



# Research Snapshot

## Service Coordination at LFCC

### What is this project?

In London Ontario, one in four children live in poverty – this means 25% of our young people are growing up without access to basic needs. Factors that have been linked to youth poverty include inadequate or a lack of housing and employment, not receiving an education, and having untreated mental health needs. In an effort to respond to these needs a three-year project involving service coordination was developed at LFCC. The goal of the project was to quickly respond to the identified needs of court involved and high-risk youth. Youth were assisted with poverty related concerns including housing crises, schooling needs, mental health services, employment skills, finances, and transportation needs. The project's two service coordinators received referrals from various professionals in the community and responded to the needs of 133 youth over the course of 2.5 years: 20 accessed the service more than once.

### What did the evaluation study involve?

This project benefited from a third-party evaluator who drew conclusions based on an analysis of information collected from youth, parents, and community stakeholders. Of the 133 young people, 39 consented to the evaluation study which was comprised of interviews, self-report questionnaires, as well as service coordinators' case notes. This study identified barriers for at-risk youth in areas most directly related to poverty: mental health, housing, education and employment. The benefits and challenges of service coordination with this group of young people were also examined.

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### What did we find?

**Mental Health:** Mental health problems and barriers to services were prevalent for this group of youth. Service coordination increased young people's sense of support and their access to mental health services.

- 97% of the youth were 'at-risk' of at least one mental health problem
- 89% had experienced at least one traumatic event in their lifetime
- A barrier for youth accessing mental health services was a lack of transportation
- Along with transportation, service coordinators offered emotional support, consulted with other service providers, and accompanied youth to appointments

**Housing:** Most youth reported being in stable housing at project start. Young people's housing histories are nevertheless characterized as unstable with many lifetime moves and episodic homelessness.

- 90% reported being in stable housing at the time of the initial interview
- Throughout the duration of the program, several youth experienced destabilized housing and required assistance securing new housing and utilizing the emergency shelter system
- 46% moved 10 or more times in their lifetime and 56% had experienced homelessness
- Barriers identified included a scarcity of youth-specific shelter and housing programs and limited financial assistance that may result in unsafe living arrangements

# Research Snapshot | Service Coordination at LFCC

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**Education and Employment:** Many youth were enrolled in school but they reported a lack of motivation, which resulted in poor attendance. Behavioural and safety issues also resulted in poor school progress for many. Some youth had work-related experience, but their earnings were inadequate to support them. Positively, at project end, youth reported improvements in the areas of education and employment.

- 72% of youth said they were enrolled in school at project start, with approximately one third indicating they attended regularly
- 85% had been suspended from school at least once; 31% had been expelled in the past
- 82% reported increased school engagement since working with service coordinators who helped them enroll in school, deal with administrative complexities, and transported them to support regular attendance
- 40% reported they were currently employed or had been within the last year, 33% had job training, 44% had volunteered over the last year
- Half of the youth were receiving financial assistance from the government
- Many experienced food insecurity which resulted in service coordinators accompanying youth to the food bank
- Barriers were a lack of part-time employment programs that could support youth with the needs as identified (for those still in school) and resources needed to secure and maintain employment, such as transportation, driver's license, identification, and a phone
- Service coordinators assisted with employment gains by exploring job skill opportunities, attending job-related appointments and advocating for volunteer placements

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## How can we use this research?

The project identified several barriers and challenges to meeting the mental health, housing, as well as the educational and employment needs of court-involved and high-risk young people. A lack of transportation for accessing existing resources and services, the scarcity of youth-specific programs for housing and employment, limited and hard to access financial assistance, and a lack of motivation and energy for engaging in a schooling program were a few of the barriers faced by these youth. Service coordinators assisted youth by: helping them enroll in school, dealing with administrative complexities within the educational, housing and financial areas, transporting and accompanying them to critical appointments to assist with their mental health and daily life needs, consulting with other service providers who could offer support, and exploring within their community job and volunteer opportunities.

We learned that transportation poverty is pervasive in the lives of these youth. Without easily accessible

and reliable transportation, many youth were unable to attend scheduled appointments or access needed programs. Parents said that service coordination helped to connect youth to needed community supports and ensured that youth attended their appointments. Many youth spoke of the benefits of having access to safe transportation, as well as the positive connections, counselling on specific concerns and encouragement offered during one-to-one conversations in the car. Young people's feedback about these interactions suggests they felt understood as well as respected.

## Recommendations:

In the future, service coordination efforts could be improved by: 1) considering the importance of supporting youth with transportation services; 2) helping to support young peoples' need for reminders and concrete support in keeping and attending appointments; 3) assist youth with navigating the administrative aspects of adult-focused services (e.g., financial and housing programs).

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**About this Summary:** This summary was prepared by Hailey Kolpin, MA. For further information about London Family Court Clinic, visit [www.lfcc.on.ca](http://www.lfcc.on.ca)

This research was conducted at LFCC with contributions by Dr. Debbie Chiodo, Shelley-Ann John, Dr. Joyce Radford and Dr. Dan Ashbourne.

**Keywords:** Youth, mental health, housing, employment, poverty

This project is funded by the Government of Ontario and administered by the Ontario Trillium Foundation through the Local Poverty Reduction Fund.



## Research Snapshot

# Mental Health and Poverty in Justice Involved Youth

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### What you need to know

This study examined how living in poverty relates to youth mental health problems and youth criminal activity. Findings suggest that youth who live in moderate to higher levels of poverty are more likely to have mental health problems, as well as early criminal involvements.

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### What is this study about?

Young people who experience poverty appear in court ten times more often than other youth. Additionally, young people involved in the criminal justice system are at a higher risk for mental health disorders compared to other young people. Research shows that between 50% and 100% of court-involved young people have a mental health disorder. While experiencing poverty and a mental health disorder does not cause crime, it can influence behaviour patterns – resulting in court involvement. An important question addressed in this study is how living in poverty relates to youth mental health problems and youth criminal activity.

### What did the researchers do?

As part of this study, 281 youth files from London Family Court Clinic (LFCC) were reviewed. Youth were originally referred by a judge to LFCC to complete a psychological assessment between the years 2010 and 2015. At the time of their involvement with LFCC, youth were between 12-23 years old, with all criminal activity having taken

place when they were under 18. Eighty-two percent of the sample were male.

Information collected related to young people's mental health problems, criminal involvement, and their level of poverty.

Mental health problems were recorded according to both the number of psychological symptoms/diagnoses, as well as, by the type of mental health problem experienced by the youth (e.g., trauma, depression). As well, the age at which mental health problems began was considered (e.g., prior to age 12 or after 12).

Criminal involvement was recorded based on a youth's number of past and current charges, as well as, when criminal activity began (e.g., prior to age 12 or after 12).

Poverty was understood by considering information about young people's socioeconomic status (e.g., parent's marital status and education, refugee status, teen pregnancy etc.). Based on this information, youth were seen as falling into one of three levels of poverty: low, moderate, or high.

# Research Snapshot | Mental Health and Poverty in Justice Involved Youth

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## What did we find?

More severe poverty is associated with persistent mental health challenges:

- Young offenders who lived in moderate to high levels of poverty were more likely to have mental health problems identified prior to age twelve.

Mental health problems are pervasive for court-involved youth:

- Overall, more than 75% of these court involved youth had at least one mental health diagnosis, with over 50% having two or more diagnoses.

Offending is sometimes directly linked to mental health:

- One in five of the offences committed were viewed as being directly related to the youth's mental health problems.

Persistent mental health concerns increase the chance of persistent offending behaviour:

- Mental health problems before age 12 tended to increase the likelihood of youth being involved in criminal behaviour prior to age twelve and into adolescence.

## How can we use this research?

While having a mental health problem or living in poverty does not in itself cause crime, these findings suggest that experiencing both higher levels of poverty and persistent mental health challenges, relates to longer term involvement in the youth justice system.

Future interventions for court-involved youth should address both the effects of poverty on youth

(e.g., addressing barriers to accessing services, safe housing) as well as their mental health service needs, in an effort to reduce their future offending and improve their lives.

Ideally, services aimed at redirecting youth from becoming involved in the justice system would begin prior to age twelve.

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**Original Research Article:** For a complete description of the research and findings, please see the full research article [by clicking here](#)

**About the Authors:** Alan Leschied, PhD, Professor, Faculty of Education, Western University and Angelina MacLellan, MA, Hubley and Carruthers, Psychologists, Halifax, NS. This research was conducted at LFCC with contributions by Dr. Joyce Radford and Dr. Dan Ashbourne.

**Keywords:** Youth, mental health, criminal activity, poverty

**About this Summary:** This summary was prepared by Rebecca West, MA Candidate at Western University. For further information about London Family Court Clinic, visit [www.lfcc.on.ca](http://www.lfcc.on.ca)

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## Research Snapshot

### Friendships, Mental Health and Poverty in Court-Involved Youth

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#### What you need to know

This study examined how friendships of young offenders relate to living in poverty, criminal behaviour, and having mental health difficulties. This study found that living in conditions related to poverty is prevalent among court-involved youth. As well, these youth were likely to live among peers who held antisocial values, beliefs and behaviours. A more negative peer environment was linked to a greater likelihood criminal involvement and mental health difficulties.

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#### What is this study about?

Young people are strongly influenced by the emotions, opinions, and behaviours of their friends. Research shows that young people are more likely to be involved in a crime with their friends, compared to adults who are involved in crime. Young people involved with friends who are a bad influence are at high risk for: violent behaviour, poor school achievement, drug and alcohol use, and criminal involvement. This risk increases further for those young people who also experience poverty. While poverty does not cause crime, research shows that youth living in marginalized economic conditions tend to have friends with a more negative influence. A question addressed by this study is how living in poverty relates to the friendships and the mental health of young people who are involved in criminal behaviour.

#### What did the researchers do?

As part of this study, 281 youth files from London Family Court Clinic (LFCC) were reviewed. These youth were originally referred by a judge to complete a psychological assessment for court purposes, between the years 2010 and 2015. At the time of their involvement with LFCC, youth were between 12-23 years old, with all criminal activity having taken place when they were under 18 years of age. Eighty-two percent of the sample were male.

Information that was collected related to young people's mental health problems, friendships, criminal involvements, and their level of poverty.

Mental health problems were recorded according to both the number of psychological symptoms/diagnoses, as well as, by the type of mental health problem experienced by the youth (e.g., trauma, depression).

Criminal involvement was recorded based on a youth's number of past and current charges, as well as, whether the crime happened when the youth was alone or with a friend.

Poverty was understood by considering information about a young person's socioeconomic status. (e.g., parent's marital status and education, refugee status, teen pregnancy, etc.). Youth were rated as falling into one of three levels of poverty: low, medium, or high.

The friendships of the young people were understood according to a youth's report of having friends or no friends. As well, based on a friend's criminal behaviour involvement, young people were rated as having poor, good, or mixed-influenced friendships.

A negative peer environment was understood by considering a youth's involvement in settings with antisocial peers (e.g., living conditions, school, etc.). Young people's negative peer environments were rated as: low, medium, or high.

## What did we find?

Poverty, negative peer environments, and antisocial friendships are evident in the lives of court-involved youth:

- While almost 20% of the youth lived in moderate to high poverty, nearly 97% had at least one negative peer environment and 78% had friendships that were a negative influence.

Poverty was associated with young people's involvement in a negative peer environment:

- For every additional contributor to poverty, a young person's involvement in a negative peer environment increased by almost 30%.

Antisocial friendships were associated with more behavioural difficulties:

- Court-involved youth with poor-influence friendships were more likely to have behavioural difficulties.

## How can we use this research?

The findings suggest that poverty, a negative peer environment, and negative-influence peers are often present in the lives of court-involved youth.

Knowing that young offenders are negatively influenced through their friendships, future rehabilitative efforts should address the function of these friendships. For example, if a youth has negative-influence friends due to peer rejection, rehabilitative efforts should in part be focused on building a youth's social skills.

Having negative-influence friendships or having no friends at all are both related to mental health

Peer isolation amongst these youth was linked to increased mental health problems:

- One out of ten of the youth were identified as having no friends at all
- Youth without friends had the highest number of mental health difficulties.

More severe negative peer environments increased the chance of psychological difficulties and offending behaviour:

- Higher negative peer environments tended to increase the likelihood of mental health symptoms and diagnoses, as well as criminal involvements.
- Over 32% of the youth who had committed a crime had done so with at least one other person.

difficulties for young people. Efforts should focus on treating mental health challenges as well as addressing the negative effects of social isolation. Efforts to assist youth should also address the effects of poverty and target key needs of young people including their daily care and their access to support and supervision.

For youth involved in the criminal justice system, interventions that focus on the effects of negative peers and social environments, may offer better educational and occupational outcomes for these young people.

# Research Snapshot | Friendships, Mental Health and Poverty in Court Involved Youth

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**Original Research Article:** For a complete description of the research and findings, please see the full research article [by clicking here](#)

**About the Authors:** Alan Leschied, PhD, Professor, Faculty of Education, Western University and Victoria Sabo, MA, CCC. This research was conducted at the LFCC with contributions by Dr. Joyce Radford and Dr. Dan Ashbourne.

**Keywords:** Youth, mental health, criminal involvement, poverty, friendships, negative peer environment

**About this Summary:** This summary was prepared by Rebecca West, MA Candidate at Western University. For further information about London Family Court Clinic, visit [www.lfcc.on.ca](http://www.lfcc.on.ca)

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## Research Snapshot

# Family, Education, Community and Poverty in the Lives of Court-Involved Youth

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### What you need to know

This study examined how living in poverty relates to a youth's family, school, and community contexts that shape their health and behaviour. Findings suggest that court-involved youth who live in poverty are more likely to have poor educational outcomes, high family instability, and are lacking prosocial ties to the community.

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### What is this study about?

Over the last 10 years, 80% of household incomes have remained unchanged for families in Canada. As a result, 1 out of every 10 children in Ontario is growing up with challenges related to poverty. Research shows that youth who experience poverty are twice as likely to engage in risky behaviour compared to youth who have never experienced poverty. While experiencing poverty does not cause crime, it can influence living and working conditions that affect a young person's health and behaviour. Research shows that youth who experience poverty have lower grades and educational achievement, less structured family routines, and poor social supports. This study addressed how living in poverty relates to a youth's family, school, and community experience, (what are generally referred to as the social determinants of health), and how these areas contribute to shaping a youth's well-being.

### What did the researchers do?

As part of this study, 281 youth files from London Family Court Clinic (LFCC) were reviewed. Youth were originally referred by a judge between the years 2010 and 2015 to the LFCC for a psychological assessment. At the time of their involvement with LFCC, youth were between

12-23 years old, with all criminal activity having taken place when they were under 18. Eighty-two percent of the sample were male.

Information collected related to young people's mental health problems, criminal involvement, education, family environment, community engagement, and their level of poverty.

*Mental health problems* were recorded according to both the number of psychological symptoms/diagnoses, the type of mental health problem experienced and the age at which the mental health problems began (e.g., prior to age 12 or after 12). (e.g., trauma, depression).

*Criminal involvement* was recorded based on a youth's number of past and current charges, as well as when criminal activity began (e.g., prior to age 12 or after 12).

*Education* was understood by considering information about a young person's educational outcomes (e.g., learning disability, grade failure, history of suspension, etc.). Based on this information, youth were seen as falling into one of three levels of education risk: low, moderate, or high.

*Family structure* was understood by considering information about a young person's risk of family instability (e.g., housing instability, lack of supervision,

victim of abuse, etc.). Based on this information, youth were seen as falling into one of three levels of family structure instability: low, moderate, or high.

*Community engagement* was understood by considering information about a young person's social ties outside of the family home (e.g., activities, hobbies, gang activity, etc.). Based on this information, youth were seen as falling into one of three levels of community risk: low, moderate, or high.

### What did we find?

**Young people's family experience was often a source of difficulty:**

- One in 5 court-involved youth did not have a birth parent as their legal guardian.
- Regardless of their level of poverty, more than 1 in 4 court-involved youth were not living with their family.
- A lack of parental involvement, rates of Children's Aid Society (CAS) involvement, family violence, and witnessing domestic violence was pervasive for all these court-involved youth.
- CAS involvement was highest for those who were more likely to live in higher poverty.
- The quality of a youth's family experience was poorest for those experiencing a high level of poverty

**Poor school progress was common for youth:**

- More than half of these court-involved youth had

### How can we use this research?

There is a need to consider the health burden associated with the living and working conditions related to poverty. For court-involved youth, important living and working conditions to consider are school, family, and community environments. While all the youth in this study demonstrated challenges in these areas of life, those youth who experience higher levels of poverty more frequently demonstrate family structure instability, a lack of parental involvement, grade failure more readily, and poor school progress as well as a lack

*The social determinants of health* were reflected in the youth's family, school and community experiences, which influence health outcomes for people.

*Poverty* was understood by considering information about young people's socioeconomic status (e.g., parent's marital status and education, refugee status, teen pregnancy, etc.). Based on this information, youth were seen as falling into one of three levels of poverty: low, moderate, or high.

completed an educational assessment due to peer achievement concerns.

- School was consistently viewed as being difficult by all of these youth.
- Youth living in moderate poverty had the lowest rate of school attendance and a higher rate of grade failure.
- Youth living in high poverty, had the lowest rate of educational attainment, and poorest motivation or interest in school, compared to the other youth.

**No or few social ties to their community:**

- An absence of recreational activities and hobbies were reported by youth across all levels of poverty.
- Youth living in high poverty were more likely than other youth to have negative relationships in their community, as well as, involvement in gang behaviour.

of positive community and recreational involvement. Also, increased poverty appears to impact young people's re-involvement with the court system and increase their difficulty in accessing services. Future services for court-involved youth should prioritize a youth's needs related to poverty (e.g., addressing barriers to accessing services, safe housing) and specific needs related to their challenges in family, school, and community environments, in order to improve their rehabilitation efforts and reduce future reoffending risks.

**Original Research Article:** For a complete description of the research and findings, please see the full research article [by clicking here](#)

**About the Authors:** Alan Leschied, PhD, Professor, Faculty of Education, Western University and Orla C. Tyrrell, MA, Faculty of Education, Western University. This research was conducted at the LFCC with contributions by Dr. Joyce Radford and Dr. Dan Ashbourne.

**Keywords:** Youth, mental health, criminal involvement, poverty, education

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## Research Snapshot

### Gender and Poverty in Justice-Involved Youth

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#### What you need to know

Pathways to crime differ for male and female youth. Females showed significantly higher levels of poverty, risky family circumstances and sexual behaviour, whereas males showed high levels of both unsafe family circumstances and poorer school performance. These male and female youth all experienced mental health issues and child welfare involvement.

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#### What is this study about?

Research on gender and youth offending tends to focus on males and then uses this information to try to understand female youth criminality. Research shows, however, that behavioural patterns or pathways that lead female youth to criminal involvement are different than for males. Females and males have unique experiences that should be part of service response and such information can promote better understanding related to gaps in service delivery. Research shows that crime rates for males are higher than for females, whereas female youth are more likely to have family and parenting issues that contribute to their difficulties. An important question addressed in this study is whether poverty affects pathways and risks to criminal activity differently for male and female youth.

#### What did the researchers do?

As part of this study, 281 youth files from London Family Court Clinic (LFCC) were reviewed. Youth were originally referred by a judge to LFCC to complete a psychological assessment, between the years 2010 and 2015. At the time of their involvement with LFCC, youth were between 12-23 years old, with all criminal activity having taken place when they were under 18. Eighty-

three percent of the sample were male.

Information collected related to youth's criminal involvement, poverty level, family dynamics, education, mental health problems, sexual behaviour and child welfare involvement.

Criminal involvement was recorded based on a youth's number of past and current charges, as well as, the type of offence.

Poverty was understood by considering information about young people's socioeconomic status (e.g., parent's marital status, refugee status, teen pregnancy, etc.). Youth were seen as falling into one of three levels of poverty: little to none, moderate, or high.

Family dynamics was understood by considering information about a young person's risk of family instability (e.g., lack of housing and supervision, victim of abuse, etc.). Youth were seen as falling into one of three levels of family risk level: low, moderate, or high.

School performance was understood by considering information about a young person's educational outcomes (e.g., learning disability, grade failure, etc.). Youth were categorized as falling into one of three levels of education risk: low, moderate, or high.

# Research Snapshot | Gender and Poverty in Justice Involved Youth

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Mental health problems were recorded based on the number of psychological diagnoses (e.g., anxiety, depression).

Sexual behaviours were recorded based on parental reports of youth's risky sexual actions (e.g., promiscuity, prostitution, etc.).

## What did we find?

Child welfare system involvement is common for both male and female youth:

- 78% of court involved males, and 92% of the females, have also had involvement with the child welfare system.
- Female court-involved youth with risky family situations were more likely to have higher rates of poverty, higher levels of family distress and instability, were more likely to reside in a shelter and come from a single-parent household.

Female court-involved youth were more likely to be victimized and engage in risky sexual behaviour:

- 47% of female youth had a history of sexual victimization, compared to 12% of males.
- Female more than male youth were more likely

## How can we use this research?

Future interventions should address the unique concerns that place males and females at an even greater risk for further criminal involvement in order to support better educational and occupational outcomes for these young people. Ideally, future intervention strategies for female court-involved youth should address risky and unstable family circumstances and dynamics, abuse and victimization,

Child welfare involvement was recorded based on whether youth currently or had previously been involved in any way with child welfare (e.g., Children's Aid Society, crown ward, etc.).

to be neglected (Female 40%; Male 23%) and physically abused (Female 70%; Male 50%).

- Female youth were more likely than males to demonstrate risky sexual behaviour.

Male court involved youth can benefit from structure and activities:

- As risky family dynamics increase for male youth, so does their number of criminal charges.
- More involvement in organized activities was associated with a lower risk for poor school performance for males.
- A lower risk for poor school performance was associated with less criminal charges in these male youth.

sexual education, and poverty barriers. For male court-involved youth, future services should address both unstable and unsafe family circumstances, as well as, poor performance at school. For both male and female youth involved in the criminal justice system, future services should focus on the effects of mental health problems and achieving financial independence.

## Research Snapshot | Gender and Poverty in Justice Involved Youth

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**Original Research Article:** For a complete description of the research and findings, please see the full research article [by clicking here](#)

**About the Authors:** Alan Leschied, PhD, Professor, Faculty of Education, Western University and Jordyn G. Webb, MA, Faculty of Education, Western University. This research was conducted at the LFCC with contributions by Dr. Joyce Radford and Dr. Dan Ashbourne.

**Keywords:** Youth, mental health, criminal activity, poverty, gender

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