

when TEENS HURT TEENS

Helping the Victims of “Youth-on-Youth” Criminal Violence

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Appendix A: The Skinny on Adolescent Development

Fourteen-year-old Nathan¹ had spent only three weeks at his new school when 15-year-old Greg, unprovoked and unexpectedly, jumped him in the stairwell and started to kick and punch him. Greg was accusing Nathan of "hitting" on his girlfriend. Nathan didn't know Greg and he didn't know his girlfriend but Greg didn't believe Nathan's protests of innocence. As Greg's friends stood watch for passing teachers, Nathan curled into a ball to try as best he could to shield himself from the kicks and blows. Would yelling make Greg angrier, or might it alert someone who could help? A million thoughts like that went through Nathan's mind in those five minutes – five minutes that felt like hours.

It can be easy to dismiss peer violence as petty, harmless – even normal – teenage behaviour. That would be a mistake.

Being physically assaulted, sexually assaulted, criminally harassed, robbed, or threatened with violence is a harrowing experience for any young person. It shakes one's sense of the world as a safe place and can erode trust in adults as protectors. Youth may fear going to school or walking in their own neighbourhoods. Some are over-whelmed with feelings of vulnerability, anxiety, worry over re-victimization, and self-blame. These emotions can manifest in a variety of ways including social withdrawal, inability to concentrate at school, and even aggression.

Secondary Trauma

In addition to the *primary* trauma of a violent victimization, we have long recognized a concept called *secondary* trauma: how coming forward and co-operating with the criminal justice response can be stressful for victims. Secondary trauma can occur at the police investigation stage, while the case is processed through the court system, and when victims participate in extra-judicial sanctions. In addition, as we discuss later in the report, the very act of coming forward and self-identifying as a victim can be associated with deep feelings of embarrassment, fear of retaliation, and regret. Victim services, training programs, educational campaigns and the like over 20 years have greatly reduced, but not eliminated, the level of secondary trauma. Certain features of the criminal process are non-negotiable, such as public testimony, cross-examination, and sentences that many victims find poorly reflect their sense of loss. Some secondary trauma is easily preventable, with kind words and a caring attitude.

Young victims and witnesses

When the victims are young, the normal anxieties about testifying can be magnified into full blown fears: fear of being hurt by the accused in the courthouse, fear of retaliation, fear of getting into trouble, and fear of doing a "bad job" on the witness stand. For this reason, extra support and protections are provided, including (in our community) a co-ordinated community response, police-based victim support by social workers, joint police/ Children's Aid investigations, a specialized child witness court preparation program, separate waiting rooms at the courthouse, dedicated Crowns, and the capacity for children and otherwise vulnerable witnesses to provide testimony via closed-circuit television.

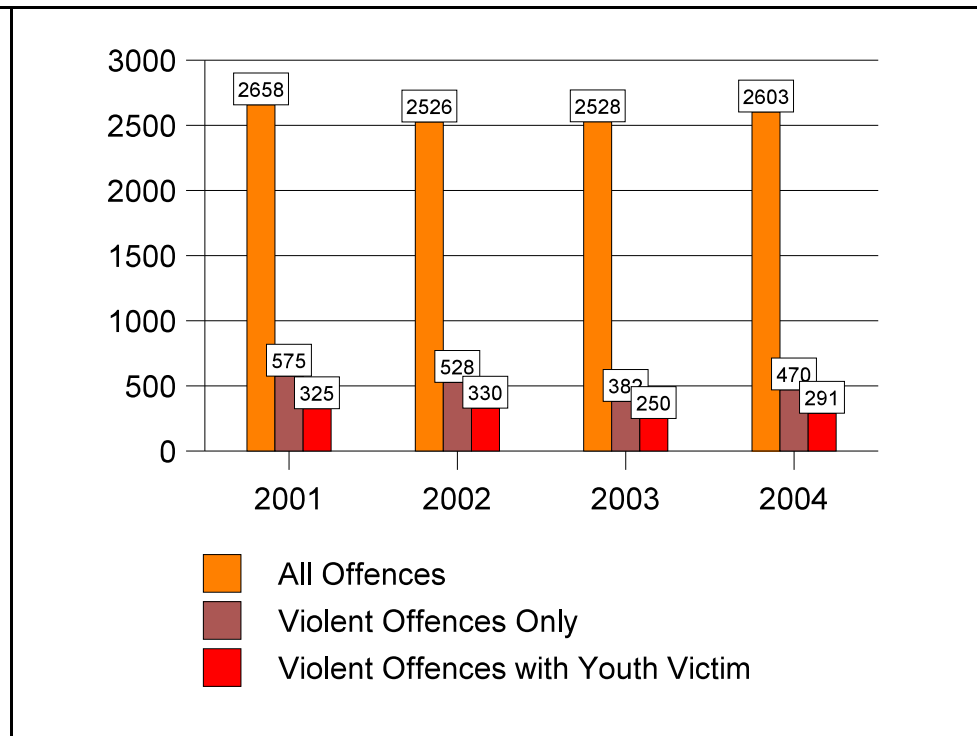
¹ This case is a composite and does not describe an actual victim or offender.

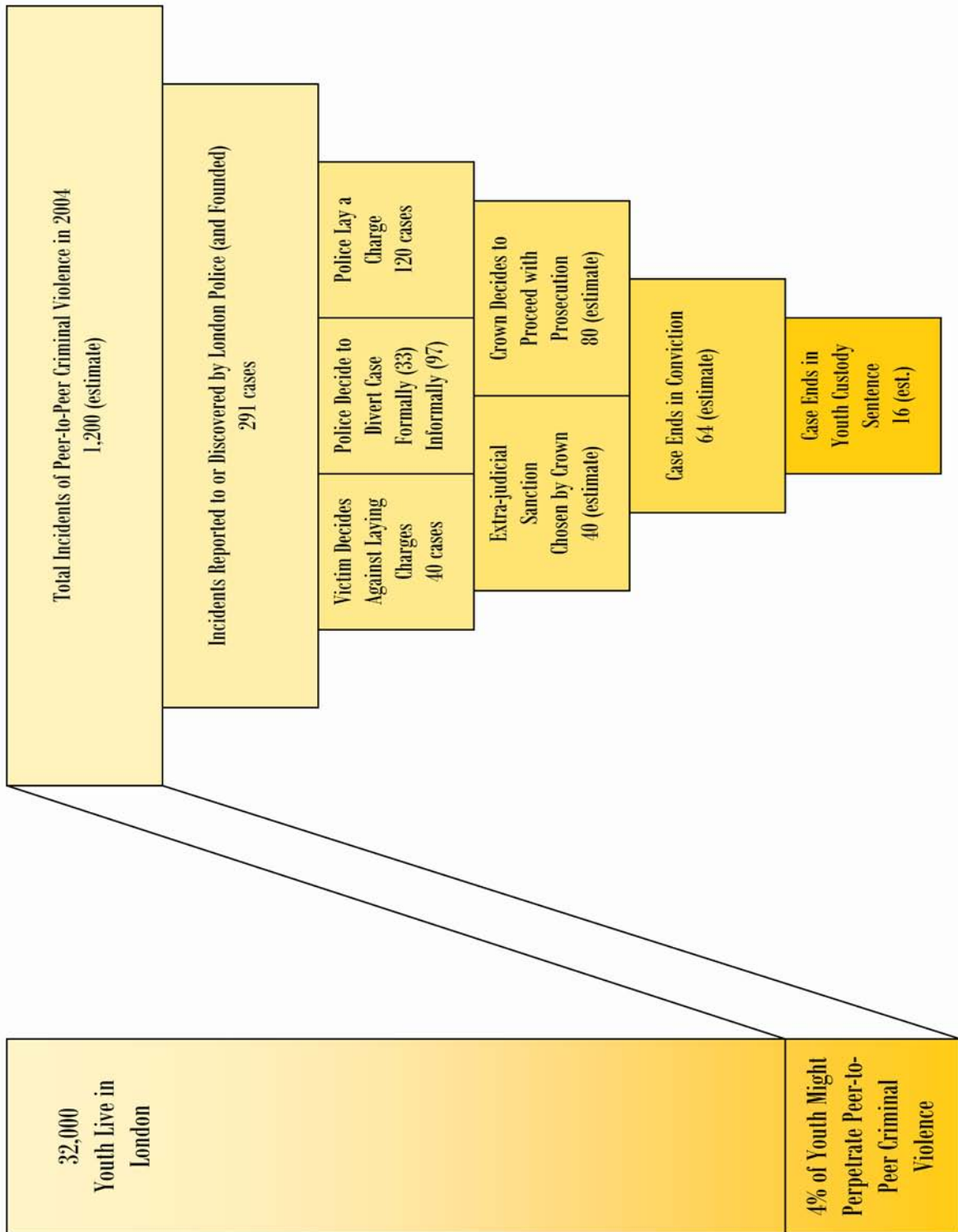
The Teens-Hurting-Teens Project

At the Family Consultant and Victim Services Unit and the Child Witness Project, we assist young victims of crime at two key stages of the criminal process. Family Consultants work with front-line officers when crimes are investigated by the police. Staff at the Child Witness Project help young victims (and witnesses) who face the prospect of testifying in court. This study was undertaken to pool what we know about adolescent victims to make suggestions for four groups of helpers: police, prosecutors, schools, and staff of child witness support programs. In addition to this report, we prepared four “tip sheets” with observations and recommendations. Throughout, we overlay concepts from adolescent development to show when helping teen victims can be different from helping adults (see Appendix A).

Our study focuses on young victims who were criminally victimized by another youth AND whose experiences were reported to or discovered by police. Specifically, we concentrate on cases where peer-to-peer criminal violence is known to the police, at least one youth suspect was identified, and charges were (or could have been) laid (see Figure 1). Included in the category of “violent crime” are the offences of assault, sexual assault, criminal harassment, robbery, threats, weapons, and murder. Assaults are divided into level 1, level 2 (assault with a weapon or causing bodily harm), and level 3 (aggravated assault). The proportion of youth offences falling into the category of violent crime (18% in 2004) is somewhat lower than the national average of 29% (Thomas, 2005).

Figure 1: Occurrences Involving Chargeable Youth Offences in City of London, 2001-2004





How Frequent is Peer-to-Peer Criminal Violence?

In Figure 1, we see that 291 incidents² were identified by police in 2004 in which at least one youth was charged or could have been charged for an inter-personal offence against another youth. However, we can be confident that this figure represents a fraction of all incidents. As we discuss below, young victims are reluctant to report to adults who could or might call the police. With few youth victimization surveys, it is difficult to estimate the rate of non-reporting. In the 1999 General Social Survey, among respondents aged 15 to 17 who had experienced a sexual assault in the previous year, 86% said the incident had not been reported by themselves or anyone to police. The same was true of 73% of physical assaults (AuCoin, 2005). It was noted that younger children would be even less likely to disclose.

According to the 2001 Census, about 32,000 young people aged 12 to 17 live in the City of London (see Figure 2). Because 82% of the incidents involved one offender acting alone, we can estimate that the 291 incidents probably reflect at most 1% of the youth population. Assuming that 75% of cases are not reported (probably an over-estimate of reporting rates), about 1,200 cases might have actually occurred in 2004. This means that perhaps 4% of youth might commit an act of inter-personal violence against a peer that could result in criminal charges in any given year.

The verbal taunts typical of bullying will fall short of the standard of a criminal charge, unless it involves a threat of a crime or constitutes criminal harassment. Also, most of what we think of as "bullying" is committed by youth under 12 years of age and therefore could not end in a charge.

Study Methodology

There are four sources of primary data used here.

- London Police Service administrative data for young offender cases where charges were laid (or could have been laid) for a violent offence against a peer in the years 2001 to 2004 (see Figure 1 above). The unit of analysis is "occurrence."
- a random sample of 247 police occurrence reports (21% of the total) from 2001, 2002, and 2003 where at least one young person was charged with a crime of inter-personal violence against another youth. Each occurrence was reviewed manually to extract data on victims, offenders and characteristics of the offences.³ The unit of analysis is "occurrence." In 82% of occurrences, one offender was involved.

² These cases include "founded" offences, those in which the incident was considered a crime. Unfounded cases include those involving a suspect under 12 or where the behaviour did not meet the criminal threshold.

³ These cases straddled the implementation of the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* in April of 2003. The data cover the last 27 months of operation of the *Young Offenders Act* and the first nine months of operation under the YCJA.

- case files of all 105 cases of peer-to-peer violence referred to the Child Witness Project during 2001, 2002 and 2003.
- interviews with 17 young people (and their parents) who had experienced or witnessed peer violence and whose cases were prosecuted.

Background

Before we begin presenting the data, it may be helpful to review quickly these features of the Ontario and broader Canadian context relating to our discussion.

The Youth Criminal Justice Act

The YCJA replaced the *Young Offenders Act* on April 1, 2003. The YCJA is distinguished from its predecessor in several ways, including the formalization and encouragement of both pre-charge diversion and post-charge alternatives to adjudication, now called extra-judicial sanctions (formerly called alternative measures). The new statute continues the age jurisdiction of the Youth Criminal Justice Court at offences (allegedly) committed by young people at least 12 years of age but who have not reached their 18th birthdays.

Diversion Policy of the London Police Service

Under the YCJA, the police are encouraged to process young offender cases without resorting to laying a charge wherever possible. An officer can issue a warning, refer the matter to the Pre-charge Diversion Program (also called extra-judicial measures), or lay a charge. A case will be diverted only if a full investigation reveals there is sufficient evidence to sustain a criminal charge. Diversion is encouraged for first-time, non-violent offences. An officer may divert a youth for a violent offence if the offence was minor, it was not a presumptive offence as defined in the YCJA, and there are special circumstances. In London in 2004, 33 cases were formally diverted for violent crimes committed against other youth. Young people in 195 cases were warned or saw their cases cleared without a charge (often because the victim did not want to proceed further). In that year, 120 cases ended in charges. Among the formally diverted youth, almost all would have been charged with assault (level 1), but there was also one sexual assault case, two cases of uttering threats, and two cases involving more serious assaults (level 2).

Extra-judicial Sanctions

Even after a charge has been laid by the police, the Crown Attorney's Office has the option of handling the matter without using the formal youth justice court system. The Crown can issue a warning, caution, or refer the young person to a program offering extra-judicial sanctions such as conferencing. In making this decision, the Crown may well consider the severity of the alleged offence and the prior record of the young person. However, evidence of prior diversionary decisions by the police may not be taken into account by prosecutors when making these decisions.

Safe Schools Act of Ontario

This controversial piece of legislation has been in effect since September of 2001, requiring "mandatory" suspensions, limited or full expulsions, and police involvement for a variety of infractions that include inter-personal violence. The *Safe Schools Act* probably explains why so many of the cases we studied involved incidents on school property and why the complainant was so frequently listed as the school.

Just as Nathan thought he was going to pass out, another student happened upon the scene and alerted a teacher. The teacher broke up the fight and questioned each boy. Greg claimed self-defence. Nathan refused to say anything. He had a history of being bullied and had learned the hard way about what happens to "rats."

Coming Forward

We can't help young people if we don't know what happened. Rightly or wrongly, our system of response requires young victims to disclose their experiences to authorities. Why do most young victims decide against this option? Embarrassment, fear of retaliation, aversion to "ratting," a desire to forget and move on, or perhaps even a rapprochement with the person who hurt them. Sadly, some are resigned to being a perpetual target. They can feel helpless, hopeless, and even unworthy of our assistance. Among the young people we interviewed, many feared retaliation by the offender and his or her peer group. For others, violent behaviour was normal in their homes, schools or neighbourhoods. The past experiences of youths who "told" may be communicated among the peer group as a cautionary tale. They may have heard about other victims who suffered public exposure, repeat victimization, social ostracization, the need to change schools, and waiting months for resolution of the case in court. The act of telling may create as many (or more) problems as it solves. These are the stressors of "telling."

Reasons for Not "Telling" Authorities	Stressors of "Telling"
* embarrassment about being a "victim," particularly for sexual offences	* friends, classmates, teachers, neighbours will learn what happened
* belief they are to blame or partly to blame or "deserve" what happened	* family will learn out what happened
* fear of retaliation or reprisal	* case may be reported in the newspaper and other media
* not wanting reputation as a "rat"	* people may disbelieve or minimize seriousness of youth's experience
* belief police involvement will be ineffective, or even harmful	* youth may be seen as a "rat" by peers, triggering social ostracization or physical retaliation
* fear of not being believed	* may attend same school with accused as case is processed
* fear of being blamed	* testimony in open court is stressful
* belief violence is "normal" or honourable	* youth court cases take on average five to six months to conclude in London
* rapprochement with offender	* victims often disappointed at sentence
* concern over consequences for the offender	

"I thought it would make it worse because they would come after me."

"I was happy that the police believed me and took it seriously."

"At our school, it's a bad thing to have police involved because you are known as a rat."

"I was nervous because I didn't want to blow it out of proportion or make it worse."

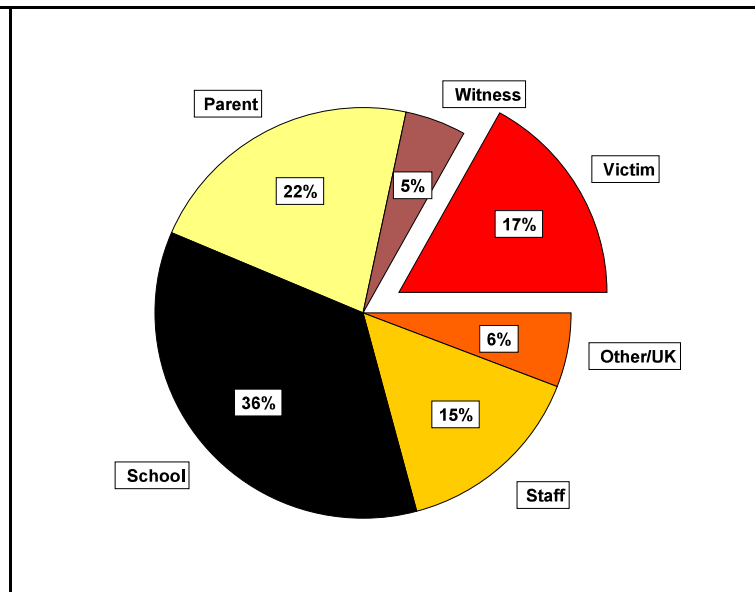
The teacher reported the matter to the principal, who started the process to suspend Greg from school temporarily. The principal also called the police, in adherence with school board policy. Nathan was not pleased when he heard the police were coming, only because he worried about Greg's reaction. However, he liked the investigating officer when she arrived and was more forthcoming about details of the incident. She was kind and patient and explained that every student has a right to feel safe and to be safe at school.

Discovery by Police

Police may discover crime through patrolling and other proactive efforts, but the majority of crime comes to police attention because of reports from the public. The majority of youth we interviewed had positive reports about the police involvement, but it had not been their ideas to involve the police. Incidents were witnessed by others, or the youths were questioned because they were visibly shaken or injured.

In the occurrences we studied (cases cleared by charge), the person who alerted the police to the incident was not typically the victim him or herself. In fact, the victim made the report in only 17% of cases. The school made the call in 36% of cases, a reflection of the fact that many of the offences took place at school and 54% of occurrences involved victims and offenders who attended the same school. We discuss this issue in greater detail later. Other people likely to call the police were a parent or guardian (including foster parent), the staff member of a facility where the victim and/or offender were residing (e.g., group home) or a witness to the incident.

Figure 3: Complainant in 247 Police Occurrences, 2001 to 2003

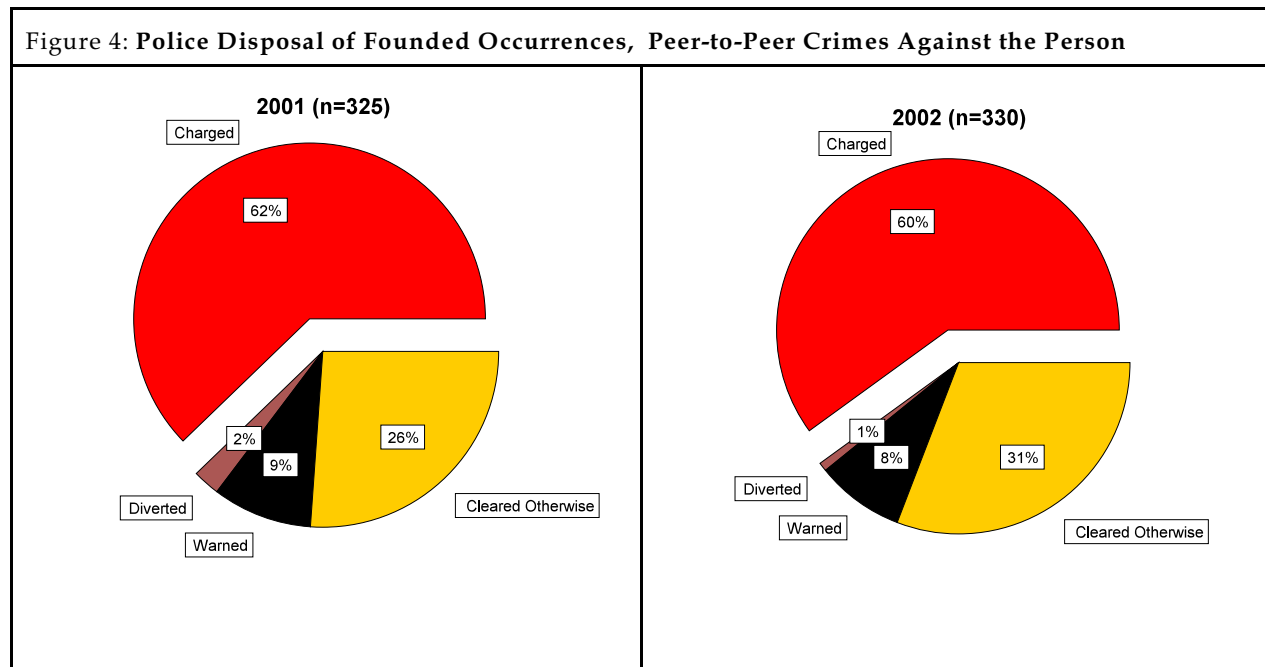


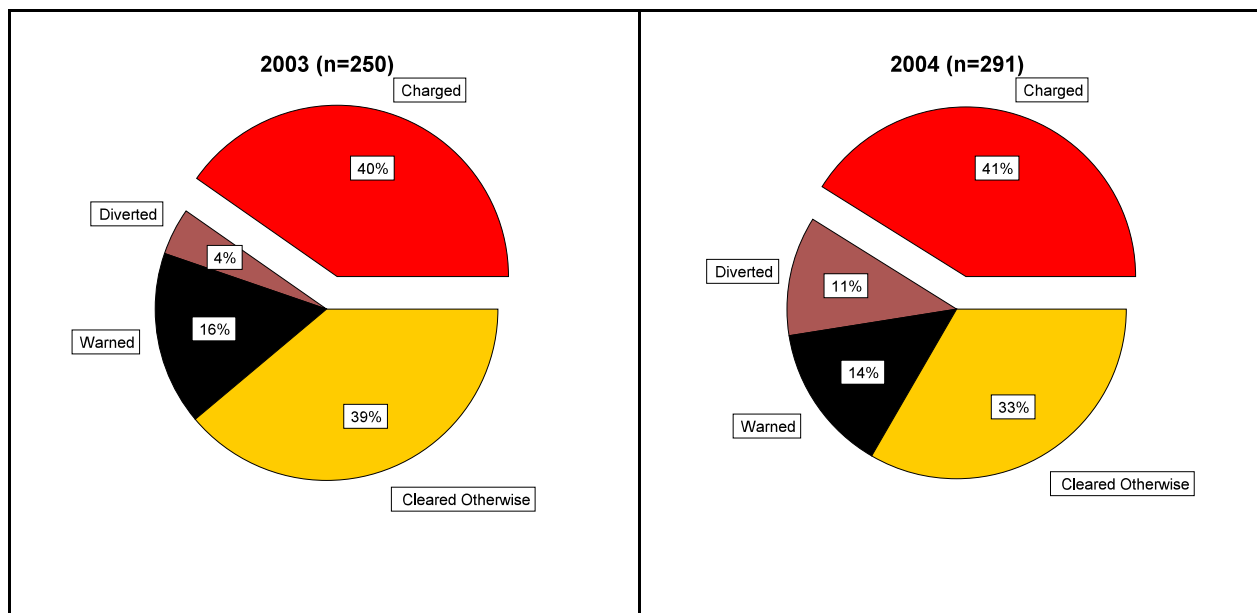
With the teacher as witness and the visible injuries on Nathan, the police officer knew she had reasonable grounds to lay a charge of assault causing bodily harm. Checking police records, she learned this was not Greg's first contact with the police. After reviewing that information, the officer was concerned enough to arrest Greg rather than issue a summons to court. Greg was later released from police detention with conditions of non-association with Nathan. The officer notified the school of Greg's release conditions and Nathan's family was also given a copy.

Disposition of Police Involvement

As can be seen in Figure 2, each case could be dealt with in one of four ways. In 40 cases (14%), victims asked the police not to lay charges. The officer may also decide to divert the case, either through the formal diversion program (33 cases) or clearing the case "otherwise" through "departmental discretion" (56 cases). An officer may also issue a warning (41 cases). In one case under study here, the suspect had left the country.

In 2004, 41% of the cases ended with a charge and moved forward into the prosecution stream. As illustrated in Figure 4, the proportion of cases ending in charge has declined under the YCJA. Another change since the YCJA is the increased use of arrest, from 17% of cases in 2001 to 81% in 2004. Arrest is used if the offender posed a risk to re-offend or there was concern he or she might not appear in court. Arrest can also be used when a victim faces the risk of retaliation, as in cases involving intimate partner violence.





Overview of Charges

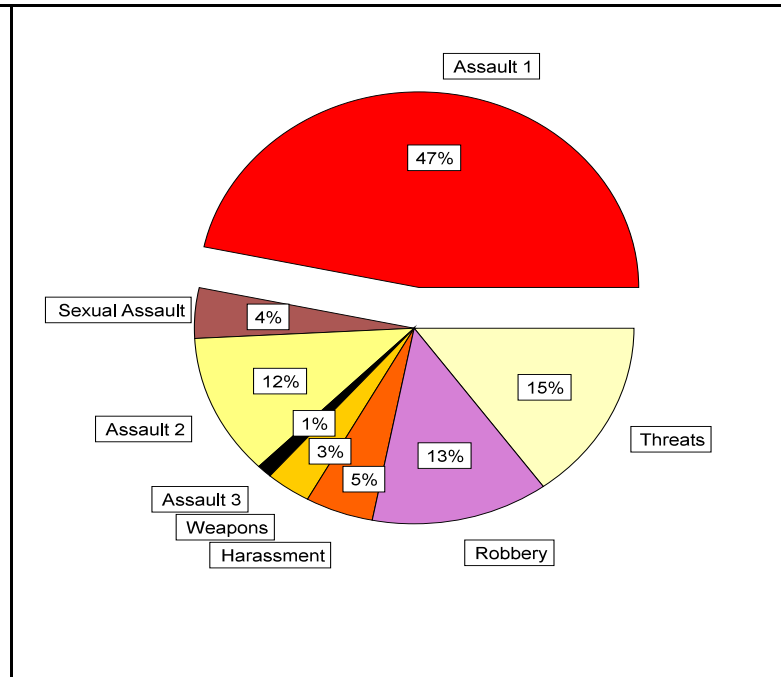
As noted above, 247 police occurrences for three years were reviewed by hand to investigate the circumstances of each offence. Referring back to Figure 1, it is apparent that offences categorized as “violent” represent a small portion of all offences known to the police. At a national level, the most common offences processed through the youth courts are theft (13%), failure to comply with a disposition (11%), assault level 1 (11%), break and enter (9%) and possession of stolen property (7%). Overall, crimes of interpersonal violence represent 29% of youth court cases in 2003/04 (Thomas, 2005).

Cases were selected for this study only if at least one charge had been laid for an interpersonal offence committed by a youth against another youth. In this sample, we found cases that fell into these categories:

- boy-on-boy violence
- girl-on-girl violence
- sexual assaults in a dating context
- physical assaults in a dating context
- targeting someone for being “different”

There was also one homicide, in 2003. Excluding that case, the most serious charge laid in each occurrence is illustrated in Figure 5. Consistent with national and provincial data, Assault Level 1 (formerly known as common assault) is by far the most common of all the crimes against the person. Sexual assaults constitute 4% of the cases.

Figure 5: Most Serious Charge Laid in 246 Police Occurrences, 2001 to 2003



Characteristics of Offences

The manual audit of 247 occurrence reports revealed these features of the offences:

- most involved one offender (82%) or two offenders (12%)
- the most common location of the offence was school (35%) or walking to or from school (11%)
- when an offence occurred at school or on the way to or from school, the complainant was listed as school staff in 78% of cases and a parent in 13%
- other common locations of offences were a public place (21%), a residence the victim and offender shared, such as a group home (11%), an institution such as a custody facility (7%), a mall (5%), or the victim's home (5%)
- overall, 18% of offences occurred in a home
- a weapon was used or present in 19% of occurrences, mostly a weapon of convenience or a knife (note that possession of a weapon was one of the crime categories)
- a gun was used or present in four cases
- two cases were categorized as gang related
- nine occurrences (3.6%) were characterized as "swarming"
- about 10% of incidents occurred between midnight and 8 a.m.
- about 50% of incidents occur between 8 a.m. and 3:30 p.m.
- about 25% of incidents occur between 3:30 p.m. and 6 p.m.

What precipitated these offences? The answer to that question was often difficult to discern from reading the police occurrence reports. It was sometimes a dispute over money or property (19%) and sometimes retaliation (5%). Five percent of incidents occurred within the context of a domestic situation, including dating partners and siblings. There was simply no apparent motive in most cases, beyond the almost half of occurrences (45%) where the offender cited some perceived offence or a dislike of the victim.

Characteristics of Offenders

These 247 police occurrences involved 306 offenders, 71% of whom were male and 29% female. Other facts we learned:

- most incidents involved one offender acting alone, true of 82% of cases
- females were slightly less likely to act alone than males but 78% of the incidents with a female offender involved one girl being charged alone
- when two offenders acted in concert, it was almost always a pairing of two youth of the same sex
- in only seven cases (3%) was there a mix of male and female offenders acting as a pair or in a group
- the mean age of offenders was just over 15, very close to the mean age of victims as a group
- about a third of the victims were younger than the offenders
- all the sexual assaults and all the weapons offences were perpetrated by males
- girls tended to be charged with threats or assault but sometimes robbery
- among the offenders, 29% were previously known to the London Police as a crime victim and 67% had already been charged before
- previously known victimization was equally as likely among males (38% in 2003) as females (35%)
- a history of previous charges was slightly more likely among males (91% in 2003) than females (82%)
- females were more likely to be known to police as a witness (59% in 2003) than males (38%)
- only 3% of male offenders had no history of contact with the police

Characteristics of Victims

The following demographic information was gleaned about the young victims:

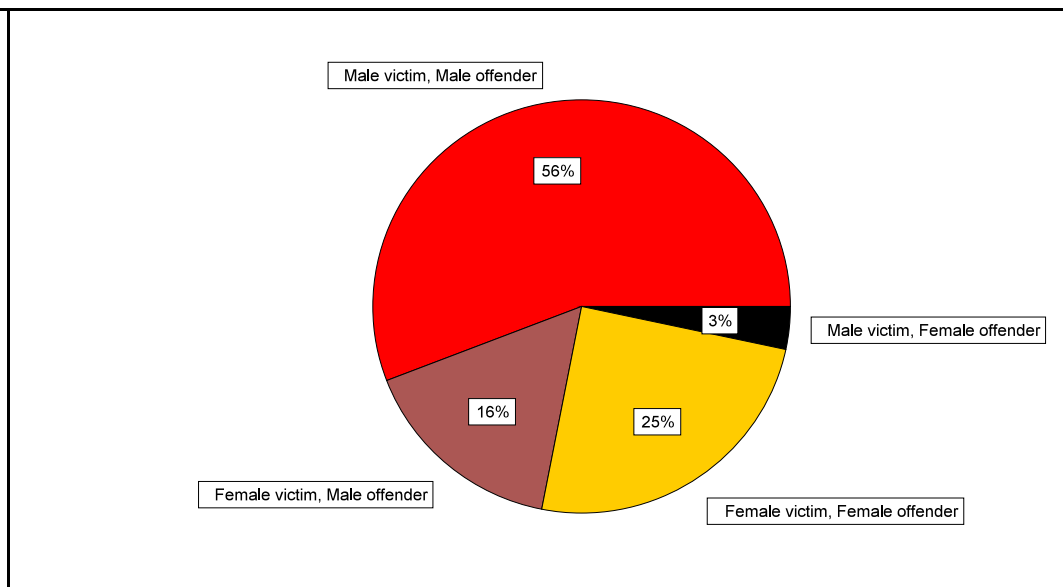
- 59% of the victims were male and 41% were female, with a combined mean age of just under 15 years
- 33% of victims had previously been categorized as a victim by the London Police Service
- an equal number had previously been categorized as an offender by the London Police Service

Victim/Offender Relationship

- most victims and offenders knew each other
- in 70% of cases, the victim and offender were friends, acquaintances or school mates
- in 54% of cases, the victim and at least one offender attended the same school
- the victim and offender were strangers in only 16% of cases
- boys were more likely to be victimized by strangers than were girls (e.g., in 2003, girls knew the offender in 100% of cases while boys were victimized by strangers in 24% of cases)
- stranger incidents usually occurred in a mall or other public place
- when the victim and offender attended the same school, 55% of incidents occurred at school and 17% occurred on the way to or from school and 8% happened in a home the victim and offender shared (e.g., they were siblings)
- there were 4 cases of intimate partner violence (1.6%) and 10 cases (4%) where the

- victim and offender were related, usually siblings
- most youth were victimized by someone of the same gender
- boys were rarely victimized by girls, true of only 8% of cases with male victims in 2003
- on the other hand, girls were often victimized by other girls (see Figure 6)

Figure 6: Sex of Victim and Offender, 247 Police Occurrences, 2001 to 2003



Changes over the Three Years

This sample of cases straddles the proclamation of the YCJA in April of 2003. It is not surprising that there are differences in the 2003 cases compared with those from 2001 and 2002. Those differences probably speak to changes in the volume and types of cases diverted before charge. To recap from above, about 40% of cases were processed without charge in 2001 and 2002, while 60% of cases were processed without charge in 2003 and 2004. This change in police decision-making patterns will have changed the profile of youth entering the prosecution stream. The changes, it would follow, will not necessarily reflect changes in youth behaviour in the community. They reflect, instead, changes in the way the criminal justice system responds to that behaviour. These changes were observed:

- increased diversion of cases with male victims leaves a higher preponderance of charged cases with female victims
- increased diversion of male-on-male violence leaves higher preponderance of charged cases with male-on-female violence (from 28% of cases with female victims to 42%)
- increased diversion of first offenders leaves a higher preponderance of victims with histories of being charged with an offence (from 25% to 47%) or having been a victim previously (from 31% to 39%)
- increased diversion leaves a higher preponderance of male offenders with histories of being a victim (from 21% to 38%)

- increased diversion leaves a higher preponderance of male offenders with histories of previous criminal charges (from 56% to 91%) and female offenders with previous charges (from 48% to 82%)
- use of arrest is increasing as the use of diversion increases, suggesting that the offences cleared by charge are more serious
- time to case resolution through the courts has not changed remarkably

Extra-judicial Sanctions

Once charges are laid against a young offender, the case will be vetted at the Crown Attorney's Office for suitability for extra-judicial sanctions. As with police diversion, this step is encouraged in the YCJA. Crown decision making was not a focus of this study. However, data from Statistics Canada suggest that perhaps one-third of cases are handled this way. In 2003/04, 9% of Ontario youth court cases ended when the Crown stayed the charges. This disposition is sometimes used for cases ending with an extra-judicial sanction. The same will be true for some of the 37% of cases which ended when the charges were withdrawn by the Crown or dismissed by the Court (Thomas, 2005). In Figure 2 above, we estimate that one third of cases are dealt with through extra-judicial sanction. This may be a low estimate.

Victim Involvement in Extra-judicial Sanctions

Extra-judicial sanctions can include a measure called "conferencing" (Owens *et al.*, 2004), a process in which victims may be given the opportunity to participate. Conferencing is sometimes felt to be better from the victim's point-of-view than traditional victim/offender mediation because there are more people in the room. Most research has shown that adult victims have generally positive views of their involvement. However, those findings must be tempered by methodological limitations such as bias contributed by how cases are chosen for restorative measures (Lattimer *et al.*, 2005). Women's advocates have traditionally been concerned about victim involvement in restorative sanctions for gendered violence cases, such as intimate partner violence and sexual assault (Curtis-Fawley & Daly, 2005; Herman, 2005). Of great concern is the possibility of secondary trauma. For example, among adult victims, participation may exacerbate secondary trauma where offenders do not take responsibility for their actions, where victims are not adequately prepared for the experience, and where facilitators are poorly trained (Strang, 2002). As with any intervention, the skill of facilitators, effectiveness of case screening, and sensitivity of program staff will define the level of secondary victimization and hence victim satisfaction with the process.

Youth Victim Involvement in Extra-judicial Sanctions

There is little research on how young victims specifically have been involved in extra-judicial sanctions involving victim/offender contact. Where the victims is young, especially under 16, and has experienced inter-personal violence, it is necessary to ensure that participation is in his or her best interests and not a measure chosen to benefit the offender. This should be assessed on a case-by-case basis. Other issues worthy of discussion include how to contact young victims and secure informed consent, how to select cases as appropriate for involvement of young victims, and how to address principal causes of secondary trauma. Some suggest, for example, that first contact with victims be made via mail.

Nathan stayed home for three days after the attack, saying he was sick. Returning to school, he was soon threatened by Greg's friends, who warned him not to testify. He decided that telling a teacher would only make things worse. Nathan avoided going to the cafeteria. Having to walk past Greg's house, he started arriving late for school. Entering the school each day became harder and harder, because he never knew where Greg's friends were going to be hanging out. Greg himself returned to school after his suspension elapsed. Nathan began to skip classes, especially the class he shared with Greg. Initially eager to try out for basketball, a sport at which he excelled, he now decided against it. At home, Nathan was moody and irritable and he spent hours alone in his room. Nathan couldn't sleep and felt anxious and depressed. He never told anyone what he was feeling. He just wished the principal had never called the police. After two months, he changed schools.

Waiting for Court

Our research and experience consistently demonstrate that the months spent waiting for court is one of the most stressful aspects of co-operating with a prosecution. For young people, the wait seems longer than it does for adults. As noted earlier, these peer-on-peer cases took between five and six months to reach a resolution here in our community, which is consistent with the provincial average (Thomas, 2005). For a child, six months represent half a school year or an entire sports season. If they attend the same school, ride the same school bus, share extra-curricular activities or live in the same neighbourhood, a young victim may have many opportunities for contact with the accused. The same is usually true of young people expected to be called as witnesses. At a national level, 10% of youth court cases take longer than one year for resolution after first appearance in court. Cases involving crimes against the person tend to take longer than other cases (Thomas, 2005).

For many of the teen victims, witnesses, and their parents, the months of waiting to testify were perceived as interminably long. Delays and adjournments were reported as great frustrations. During this waiting period, teens and their parents were requested to attend court-related appointments, thus school was missed and parents had to take time off work. Being kept informed of changes in court dates and other pertinent justice system updates was much appreciated. The collective experience was that the cases took far too long to reach closure. There were unanimous recommendations from parents and teens that cases should be dealt with in an expeditious manner when young people are involved.

"I skipped school a lot, I was afraid to be there."

"We were put in the same class. I was scared – I was told nothing could be done."

"He told me that the next time I saw him, he would be carrying a gun."

"There are always consequences because you are known as a rat."

"I stopped going out for recess."

Mother: "My daughter lost her independence because she was afraid to go out or go to school."

"There was one adjournment and the next date was seven months later!"

"By the time it got to trial, the other witnesses didn't want to be involved."

"It was hard because it took so long – March 2002 to June 2003."

"The court date got changed many times. Then, I had to go on the first day of high school."

As the court date neared, Nathan received court preparation services from the local child witness project. They determined that he was highly afraid of testifying. Seeing Greg in the courtroom was going to be difficult and he knew Greg's friends would be there. He wanted the charges dropped. Project staff met with Nathan three times and taught him some strategies to alleviate his anxieties. He learned about the court process and had an orientation visit to the courthouse where he met with the Assistant Crown Attorney who would be prosecuting the case.

Court Preparation

In London/Middlesex, the Child Witness Project has offered court preparation services to young victims and witnesses since 1987, making it one of the first two programs in Canada. In 2004/05, there were 590 referrals.⁴ Many of cases concluded fairly quickly, with early guilty pleas or diversion of charges away from prosecution. About 170 victims and witness received court preparation services that year, the length and nature of the intervention matched to the age and needs of each child. A youth would be prepared for court only where there was a reasonable prospect that he or she would have to testify.

About two-thirds of cases referred to the Project involve peer-to-peer criminal violence. Over the period under study here (2001, 2002 and 2003), 603 teenagers were referred as victims or witnesses of peer violence. Of these youth, 258 were victims of peer assault and 345 were witnesses to peer assault. There were slightly more female victims (55%) in this group than male victims (45%). Most victims knew the accused. Only 6 of the 258 victims were assaulted by a stranger.

Guilty Pleas

In cases where a youth received services from the Child Witness Project (i.e., there was a reasonable prospect of trial), 78% eventually ended in a guilty plea. Most victims are relieved to learn they do not have to testify, but often suffered anticipatory anxiety until the day of trial, when many guilty pleas were entered. In other words, they had spent months worrying about testifying, so the late change of plea was of little consolation.

⁴ . These figures relate to offences across Middlesex County rather than solely in the City of London.

The first court date ended with an adjournment, and so did the second. On the third date, Nathan testified. A dozen students from his old school showed up. Nathan managed to give his evidence. The defence attorney tried to make it sound like Nathan started a fight with Greg, but Nathan held his ground. In the end, the judge convicted Greg of assault level 1, a lesser and included offence of assault causing bodily harm.

Trials and the Experience of Testifying

While guilty pleas were eventually entered in 78% of cases, 22% of teen victims testified. Avoiding reminders of the traumatic event is impossible for those expected to testify, because they must remember the incident for months or years and, in an adversarial setting, recall and describe in detail what happened. One young person reflected on the most stressful aspect: “testifying reminded me of a situation that I wanted to forget and was hard for me to relive.”

Fears of Court

At the Child Witness Project, one of the first efforts undertaken is to ascertain each young person’s fears associated with going to court and being a witness.⁵ Fear of facing the accused is the most salient fear reported by victims of sexual assault. Seeing the defendant in court is intimidating and can inhibit some witnesses from providing effective evidence. Other court related fears include: that the accused will lie and be believed; and, that they worry about having to describe what happened. Children who are witnesses in domestic violence cases worry about retaliation by the accused and also about feeling physically ill in the witness box. Analysis of the FCQ-R completed by 69 teenaged victims and witnesses of peer assault revealed that victims of less serious assaults and eye witnesses tended to worry most about the task of testifying, about giving evidence in an open courtroom and of being questioned by defence counsel. The victims of sexual offences and more serious peer assaults endorsed fears of facing the accused and they worried about retaliation.

Testimonial Aids

Since 1988, Canadian law has provided for a number of testimonial aids for some victims and witnesses who must testify. For example, a young person may testify from behind a sequestration screen or via closed-circuit television, in certain circumstances. Allowing young witnesses to testify from outside the courtroom can reduce their levels of stress and thus improve the quality of their evidence. No victim or witness of peer-to-peer interpersonal violence used testimonial aids during the period of study here. They all testified in open court with the accused present. However, in January of 2006, amendments to the *Criminal Code* came into force creating a presumption that all children under age 18 will have the opportunity to choose a testimonial aid or to have a support person beside them whilst they testify.

⁵ Children’s court-related fears are assessed using a screening tool called the Fears of Court Questionnaire. The FCQ-R, first developed by the Child Witness Project in 1988 and later revised, measures self-report anxiety and concerns of young witnesses. Five core domains are tapped: facing the accused, fear of personal inadequacy as a witness, fear of public exposure, impact of testifying on others, and general fear of the court process. In conjunction with other sources of information, especially the clinical interview, information collected with the FCQ-R helps identify areas of focus for court preparation. It is also important in determining the need for testimonial aids.

Outcomes of Trials

In the 23 cases where a youth testified, a guilty finding resulted in 17 of them. In two cases, the charges were dismissed by the Court and in four cases the charges were withdrawn by the Crown. When a case ends without conviction, youth are typically affected by a sense that they were not believed or that the judge did not appreciate the seriousness of the incident. It is important to explain that there are many legal reasons a judge might believe a victim but still dismiss the case. A young person's "job" in court is to present the evidence completely and accurately and what happens after that is in the hands of others. If a young person testified as well as he or she could, they should feel satisfied at the contribution to the criminal process. For victims more than witnesses, however, these case conclusions are typically taken personally as a repudiation of their pain and feelings.

"The courtroom was full because there was a class of students. That was hard for me."

"Friends of the accused were sitting in the courtroom and staring down at me."

Sentencing

Likewise, victims of crime are often disappointed at the sentences, and youth are no different. In fact, they are perhaps more likely to be upset at the sentences than are adult victims. Perhaps it is from watching American crime dramas where crimes can draw dramatically long sentences. But young people are prone to equating the severity of the sentence with how seriously the judge took the offence. Probation, the most common sentence handed down in youth court, is likely to be seen as a "slap on the wrist." Fairness is an important concept to youth of this age. Victims often feel that the offenders suffered no consequence for their bad behaviour. Again, it is important to prepare young people for the typical range of sentences in youth court and to explain the many factors that are considered when choosing a sentence. If they are adequately prepared, they will not personalize the sentence to the same extent.

"They [the accused] were not held accountable."

"The courts should have been tougher with him – he didn't learn a lesson."

"I would have rather seen a more severe punishment."

"It did not teach [the accused] anything."

"I think the sentences should be tougher."

"I think the YCJA is horrible because it is totally ineffective."

"My involvement with the justice system was overwhelming, nerve wracking, scary and stressful. But I was pleased with the outcome of the case."

"The sentence was not enough."

"I thought the judge was too lenient. [The accused] didn't learn his lesson."

"I thought the sentence was appropriate" [a significant sentence following a conviction of aggravated assault].

"I thought the sentence was too lenient. [The two accused] continued to try to intimidate me and they tried to turn a lot of people against me."

"I think the outcome of a guilty plea with probation of 12 months was perfect. The girl never bothered me again. I think if she had to do community service or anger management, it would have been even better."

"I think he needed a more severe punishment because he didn't learn anything from it."

"For some people the justice system works, but for some kids like [this accused] it was not effective because he still gets into trouble. I think the system should be tougher."

"I thought it was a good outcome. I was glad that she didn't get away it."

Victim Impact

Young victims face both immediate and long-term impacts. Common symptoms reported are nightmares, sleep problems, and mood cycles of depression, anger and anxiety. Some victims had to deal with physical as well as emotional consequences of an assault. For some, the intensity of the fear may remain intact for years following the occurrence. However, not all victims will be traumatized. Some may experience the incident as frightening or distressing. Some may see it as a "normal" part of being a teenager.

Characteristics of the offence in isolation are usually a poor indicator of degree of trauma, and other factors must be considered in determining the level of distress experienced by each youth. In addition, teenagers may be reluctant to reveal their true feelings to adults, opting instead for an appearance of aloofness and false bravado. Also important to recognize is the need for teenagers to maintain loyalty to a peer group. Co-operating with a prosecution, in their minds, can put them at risk for retaliation, ostracization, and harassment. This belief is likely to colour all their decisions.

"It has affected my self esteem and my self worth."

"I am scared that he will do it again."

"I prefer negative attention now, and it bothers me to get a compliment."

"The injury was very painful – I was shocked to find that someone who was supposed to be my friend could do that to me. I have a hard time trusting people now."

"I am scared to go back and visit my old school."

"I never used to be afraid or concerned to go anywhere by myself, but after I was assaulted I was nervous to go out alone and I always bring someone with me now."

Post-YOA Trends

After analysing the police data, these trends seem related to the advent of the YCJA:

- **police charging practices have changed so fewer cases end in charges**

While the number of offences known to the police remains about the same, the number of occurrences in which at least one youth was charged with peer-to-peer violence has declined. This development is consistent with the encouragement in the YCJA for police to use warnings, reprimands and other types of pre-charge diversion. It is also consistent with figures at the national level, where Statistics Canada reports a 30% increase in the rate of youths “cleared otherwise” (Thomas, 2005).

- **criminal charges are almost always laid against youth with histories of prior charges and prior chargeable offences, changing the profile of youth who are prosecuted**

While most diverted youth do not recidivate, a sub-group does. As the number of police contacts increases, so does the likelihood that a youth will eventually be charged. This dynamic changes the profile of youth who are charged. Logically, they will be older as a group but this is also a group for whom the warnings, reprimands and other measures were not effective deterrents to further criminal behaviour. As a group, therefore, the youth charged have histories of prior charges and chargeable offences. As a group, their offences may be more serious. The potentially more serious offence profile is suggested by the increased use of arrest for these interpersonal offences.

- **access to youth correctional resources is both reduced and delayed**

The youth justice system used to be a major conduit for troubled youth into helpful services and programs. Resources were distributed to reflect that fact. The increased use of pre-charge diversion and extra-judicial sanctions will reduce the number of youth advancing to the point where they might be convicted and sentenced. Moreover, the youth will not come into contact with the youth correctional system until later than they would have before. Some will even be adults by this point. Provisions of the YCJA aimed at reducing the use of custody are also being successful. An increased number of youth will, therefore, be served by the child protection and children’s mental health service-delivery systems rather than the youth correctional system. In response, the re-distribution of funding among child-serving organizations is a process already underway in Ontario. The challenge is to ensure early/timely intervention so youths do not fall between the cracks.

- **the profile of youth in the correctional system will be different**

In a related vein, youth who reach correctional services will be a different group than they were under the YOA. They will be older on average and patterns of criminal behaviour may be more entrenched or reflect more serious offences. For some, this could reflect greater needs and more complex constellations of issues. This observation matches anecdotal comments of correctional program deliverers and the experience of our Youth Justice Assessment team at the Centre for Children and Families in the Justice System. We are seeing an increased number of youths with serious mental health issues such as psychosis, 12-year olds with lengthy police histories, and youth with entrenched anti-social attitudes.

- **patterns of access to victim services may have changed**

Most victim services are police-based or court-based. When so many young offenders are diverted from the prosecution stream, we must be vigilant to ensure victims of young offenders do not fall through the cracks. They must be informed of diversionary decisions, referred to other helpful services if needed, and their involvement with extra-judicial sanctions should be sought with sensitivity to the fact that participating may not always be in their best interests. We must ensure that efforts to find the least intrusive interventions for young offenders do not constitute a disadvantage for their victims.

Implications for Helping Victims

Pulling together all the information collected for this study, we advance some suggestions for groups who help victims of peer-on-peer criminal violence: police, prosecutors, child witness support programs, and schools.

Implications for Police

How a police officer interacts with a crime victim has an enormous impact on how that victim adjusts in the short and long-term. *The Youth Criminal Justice Act* provides more options for front-line officers when making decisions about charging youth suspects. However, the needs of the young victims remain the same. Regardless of their criminal history and regardless of an officer's decision on charging, victims need: a caring response from the police, information on their cases and the system in general, to feel safe, and access to victim assistance services. These recommendations are offered to police in Ontario:

- Ensure victims of diverted offenders have access to all the information, services and considerations extended to victims whose cases are prosecuted. Provide victims of diverted offenders with information about the diversion process and what their role can be.
- Have a discussion with victims (and any witnesses expected to testify) about the typical ways they interact with the accused and consider these issues when you request release conditions.
- Spend time safety planning with victims. Consider specific circumstances such as sports, school or other typical ways the victim will have contact with the offender. Where appropriate, advise victims to disclose any conditions of non-association to coaches and the school.
- If the victim and accused attend the same school, consider contacting the principal to ensure he or she knows the accused's release conditions and are involved in safety planning with the victim at school. Police have the authority to disclose this information under the YCJA, section 125(6).
- When a case is resolved without charge, consider referring the victim to the victim services program in your jurisdiction for support and on-going assistance.
- When the decision has been made to proceed by way of charge, remember to refer the victim to the Victim Witness Assistance Program.

- Where possible, consider proceeding by way of promise to appear as opposed to summons. While this may initially be more work for the officer, the hastening of case resolution makes a big difference for victims.
- Remember to leave victim information packages, if available, with the victim. If this information is not available in your jurisdiction a model can be accessed at www.police.london.ca (under 'Victim Services').

The specific implications and observations of this study for police are summarized on a two-page tip sheet developed by the project team.

Implications for Prosecutors

Because victims and perpetrators of peer-on-peer violence usually know each other, the events described in a police report are often a snap shot in the context of an on-going relationship. This fact has many implications for the prosecution process, as does the fact that young victims have special needs and vulnerabilities. Teenage victims may look all grown up on the surface, but they can think and feel very much like children. They have a need to feel safe, be treated with an age-appropriate understanding, have access to testimonial aids and supports available to them by law, receive specialized court preparation in cities where such a service is available, and have the right to receive and contribute information. These recommendations are offered for consideration by Crown Attorney's Offices in Ontario:

- Discuss with local police the implications for timely case processing and victim safety associated with summonses, promises to appear, etc.
- When extra-judicial sanctions are used, clarify responsibility for informing victims of this decision and related implications. Does this task fall to police, the Victim Witness Assistance Program, or the Crown's office?
- A young victim's involvement in extra-judicial sanctions involving victim/offender contact should be sought, wherever possible, by a neutral person with experience in victim services who can determine if involvement is in the victim's best interests.
- When extra-judicial sanctions involve victim/offender contact, ensure young victims know that no penalty will befall them or the accused if they decline to participate and that their consent can be withdrawn at any point in the process.
- To the extent possible, expedite cases where children or teens are expected to testify.
- Especially in cases of sexual violence, meet the victim at least once prior to the court date.
- Spell out the options for testimonial aids and give teenage witnesses a choice.

The specific implications and observations of this study for prosecutors are summarized on a two-page tip sheet developed by the project team.

Implications for Child Witness Support Programs

Adolescent victims and witnesses of violent crimes can present complex and complicated issues for their supporters. They may appear more mature and informed than they are. Many will be reluctant to reveal feelings of vulnerability and they have difficulty expressing their concerns about testifying. Some are embarrassed to label themselves as “victims.” They are best served by identifying their individual needs as early as possible. These recommendations are offered for consideration by victim service providers in Ontario:

- When the referral is first received, personal contact with young victims and their families is appreciated.
- Timely advisement to the prosecutor about special needs and recommendations for testimonial aids helps avoid delays.
- Courtroom orientation and the opportunity to review his or her statement, before the court date, reduced anticipatory anxiety.
- A secure waiting area in the courthouse reduces the risk of unwanted contact with the accused on the day of court.
- A young victim’s involvement in extra-judicial sanctions involving victim/offender contact should be sought, wherever possible, by a neutral person with experience in victim services who can determine if participation is in the victim’s best interests.
- Where an extra-judicial sanction involves victim/offender contact, the victim may require an identified support person
- When there is a finding of guilt or a guilty plea, young victims may need information and assistance about completing a victim impact statement.

The specific implications and observations of this study for prosecutors are summarized on a two-page tip sheet developed by the project team.

Implications for Schools

The majority of peer-on-peer violence known to the police occurs at school or on the way to or from school. Because the victim and accused are usually acquainted, the reality of on-going contact can cause distress and raise safety concerns after the incident is discovered by authorities. Fear of retaliation or intimidation by the accused and his or her associates may result in the victim skipping classes, missing extracurricular opportunities, changing schools, or even dropping out. These recommendations are offered for Ontario schools:

- Designate one teacher or guidance counsellor as the “go to” person the victim can contact when he or she has concerns or needs to talk
- Familiarize yourself with the implications for victims of the different ways police resolve cases in your community (e.g., charging vs. diversion) and how they compel an accused’s attendance in court (e.g., promise to appear vs. arrest)

- Either the investigating officer or the victim can share with the school the details of legal restrictions on victim/offender contact, so incorporate this information into safety planning for the victim
- Recognize points of potential difficulty for victims such as the day an accused returns from suspension or the day of any trial or sentencing
- Be aware of how your actions toward the accused may be interpreted by the victim as condoning or minimizing the severity of his or her victimization
- Do your best to accommodate the many appointments and court dates victims must attend while their cases are processed through the court system
- If a course requires a field trip to the courthouse, avoid entering a courtroom where a teenager or child is testifying

Emerging Areas for Victim Services

In our community, we are seeing early evidence of several variants of peer-to-peer crime that will have implications for victim services.

Gang-related Violence

As Toronto headlines scream alarming messages about gun violence and gangs, we in London have largely been insulated from the more dramatic and visible indications of gang presence. This is not to say that gang-related crime is not an issue in our community. "Guns and gangs" and youth crime are two of six priority areas for the London Police. This flows in great measure from the results of public surveys suggesting that gang-related activities and youth crime are the most important crime-related problems in our community. The London Police have instituted training initiatives and made a number of public presentations on youth gangs. That said, however, our data suggest that peer-on-peer gang-related violence did not constitute a major portion of youth-on-youth crime known to the police. Two of the 247 occurrences appeared gang-related. In the absence of public displays of violence such as drive-by shootings, one could surmise that victims of gang violence are highly reluctant to involve the police. Also, gang-related violence may be directed primarily against young adults (18 and over) as victims and may be perpetrated by young adults who are 18 and over.

Imported Ethnic Tensions

This issue is seen in our school system in greatest frequency where ESL services are clustered in a few schools. Attending school together on a daily basis, groups of youth from opposing sides in war-torn countries can have an uneasy truce with each other that occasionally erupts into outbursts of threats and violence. Serving these groups of victims requires an understanding of the historical context in which the animosity was created in the first place. These youths may have imported well-founded fears of the police, distrust of the criminal justice system, and a lack of familiarity with our adversarial legal system. Levels of fear may be magnified by personal memories of atrocities in the home country. They may have become desensitized to violence and organize into groups for mutual protection.

Peer-to-Peer Cyber-crime

While potentially a common occurrence in Canada today, these offences are not yet being brought to police attention at a significant rate. Some cyber-crime is the domain of adults, such as Internet luring and most on-line production and distribution of child pornography. However, there are several areas where young people victimize others of similar age, such as harassment through text messaging, e-mail, voice mail, chat groups and web sites.

Future Research

Conducting this small study has suggested several ideas for further research.

- **track and follow-up young victims in 100 cases**

Among cases involving young offenders, whether or not charges are laid, did the victims feel informed about decisions and able to contribute their opinions? How did their parents feel? Were they referred to services to assist in resolving the consequences of their victimizations? Who received services from what organizations? Did they feel vulnerable to re-victimization and did they feel the criminal justice system addressed their safety concerns? How did the experience affect their school performance and attendance? How did the case end if charges were laid? Did they have to testify and what was that experience like? What happened in the long-run between them and the offender? Would they make a report if a similar incident happened in the future? What recommendations do they have to improve our responses to young victims of youth crime? This information could be collected through an interview study with a random sample of victims.

- **track and follow young offenders in 100 cases**

Likewise, we could learn a great deal from understanding the trajectory of case processing when youth crime is discovered by or reported to the police. Tracking 100 cases can help us learn about service utilization patterns and decision making. How many ended up receiving correctional services and who was sentenced to custody? How are the male and female offenders different? A follow-up component could determine patterns of recidivism. This information could be collected through tracking cases in official data bases.

- **identify and study the "chronic" young offenders**

The majority of youth coming to the attention of the youth courts are "one-time offenders" who do not carry on with more criminal conduct (Statistics Canada, 2005). However, there is a sub-group of youth repeatedly identified as criminal suspects. Because past behaviour is the best predictor of future behaviour, length of prior record is often used to demark "chronic" young offenders from the remainder. Studying the years prior to the advent of the YCJA, and looking at criminal career trajectories of a birth cohort tracked between the ages of 12 and 21, 16% of offenders were categorized as "chronic," meaning they had five or more referrals to court by the age of 21 (Statistics Canada, 2005). This 16% was responsible for 60% of all cases processed in court. Today, with the increased use of diversion, that "chronic" group will represent a higher proportion of the youth court population. Knowing more about these youth – who they are, how to identify them early, what they need – could help us to design intensive intervention programs tailored to their unique need profile. Using police occurrence records, it is easy to flag cases

where a set threshold of charges has been reached. These youth and/or their families could then be studied and their needs assessed.

- **study desistance in young offenders**

In contrast to studying chronic offenders, we can learn a great deal from understanding the motivations and circumstances of young offenders who desist from crime. What factors do they attribute to the decision? What factors do their parents see as important? Why are desistance patterns different for boys and girls? This study could be conducted with interviews.

- **interview young victims who have participated in restorative justice options that involve their presence, including a follow-up component**

Another helpful study would involve interviewing the young victims who participate in extra-judicial sanctions involving victim/offender contact. What were their perceptions of the experience? What benefits did they derive? Did they feel pressured to participate? Did they know they could decline? What was the nature (if any) of any subsequent contact with the offender? To add a comparative element, young victims whose cases were cleared "otherwise" could also be interviewed. This group would represent better equivalency than victims whose cases were prosecuted.

- **study youth perceptions of peer-on-peer assaults and the decisions of victims**

Another area that would be worth pursuing is to explore the reasons young people have for deciding not to report a victimization. Working with the schools, it would be possible to survey students about their opinions of coming forward and what they see as the pros and cons. We could investigate rationalizations for violence and rationalizations for not disclosing. This exercise could also incorporate a victimization survey.

- **investigate cyber crime**

Finally, we know very little about the phenomenon of youth-on-youth cyber crime. In order to develop expertise in this emerging area of victim service, it would be helpful to undertake a review of existing information. As part of this effort, we could use the media to ask youth to make confidential reports through our Internet site or via e-mail.

Future Program Development

We also provide these observations about potential gaps in services for these client groups, both young victims and young offenders. All these suggestions would necessarily require discussion among stakeholder groups, including funders.

Services for Teenaged Victims of Sexual Assault

Only in recent years can we say that most young victims of sexual assault could find an appropriate counselling service in London. The problem was most acute for 16 and 17-year old victims and for male victims. This leads us to suggest that this type of programming may not be available in many Ontario communities.

Case Manager for Victims of Diverted Offenders

Another potential service gap arising from our data pertains to the victims of offences that are diverted by the police or Crown. Several recommendations advanced here reflect our concern that these victims could fall through the cracks of the existing system of victim services. While we applaud the intent of the YCJA to encourage the least intrusive measure for young offenders, victims involved in diverted cases deserve to be kept apprised of case developments, able to submit information to aid in decision making, and referred to appropriate services if needed. At the police level, these responsibilities may fall to already over-burdened front-line officers. Once charges are laid, this responsibility may fall to already over-burdened victim/witness staff or Assistant Crown Attorneys. Vesting this responsibility in one person or role might be the best way of both divesting these groups from the responsibility and encouraging equitable service to all victims.

Domestic Violence Program for Adolescents

London is one of many communities across Ontario with a domestic violence court and an early intervention option for first-time, non-serious offenders. As part of this option, a qualifying accused can access men's treatment and the victim can access the support of a woman's advocate. Because the funding is directed at the adult system, young perpetrators of domestic violence offences are not eligible. Our police data show that the number of cases involving both victims and offenders under 18 is quite small. At least this is true among cases known to the police. Anecdotally, however, we see at the Child Witness Project that most young female victims of intimate partner violence report victimizations by partners who are 18 or 19. For example, 18 young women under 18 were referred in cases involving boy friends or ex-boy friends (12), common-law partners (5) or same-sex partners (1). Thus, while the victim is young, the offender is processed through the adult court system (precluding their inclusion in this study). While they are legally adults, these young men – developmentally – are adolescents. Two issues may warrant discussion at the community-level. First, would there be a benefit to developing a "men's" treatment program for adolescents? Second, would some of the younger men currently attending the men's program be better suited to an adolescent group?

Programming for the "Chronic" Offender

As discussed above, most youth who have contact with the criminal justice system are one-time offenders. A sub-group, however, can be categorized as "chronic." Most of them will have had their first police contact prior to the age of 12. The police are in a unique position to identify chronic young offenders earlier than can any other component of the system. Addressing recidivism among this group of youth would require interventions of greater intensity and length than may be available currently. To be consistent with the literature, such an intervention would necessarily be family-based. Likelihood of success would be directly linked to how early these youth are identified for intensive service.

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Appendix A

THE "SKINNY" ON ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

The many changes teens experience present their adult allies with both challenges and rewards.

A graphic representation of the typical adolescent growth curve would have small ups and downs each day, with larger gains and losses on some days, with an upward trend overall. The picture changes when a teen is the victim of a crime. There are often more downs than ups, and sometimes the upward growth stops altogether. Some features of adolescent development are obvious, such as the physical changes brought about by puberty, and even a teen's growing awareness of body image and sexual identity. Other changes are less obvious.

Cognitive Changes

Concrete thinking: Young children see things in black and white. They can't weigh options or analyze multiple layers of situations, and often interpret language literally, failing to understand ironic humor and double meanings. Early adolescents may still be at this stage of cognitive development or may be moving to the stages described below.

Abstract thinking: Middle adolescents develop the ability to see shades of gray when considering problems. Interpretation of language expands to include nuance and irony. They also progress in using metaphors, symbols, and abstract concepts such as those involved in philosophy.

Critical thinking: This cognitive shift is marked by the change from "what" questions to "how" and "why" questions. Adolescents begin to be able to grapple with complex issues, analyzing the available information and drawing conclusions. They can evaluate alternatives and use logic to make decisions.

Social Changes

Peer group involvement: Adults have many relationships outside the family. Adolescents prepare for these adult relationships by pulling back -- to a greater or lesser degree -- from family and spending more time with friends. Young teens explore gender, as girls and boys tend to hang out together in groups. In middle adolescence, peer groups support the search for identity by establishing their own dress code, communication style, and code of conduct.

Communication: Increased vocabularies and mastery of communication tools, together with their expanded world of non-family relationships, lead teenagers to spend a larger part of every day communicating. Communication skills improve at this time.

Emotional Changes

Mood swings: The intense hormonal activity within the adolescent body, along with the seismic emotional and cognitive shifts, can lead to sudden mood swings in even the most "mellow" of adolescents. An adolescent can go from euphoria to tears or vice versa in a few minutes.

Intimacy: Forming non-family relationships with peers of both sexes gives adolescents their first opportunity to decide how much information about themselves to share with others. Adolescents experiment with intimacy both with friends and with romantic partners, forming close emotional bonds and experiencing vulnerability and trust in relationships. They may begin to explore sexual intimacy.

Adult Identity Development

Identity: The quest for identity begins in adolescence. Middle adolescents begin to be both introspective and egocentric, focusing on who they are and what they are becoming. All information is filtered through a "me" lens: "What does this mean about who I am?"

Autonomy: Moving toward adulthood, adolescents develop their own belief systems. This often entails questioning their parents' beliefs and testing out new values introduced by peers or adults outside the family. Adolescents also claim autonomy over their own thoughts and feelings. Previously they may have been open with parents about their hurts and disappointments; now they begin to assert a right to privacy and to manage their own inner worlds.

Independence: Becoming independent means making their own decisions. Teens establish independence in a variety of ways: by working part-time jobs to earn their own money, by learning to drive or to navigate public transportation on their own, by making choices about everything from what clothes to wear to which school electives to take. Such freedom is routine for adults but novel for most teens.

Achievement: Younger children are motivated to achieve by the desire to win the approval of parents, teachers, and others. Adolescents begin to take satisfaction in achievement for its own sake, and they demonstrate a growing desire to succeed in the efforts they undertake.

Risk: The passage to adulthood involves learning to assess risk, predict outcomes, and take reasonable chances; therefore, some risk-taking is normal. Some of the risks teens take are likely to be applauded, such as trying out for plays or sports teams or asking someone out. Other risk behaviors, such as driving too fast or experimenting with cigarettes or alcohol, are physically dangerous as well as illegal.

Excerpted from: National Crime Prevention Council & the National Center for Victims of Crime (2005). *Reaching and Serving Teens: A Practical Handbook*. Washington DC: National Crime Prevention Council.

Family Consultant and Victim Services Unit, London Police Service

The London Police Service, which celebrated its 150th anniversary in 2005, has a complement of 760 employees: 575 police officers, 19 cadets, and 166 civilians. The LPS serves the City of London which has a population of 340,000 and covers 422 square kilometres. Since 1973, social workers in the innovative Family Consultant and Victim Services Unit have worked alongside police officers with families and individuals in crisis to address immediate needs, perform crisis counselling, and make referrals to other community resources. The Unit operates from Police Headquarters seven days a week. The staff are mobile and are in constant radio contact with the police Communications Centre, allowing for immediate response when front-line officers are involved in cases needing the expertise of the Unit. The Consultant provides sufficient counselling to begin the crisis-resolution process, and then makes arrangements for on-going support from community agencies, extended family, and other resources as appropriate. The Consultants provide officers with feedback and interventions. The process of building support or further counselling for the family usually continues during office hours the following day, as team members follow-up with agencies, clients and officers.

For more information, consult their web site at www.police.london.ca

Child Witness Project, Centre for Children and Families in the Justice System

The Centre for Children and Families in the Justice System (formerly the London Family Court Clinic) is a non-profit social service agency committed to advocate for the special needs of children and families involved in the criminal and civil legal systems. As one of its six clinical programs, the Child Witness Project (CWP) helps children and adolescents called to testify in court, to ensure they can communicate their evidence without being traumatized by the challenging process of being a witness. This is achieved through assessment, education, stress reduction, consultation, and expert testimony. The CWP also has a strong history of innovation in program development, training, and research. The Project is funded by the Attorney General of Ontario.

For more information, consult the project web site at www.lfcc.on.ca/cwp.htm

Helping the Victims of "Youth-on-Youth" Criminal Violence



- 1 Implications for Police
- 2 Implications for Prosecutors
- 3 Implications for Child Witness Support Programs
- 4 Implications for Schools

See www.lfcc.on.ca



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