement"=67; "Friends/Acquaintances Gang Members"=65.

[1] $X(1) = 4.59$, $p < .05$

Youth who had a known or suspected involvement with gangs were significantly less likely to desist from offending as they transitioned to adulthood (6.3%) than were

youth with no known gang involvement (23.9%). While the relationship between having friends and acquaintances with gang involvement and desistance from offending was not statistically significant, this may have been due to the small sample size.

7.5 First Conviction

Characteristics of the youths' first conviction were examined to determine whether there was an impact on the pathway to desistance. First, age at first conviction was examined. When comparing desisters to non-desisters, desisters were slightly younger than non-desisters at first conviction (14.6 years compared to 14.8 years). However, an independent samples t-test revealed that this difference was not statistically significant. The data were analyzed to determine whether offence type on first conviction predicted desistance, and the results are presented in Table 7.9.

Table 7.9

Types of Offences Charged on First Conviction by Whether Youth Desisted from Offending as Adults

Offence Type	Desisted from Offending					
	Yes		No		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Person Offence						
Yes	11	15.1	62	84.9	73	100.0
No	17	17.5	80	82.5	97	100.0
Property Offence						
Yes	22	17.6	103	82.4	125	100.0
No	6	13.3	39	86.7	45	100.0
Drug Offence						
Yes	2	13.3	13	86.7	15	100.0
No	26	16.8	129	83.2	155	100.0
Other *Criminal Code* Offence						
Yes	22	19.8	89	80.2	111	100.0
No	6	10.2	53	89.8	59	100.0
Traffic Offence						
Yes	1	33.3	2	66.7	3	100.0
No	27	16.2	140	83.8	167	100.0
Other Provincial/Municipal Offence						
Yes	1	33.3	2	66.7	3	100.0
No	27	16.2	140	83.8	167	100.0
YCJA Offence						
Yes	2	18.2	9	81.8	11	100.0
No	26	16.4	133	83.6	159	100.0

Source of data: Youth Probation File Review; Total N=170

Desisters were more likely to be charged with property, other *Criminal Code*, other provincial/municipal offences, and YCJA offences. Non-desisters were most likely to be charged with person offences and drug offences. However, none of these differences were found to significantly predict desistance.

Analyses were also conducted to determine whether the number of convictions on first offence was significantly related to desistance, and the results are presented by offence type in Table 7.10. Desisters were found to have a higher average number of property, other *Criminal Code*, other provincial/municipal, and YCJA convictions and a lower average number of person, drug, and traffic convictions than non-desisters. However, only YCJA convictions was found to be statistically significant. On average, desisters had 0.79 convictions for YCJA offences as compared to .08 for non-desisters. This suggests that having convictions for less serious offences on first conviction may be a predictor of future desistance. It may also suggest that failure to comply with YCJA conditions may be predictive of non-desistance.

Table 7.10

Mean Number of Charges Convicted on First Conviction by Offence Type and Whether Youth Desisted from Offending as Adults

Offence Type	Desisted from Offending		
	Yes[1]	No[2]	t-test
	$\overline{x}$	$\overline{x}$	
Person	1.0	1.1	t(168)=.105, ns
Property	3.1	2.8	t(168)=-.291, ns
Drug	.14	.27	t(168)=.671, ns
Other *Criminal Code*	4.6	3.4	t(168)=-.869, ns
Traffic	.04	.08	t(168)=.322, ns
Other Provincial/Municipal	.14	.02	t(168)=-1.691, ns
YCJA	.79	.08	t(168)=-2.091, p<.05
Total Offences Convicted	9.9	7.7	t(168)=-1.001

Source of data: Youth Probation File Review; Total N=170

[1]n=28

[2]n=142

Analyses were conducted to determine whether having a conviction on the youths' first offence made a difference. Among those who were convicted on first offence, 18.2% were desisters, while 14.6% of desisters were not convicted on their first offence. Conversely, a greater proportion of non-desisters were not convicted on their

first offence (84.5% of those not convicted on first offence versus 81.8% who were). However, a chi-square analysis revealed that these differences were not statistically significant.

Sentences received on first conviction were examined to assess whether there was a long-term impact on desistance (see Table 7.11).

Table 7.11

Types of Sentences Received on First Conviction by Whether Youth Desisted from Offending as Adults

Offence Type[1]	Desisted from Offending					
	Yes		No		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Secure custody						
Yes	8	23.5	26	76.5	34	100.0
No	20	14.7	116	85.3	136	100.0
Community Supervision						
Yes	4	36.4	7	63.6	11	100.0
No	24	15.1	135	84.9	159	100.0
Open Custody						
Yes	1	33.3	2	66.7	3	100.0
No	27	16.2	140	83.8	167	100.0
Intensive Support & Supervision Order[1]						
Yes	4	50.0	4	50.0	8	100.0
No	24	14.8	138	85.2	162	100.0
Probation						
Yes	19	14.5	112	85.5	39	100.0
No	9	23.1	30	76.9	131	100.0
Fine						
Yes	1	100.0	0	0.0	1	100.0
No	27	16.0	147	84.0	169	100.0
Restitution						
Yes	0	0.0	8	100.0	8	100.0
No	28	17.3	134	82.7	162	100.0
Community Service						
Yes	8	19.0	34	81.0	42	100.0
No	20	15.6	108	84.4	128	100.0

Continued

Table 7.11 Continued

Offence Type	Desisted from Offending					
	Yes		No		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Attendance						
Yes	1	9.1	10	90.9	11	100.0
No	27	17.0	132	83.0	159	100.0
Absolute Discharge						
Yes	0	0.0	1	100.0	1	100.0
No	28	16.6	141	83.4	169	100.0
Conditional Discharge						
Yes	4	20.0	16	80.0	20	100.0
No	24	16.0	126	84.0	150	100.0
Firearm Prohibition[3]						
Yes	1	3.7	26	96.3	27	100.0
No	27	18.9	116	81.1	143	100.0
Reprimand						
Yes	1	20.0	4	80.0	5	100.0
No	27	16.4	138	83.6	165	100.0
Deferred Custody and Supervision						
Yes	2	40.0	3	60.0	5	100.0
No	26	15.8	139	84.2	165	100.0

Source of data: JOIN; Total N=170

[1] Intensive custody and suspended sentence as none of the youth received these sentences.

[2] $X^2(1) = 6.86$, $p < .01$

[3] $X^2(1) = 3.80$, $p < .05$

Some sentence types (e.g., fine, absolute discharge, open custody, reprimand, deferred sentence) were so uncommon that the results were negligible and tests for significance were not reliable. However, analyses of Intensive Support and Supervision Order (ISSO) and firearm prohibitions yielded significant results. Specifically, the analysis of ISSO as a sentence on first conviction showed that 50% of youth who received this sentence desisted while 14.8% who did not receive this sentence desisted. The significant finding suggests that receiving the ISSO as a sentence on first conviction, and having access to the added supervisions and counselling that it entails, may lead to future desistance. With regard to firearm prohibition, only 3.7% of those who received a firearm prohibition were desisters, while 18.9% of youth who did not receive a firearm prohibition desisted from offending. This finding might suggest that non-desisters are more likely to be involved in offences involving firearms, which may be related to non-desistance in the future.

Table 7.12 presents findings of analyses on length of sentence given on first conviction. On average, desisters were given longer community supervision, open custody, ISSOs, and community service orders, while non-desisters were given longer

secure custody, probation, attendance, and restitution orders. However, the only significant difference was with regard to the ISSO sentence. On average, desisters received 1.5 months as opposed to .26 for non-desisters. This might suggest that longer ISSO sentences on first conviction may lead to future desistance.

Table 7.12

Length/Amount of Sentences on First Conviction by Whether Youth Desisted from Offending as Adults

Sentence Type[1]	Desisted from Offending		t-test
	Yes[2]	No[3]	
	$\bar{x}$	$\bar{x}$	
Secure custody (months)	.10	.16	t(168)=.270, ns
Community Supervision (months)	.32	.17	t(168)=-.852, ns
Open Custody (months)	.12	.06	t(168)=-.497,ns
Probation (months)	7.2	7.9	t(168)=.674, ns
Intensive Support and Supervision Order (ISSO) (months)	1.5	.26	t(168)=-2.733, p<.01
Community Service (hours)	6.8	5.6	t(168)=-.498, ns
Attendance (hours)	1.1	1.8	t(168)=.466, ns
Restitution ($)	0.0	22.2	t(168)=.813, ns

Source of data: Youth Probation File Review; Total N=170

[1] Fines were not included in the analysis as there was only one youth who received this sentence.

[2] n=28

[3] n=142

The lack of differences between desisters and non-desisters on characteristics related to first conviction suggests that the two groups may have started their criminal careers in similar ways.

7.6 Conviction History

Historical offending data to August 31, 2011 were analyzed to examine whether various characteristics of the youths' conviction histories were significantly related to desistance. Age at first offence, first conviction, and last conviction were analyzed and the results are presented in Table 7.13. On average, desisters and non-desisters were very similar in age at first offence and first conviction. However, desisters were found to be slightly younger at their last youth conviction, and this difference was found to be significant. This may indicate that desisters and non-desisters have similar starts to their criminal careers, but desisters stop offending well before their 18th birthday.

Table 7.13

Age at First Offence, First Conviction, and Last Conviction by Whether Youth Desisted from Offending as Adults

Offence Type	Desisted from Offending		t-test
	Yes[1]	No[2]	
	$\bar{x}$	$\bar{x}$	
Age at first offence	13.8	13.7	t(168)=-.386, ns
Age at first conviction	14.6	14.8	t(168)=.599, ns
Age at last youth conviction	16.7	17.5	t(168)=4.14, p<.001

Source of data: JOIN; Total N=170

[1] n=28

[2]n=142

Table 7.14 presents findings related to overall convictions by offence type and whether or not the youth desisted.

Table 7.14

Overall Number of Convictions by Offence Type and Whether Youth Desisted from Offending as Adults

Offence Type	Desisted from Offending		t-test
	Yes[1]	No[2]	
	$\bar{x}$	$\bar{x}$	
Person	2.4	7.1	t(168)=1.722, ns
Property	7.5	10.6	t(168)=1.182, ns
Drug	0.5	1.2	t(168)=-1.125, ns
Other *Criminal Code*	10.9	16.8	t(168)=.1.793, ns
Traffic	.54	2.7	t(168)=.888, ns
Other Provincial/Municipal	.14	.28	t(168)=.625, ns
YCJA	11.2	18.2	t(168)=1.656, ns
Total Convictions	33.1	56.9	t(168)=2.393, p<.05

Source of data: JOIN; Total N=170

[1] n=28

[2]n=142

Desisters had a lower average number of convictions on all offence types, though none of the differences were statistically significant. Overall convictions were also analyzed, and non-desisters were found to have a significantly higher average number of convictions (56.9) as compared to desisters (33.1). This suggests that, overall, desisters are less prolific youth offenders than non-desisters.

The variety in offending types was also examined to determine whether the number of different offence types that resulted in conviction impacted pathways to desistance or persistence. Person, property, drug, other *Criminal Code*, traffic, other provincial/municipal, and YCJA were included in the analysis. Non-desisters averaged 4.2 offence types for which they had convictions as youth compared to 3.8 for desisters. A t-test of independent means was conducted and the difference was found to be significant (t(168)=1.990, p<.05).

7.7 Sentence History

The youths' sentence histories were examined to determine whether sentences were related to future desistance. Table 7.15 presents the average number of times the youth were sentenced to various sentence types by desistance and non-desistance, and whether the differences were statistically significant.

Table 7.15

Total Number of Times Youth Received Various Sentences by Whether Youth Desisted from Offending as Adults

Sentence Type[1]	Desisted from Offending		t-test
	Yes[2]	No[3]	
	$\bar{x}$	$\bar{x}$	
Secure custody	2.3	4.0	t(168)=2.562, p<.05
Community Supervision	1.3	2.5	t(168)=2.373, p<.05
Open Custody	.39	.80	t(168)=1.768, ns
Probation	2.2	2.9	t(168)=2.4, p<.05
Intensive Support and Supervision Order (ISSO)	.39	.14	t(168)=-2.333, p<.05
Community Service	1.1	1.1	t(168)=.136, ns
Attendance	.57	.67	t(168)=.540, ns
Fine	.29	.47	t(168)=1.027, ns
Firearm Prohibition	.39	.99	t(168)=2.806, p<.01
Reprimand	.07	.07	t(168)=-.019, ns
Deferred Custody and Supervision	.54	.77	t(168)=1.044, ns
Conditional Discharge	.14	.15	t(168)=.063, ns

Source of data: JOIN; Total N=170

[1] Intensive custody, peace bond, restitution, suspended sentence, and absolute discharge were not included as very few youth received these sentences

[2] n=28

[3] n=142

As shown, on average non-desisters tended to be sentenced more often than desisters, reflecting their greater number of offences. Differences were statistically significant for secure custody, community supervision, probation, and firearm

prohibitions. On average, non-desisters received 4 secure custody sentences as compared to 2.3 for desisters, and 2.5 community supervision sentences as compared to 1.3 for desisters. Desisters also received significantly fewer probation sentences (2.2 vs 2.9 for non-desisters). These findings may suggest a number of things, including that secure custody, community supervision, and probation sentences may not lead to desistance, or alternatively, that non-desisters' criminal pathways may constitute being sentenced to these sentences more often. Further, non-desisters received .99 firearm prohibitions as compared to .39 for desisters. Similar to the significant finding related to firearm prohibitions on first offence, this finding may suggest that non-desisters' criminal behaviour is such that a firearm prohibition is warranted. Interestingly, the only sentence that desisters received more often than non-desisters was the ISSO, and this finding was significant (.39 compared to .14 for non-desisters). This suggests that the ISSO may lead to desistance among persistent youth offenders.

The overall amount of each type of sentence was also examined to determine whether sentence length predicted desistance. As shown in Table 7.16, on average, non-desisters had spent more time on most types of sentences, with the exception of ISSO and community service. However, the differences were significant with regard to secure custody, community supervision, probation and ISSO. Non-desisters spent significantly more time in secure custody (3.1 months vs .72 months), community supervision (4.8 months vs 2.6 months), and probation (29 months vs 20.2 months) than desisters.

Table 7.16

Length/Amount of Sentences by Whether Youth Desisted from Offending as Adults

Sentence Type[1]	Desisted from Offending		t-test
	Yes[2]	No[3]	
	$\overline{x}$	$\overline{x}$	
Secure custody (months)	.72	3.1	t(168)=2.171, p<.05
Community Supervision (months)	2.6	4.8	t(168)=1.947, p<.05
Open Custody (months)	.74	1.6	t(168)=1.623, ns
Probation (months)	20.2	29.0	t(168)=2.965, p<.01
Intensive Support and Supervision Order (ISSO) (months)	4.1	1.4	t(168)=-2.711, p<.01
Community Service (hours)	32.5	31.9	t(168)=-.072, ns
Attendance (hours)	19.1	24.5	t(168)=.667, ns
Fine ($)	29.5	105.2	t(168)=1.234, ns

Source of data: JOIN; Total N=170

[1] Restitution was not included given only one desister received this sentence.

[2] n=28

[2] n=142

On the other hand, desisters were sentenced to more time on the ISSO (4.1 months compared to 1.4 months for non-desisters). Once again, this difference was statistically significant. As previously discussed, these findings suggest that the ISSO may have a significant impact on the pathways of persistent youth offenders and may lead to desistance. More time spent in secure custody, open custody, and community supervision may lead to non-desistance, or non-desisters' more serious and frequent criminal behaviour may warrant more time spent on these types of sentences.

Finally, the variety of sentences that youth received was examined to assess whether the number of different sentence types a youth experienced impacted pathways to desistance or persistence. On average, desisters received 5.6 different sentences as compared to 6.7 for non-desisters; this difference was found to be significant ($t(168)=2.404$, $p<.05$).

7.8 Best Predictors of Desistance

A number of social, criminal, and justice system factors significantly related to desistance and non-desistance have been presented in the chapter thus far. Logistic regression models that included these factors were conducted to assess which factors are the most important to predicting desistance or non-desistance. Since the dependent variable (i.e., desistance) was dichotomous, binary logistic regression was used. The independent variables that were found to be significant were put into three forward stepwise logistic regression models – social characteristics, offence characteristics, and justice system response. The forward stepwise logistic regression assessed the variables one at a time to determine with the highest degree of accuracy which factors best predict desistance. Statistical significance was tested using the Wald statistic. The independent variable with the highest level of predictability is entered into the regression equation on the first step, and subsequent variables are assessed one at a time to see if their addition significantly increases the prediction of desistance, the dependent variable. When the addition of variables no longer increases the predictability of the model, the procedure ends.

7.8.1 Social Characteristics Model

As presented in previous sections, only two social characteristics were statistically significantly related to desistance. In Section 7.1 it was reported that youth whose parents had never been charged with a crime were significantly more likely to desist. In Section 7.4 it was reported that not having been a member of a gang was significantly related to desistance. Unfortunately, it was not feasible to include these variables in a regression analysis with multiple independent variables because of too many cases with missing values.

7.8.2 Offence History Characteristics Model

Sections 7.5 and 7.6 presented data related to the youths' first conviction and overall conviction history. Four offence characteristics were significantly related to desistance. Youth who had a higher average number of YCJA convictions on their first conviction were more likely to desist. In addition, throughout their criminal career desisters had a lower average number of convictions and had convictions across fewer offence types. Finally, when examining their last conviction before age 18, desisters were significantly younger than non-desisters.

These four factors were entered into the forward stepwise logistic regression model and the only factor to enter the equation was age at last conviction before age 18 (Wald(1)=13.445, $p<.001$). This indicated that of the offence variables, age at last conviction was the only significant predictor of desistance.

7.8.3 Sentence Characteristics Model

Previous sections presented findings related to the youths' historical involvement with the justice system, specifically the types and lengths/amounts of sentences they received on their first conviction (Section 7.5) and their overall sentence history (Section 7.7). A number of sentencing variables were significantly related to desistance. Desisters were less likely to have firearm prohibitions on first offence and were more likely to have had an ISSO sentence on first conviction. Further, historically, desisters received fewer secure custody sentences, community supervision sentences, probation sentences, and firearm prohibitions. However, desisters received more ISSO sentences. In addition, non-desisters received a greater variety of sentences over their careers.

These eight variables were entered into the forward stepwise logistic regression equation. On the first step, total firearm prohibitions entered the equation, indicating that this variable was the single most important predictor of desistance (Wald(1)=6.855, $p<.01$). On the second step, total intensive support and supervision orders entered the equation, indicating that this variable in combination with total firearm prohibitions more accurately predicted desistance (Wald(1)=6.119, $p<.05$). On the third step, total secure custody time entered the equation as a significant predictor indicating that these three variables together provided the most accurate prediction of desistance than any of the factors alone (Wald(1)=4.182, $p<.05$).

7.8.4 Final Model

The characteristics that were found to be significant in each of the three previous models were combined into a final predictive model for desistance. These characteristics included age at last conviction before age 18, total firearm prohibitions, total ISSO sentences, and total secure custody sentences.

When included in the forward stepwise logistic regression model, age at last conviction before age 18 entered into the equation on the first step, indicating that it was the best predictor of desistance (Wald(1)=5.13.445, $p<.001$). In step 2 of the regression, total ISSO sentences entered into the equation to improve the predictability of the model (Wald(1)=5.505, $p<.05$). Finally, total firearm prohibitions entered into the model on step 3 as a significant predictor to improve the predictability of the model further (Wald(1)=7.059, $p<.01$). Overall, the final model indicates that being younger at last conviction before age 18, having been sentenced more often to the ISSO, and having fewer firearm prohibitions are the best predictors of desistance.

8.0 SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

8.1 Summaries

8.1.1 Profile of Study Participants

Information for the profile of study participants was obtained from probation file reviews (n=170) and interviews (n=52). Data on individual, family, peer, school, and community characteristics were analyzed descriptively for all 170 youth in the study sample.

Demographic Characteristics

- The majority of youth whose probation files were reviewed were male (81.2%) and 17 years of age at the beginning of the research study (60.6%). Similarly, 90.4% of the youth who participated in an interview were male and 63.5% were 17 years of age at the time of their interview.

- File reviews indicated that 47.4% of the file review sample was Caucasian, while 36.4% were Native or Métis. The substantial majority of youth were born in Canada (89.9%).

Family Characteristics

- File reviews indicated that the majority of the youths' parents were either separated (31.5%) or divorced (30.1%), while 16.1% were married.

- Over one-third of youth were living with one parent (34.4%), while 10.6% were living with both biological parents. Almost one-fifth of youth (17.5%) were incarcerated at the time their file was reviewed, and 13.8% were living in a foster or group home.

- The majority of youth had run away from home at least once (58.1%) and over one-third had been kicked out of their home (36.8%).

- The majority of youth had experienced family violence in some form (77.1%); over one-half (58.8%) had been a victim of family violence and 24.1% had been a victim of sexual abuse.

- Probation files indicated that at least one of the participants' parents had been charged with a crime in 68.3% of cases, and a sibling had been charged with a crime in 48% of cases.

- The majority of youth had been involved with the child welfare system at some point (70.1%), and a substantial proportion had lived in foster care (39.9%) and/or a group home (50.7%).

- Data on child welfare involvement were obtained from the Child and Family Services Division of Human Services Alberta for a sample of 35 study participants who provided consent for release of this information.

- Twenty-six youth had at least one child welfare intervention; nine youth only received front-end child welfare services and did not have a legally mandated child welfare intervention. The most common intervention was Family Enhancement services followed by Child Protection services.

- The most common types of legally mandated child welfare interventions received under a legal authority were group home care, residential treatment, foster care, services in a YCJA facility, and supported independent living.

- Youth who received interventions under a legal mandate received child welfare services for an average of 1022 days and were in child welfare interventions for an average of 655 days.

- Youth who received services while out of their homes were in child welfare care for an average of 1064 days.

Personal Characteristics

- Probation files indicated that just over one-half of youth had received a psychological assessment (54.4%), and a similar proportion had received counselling or psychological treatment (54%).

- The most common diagnoses of psychological disorders were attention deficit disorder/attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (42.9%), followed by conduct disorder (33.7%). Almost one-fifth of study participants had been diagnosed with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (19%).

- Almost all youth (97.3%) had used alcohol and almost three-quarters (74.4%) had a history of alcohol abuse. Similarly, 96% of youth had used drugs and 80.8%

had a history of drug abuse. The substantial majority of participants had bought illegal drugs (88.7%) and one-half (50%) had sold illegal drugs.

- According to probation files, the most common drugs used by participants were marijuana (92.4%), followed by ecstasy (57.6%), mushrooms (35.4%), and cocaine (34.7%).

Educational Experiences

- Almost two-thirds of the youth (62.6%) were attending high school at the time of the file review, and two participants were pursuing post-secondary education. Almost all youth (98.6%) had a history of school truancy, and over one-half (57.9%) of youth had dropped out of school at some point.

- Almost all participants had a history of fighting with others at school (93.2%).

- During the interviews, youth were asked how much school they expected to complete, and the most common response was technical/trade school (42.3%), followed by high school (26.9%) and university (21.2%).

- Just over one-half of interviewed youth (51.9%) stated that they had taken a weapon to school, of these, one-third (33.3%) indicated that they had used a weapon at school.

- When youth who had taken a weapon to school were asked the type of weapon, the most common responses were knives (66.7%), pepper or bear spray (44.4%), clubs, bats or batons (33.3%), and metal knuckles (22.2%).

Social Life

- According to information contained in the probation files, almost all youth had a history of associating with delinquent peers (97.8%), and a substantial majority also had a history of engaging in criminal activity with their peers (91.4%).

- Almost all interviewed youth (90.4%) said that their close friends have been in trouble with the police, and three-quarters (75%) said that they get in trouble with their friends.

- When youth who were involved in a romantic relationship were asked if their boyfriend/girlfriend had ever been in trouble with the police, 30.8% indicated

that they had; however, only 11.5% of respondents said that they had ever been in trouble with the police while they were with their partner.

Community Life

- When interviewed youth were asked about the ethnic diversity of their neighbourhood, the majority (57.7%) indicated that it is multicultural and 25% said that it is predominantly white.

- The substantial majority of participants stated that they think their neighbourhood is safe (86.5%) while 11.5% indicated that they consider their neighbourhood is unsafe.

- Over one-third of participants (39.2%) reported that they have carried a weapon in their community and, of these, the substantial majority indicated that they had used a weapon in the community (94.1%).

- The most common weapons carried or used in the community were knives (80%), pepper/bear spray (70%), clubs/bats/batons (45%), swords/machetes (40%), and handguns (35%).

Self-reported Delinquency

- During the interviews, a substantial proportion of participants (85.4%) stated that they had damaged or destroyed someone's property on purpose; of those who had done this at some point, 41.5% said they had engaged in this behaviour within the past year.

- Over two-thirds of participants (69.4%) had broken into a home, and one-quarter of these (25.8%) had done so within the past year.

- Over two-thirds of participants (69.4%) reported that they had stolen something worth less than $50, and almost one-half of these youth (45.5%) had done so within the past year. Almost all youth (90%) said that they had stolen something worth more than $50 and, of these, over one-half (54.5%) had done so within the past year.

- A substantial proportion of youth (76%) indicated that they had stolen a car or motorcycle with 36.8% of these stating they had done so within the past year.

- When asked if they had ever stolen something using force or threat of force, 72.3% of youth indicated that they had; of these, 41.2% had done this within the past year.

- When respondents who had ever harassed, threatened, or bullied someone were asked if they had ever threatened someone with a weapon, four-fifths (79.5%) indicated that they had done this; 58.6% of these youth had done this within the past year.

- Almost all youth (93.9%) indicated that they had assaulted or hurt someone, and two-thirds of these youth (65.2%) had done so within the past year.

- When youth were asked if they had ever fought others with a group of their friends, 71.4% indicated that they had ever done this; 40% had done this within the past year.

Gangs

- When asked during the interviews if there are gangs at their school, 40.8% of respondents said that there are. A somewhat higher proportion of youth (58%) stated that there are gangs in their community.

- Over two-thirds of participants (68%) said that they have friends who are gang members.

- When asked if a gang had ever tried to recruit them, 68% of youth responded affirmatively. However, a substantially lower proportion (38.8%) stated that they had ever been a member of a gang.

- File data indicated that one-third of the youth in this sample have known gang involvement and one-third have friends who were gang members. The rate of gang membership in probation files was similar to the rate in the interviews.

Future Goals

- When asked during the interviews if they want to stop offending in the future, almost all youth (94%) said that they do.

- A substantial majority of youth (86%) indicated that they have specific career plans. When youth who said that they have specific career plans were asked if

they thought that their plan is a possibility, almost all (95.2%) stated that they think it is.

8.1.2 Police Occurrence Data

- Data on alleged police occurrences involving study participants were obtained from Edmonton Police Service and Calgary Police Service during the period from the point of a youth's first alleged criminal occurrence through August 31, 2013.

- The total number of occurrences for each participant ranged from 1 to 141, with an average of 26.9 occurrences per individual.

- Age of participants at the time of the alleged occurrences ranged from 6 to 20 years, with an average of 15.6 years.

- The most common offences involved in the alleged occurrences were property-related crimes, followed by other *Criminal Code* violations and person-related offences.

- Weapons were alleged to have been involved in 6% of all occurrences.

- In 77% of occurrences, charges were laid against the alleged offender. In cases where charges were not laid, the most common reasons were that it was determined that the occurrence was non-criminal, that that the offence was cleared otherwise because the alleged offender was involved in other incidents, and that there was insufficient evidence to lay a charge.

- Occurrences were most likely to take place on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays and were most common in the early afternoon and the late evening; offences were least likely to occur on Sundays.

- Study participants were involved in an average of 21 occurrences each while they were youth; the average number of occurrences per participant after they reached the age of 18 years was 6.

8.1.3 JOIN Data

Data for the retrospective offending profile were obtained from Justice Online Information Network (JOIN) Operations of Alberta Justice. Charge, charge outcome, and sentencing data to August 31, 2013 were analyzed descriptively for all 170 youth in the study sample.

Charges and Outcomes

- A total of 33,324 charges were laid against the 170 participants in the sample.
- A large majority of charges were laid against males (90.5%).
- Over three-quarters of the charges were laid prior the participants' 18th birthday; 16.3% were adult charges.
- The most common charge types were Other *Criminal Code* offences and *Youth Criminal Justice Act* (YCJA) offences.
- A large proportion of charges were withdrawn, dismissed, or stayed. Other provincial/municipal offences had the greatest proportion of charges withdrawn, dismissed, or stayed at 73.2%. Property offences were the least likely to have this outcome, with 23.2% of charges having been withdrawn, dismissed, or stayed.
- Property offences had the highest rate of conviction, at 49.2%. Other provincial/municipal offences had the lowest rate of conviction (23.2%).

First Offence

- The average age at first offence (as recorded in JOIN) was 13.8 years.
- A large majority of participants 90.6% had only one type of charge on their first offence.
- The majority of participants (70.6%) had only one charge on their first offence, 20% had two to five charges, and nearly 10% had more than five charges.
- Property offences were the most common charge type (63.5%), followed by person offences (32.9%), other *Criminal Code* (10.0%), drug offences (2.4%), YCJA offences (1.2%), other provincial/municipal offences (0.6%) and traffic offences (0.6%).
- Regarding outcomes, 64.1% of participants were guilty and sentenced, 35.9% had charges withdrawn, dismissed, or stayed, and 15.3% had charges withdrawn due to alternative or extrajudicial measures. Other outcomes accounted for 2.9% of first offences.

- On average, participants were age 14.8 when they were first convicted of an offence, ranging from 12.3 to 17.6 years.

- On average, nearly one year passed between when a participant was first charged and when he/she was convicted.

Convictions

- The 170 participants in the sample had 10,981 convictions, averaging 64.6 charges that resulted in conviction.

- A large majority of convictions were against males (87.0%).

- Nearly half of the convictions occurred at ages 16 or 17.

- The 170 participants averaged 55.6 youth convictions. The most commonly convicted youth charges were for YCJA offences (32.8%) and other *Criminal Code* offences (28.9%).

- Ninety-six participants registered adult convictions. These participants averaged 16 adult convictions. The most commonly convicted adult charges were for other *Criminal Code* offences (47.3%).

Sentence Profile

- Probation was the most common form of sentence, with 99.4% having been sentenced to probation at least once. On average, the participants spent 32.0 months on probation.

- Ninety-four percent of participants had been sentenced to secure custody at least once. On average, the participants spent 8.9 months in secure custody, ranging from .03 months to 133.9 months.

- Community supervision and community service were also relatively common, with 72.3% and 68.8% of youth, respectively, having had these types of sentences at least once. On average, the youth spent 7.1 months on community supervision. The average amount of time spent on community service was 49.1 hours.

- 61.8% of youth had a firearm prohibition.

- Just under half (44.7%) of the youth were sentenced to open custody, with the youth spending on average of 3.7 months serving open custody sentences. The total amount of open custody time served ranged from .33 to 17.3 months.

- Just under half of the youth (47.1%) had been sentenced to attendance centre. Total attendance hours averaged 51.4 hours, but ranged from 10 to 245 hours.

- Youth were sentenced to a range of financial penalties. The most common were fines (51.8%) followed by restitution (19.4%). On average, youth paid $565.70 in fines, ranging from $0.50 to $3,025. The average restitution amount paid was $400, ranging from $74 to $4,185.

- Forty-six percent of youth had at least one sentence of deferred custody and supervision and 15.3% had at least one conditional discharge. Suspended sentences and absolute discharges were less common.

- Intensive support and supervision orders were given to 13.5% of youth. On average, the youth spent 13.6 months serving these orders.

8.1.4 Predictors of Desistance from Offending

- Of the 170 youth in the sample, only 28 (17%) desisted from offending after turning 18.

- A number of personal, family, school, and peer characteristics from the probation file reviews were examined to determine which were significantly related to desistance. Two factors were found to be significant – parental criminality and history of gang involvement. Youth were more likely to desist from offending if their parents were not criminally involved or if the youth did not have a history of gang involvement.

- Characteristics of the youths' first conviction were examined to determine if they were significantly related to desistance. On average, youth who desisted had more *Youth Criminal Justice Act* charges convicted.

- Youth who desisted were significantly more likely to have an intensive support and supervision order (ISSO) sentenced on their first conviction, and to have a higher average ISSO length sentenced. They were also significantly less likely to have been given a firearm prohibition on their first offence.

- Overall, when examining age at their last conviction before turning 18, desisters were significantly younger than non-desisters.

- Overall, youth who desisted had significantly fewer total convictions than youth who did not desist, and were convicted of significantly fewer different offence types.

- Overall, youth who desisted were sentenced fewer times to secure custody, community supervision, probation, and firearm prohibitions than non-desisters, and were sentenced more often to intensive support and supervision.

- Overall, youth who desisted spent significantly less time in secure custody, community supervision, and probation. Youth who desisted spent significantly more time on intensive support and supervision orders.

- Overall, youth who desisted received significantly fewer different types of sentences.

- A logistic regression model examining offence history characteristics revealed that age at last conviction before turning 18 was the best predictor of desistance. Youth who desisted were significantly younger when they received their last conviction before turning 18.

- A logistic regression model examining sentence characteristics revealed that having fewer firearm prohibitions, receiving more intensive support and supervision orders, and serving less time in secure custody were the best predictors of desistance.

- A final logistic regression model using the significant predictors of desistance in the social, offence, and sentencing characteristics model revealed that being younger at last conviction before age 18, receiving more intensive support and supervision orders, and receiving fewer firearm prohibitions were the best predictors of desistance.

8.2 Discussion

This report summarizes the findings of a four-year study of pathways and transitions of persistent youth offenders in Alberta. The overall objectives of the study were to understand the factors that differentiate persistent youth offenders who offend into adulthood from those who do not, understand these factors in a developmental

context, and provide focussed information to develop and improve multi-sectoral prevention and intervention initiatives.

The following research questions were addressed in this report:

(1) What are the known life-course trajectories for persistent youth offenders as established in the literature?

(2) What individual, family, peer, school, and community risk factors can be identified among a sample of persistent youth offenders?

(3) What characterizes the offending behaviour of the sample of persistent youth offenders?

(4) What is the nature and extent of persistent youth offenders' involvement with the youth justice system?

(5) What are the patterns in risk factors and offending behaviour that can be identified, and how do these patterns predict offending behaviour in adulthood?

To address these research questions, a cohort of 170 persistent youth offenders born between September 1, 1992 and September 1, 1994 was selected. Persistent youth offenders were defined as youth who had *Criminal Code* or *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act* convictions on five or more different occasions while young persons. All of the youth in the sample had their last youth court appearances in Calgary (n=80) or Edmonton (n=90).

A number of sources of data were used for this report. First, data collected from probation file reviews conducted on all 170 youth from October 1, 2010 to August 31, 2011 and life history interviews conducted with 52 youth during the same time period were used to create a retrospective social profile of the youth in the sample. Data obtained from the Child and Family Services Division of Alberta Human Services on 38 youth provided supplemental data on child welfare involvement. Finally, police occurrence data and Justice Online Information Network (JOIN) data on police occurrences, charges, convictions, and sentencing were obtained and analyzed to create an understanding of the participants' criminal histories.

Overall, the study yielded a rich collection of data on the 170 persistent youth offenders in the sample. Detailed retrospective profiles were generated through the life history interviews, file reviews, and child welfare data. The data provided by JOIN and Calgary and Edmonton Police Services allowed for a thorough retrospective and

longitudinal analysis of offending behaviour. However, though a number of the research questions were answered with the data that were obtained, the limitations of the study prevented the researchers from exploring developmental pathways and transitions of youth offending to the extent that the objectives of the study necessitated. Specifically it was intended that follow-up interviews be conducted with the youth who consented (n=40) in order to assess those social factors which influenced the youths' pathways of offending, however, a large majority of the youth proved impossible to contact, and only one participant was interviewed. Thus, a major limitation of the study was that there was no longitudinal life course data, other than police contact, charges, convictions, and sentences, to meaningfully discuss those social factors that lead to desistance. The examination of social factors was limited to the influence of historical events on future pathways and transitions and offending behaviour. In addition, the nature of the life history data available created methodological issues in that there were too few interviews to use those data in the predictive models, and the third-party nature of the file review data resulted in a large amount of missing data as well as issues related to reliability. Though the study benefited from the acquisition of child welfare data from Alberta Human Services, too few youth consented to the release of these data for them to be useful in the predictive models. Further, the study would have benefited from a longer follow-up period to gain a more accurate and reliable idea of desistance among the sample. Future studies would benefit from a longer follow-up period; however, given the unpredictable nature of many of their lives, persistent youth offenders are simply a difficult population to study longitudinally.

Despite the limitations, the data obtained did result in a number of meaningful findings about persistent youth offenders in Alberta, and for some preliminary conclusions to be drawn about pathways to desistance. Though the literature suggests defining desistance as a process rather than simply the termination of offending, for this study, given the small sample size and data limitations, desistance was defined as the absence of contact with the justice system during the two-year follow-up period (i.e., police contact, justice system contact). Of the 170 youth in the sample only 17% desisted according to this definition, indicating that few persistent offenders desist as they transition to adulthood. However, given the short period of time that the study allowed for determining desistance, it is possible both that those who were categorized as non-desisters may desist as they get further into adulthood, and that some who were identified as desisters may reoffend beyond the two-year follow-up period.

The presence of multiple individual, family, peer, school, and community risk factors throughout childhood and adolescence has a potentially negative effect on the individual and social capital that is required for persistent youth offenders to desist from offending in adulthood. Findings from the interviews were consistent with the literature suggesting that persistent youth offenders tend to display impulsiveness and

low self control (Farrington, 2005; Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). A large majority of those interviewed (84.6%) indicated that they were risk takers. Further, Pauwels et al. (2011) suggest that low morality explains higher levels of offending; nearly 85% of those interviewed indicated that they would break the rules to enjoy new and exciting experiences.

Also on an individual level, findings from the retrospective data supported suggestions in the literature that hyperactivity predicts persistent offending (e.g., Leschied et al., 2008; MacRae et al., 2011; Rabiner et al., 2005). Nearly half the sample had a diagnosis of ADHD, and approximately half of those interviewed found it difficult to pay attention. In addition, aggression is an individual characteristic that has been found to be consistent with persistent youth offending (Broidy et al., 2003; Chen, 2009). Self-report and offending data indicated a high propensity for aggressive behaviour toward others among the youth in the sample.

In addition, mental health proved to be a potentially critical risk factor, with over half the youth in the sample having a mental health diagnosis. The effect of mental health issues on reoffending has also been shown in the literature (Day et al., 2008; DeGusti et al., 2009), pointing to the need for interventions and supports in this area. Addiction issues were particularly apparent, with nearly three-quarters having a history of alcohol abuse and just over 80% having a history of drug abuse, according to the file reviews. The youth interviewed also reported a particularly low average age of onset for drug and alcohol use (age 12.2 and 11.6, respectively); however, youth reported being as young as 6 when they first tried alcohol and 7 when they first used drugs. Thus, as these youth face the challenges of the transition to adulthood, attitude, behaviour, mental health, and addiction may serve as barriers to successful transitions and criminal desistance, important factors to consider in studying offending pathways and future trajectories.

The literature also identifies a number of critical family risk factors that lead to persistent youth offending. Of particular importance are child maltreatment and the experience of inter-parental conflict (Lemmon, 2006; Leschied et al., 2008; Smith et al., 2005). Over three-quarters of the youth in the sample had experienced family violence – over half as a victim. Nearly two-thirds of the sample had also experienced neglect. Though data limitations prevented more thorough analyses, future research examining the experience of family violence in the context of development will be important to assess the long-term impact on offending (Currie & Covell, 1998; Tyler et al., 2008; Widom, 2010).

Family disruption is also an important consideration in examining persistent, life course offending (Schroeder et al., 2010). Well over half of the study sample had

parents who were either separated or divorced, and an additional 16% had parents who never lived together. On average, family breakdown occurred when youth were five years of age, and while three-quarters of youth had a relationship with their mother, only half had a relationship with their father. Only one-third of the youth lived with one parent, and only a tenth of the sample lived with both parents. Many of the youth no longer lived with their parents, with nearly a fifth living in foster care or a group home, and approximately 13% living independently. Some youth lived with extended family or on the street. Not living with both parents was found by MacRae et al. (2009) to be a strong predictor of reoffending. Ward and Day's (2010) study of offending trajectories suggests that youth who experience family disruption during childhood are likely to follow a moderate trajectory of offending.

Parental criminality has been linked to a moderate to high offending trajectory (Ward & Day, 2010). Two-thirds of the study sample had at least one parent charged with a crime, and a majority of these had a parent incarcerated. Parental criminality turned out to be one of the only social factors in this study that was statistically significantly related to desistance. Youth who desisted were significantly less likely to have at least one parent who was charged with a crime, suggesting that the absence of this negative influence may increase the likelihood that a youth is able to desist from offending as they enter adulthood. This supports the finding by Ward and Day (2010) that youth who have criminal family members are more likely to have a moderate to high rate trajectory of offending in the future.

The effects of family breakdown are particularly apparent when youth become involved with the child welfare system. The Institute's previous study of youth reoffending (MacRae et al., 2009) revealed that chronic youth offenders are far more likely to be involved with the child welfare system than one-time offenders. The transition to adulthood literature (e.g., Bosick & Gover, 2010) suggests that aging out of the system makes the transition particularly difficult for these youth, given that the resources provided are no longer available. This is a reality for the youth in the study sample, given 70% were found to be involved with the child welfare system in some capacity, with the average age of first involvement being 8 years of age. The data provided by Alberta Human Services on 38 of the youth revealed that a substantial proportion were heavily involved in the child welfare system for a long period of time. The trajectory literature (e.g., Ward & Day, 2010) suggest that youth who have a history of alternative care in childhood or adolescence have greater odds of a higher rate of offending.

Peer factors are an important consideration in examining the course of persistent youth offending, with significant evidence in the literature pointing to the detrimental effect of negative peer association (Farrington, 2005; Jennings et al., 2009; Mears & Field,

2002; Mellin & Fang, 2010). Nearly all of the youth in the sample had a history of associating with delinquent peers, and a large proportion engaged in criminal activity with friends. The influence of negative peers is an important consideration given very few youth in the sample, less than 20%, participated in structured activities in their spare time; this is particularly critical given previous findings demonstrating the protective effect of structured activities (e.g., MacRae et al., 2009). However, an important factor to note with regard to peer influence is the effect of being in an intimate relationship – of those interviewed who reported having a partner, over three-quarters reported that their offending decreased as a result.

Importantly, as found by the Canadian Research Institute for Law and the Family in 2009, association with gang-involved peers is significantly linked to youth offending (MacRae et al., 2009). Once again, the findings from this study showed that gang involvement is a highly significant risk factor for persistent youth offenders. One-third of the youth in the sample had known gang involvement and one-third had friends that were gang members. When tests of significance were conducted to determine the influence of gang involvement on desistance, having ever been involved in a gang was found to be significant. Youth who desisted were less likely to have been a member of gang, pointing to the potentially detrimental impact of gang involvement on long-term criminal involvement.

The importance of gang influence as a risk factor extends to findings regarding community, with nearly half of the youth interviewed reporting gangs in their school and over half reporting gangs in their community. The presence of gangs in the community may contribute to the overall effect of neighbourhood poverty or disorganization. Though studies have found that neighbourhood factors have an indirect effect on persistent offending (e.g., Chauhan & Reppucci, 2009), it is important to note that a majority of the youth interviewed reported living in a middle class neighbourhood, while only a relatively small proportion (12%) reported living in a poor neighbourhood. However, their self-reports of socio-economic conditions in their neighbourhoods may not be accurate.

One-third of youth also reported carrying a weapon in the community, and nearly all of these youth reported using it. This is especially important given the findings from the Institute's 2009 study suggesting that having carried a weapon in the community is a significant predictor of future offending (MacRae et al., 2009). In this study, having had a firearm prohibition resulting from their first conviction and having more firearm prohibitions overall were significantly related to non-desistance, with the latter proving to be a predictor in both the sentence model and final logistic regression model. This suggests that youth who did not desist displayed behaviours that necessitated firearm prohibitions early on and throughout in their criminal careers.

When considering the importance of social capital as youth transition to adulthood, school risk factors are of particular importance, especially given the role that post-secondary education plays in emerging adulthood (Settersten & Ray, 2010). Probation file reviews found that though a majority of youth were attending school, approximately 18% of these youth were incarcerated in a young offender facility, where they must attend school. Nearly three-quarters were below average in school performance (though self-report was somewhat different in this regard), and many struggled with behaviour issues and school attachment. A majority of youth had a history of truancy and over half had dropped out at some point, which speaks to both poor attachment to school and a lack of daily structure. Further, a large majority of youth had negative school experiences, including being bullied, bullying others, and getting into fights. Importantly, just over half the youth interviewed had taken a weapon to school, which MacRae et al. (2009) found to be a significant predictor of future offending. However, none of these factors was related to desistance at statistically significant levels in this study.

Charge, conviction, and sentencing data allowed for a thorough analysis of the relationship of criminal behaviour patterns and desistance. A number of offending characteristics were examined. First, age of first offence is an important consideration given the literature suggests that the earlier youth begin offending, the greater the likelihood they will continue to offend into adulthood (Mullis et al., 2005). The average age of first offence for the youth in the sample was found to be 13.8 years, but it varied from 11.3 to 16.9 (noting that the youth aged 11.3 was later charged with this offence that allegedly began at this age). Self-report data support these findings, suggesting the onset for delinquent activity is largely in early adolescence (age 11-13). Age at first conviction was found to be 14.8 years, ranging from 12.3 to 17.6 years. Given findings in the trajectory literature related to the relationship between age of onset of criminal activity and offending trajectory (e.g., Livingston et al., 2008), it was somewhat surprising that when examined in relation to desistance and non-desistance, age at first offence and conviction were not found to be significant predictors. However, this might be explained by the homogenous nature of the sample, given that it was selected based on similarities in the youths' criminal histories.

Discussions of offending trajectories in the literature focus predominantly on frequency of offending (e.g., Day et al., 2008; Chung et al., 2002; Moffitt et al., 2002). The data obtained for this study allowed for a thorough examination of offending frequency. Analyses of the police occurrence and JOIN data revealed that the 170 youth in the sample were extremely prolific offenders, but also that there was a tremendous range in the frequency of offending. The youth in the sample were convicted on nearly 11,000 charges, but the range was as low as five convictions upward to 445 convictions.

Tests of significance revealed that youth who desisted had significantly fewer total convictions over the course of their criminal careers. Thus, this study supports findings in the literature related to offending frequency and desistance.

According to the literature, another important characteristic in distinguishing offending trajectories is type of offences committed (Fergusson et al., 2000; Weisner & Capaldi, 2003). Police occurrence and JOIN data revealed a wide range of offences committed by the youth in the sample, however, only subtle differences between desisters and non-desisters were found when tests of significance were conducted. Youth who desisted were convicted of significantly more *Youth Criminal Justice Act* charges their first conviction than youth who did not desist. This may suggest that youth who desist may have had a less serious start to their criminal careers.

Analysis of the effect of sentencing on persistent youth offenders revealed that secure custody was the second most common sentence among the group, with 94% of the youth having been given a secure custody sentence at least once. Though the total amount of time youth were sentenced to secure custody ranged greatly (1 day to 133.39 months), the unintended consequences of incarceration identified by Clear et al. (2001), such as stigma, financial issues, struggles with identity, and deficits in community relationships, are important considerations in relation to offending trajectories. The findings from this study were consistent with the implications of time spent in secure custody. Youth who desisted received significantly fewer secure custody sentences and spent significantly less time in custody. The number of secure custody sentences proved to be a significant predictor in the sentence model logistic regression. This is an important finding considering that even though non-desisters spent more time in custody, they were still more prolific than desisters.

Another significant finding related to sentencing was the impact of the Intensive Support and Supervision Order (ISSO) made available to the court in the *Youth Criminal Justice Act*. Study results revealed that youth who desisted were significantly more likely to receive an ISSO on first conviction, that these ISSO sentences on first conviction were significantly longer, and that overall, desisters spent more time on ISSO sentences over the course of their careers than non-desisters. The positive effect of the ISSO extended to the predictive models, with receiving more ISSO sentences being a significant predictor of desistance in the future. Thus, although ISSOs were made infrequently, they were a significant predictor of desistance for the youth who received them. Overall, findings related to sentencing suggest that the ISSO, and its increased access to community supports and supervisions, has a significant positive effect on persistent youth offenders. Sentencing to secure custody is related to an intensification of offending behaviour.

One very interesting finding was related to age at last conviction prior to turning 18. Findings from the logistic regressions suggest that being younger at last conviction prior to turning age 18 is a significant predictor of desistance. On average, youth who desisted were 16.7 at the time of their last conviction before turning 18, compared to 17.5 for non-desisters. This suggests that the desisters in this sample stopped offending well before their 18th birthday, providing some evidence for the adolescence-limited offending trajectories observed by Moffitt (1993) and others (Day et al., 2008; Van der Gest et al., 2009).

Moffitt (1993) argued that adolescent-limited and life-course persistent offenders closely resemble one another during early adolescence. Ultimately the homogenous nature of the youth in this study and the data limitations proved difficult to effectively distinguish desisters from non-desisters using retrospective data alone. However, though the study could not completely address some of the research questions, the fact that it was one of the first of its kind to examine persistent youth offenders in Alberta is important for future research and policy. Similar to the Institute's previous study of youth offending (MacRae et al., 2009), descriptive findings from this study related to individual, family, peer, community, and school risk factors make a convincing argument for the importance of early intervention programs and opportunities for at-risk and vulnerable youth. Programs that have been developed to address children and youth at risk, such as Gateway for first time offenders, Multi-Agency School Support Teams (MASST) for at risk youth, and the Youth At Risk Development (YARD) Program for youth at risk of gang involvement, have the potential to make a real difference in the lives of children and youth who may continue on a path to persistent youth offending. These early intervention programs may not only lead to healthier children and youth but may lead to a long-term decrease in demand for resources in various systems, including justice, health, and social services. In addition, findings related to risk factors may also inform the development of more accurate risk assessment tools for youth in Alberta.

The results have important implications with regard to youth sentencing. Though the findings with regard to secure custody are intuitive given the fact that non-desisters seemed to be more prolific in their offending, the fact that they spent more time in custody *and* had considerably more convictions suggests that these youth may require more support and assistance than a secure custody sentence can provide. The results of this study also suggest a positive impact of the ISSO on future desistance, and increased resources dedicated to this sentence may lead to long-term benefits in multiple systems.

Though the data in this study were limited, the literature stresses that the transition to adulthood is a critical time that is marked by the formation of

relationships, building social capital, and making decisions that affect an individual's future (Osgood et al., 2010). For youth at risk, this period of transition may be marked by problematic events and a lack of the resources and supportive relationships that are essential to successful transition. At-risk youth suffer deficits in the eight key areas that Reid and Dudding (2006) identify as important to supporting successful transition: education; housing; relationships; life skills; identity; youth engagement; emotional healing; and financial support. As Barry (2007) noted, youth offenders who do not gain legitimate means to fulfill these needs continue to find illegitimate means to do so. Support in these areas through the transition to adulthood is likely to contribute to desistance, particularly for youth offenders who have been involved in the child welfare system or those who have been incarcerated (Bosic & Gover, 2010; Clear et al., 2001; Leadbeater et al., 2008).

Continued efforts to study at-risk youth are vital to evidence-based decision-making with regard to policy and programming. A longitudinal study with a longer follow-up period would provide for more conclusive findings with regard to long-term desistance, and would allow desistance to be examined as a process as opposed to simply the termination of offending. Though finding these youth to engage in a follow-up interview proved to be extremely difficult in this study, the two-year follow-up period may have hampered these efforts in the sense that the youth may have long moved on. Thus, future studies may benefit from shorter and more regular periods of follow-up so that researchers might keep track of the youth and their movements. Further, the ability to contact them in custody or through adult probation may also lead to greater success.

Future Alberta studies would also benefit from a larger sample size. This would likely allow for more life history interviews (and ultimately decreased reliance on third-party life history information as provided in probation files), potentially more follow-up interviews, and an increased ability to draw reliable conclusions from predictive models. A larger sample size would also enable researchers to more thoroughly examine distinct offender groups and contrast their pathways to offending, such as those discussed by Loeber et al. (1998), Fergusson et al. (2000), White et al. (2001), Moffitt et al., (2002), Ward and Day (2010), etc.

8.3 Recommendations

The results of this four-year study of pathways and transitions of persistent youth offenders in Alberta have yielded the following recommendations:

(1) Future research is required to more closely examine the trajectories of different types of offenders and the impact of risk factors at various stages of

development. This information would allow for a more targeted approach to prevention and early intervention. To be successful, these studies would benefit from a larger sample size, a longer period of follow-up, and more frequent contact with the youth to ensure long-term life course data is collected.

(2) Future research is required to examine more closely the interaction between child welfare involvement and persistent youth offending. Findings reported from this study suggest that persistent youth offenders are heavily involved in the child welfare system, though it is unclear exactly what impact child welfare involvement has on the youths' developmental trajectories. Preliminary analyses of the data collected from Alberta Human Services suggested that longer periods of time in care may be related to desistance, though this finding was not reported due to the small sample size. It is important that future studies more thoroughly examine the developmental role that the child welfare system plays in the lives of at-risk children and youth.

(3) Findings from this study point to a number of individual, family, peer, school, and community risk factors experienced by children who become persistent offenders. These findings support the development of early intervention programs that target children who are at-risk due to family breakdown, parental criminality, mental health issues, addiction, poverty, gang involvement, and other factors. Given persistent youth offenders are committing offences at a very young age, these programs would likely have the most impact during childhood. Though there are a number of examples of early intervention programs in Alberta, evaluation of these programs is critical to inform best practice in other communities.

(4) Similar to previous studies, gang involvement was found to be significantly related persistent offending. This finding supports the continued development of Alberta's Gang Reduction Strategy, as well as prevention and intervention programs.

(5) This study suggests that the Intensive Support and Supervision Order provided under the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* may have a significant impact on the pathways of persistent youth offenders, increasing the likelihood of desistance. A closer examination of the use of the ISSO in Canada is needed in order to better understand its short- and long-term impact.

(6) Findings from this study suggest that a majority of persistent youth offenders continue offending into adulthood. Given many of the supports available to this population are only available to age 18, this speaks to the importance of

extending social supports beyond age 18 to foster a more successful transition to adulthood.

(7) Similar to the Institute's previous study of youth offending (MacRae et al., 2009), findings from this study suggest that a majority of crime committed by persistent youth offenders occurs during the day, and that many of these youth are not well engaged in school. This points to the importance of structured daily activity and the development of initiatives to keep youth engaged and interested in school or work.

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GLOSSARY

Categorical Data: Categorical data refer to variables that can only take on one of a limited number of possible values. For example, in this study, parents' marital status is a categorical variable because the only possible values are married, common law, never lived together, separated, divorced, or widowed. A dichotomous variable is an example of categorical data in which the number of possible values is only two.

CC: The federal *Criminal Code of Canada*

Chi-square Analysis or χ^2 Analysis: This is a test of statistical significance that is used to determine whether differences between two sets of categorical data represent "real" differences in the population under study or whether the differences should be attributed to chance.

CPIC: The Canadian Police Information Centre, which maintains a national database containing information on individuals' conviction records, warrant status and other matters relating to criminal involvement.

CPS: The Calgary Police Service

Dependent Variable: The dependent variable refers to a characteristic that is being investigated and whose value is assumed to depend upon the values of one or more other characteristics ("independent variables"). For example, in this study, "desister" is a dependent variable because whether a youth desists from offending as they transition to adulthood is believed to be related to other characteristics.

Dichotomous Variable: This refers to a characteristic that can only have two values. For example, in the present study, "desister" is a dichotomous variable because it can only have the values of "Yes" or "No."

EPS: The Edmonton Police Service

HTA: The provincial *Highway Traffic Act*

Independent Variable: An independent variable is a characteristic that can be measured or determined and that will not change as a result of changes in other

characteristics. For example, gender is frequently used as an independent variable in research studies.

ISSO: Intensive Support and Supervision Order, an order which can be made as part of a sentence under the federal *Youth Criminal Justice Act*.

JOIN: Justice Online Information Network, an Alberta provincial database containing information on individuals' conviction and sentence records.

Logistic Regression Analysis: This refers to a type of statistical test in which one or more independent variables are used in an attempt to predict the value of a categorical dependent variable. For example, in this study, independent variables such as parental criminal activity and youths' gang involvement are used to try to predict desistance from offending in adulthood.

Mean: The mean is the average response to a question. It is calculated by adding up all of the responses received and then dividing the resulting sum by the total number of responses.

Median: The median is the mid-point of all responses to a question such that one-half of responses are more than the median value and one-half of responses are less.

Missing Cases: The number of responses on individual questions that are not available. The most common reason for missing cases in survey or interview data is that the respondent chose not to answer a particular question. In file review data, missing cases are usually the result of the relevant information not being included in the file.

Multiple Response Data: Multiple response data refers to questions in which respondents are allowed to choose more than one answer. In tables where multiple response data are presented, the percentages presented for individual items will total more than 100.

MVAA: The provincial *Motor Vehicle Administration Act*

N *and* n: N refers to the total number of respondents to a survey or interview or the total number of files that were available for review while n refers to a subset of the total responses that may be selected for specific data analyses. For example, if 100 people respond to a survey, N = 100. If 30 of those respondents identify as female, then n = 30 females and n = 70 males.

p value: The *p* (probability) value is used to determine whether the differences observed between two groups represent "real" differences in the population under study or whether they should be attributed to chance. *p* values range from 0 to 1, with numbers closer to 0 indicating that the value of the dependent variable likely results from the value of the independent variable; *p* values closer to 1 indicate that the values of the variables are more likely unrelated. The commonly accepted threshold of statistical significance is $p = .05$, which indicates that the difference observed between groups would only be attributable to chance in 5 cases out of 100.

Prospective Longitudinal Study: This is a type of research design in which a group of study participants is identified and is assessed one or more times in the future.

PSECA: The provincial *Protection of Sexually Exploited Children Act*

Range: The lowest and highest responses from the range of responses received to a question.

Representativeness: The extent to which the responses to a survey or interview are likely to reflect the responses that would be given if every potential respondent could be surveyed or interviewed.

Response Rate: The percentage of completed surveys out of the total number distributed to potential respondents. In the case of interviews, the response rate refers to the number of completed interviews out of the total number of individuals contacted for an interview.

Statistical Significance: An expression of the extent to which any differences observed between two or more groups on a characteristic should be attributed to chance or whether they represent "real" differences in the population under study. Statistical significance is represented by the *p* (probability) value.

T-Test: A test of statistical significance used to determine if the difference between two mean is large enough that the difference cannot be attributed to chance. The *p* (probability) value expresses the significance of the *t*-test.

YCJA: The federal *Youth Criminal Justice Act*

APPENDIX A

PROBATION FILE REVIEW FORM

PATHWAYS AND TRANSITIONS OF PERSISTENT YOUTH OFFENDERS IN ALBERTA

PROBATION FILE REVIEW FORM

Review Conducted by: Click here to enter text.
ID#: Click here to enter text.
Location: ☐ **Calgary** ☐ **Edmonton**
Date: Click here to enter a date.

PART A: Background

1. **ID #:** Click here to enter text.
2. **Gender:** Male ☐ Female ☐
3. **Date of Birth:** Click here to enter a date.

4. **Racial/Ethnic Background**

☐ Caucasian
☐ Native
☐ Métis
☐ Asian
☐ Other (specify): Click here to enter text.
☐Middle-Eastern
☐African
☐Mulatto
☐Hispanic
☐ Unknown

5. **Country of Birth**

☐Canada
☐United States
☐Other (specify): Click here to enter text.
☐ Unknown

6. **Current Living Arrangement(s)**

☐Mother and father together
☐Father
☐Mother
☐Stepmother
☐Stepfather
☐Grandparent(s)
☐Sibling(s)
☐Other relative (specify): Click here to enter text.
☐Foster parents
☐Legal guardian
☐Group home
☐Incarcerated
☐Roommate
☐Spouse/partner
☐Live alone
☐Other living arrangement (specify): Click here to enter text.

7. Parents' Marital Status

☐Married ☐Separated
☐Common law ☐Divorced
☐Never lived together ☐Widowed
☐Other (specify): Click here to enter text.

If parents split up, age when occurred: Click here to enter text.

8. Parental Employment

Mother employed: ☐No ☐ Yes ☐ N/A
Father employed: ☐No ☐ Yes ☐ N/A
Step-mother employed: ☐No ☐ Yes ☐ N/A
Step-father employed: ☐No ☐ Yes ☐ N/A

9. Attachment to Family

Run away from home:
☐No ☐ Yes ☐ Unknown
If yes: Number of times: Click here to enter text.
Age first time: Click here to enter text.

Kicked out of home:
☐No ☐ Yes ☐ Unknown
If yes: Number of times: Click here to enter text.
Age first time: Click here to enter text.

Relationship with father:
☐No ☐ Yes ☐ Unknown
☐Positive ☐ Negative

Relationship with mother:
☐No ☐ Yes ☐ Unknown
☐Positive ☐ Negative

Relationship with sibling(s)?
☐No ☐ Yes ☐ Unknown
☐Positive ☐ Negative
☐Different relationships with different siblings

10. Familial Involvement in the Justice System:

Parent ever charged with a crime: ☐No ☐ Yes ☐ Unknown
If yes: parent ever incarcerated: ☐No ☐Yes

Sibling ever charged with a crime: ☐No ☐ Yes ☐ Unknown
If yes: sibling ever incarcerated: ☐No ☐Yes

11. Involvement with Child Welfare Services

Ever involved: ☐No ☐ Yes ☐ Unknown
If yes: age first time Click here to enter text.

Current guardianship order: ☐No ☐ Yes ☐ Unknown
If yes: ☐ Temporary ☐ Permanent ☐ Unknown

Previous guardianship order: ☐No ☐ Yes ☐ Unknown
If yes: ☐Temporary ☐ Permanent ☐Unknown

Ever been in foster care: ☐No ☐ Yes ☐ Unknown
If yes: age first time: Click here to enter text.
Number of foster homes: Click here to enter text.
Total time spent in foster care: Click here to enter text.

Ever been in a group home: ☐No ☐ Yes ☐ Unknown
If yes: age first time: Click here to enter text.
Number of group homes: Click here to enter text.
Total time spent in group home: Click here to enter text.

12. Family Violence/Neglect/Abuse

Experienced family violence: ☐ No ☐ Yes ☐ Unknown
If yes: ☐ Victim ☐ Witness ☐Perpetrator ☐ Unknown

Experienced neglect: ☐ No ☐ Yes ☐ Unknown

Experienced sexual abuse: ☐ No ☐ Yes ☐ Suspected ☐ Unknown
If yes: ☐ Victim ☐ Witness ☐Perpetrator ☐ Unknown

13. Mental Health

Psychological assessment: ☐ No ☐ Yes ☐Unknown
If yes: age at first assessment Click here to enter text.
Number of assessments: Click here to enter text.

Diagnosed with ADD/ADHD: ☐ No ☐ Yes ☐Unknown
If yes: prescribed medication:
Prescribed medication? ☐ No ☐ Yes ☐Unknown
Age when first diagnosed: Click here to enter text.

Diagnosed with other disorder?

☐ Conduct disorder
Age: Click here to enter text.
Prescribed medication: ☐ No ☐ Yes ☐Unknown

☐ Oppositional defiant disorder
Age: Click here to enter text.
Prescribed medication: ☐ No ☐ Yes ☐Unknown

☐ Learning disability
Age: Click here to enter text.
Prescribed medication: ☐ No ☐ Yes ☐Unknown

☐ Personality disorder
Age: Click here to enter text.
Prescribed medication: ☐ No ☐ Yes ☐Unknown

☐ Depressive disorder
Age: Click here to enter text.
Prescribed medication: ☐ No ☐ Yes ☐Unknown

☐ Anxiety disorder
Age: Click here to enter text.
Prescribed medication: ☐ No ☐ Yes ☐Unknown

☐ Fetal alcohol syndrome
Age: Click here to enter text.
Prescribed medication: ☐ No ☐ Yes ☐Unknown

☐ Other: Click here to enter text.
Age: Click here to enter text.
Prescribed medication: ☐ No ☐ Yes ☐Unknown

Counselling/treatment? ☐No ☐ Yes ☐ Unknown
If yes: age first time: Click here to enter text.
Number of occasions: Click here to enter text.

Additional notes on background information: Click here to enter text.

PART B: Community

1. Community Investment

How often youth moved growing up: Click here to enter text.
Youth changed schools when moved? ☐No ☐ Yes ☐ Unknown

Known to carry a weapon in the community? ☐No ☐Yes ☐ Unknown

Additional notes on community history: Click here to enter text.

PART C: School

1. School Investment

Currently attending high school:
☐ No ☐ Yes ☐ Attending post-secondary ☐ Unknown

School proficiency:
☐ Above average
☐ Average
☐ Below average
☐ Unknown

History of truancy:
☐No ☐Yes ☐Unknown

Dropped out of school:
☐No ☐Yes ☐Unknown

2. School Experience

History of being bullied:
☐No ☐Yes ☐Unknown

History of bullying others at school:
☐No ☐Yes ☐Unknown

History of fighting at school:
☐No ☐Yes ☐Unknown

Taken a weapon to school:
☐No ☐Yes ☐Unknown

Additional notes on school history: Click here to enter text.

PART D: Social Life

3. Peers

History of delinquent peers:
☐No ☐Yes ☐Unknown

Age of peers:
☐ Same age
☐ Mostly older

☐ Mostly younger
☐ Vary in age
☐ Unknown

Criminal activity with peers:
☐No ☐Yes ☐Unknown

In a relationship?
☐No ☐Yes ☐Unknown
If yes: criminal activity with boyfriend/girlfriend?
☐No ☐Yes ☐Unknown

4. Structured Activities

Involvement in structured activities?
☐No ☐Yes ☐Unknown

5. Employment

Currently employed:
☐No ☐Yes ☐Unknown

History of transient employment:
☐No ☐Yes ☐Unknown

6. Substance Use

Ever used alcohol?
☐ No ☐ Yes ☐Unknown
If yes:
Age when alcohol use started: Click here to enter text.
History of alcohol abuse:
☐No ☐Yes ☐Unknown
If yes: treatment for alcohol abuse:
☐No ☐Yes ☐Unknown

Ever used drugs?
☐ No ☐ Yes ☐Unknown
If yes:
Age when drug use started: Click here to enter text.
History of drug abuse:
☐No ☐Yes ☐Unknown
If yes: treatment for drug abuse:
☐No ☐Yes ☐Unknown

Drug(s) used:
☐ Marijuana ☐ Cocaine
☐ Steroids ☐ Crack

☐ Ecstasy
☐ Prescription drugs – (others)
☐ Mushrooms
☐ Crystal methamphetamine
☐Other: Click here to enter text.

Continue to abuse alcohol/drugs?
☐No ☐Yes ☐Unknown

Additional notes on social life history: Click here to enter text.

PART E: Offending History

1. Offending History

History of buying illegal drugs?
☐No ☐Yes ☐Unknown

History of selling illegal drugs?
☐No ☐Yes ☐Unknown

2. First Recorded Contact with Police

Age of first contact: Click here to enter text.
Description (incident, events preceding, police response, justice system response, family response, mental health response): Click here to enter text.

Additional notes on offending history: Click here to enter text.

PART E: Gang Involvement

1. Gang Involvement

Gang involvement (ever):
☐ Known
☐ Suspected
☐ Unknown
☐ Associate
☐ Recruited (not a member)
☐ Currently Involved
☐No Gang Involvement

Current friends/acquaintances gang members:
☐ Known
☐ Suspected
☐ Unknown

☐ Associate
☐ Recruited (not a member)
☐ Currently Involved
☐No Gang Involvement

2. Gang Membership Details

If gang involvement known/suspected:
Age at first involvement: Click here to enter text.
Gang composition: Click here to enter text.

Youth currently known/suspected to be in a gang:
☐No ☐Yes ☐Unknown

Additional notes on gang involvement: Click here to enter text.

PART G: Future Plans

1. Future plans: Click here to enter text.

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

PATHWAYS AND TRANSITIONS OF PERSISTENT YOUTH OFFENDERS IN ALBERTA

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Interview Conducted by: Click here to enter text.
ID#: Click here to enter text.
Location: ☐ **Calgary** ☐ **Edmonton**
Date: Click here to enter a date.

PART A: Background

1. How old are you? ☐17 years old ☐18 years old ☐ Other (specify) Click here to enter text.

2. What is your racial or ethnic background?
   ☐ Caucasian
   ☐ Native
   ☐ Metis
   ☐ Asian
   ☐ Other (specify)Click here to enter text.
   ☐ Middle-Eastern
   ☐ African
   ☐ Mulatto
   ☐ Hispanic

3. What country were you born in?
   ☐ Canada
   ☐ United States
   ☐ Other (specify) Click here to enter text.

4. Do you have any siblings? ☐No ☐ Yes

   If yes:
   Number of Brother(s):
   ☐ 1
   ☐ 2
   ☐ 3+
   Details: (e.g., older or younger) Click here to enter text.

   Number of Sister(s)
   ☐ 1
   ☐ 2
   ☐ 3+
   Details: (e.g., older or younger) Click here to enter text.

   Describe relationship with siblings: Click here to enter text.

5. Who do you live with most of the time?

☐ Mother and father together
☐ Father
☐ Mother
☐ Stepmother
☐ Stepfather
☐ Grandparent(s)
☐ Sibling(s)
☐ Other relative (specify) Click here to enter text.
☐ Foster parents
☐ Legal guardian
☐ Group home
☐ Incarcerated
☐ Roommate
☐ Spouse/partner
☐ Live alone
☐ Other living arrangement Click here to enter text.

6. Who was the most important person in raising you? Click here to enter text.

7. What is your parents' marital status? (Are they married, divorced, separated, remarried…?)

☐ Married
☐ Common law
☐ Never lived together
☐ Other (specify) Click here to enter text.
☐ Separated
☐ Divorced
☐ Widowed

If parents are divorced or separated: How old were you when they split up? Click here to enter text.

8. Do you have a good relationship with your parents? Explain: Click here to enter text.

9. Does your mother currently have a job? ☐No ☐ Yes ☐ N/A

10. Does your father currently have a job? ☐No ☐ Yes ☐ N/A

11. Have members of your family been in trouble with the law? ☐No ☐ Yes
If yes:

Family Member	No	Yes
Father	☐	☐
Mother	☐	☐
Sibling - specify Click here to enter text.	☐	☐
Sibling - specify Click here to enter text.	☐	☐
Sibling - specify Click here to enter text.	☐	☐

12. When you leave the house do your parents know where you are?
☐No ☐ Yes ☐ N/A ☐Sometimes

13. Do you share your thoughts and feelings with your parents?
☐No ☐ Yes ☐ N/A ☐Other

14. Would you like to be similar to your mother? ☐No ☐ Yes ☐ N/A
Details: Click here to enter text.

15. Would you like to be similar to your father? ☐No ☐ Yes ☐ N/A
Details: Click here to enter text.

16. Would you like to be similar to your siblings? ☐No ☐ Yes ☐ N/A
Details: Click here to enter text.

17. Have you ever run away from home? ☐No ☐ Yes

If yes: How many times? Click here to enter text.

How old were you when you first did it? Click here to enter text.

What is the longest you've been away? Click here to enter text.

Where did you live? Click here to enter text.

18. Have your ever been kicked out of the house by your caregiver (e.g., parent, grandparent, guardian)? ☐No ☐Yes

19. Have you ever been involved with child welfare services? ☐No ☐ Yes

If yes: How old were you when you first became involved with child welfare services? Click here to enter text.

If yes: Have you ever been under a guardianship order? ☐No ☐ Yes
Are you currently under a guardianship order? ☐No ☐ Yes

20. Have you ever been in foster care? ☐No ☐ Yes

If yes: How old were you when you first went into foster care? Click here to enter text.

How long were you in [*or have you been in*] foster care? Click here to enter text.

How many foster homes have you been in? Click here to enter text.

21. Have you ever lived in a group home? ☐No ☐ Yes

If yes: How old were you when you first went into the group home? Click here to enter text.

How long were you in [*or have you been in*] the group home? Click here to enter text.

How many group homes have you been in? Click here to enter text.

22. Have you ever been diagnosed with ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder) or ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder)? ☐No ☐ Yes

If yes: How old were you when you were diagnosed? Click here to enter text.

Have you ever taken medication for this? ☐No ☐ Yes

If yes: Do you still take it? ☐No ☐ Yes

23. Have you ever been diagnosed with any other disorders? (Probe: conduct disorder, depression, anxiety, learning disorder) ☐No ☐ Yes

If yes: What were you diagnosed with? Click here to enter text.

How old were you when you were diagnosed? Click here to enter text.

Have you ever taken medication for this? ☐No ☐ Yes

If yes: Do you still take it? ☐No ☐ Yes

PART B: Personality

1. Do you think carefully before you act? ☐No ☐ Yes

2. Are you able to think clearly in stressful situations? ☐No ☐ Yes

3. Are you always able to keep your feelings under control? ☐No ☐ Yes

4. Do you have difficulty paying attention for long periods of time? ☐No ☐ Yes

5. Do you enjoy new and exciting experiences, even if they involve breaking the rules? ☐No ☐ Yes

6. Are you a risk-taker? ☐No ☐ Yes

PART C: Community

1. Since you were born, how often have you moved? Click here to enter text.

   Did you find it difficult to make new friends when you moved?
   ☐ No
   ☐ Yes
   ☐ Sometimes

2. Have you moved in the past year? ☐ No ☐ Yes

4. Would you describe your neighbourhood as:
   ☐ Poor
   ☐ Middle-Class
   ☐ Wealthy

5. Would you describe your neighbourhood as:
   ☐ Poorly maintained
   ☐ Moderately maintained
   ☐ Well maintained

6. Can you describe the ethnic diversity of your neighbourhood?
   Click here to enter text.

7. Do you consider your neighbourhood to be safe?
   ☐No ☐ Yes ☐ Unsure

8. Would you describe your old neighbourhood as:
   ☐ Poor
   ☐ Middle-Class
   ☐ Wealthy

9. Would you describe your old neighbourhood as:
   ☐ Poorly maintained
   ☐ Moderately maintained
   ☐ Well maintained

10. Can you describe the ethnic diversity of your old neighbourhood?
    Click here to enter text.

11. Did you consider your old neighbourhood to be safe?
    ☐ No ☐Yes ☐ Unsure

12. Are you involved in organized activities in your community? ☐ No ☐ Yes

If yes: What activities? Click here to enter text.

13. Do you ever carry a weapon in your community? ☐ No ☐ Yes

If yes: How often?
☐ All the time
☐ Most of the time
☐ Occasionally
☐ Rarely

What weapon(s) do you carry?

☐ Knife	☐ Club, bat or baton
☐ Sword/machete	☐ Metal knuckles
☐ Imitation (i.e., of a gun, knife)	☐ Pellet, BB, airsoft or paintball gun
☐ Homemade weapon	☐ Handgun
☐ Pepper spray or bear spray	☐ Other (specify) Click here to enter text.

Have you ever used it? ☐No ☐ Yes

If yes: Describe the circumstances Click here to enter text.

PART D: School

1. Are you currently attending high school?
☐No ☐ Yes ☐ Attending post-secondary school

If no: Did you finish high school? ☐No ☐ Yes

2. How well do you do [*or did you do*] in school?
☐ Above average
☐ Average
☐ Below average

4. Do you like school?
☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Neutral

5. How many different elementary schools did you attend? Click here to enter text.

   How many different junior high schools did you attend? Click here to enter text.

   How many different high schools did you attend? Click here to enter text.

6. How much schooling do you expect to complete eventually?
   ☐ High school
   ☐ Technical/Trade school
   ☐ College
   ☐ University
   ☐ Do not expect to finish high school

7. Do you [*or did you*] skip classes? ☐No ☐ Yes

   If yes: How often?
   ☐ Daily
   ☐ Weekly
   ☐ Monthly
   ☐ Other (specify) Click here to enter text.

6. Have you ever been [*or were you ever*] suspended from school (not including in-school suspensions/detentions)? ☐ No ☐ Yes

   If yes: How many times? Click here to enter text.

   What grade were you in the first time you were suspended? Click here to enter text.

7. Have you ever thought [*or did you ever think*] seriously of dropping out of school? ☐No ☐ Yes

   If yes: What kept you in school? Click here to enter text.

8. Have you ever dropped out of school? ☐ No ☐ Yes

   If yes: Why did you drop out? Click here to enter text.

   If back in school, why did you come back? Click here to enter text.

9. Have you ever been [*or were you ever*] bullied at school? [*By bullied, we mean behaviours and actions toward you that are verbal, physical and/or anti-social.]* ☐No ☐ Yes

10. Have you ever been [*or were you ever*] in fights with other students at school? ☐ No ☐ Yes

11. Have you ever taken [*or did you ever take*] a weapon to school?
☐No ☐ Yes

If yes: How often?
☐ All the time
☐ Most of the time
☐ Occasionally
☐ Rarely

What weapon(s) do you [*or did you*] carry?
☐ Knife
☐ Sword/machete
☐ Imitation (i.e., of a gun, knife)
☐ Homemade weapon
☐ Pepper spray or bear spray
☐ Club, bat or baton
☐ Metal knuckles
☐ Pellet, BB, airsoft or paintball gun
☐ Handgun
☐ Other (specify) Click here to enter text.

Have you ever used it [*or did you ever use it*]? ☐No ☐ Yes

If yes: Describe the circumstances Click here to enter text.

PART E: Social Life

1. How many close friends do you have? Click here to enter text.

2. Where did you meet most of your friends?
☐ At school
☐ At parties
☐ At work
☐ Playing sports
☐ Internet
☐ Other (specify) Click here to enter text.
☐ In the neighbourhood
☐ Through other friends
☐ On the street
☐ Through gangs
☐ In custody

3. Are your closest friends about the same age as you, or do they tend to be older or younger than you?
☐ Same age
☐ Mostly older
☐ Mostly younger
☐ Vary in age

4. Have any of your close friends gotten in trouble with the police? ☐No ☐ Yes

5. [Apart from school,] about how many times a week do you see your friends?
☐ Everyday
☐ Every weekend
☐ A few times per week
☐ Less than once per week

6. Do your parents [*or the people you live with*] approve of your friends?
☐ No
☐ Yes
☐ Some yes, some no
☐ Parents don't know friends
☐ Don't know

7. Do you ever get into trouble with the police when you are with your friends?
☐No ☐ Yes

8. Do you have a steady boyfriend or girlfriend?
☐No ☐ Yes→ ☐ Boyfriend ☐ Girlfriend

If no: Skip to # 9

If yes: How long have you been together? Click here to enter text.

Do your parents [*or the people you live with*] approve of your girlfriend/ boyfriend? ☐No ☐ Yes

Has your girlfriend/boyfriend ever been in trouble with the police?
☐No ☐ Yes ☐Unsure

Do you ever get into trouble with the police when you are with your girlfriend/ boyfriend? ☐No ☐ Yes ☐Unsure

Since you have been together, has your own offending:
☐ Increased
☐ Decreased
☐ Stayed the same

9. What kinds of activities do you do in your spare time?
☐ Adult-coached sports
☐ Non-coached sports
☐ Lessons in music, art or dance
☐ Play video games
☐ Go to the bar/clubs
☐ Surf internet
☐ Other (specify) Click here to enter text.

10. Do you consider yourself to be spiritual or religious? ☐No ☐ Yes

If yes: What is your religion or what kind of spiritual beliefs do you have? Click here to enter text.

Do you attend a worship or spiritual service regularly? ☐No ☐ Yes

Do you belong to a spiritual or religious club? ☐No ☐ Yes

11. Have you ever had a job? ☐No ☐ Yes

If yes: How many jobs have you had in your life? Click here to enter text.

Do you currently have a job? ☐No ☐ Yes

If yes: What do you? Click here to enter text.

Do you like your job? ☐No ☐ Yes ☐Neutral

How many hours a week do you work? Click here to enter text.

How long have you had the job? Click here to enter text.

12. Have you ever tried alcohol? ☐No ☐ Yes

If no: Skip to question 13

If yes: How old were you when you first tried alcohol? Click here to enter text.

Have you ever had 5 or more drinks of alcohol on one occasion? ☐No ☐ Yes

If yes: How old were you when you first had 5 more drinks of alcohol on one occasion? Click here to enter text.

If yes: Have you done this in the past year? ☐No ☐ Yes

If yes: How often?
☐ Daily
☐ Weekly
☐ Monthly
☐ Other (specify) Click here to enter text.

13. Do you think you have an addiction to alcohol? ☐ No ☐ Yes

If yes: Have you sought treatment? ☐No ☐ Yes

14. Have you ever used illegal drugs? ☐No ☐ Yes

If yes: How old were you the first time you used them? Click here to enter text.

Have you used illegal drugs in the past year? ☐No ☐ Yes

If yes: How often?
☐ Daily
☐ Weekly
☐ Monthly
☐ Other (specify) Click here to enter text.

If yes: which drugs have you used?
☐ Marijuana/hash
☐ Steroids
☐ Ecstasy
☐ Crystal methamphetamine
☐ Other (specify) Click here to enter text.
☐ Cocaine
☐ Crack
☐ Mushrooms
☐ Someone else's prescription drugs

15. Have you ever bought illegal drugs? ☐No ☐ Yes

If yes: Have you done this in the past year? ☐No ☐ Yes

If yes: How often?
☐ Daily
☐ Weekly
☐ Monthly
☐ Other (specify) Click here to enter text.

16. Have you ever sold illegal drugs? ☐No ☐ Yes

If yes: Have you done this in the past year? ☐No ☐ Yes

If yes: How often?
☐ Daily
☐ Weekly
☐ Monthly
☐ Other (specify) Click here to enter text.

17. Do you think you have an addiction to drugs? ☐No ☐ Yes

If yes: Have you sought treatment? ☐No ☐ Yes

PART F: Offending History

The next set of questions ask about things that people sometimes do. For each of the following, tell me if you have EVER done these things. If so, how many times have you done them and have you done them in the PAST YEAR?

1. Have you ever damaged or destroyed someone else's property on purpose?
☐No ☐ Yes

   If yes: How many times have you done this? Click here to enter text.
   How old were you the first time you did this? Click here to enter text.
   Have you done this in the past year? ☐No ☐ Yes

2. Have you ever set something on fire that you shouldn't have? (e.g., a building, a car, a dumpster, etc.)
☐No ☐ Yes

   If yes: How many times have you done this? Click here to enter text.
   How old were you the first time you did this? Click here to enter text.
   Have you done this in the past year? ☐No ☐ Yes

3. Have you ever broken into a house? ☐No ☐ Yes

   If yes: How many times have you done this? Click here to enter text.
   How old were you the first time you did this? Click here to enter text.
   Have you done this in the past year? ☐No ☐ Yes

4. Have you ever stolen anything from a place or person? ☐No ☐ Yes
   If no: Skip to #5.

   If yes: How many times have you done this? Click here to enter text.
   How old were you the first time you did this? Click here to enter text.
   Have you done this in the past year? ☐No ☐ Yes

   Have you ever stolen something worth less than $50? ☐No ☐ Yes
   If yes: How many times have you done this? Click here to enter text.
   Have you done this in the past year? ☐No ☐ Yes

   Have you ever stolen something worth more than $50? ☐No ☐ Yes
   If yes: How many times have you done this? Click here to enter text.
   Have you done this in the past year? ☐No ☐ Yes

Have you ever stolen a car or motorcycle? ☐No ☐Yes
If yes: How many times have you done this? Click here to enter text.
Have you done this in the past year? ☐No ☐ Yes

Have you ever stolen something with a group of friends? ☐No ☐ Yes
If yes: How many times have you done this? Click here to enter text.
Have you done this in the past year? ☐No ☐ Yes

Have you ever taken something from someone by using force or threat of force?
☐No ☐ Yes
If yes: How many times have you done this? Click here to enter text.
Have you done this in the past year? ☐No ☐ Yes

5. Have you ever harassed, threatened, or bullied someone? ☐No ☐ Yes

If yes: How many times have you done this? Click here to enter text.
How old were you the first time you did this? Click here to enter text.
Have you done this in the past year? ☐No ☐ Yes

6. Have you ever threatened someone with a weapon?
☐No ☐ Yes

If yes: How many times have you done this? Click here to enter text.
How old were you the first time you did this? Click here to enter text.
Have you done this in the past year? ☐No ☐ Yes

7. Have you ever assaulted or hurt someone (i.e., slapped, punched, kicked, struck with an object, etc)? ☐No ☐ Yes
If no: Skip to #8.

If yes: How many times have you done this? Click here to enter text.
How old were you the first time you did this? Click here to enter text.
Have you done this in the past year? ☐No ☐ Yes

Have you ever assaulted or hurt someone with a weapon? ☐No ☐ Yes

If yes: How many times have you done this? Click here to enter text.
Have you done this in the past year? ☐No ☐ Yes

Have you ever assaulted someone with your friends? ☐ No ☐ Yes

If yes: How many times have you done this? Click here to enter text.
Have you done this in the past year? ☐No ☐ Yes

8. Have you ever, together with a group of friends, fought with others?
☐ No ☐ Yes

If yes: How many times have you done this? Click here to enter text.
How old were you the first time you did this? Click here to enter text.
Have you done this in the past year? ☐No ☐ Yes

9. How old were you when you first had contact with the police because of something you did? Click here to enter text.

   What happened? [*describe incident, what led to it, police response, justice system response, social service response, mental health response, family response*] Click here to enter text.

10. Have you ever been in jail? ☐No ☐ Yes
    If no: Skip to Part G, #1.

    If yes: How many times have you been in jail? Click here to enter text.

    What was your longest sentence? Click here to enter text.

    What was your experience? [what was your experience; were you part of any programs; if yes, did they help you, did you enjoy them] Click here to enter text.

PART G: Knowledge of Gangs

Next, I want to ask you a few questions about your knowledge of gangs. We define a gang as a group of three or more people who regularly engage in criminal activity. Can you please answer the questions based on our definition?

1. Are there [*or were there*] any gangs at your school? ☐No ☐ Yes

2. Are there any gangs in your community? ☐No ☐ Yes

3. Do any of your friends belong to a gang? ☐No ☐ Yes

4. Has a gang ever tried to recruit you as a member? ☐No ☐ Yes

5. Have you ever been a member of a gang? ☐No ☐ Yes

   If no: Skip to Part G.

   If yes: Are you a gang member now? ☐No ☐ Yes

6. How many members are there [*or were there*] in your gang? Click here to enter text.

7. Do all [*or did all*] the members of your gang belong to the same ethnic group?
☐No ☐ Yes

If yes: Which ethnic group?

☐ Caucasian
☐ Native
☐ Metis
☐ Asian
☐ Other (specify) Click here to enter text.
☐ Middle-Eastern
☐ African
☐ Mulatto
☐ Hispanic

8. What activities does your [*or did your*] gang do? Click here to enter text.

9. Why did you join the gang? Click here to enter text.

How old were you when you joined the gang? Click here to enter text.

10. Do you want to get out of the gang?
☐ No
☐ Yes
☐ Maybe
☐ Got out already
☐ Don't know

If yes or maybe: Why don't you get out? Click here to enter text.

If got out already: Why did you get out? Click here to enter text.

If no: Why do you stay in the gang? Click here to enter text.

PART H: Future

1. You have a history of repeated offending. Why is that? Click here to enter text.

2. Do you want to stop offending? ☐No ☐ Yes
If yes: What do you think you need to be able to stop offending? Click here to enter text.

3. If you could change anything in your life, what would it be? Click here to enter text.

4. Do you have any specific career plans? ☐No ☐ Yes

   If yes: Do you feel this is a possibility for you [probes – do you have access to training/education?] Click here to enter text.

5. What do you think you will be doing this time next year? Click here to enter text.

6. How about in five years from now? Click here to enter text.

7. Do you eventually want to get married? ☐No ☐ Yes ☐Unsure

8. Do you eventually want children? ☐No ☐ Yes ☐Unsure

APPENDIX C

RESEARCH INFORMATION SHEET

PATHWAYS AND TRANSITIONS OF PERSISTENT YOUTH OFFENDERS IN ALBERTA

INFORMATION SHEET

The Canadian Research Institute for Law and the Family (CRILF) is conducting a study of the pathways of youth offenders in Alberta. The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences and backgrounds of youth who become persistent offenders (youth who have been convicted of more than five offences) as they enter adulthood. This information will be used to assist agencies and organizations in Alberta develop better supports and programs for youth at various stages in their lives in order to prevent future involvement in crime. It may also be used in future research and publications to provide information to other researchers and service providers who are doing work in this area.

As part of the study, CRILF is examining your *Youth Criminal Justice Act* records. This would include police, probation, and court-related records. These records provide the researchers with very helpful information to better understand your history and future behaviour.

To better understand you and your experiences, CRILF is also asking for your consent to be interviewed about your life and experiences. The interview will take approximately 45 minutes and will be conducted by a member of the research team. The researcher will ask you questions about you, your family, friends, activities, and offending history.

Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw from the interview at any time without any consequences. If you agree to participate and there are any questions that you prefer not to answer, you do not have to answer them. Your responses will be strictly confidential and anonymous - your answers will never be traced back to you. Nobody in the justice system (including the police or your probation officer) will ever see your responses. Consequently, there are no risks associated with participating in this project.

Your decision to participate or not participate in this study will not affect your treatment by the police, your probation officer, or anyone else in the justice system in any way, either positively or negatively. If you participate in this study, you will be paid $20.00 for your time.

If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact Dr. Joseph P. Hornick, Executive Director, CRILF, at (403) 216-0340 or toll-free at 1-888-881-4273.

APPENDIX D

RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: **Pathways and Transitions of Persistent Youth Offenders in Alberta**

Principal Investigator: Dr. Joseph P. Hornick

Telephone Numbers: (403) 216-0340
or 1-888-881-4273 (toll-free)

	Yes	No
Do you understand that you have been asked to be in a research study of youth offending, and that by doing so will be participating in an interview regarding your experiences?	❑	❑
Have you read (or has it been read to you) and received a copy of the attached Information Sheet?	❑	❑
Do you understand the benefits and risks involved in taking part in this research study?	❑	❑
Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study?	❑	❑
Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from the study at any time, without having to give a reason and without affecting your future care?	❑	❑
Do you understand that you may refuse to answer any question?	❑	❑
Do you understand which of your records the researchers are accessing?	❑	❑
Has the issue of confidentiality been explained to you and do you understand who will have access to your records?	❑	❑
Do you understand it will take approximately 45 minutes to complete the interview?	❑	❑
Do you understand how the information you provide will be used?	❑	❑
Are you aware that you will not receive preferred treatment as a result of your participation in this study?	❑	❑

Who explained this study to you? _____

I agree to take part in this interview: Yes ❑ No ❑

Signature of Research Subject: _____

Printed Name: _____

Date: _____

Signature of Investigator or Designate: _____

APPENDIX E

FOLLOW-UP RESEARCH INFORMATION SHEET

AND CONSENT FORM

CANADIAN RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR LAW AND THE FAMILY

One Executive Place, Suite 510, 1816 Crowchild Trail NW, Calgary, Alberta, Canada T2M 3Y7
Telephone: (403) 216-0340 Fax: (403) 289-4887 email: crilf@ucalgary.ca www.ucalgary.ca/~crilf

PATHWAYS AND TRANSITIONS OF PERSISTENT YOUTH OFFENDERS IN ALBERTA

FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW AND RELEASE OF ALBERTA CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES AND ALBERTA EDUCATION INFORMATION

INFORMATION SHEET

Thank you for participating in the interview. At this time, the Canadian Research Institute for Law and the Family (CRILF) is asking for your consent to contact you for a follow-up interview in two years' time. The interview will explore how your life has changed and what has happened since the first interview with regard to personal experiences, family, social life, and activities. If you agree to this interview, CRILF is asking that you provide contact information in the form of a telephone number and/or email address, as well as the name and contact information for a friend or family member close to you who would be able to connect the researchers with you in the event that your contact information is no longer valid. CRILF may contact you in two years' time to ask if you are still willing to participate in the interview, and if so, arrange to conduct the interview in person or by telephone. If you are no longer willing to participate in the follow-up interview, there will be no consequences to you. All of the contact information you provide will remain strictly confidential, and will be destroyed at the end of the project.

In addition, if you have been involved with Alberta Children and Youth Services, CRILF is asking for your permission to access your file information. This information will help the researchers better understand your family history. Information collected would include any contact you have had with Children and Youth Services – for example, whether you have been in foster care or a group home, whether your family has received services, etc. Finally, CRILF also asks for your permission to access your Alberta Education file information to help the researchers better understand your school history – for example, what schools you have attended, your grades, etc. All file information will remain strictly confidential and anonymous. If you refuse to consent to the release of this information, there will be no consequences to you. If at any point in the future you decide that you no longer wish to be involved in the research project, you may revoke your consent by contacting Dr. Joseph P. Hornick, Executive Director, CRILF, at (403) 216-0340 or toll-free at 1-888-881-4273.

PATHWAYS AND TRANSITIONS OF PERSISTENT YOUTH OFFENDERS IN ALBERTA

FOLLOW-UP CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: **Pathways and Transitions of Persistent Youth Offenders in Alberta**

Principal Investigator: Dr. Joseph P. Hornick

Telephone Numbers: (403) 216-0340 or 1-888-881-4273 (toll-free)

	Yes	No
Do you understand that you are being asked to be contacted in two years' time to participate in a follow-up interview as part of this study?	❑	❑
Do you understand that you are being asked to consent to the release of your Alberta Children and Youth Services file information for the purposes of this study?	❑	❑
Do you understand that you are being asked to consent to the release of your Alberta Education file information for the purposes of this study?	❑	❑
Have you read (or has it been read to you) and received a copy of the attached Information Sheet?	❑	❑
Do you understand that you are free to refuse to provide contact information or participate in a future follow-up interview without any consequences?	❑	❑
Do you understand that you are free to refuse to consent to the release of your Alberta Children and Youth Services file information without any consequences?	❑	❑
Do you understand that you are free to refuse to consent to the release of your Alberta Education file information without any consequences?	❑	❑
Has the issue of confidentiality been explained to you and do you understand who will have access to your records?	❑	❑
Are you aware that you will not receive preferred treatment as a result of your participation?	❑	❑

Who explained this to you? _____

1. I consent to be contacted for a follow up interview in two years' time: Yes ❑ No ❑

Phone Number: _____ _____ Email Address: _____

Alternate Contact Person: _____ Phone Number: _____

2. I consent to the release of my Alberta Children and Youth Services file records to CRILF for research purposes: Yes ❑ No ❑

3. I consent to the release of my Alberta Education file records to CRILF for research purposes: Yes ❑ No ❑

Signature of Research Subject: _____

Printed Name: _____

Date: _____

Signature of Investigator or Designate: _____