



# Violence in the Lives of High Risk Youth: A Descriptive Epidemiology

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## Violence and Homeless Youth

Violent victimization is a common theme among homeless and runaway youth. These youth often report being physically and/or sexually assaulted prior to leaving home – often a chief impetus for running away – and are frequently victims of violence while on the streets. Such experiences of violence are often associated with engaging in risk behaviors and suffering from negative health outcomes. Physical and sexual abuse among homeless youth, for instance, has been linked to participation in crime, gang involvement, substance abuse, suicide, unsafe sexual behaviors, and mental health disorders.

## Objectives

This poster provides a descriptive epidemiology of violence in the lives of 67 homeless young injection drug users (IDUs). In particular, we profile youths' experiences of abuse when they were living at home, when they were institutionalized (e.g. incarcerated, schools, mental health facilities), and while living 'on the street'. Moreover, we provide data regarding how such youth felt such experiences of abuse impacted their schooling, substance abuse, and homelessness.

## Methods

The data presented are based upon structured, qualitative interviews with young IDUs (n=67) recruited in Los Angeles as part of a larger, three city study examining health risks associated with young people who have injected ketamine, a dissociative anesthetic.

Young people were eligible for study enrollment if they were between the ages of 16 and 29 years old, and had injected ketamine at least once within the past two years. These criteria were selected to enroll a sample of young IDUs who could describe recent ketamine injection events. Before beginning an interview, individuals signed informed consent documents approved by the Institutional Review Board at Childrens Hospital Los Angeles. At the conclusion of each interview, which lasted approximately one hour, subjects received a \$20 cash payment, as well as referral information for local needle exchanges, health clinics, homeless shelters, and other service organizations targeting high risk youth.

During a 15-month period between January 2005 and March 2006, a total of 101 young IDUs were recruited from Hollywood, Santa Monica and Venice Beach. In 2006, the longitudinal phase of the research began, whereby youth were re-interviewed at approximately three-month intervals.

Data within this poster is largely drawn from Follow-Up Four, which probed youths' experiences as both victims and perpetrators of physical and sexual violence in various settings. A total of 67 youth completed the Follow-Up Four interview and are the data reported on here. Data is also drawn from the general demographics section from their original baseline interview.

## Table 1: Demographics (n=67)

Median Age	21
Male	59.7%
Race and Ethnicity	
White/Caucasian	79.1%
Black/African American	1.5%
Hispanic/Latino	7.5%
Asian or Pacific Islander	1.5%
Multiracial Background	10.4%
Sexual Identity	
Heterosexual	74.6%
Gay/Lesbian	3.0%
Bisexual	20.9%
Other/Undecided	3.0%
High School Graduate or GED	61.2%
Homeless	95.1%
Homeless Traveler	70.1%
Employed Full or Part Time	10.4%
History of Drug Treatment	56.7%
History of Mental Health Care	71.6%
Ever Arrested	98.5%
Ever in Jail	89.6%
Ever in Prison	10.4%
HCV Positive (self-report)	26.9%

## Table 3: Abuse in Institutions

Adults	
<b>Beat, Punched or Kicked</b>	14.9%
Age When First Occurred	7-21
Gender Male	60.0%
# of Times: Median	3.5
Abuser Intoxicated	16.7%
Used Drugs in Response	30.0%
<b>Forced to Have Sex/Unwanted Attention</b>	1.5%
<b>Young Person: Any of These Things</b>	9.0%
<b>Witnessed Violence In Institution</b>	38.8%

## Table 2: Abuse in the Home

<b>Physical Abuse by Parent /Adult</b>	40.3%
Age When First Occurred	1-13
Male Gender	59.3%
# of Times: Median	100
Needed Medical Care	48.0%
Abuser Intoxicated	56.0%
Used Drugs in Response	30.8%
<b>Forced to Have Sex/Unwanted Sexual Attention</b>	10.4%
Age When First Occurred	3-11
Female Gender	57.1%
# of Times: Median	15
Needed Medical Care	28.6%
Abuser Intoxicated	50.0%
Used Drugs in Response	28.6%
<b>Forced to Use Drugs or Alcohol</b>	3.0%
<b>Abuse by Young Person In Home</b>	17.9%

## Table 4: Abuse 'On the Street'

<b>Beat, Punched or Kicked</b>	52.2%
Age When First Occurred	11-30
Gender Male	68.6%
# of Times: Median	6
Needed Medical Care	54.3%
Abuser Intoxicated	93.3%
Used Drugs in Response	52.9%
<b>Forced to Have Sex</b>	25.4%
Age When First Occurred	10-30
Gender Female	70.6%
# of Times: Median	3
Needed Medical Care	5.9%
Abuser Intoxicated	78.6%
Used Drugs in Response	58.8%
<b>Witnessed Abuse</b>	65.7%
Age When First Occurred	7-29
Gender Male	56.8%
# of Times: Mean	5
Abuser Intoxicated	96.0%
Used Drugs in Response	29.3%
<b>Forced to Use Drugs/Alcohol</b>	4.5%

## Table 5: Poly-victimization and Outcomes

#	0* N=17	1 N=18	2 N=16	3 N=12	4 N=4
Abuse impacted schooling	11.8%	27.8%	56.3%	41.7%	100.0%
Abuse impacted drug use	23.5%	27.8%	43.8%	58.3%	100.0%
Abuse impacted homeless status	5.9%	27.8%	43.8%	41.7%	100.0%

# refers to incidents of abuse or number of environments where abuse occurred.

\*May have been verbally abused.

## Table 6: Mean number of abuse types by outcome

	Number of types of abuse (mean)	
<b>Abuse impacted schooling</b>		
Yes		2.2
No		1.2
Difference CI (95%)		0.9 (0.3-1.5)
<b>Abuse impacted drug use</b>		
Yes		2.1
No		1.2
Difference CI (95%)		0.9 (0.2-1.5)
<b>Abuse impacted homelessness</b>		
Yes		2.3
No		1.2
Difference CI (95%)		1.1 (0.5-1.7)

## Discussion

This poster has outlined various forms of physical and sexual abuse experienced by a sample of 67 homeless youth who are also IDUs. While in the home, males were more likely to report physical abuse and females more likely to report sexual abuse. Nearly one-fifth of the sample also mentioned abuse by a young person while in the home. Abuse in institutions was relatively low, though close to two-fifths of the youth mentioned witnessing violence in such settings. While living on the street, males were much more likely to report physical abuse. This abuse does not refer to fighting, but rather when unprovoked random strangers would attack such youth. A quarter of the sample experienced sexual abuse while living on the street, the great majority of them females. Witnessing abuse while on the street was also high. Youth also mentioned how, on average, at least two forms of abuse or abuse in at least two different settings impacted their schooling, drug use and homeless status. In such cases, poly-victimization – being victimized on multiple occasions – was significantly associated with these self-reported negative health and social outcomes. Our findings provide evidence for the detrimental effect that suffering from multiple forms of abuse both within and between various settings has on youths' substance use, homeless status and school participation, which has implications for violence prevention and intervention efforts.