ATLANTA YOUTH COUNT!

Homeless Youth Count and Needs Assessment

FINAL REPORT MAY 2016

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2015 ATLANTA YOUTH COUNT AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

In early 2015, researchers, community advocates, service providers, and students from across metro Atlanta joined together to plan and conduct the Atlanta Youth Count and Needs Assessment (AYCNA). The goals of the project were to: 1) provide metro-Atlanta service providers, policymakers, and youth advocates practical information on the size, nature, and needs of the homeless, precariously housed, and runaway youth in our community; 2) collect information that can be used to develop and refine policies, programs, and interventions to help these youth in our community; and 3) encourage a community-wide dialogue about the needs and social determinants of youth homelessness.

Data were collected from May-July of 2015. Teams of outreach workers and service providers worked together with students, youth, and other trained volunteers to conduct sweeps of the metro area shelters and other street and community locations where homeless youth spend time and live. The study utilized sophisticated systematic capture-recapture field sampling methods to locate homeless youth in order to ensure that the sample accurately describes the current population of homeless youth in metro Atlanta. All homeless and runaway youth ages 14-25, who did not have a permanent stable residence of their own, and who were living independently without consistent parental or family support were eligible and encouraged to participate.

Every homeless youth encountered was invited to complete a brief 15-minute survey about their current and past experiences with homelessness, including factors that led to their becoming homeless. They also were asked about their personal and social background, health status, and contact with various health and social service systems. In order to make the youth feel comfortable and to protect them from potential harm, the data were collected anonymously. *No information was collected that could be used to identify or trace participants*. Youth received a $10 gift card as a thank you for participating. This study was reviewed and overseen by the Institutional Review Board at Georgia State University (Study Number H15427). All of the data collected were aggregated and analyzed by the local university-based, interdisciplinary team of researchers and advanced undergraduate and graduate students.

This document is the official public report and provides an overview of the study methodology and key findings, including the research team's official estimates of the number of homeless youth in metro Atlanta as well as a description of key characteristics of the population derived from the survey data collected. Members of the research team are continuing to analyze and use the data to improve public and policymakers' understanding of youth homelessness and to guide community-efforts to improve services for these young people. Additional in-depth reports and public issue briefs will be made available to the public via our project website, (www.atlantayouthcount.weebly.com), social media (www.facebook.com/atlantayouthcount/), and in the professional, scientific literature.

KEY FINDINGS

- In a typical summer month in the Atlanta metro, we estimate that there are approximately 3,374 homeless and runaway youth living on the streets, in shelters, or in other precarious housing situations. This estimate is derived from several different statistical calculations, ranging from 1,516 to 3,833 and based on field research that included portions of Fulton, Cobb, Clayton, DeKalb, and Gwinnett counties and multiple municipalities.
- The vast majority of homeless youth surveyed were Black or African-American (71%), cisgender men (60.5%) between the ages of 20-25 (70.9%).
- Approximately half (52.2%) of homeless youth surveyed in Atlanta were born in the State of Georgia.
- Nearly one-third (31.5%) of homeless youth interviewed reported being in school.
- Overall, 28.2% of the homeless youth surveyed self-identified as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and/or Transgender (LGBT).
- The most common reasons youth found themselves homeless were financial problems (46.1%), job problems (32.3%), family violence/problems (28.2%), being kicked out of the home (24.2%), and housing problems (23.7%).
- Approximately 28% of Atlanta's homeless youth surveyed reported symptoms indicating the possibility of having a serious mental illness.
- The majority of the homeless youth in the survey use alcohol (58%) and/or marijuana or hashish (64%), and nearly two-thirds (62.5%) of those who use have a high likelihood of having a substance use disorder.
- Many homeless youth in the survey reported experiencing significant life traumas, including: exposure to neighborhood violence (78.4%), being robbed or having something stolen (60.5%), witnessing a parent going to jail or prison (50.7%), experiencing abuse as a child (42.2%), or been involved with the foster care (26.8%) or child welfare systems (19.2%).
- Only one-quarter (25.4%) of the homeless youth surveyed have a regular doctor or medical facility that they go to for health care, but more than half (59.8%) had gone to a hospital emergency room in the past year.
- The majority (88.5%) of homeless youth survey report having been tested for HIV infection.
- Nearly half (49.2%) of homeless youth surveyed indicated they had been sexually abused or been involved in paid sex activities either on their own or facilitated by someone.
- Homeless youth surveyed were most likely to turn to same age friends (65%), followed closely by adult friends (62%) when they want to talk to about important matters or seek help with a problem.
- Two-thirds (66.7%) of homeless youth surveyed were "dreamers" who demonstrated remarkable resilience and hope for the future, including big careers and independent success.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, we would like to acknowledge the many young people who participated in this research. They inspired us in so many ways, and we dedicate this report to them and their heroic journeys.

We also would like to publicly acknowledge and thank the special role of the Atlanta Coalition for LGBTQ Youth (ACFLY). Several ACFLY members, including Emily Brown, the group's facilitator, suggested the idea and need for a focused count of homeless youth in the Atlanta metro area. They also were instrumental in the planning process and disseminating information about the project.

Many, many governmental and community leaders as well as a host of homeless and social service provider organizations across the metro region contributed to the project in important ways. In addition to collaborating with our team in outreach efforts, many offered their insights at every step of the research process. Without their support and involvement, this project would not have been possible.

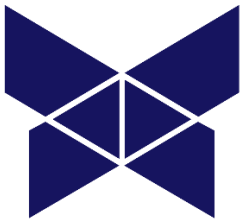
Finally, we wish to extend a warm and heart-filled thanks to the many students and community volunteers involved in collecting the data on which this report is based. They worked long hours and readily shared their insights from the field that made the project better than any of the investigators ever hoped it would be.

A complete listing of the key individuals and participating organizations is included in Section 13.

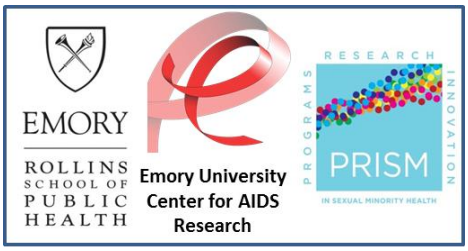
INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT AND FUNDING

Financial and in-kind resources were contributed by a number of institutions:

- Georgia State University Department of Sociology provided summer funding for a number of graduate students to serve as field supervisors;
- Street Grace and YouthSpark raised funds that were used to purchase the gift cards for the participants and research supplies;
- The Rollins School of Public Health, Center for AIDS Research, and the Program for Research and Intervention in Sexual Minority Health (PRISM Health) at Emory University provided technical support regarding data entry and research supplies;
- Georgia State University Center for Neighborhood and Metropolitan Studies provided funding to support the purchase of t-shirts for our field work teams; and,
- Morehouse School of Medicine Department of Pediatrics provided technical assistance in the development of the field protocol and training materials regarding dealing with vulnerable youth.



STREETGRACE



The Center for Neighborhood and Metropolitan Studies

MOREHOUSE SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

1. INTRODUCTION

Each year, federal and state officials develop Point-in-Time (PIT) estimates of the homeless population in the U.S. by conducting a survey of the sheltered and unsheltered homeless populations on a single night in January. These data are the basis for the Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) *Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress* (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2015). In January 2015, HUD estimated number of homeless people in the U.S. was 564,708 with an estimated 180,760 homeless children and youth. Among the youth, 127,787 were children under the age of 18, and 52,973 were between the ages of 18 and 24. Seventy-six percent of homeless youth and children were part of a homeless family. There were 36,907 unaccompanied homeless children and youth, most of whom were between the ages of 18 and 24 (32,240 or 87%). In addition to the PIT count, data from the U.S. Department of Education's count of homeless children in the nation's school systems reports that about one in every 30 children in the U.S. experienced homelessness in 2013 (National Center for Homeless Education, 2015). The estimated rate of homeless children in the U.S. increased by eight percent from 2012 to 2013 and increases were most significant in 31 states, including Georgia, and the District of Columbia.

While local homeless advocates in metro Atlanta historically have estimated that between 2,000-2,400 homeless youth are in shelters or on the street on any given day, little useful empirical data on the unmet needs of unaccompanied homeless youth exists in the Atlanta metro area. Prior research suggests that homeless youth often behave differently than homeless adults. They are more likely to be unaccounted for in homeless counts because they frequently move around and are likely to "couch surf" or sleep in extended stay motels with or without friends or family. Homeless youth, especially those under the age of 18, often live in fear of being caught so they are less likely to access support systems when compared to homeless adults. Prior studies also show high rates of homeless youth involvement in paid sex scenarios, including survival sex, sex trafficking, and sex work. Metro-Atlanta is well known as a center of sex-trafficking (Bailey & Wade, 2014; Dank et al., 2014; Testimony of Chris Swecker, Assistant Director, Criminal Investigative Division, FBI,, 2005; YouthSpark, 2010). All of these factors and others contribute to homeless youth being a vulnerable, hidden population, making it difficult to expand research by recruiting these youth into studies. Nevertheless, the existing research indicates that they are an exceptionally vulnerable community and engage in a wide-range of behaviors that put them at risk in order to survive on the streets.

Recognizing the critical need for basic, accurate information on the size, demographic makeup, and behavior of the homeless youth population in metro Atlanta, university researchers, community advocates, service providers, and students from across metro Atlanta joined together in early 2015 and began planning this study to fill this gap. Together, the community identified threes specific goals of the Atlanta Youth Count and Needs Assessment (AYCNA) project:

1) Provide metro-Atlanta service providers, policymakers, and youth advocates practical information on the size, nature, and needs of the homeless, precariously housed, and runaway youth in our community;

2) Collect information that can be used to develop and refine policies, programs, and interventions to help these youth in our community; and

3) Encourage a community-wide dialogue about the needs and social determinants of youth homelessness.

This report provides an overview of the study's key findings and offers some preliminary conclusions to guide future service and research initiatives. The team of investigators and many of the students involved in the project will continue to analyze the data in partnership with community and governmental agencies to disseminate the findings both to the public and in the professional scientific literature. These reports as well as project updates will be made available to the public via the project website (www.atlantayouthcount.weebly.com) and social media (www.facebook.com/atlantayouthcount/).

STUDY METHODOLOGY

The data were collected between May 15th and July 31st of 2015.

All homeless and runaway youth ages 14-25, who did not have a permanent stable residence of their own, and who were living independently without consistent parental or family support were eligible and encouraged to participate.

The study employed a sophisticated systematic capture-recapture field sampling methods to locate homeless youth to help ensure that the sample accurately described the current population of homeless youth in metro Atlanta.

These procedures involved two principal phases. In phase 1 (approximately May 15th through June 18th), the principal investigators (PIs) and 17 graduate student field researchers accompanied nine different community-based organizations that conducted regular outreach to homeless youth in metro-Atlanta. Between June 2nd and June 18th, outreach workers were asked to distribute "tokens" to the youth in addition to the normal resources they gave to the youth they encountered (e.g., sanitation packs, food, condoms). During this initial phase, the field research team served as assistants to the experienced outreach workers both to understand the nature of their work, to familiarize themselves with the field, to assist in planning the survey data collection phase, and to observe the token distribution process. During this initial phase, a total of 132 tokens were distributed according to the study protocol and preliminary, working maps of the critical areas to target for subject recruitment were constructed.

The second phase focused on the recruitment and collection of survey data from homeless youth. In early June, 38 additional undergraduate and graduate student researchers and approximately 30 community volunteers joined the field research team and completed an in-depth, week-long training in the study research protocol, survey research methods, the ethical conduct of research with human subjects, and practiced administering the survey instrument.

Survey data collection occurred during two-week phases (Sweep 1: June 18 - July 2, 2015; Sweep 2: July 8 - July 23, 2015). In each sweep, small teams of outreach workers and service providers worked together with 2-4 student, youth, and other trained volunteers to conduct sweeps of the metro area shelters and other street and community locations where homeless youth spend time and live. Researchers also visited local extended stay motels in order to include the temporarily housed youth who often sleep in those facilities. Over the course of the four weeks, the research team learned about additional areas to potentially recruit youth, and so the total number of areas targeted increased during

the second sweep. By the end of the four week data collection phase, our field teams visited locations extending to approximately 5-7 miles outside the I285 perimeter, including significant portions of Fulton, Cobb, Clayton, DeKalb, and Gwinnett Counties.

Teams visited each location multiple times and at different times of day and night during the study. Each youth encountered was asked to complete a 10-15 minute survey about their current and past experiences with homelessness, including questions about common factors that can lead to youth homelessness.

The survey also asked about their personal and family background, health status, and contact with health and outreach organizations. All surveys were conducted completely anonymously in order to encourage honesty and protect respondents from any harm or negative consequences stemming from their answers. *No information was collected that could be used to identify or trace participants*. Upon completion of the survey, respondents received a $10 Visa card and a list of useful resources available to them in the community. An online version of the survey was also available to those who chose to participate without a face to face interview. In addition, the field teams recorded additional observational data on youth observed but not contacted in the field who appeared to fit the study eligibility criteria.

Across both sweeps, we had a total of 1,102 "contacts" with homeless youth. This includes both collecting survey data from 855 youth as well 247 windshield observations the field team were reasonably confident were both homeless and met our additional eligibility criteria. Because the surveys were anonymous and youth could complete the survey more than once, we combined non-identifying descriptive variables such as a participant's age (A1), last name initial (Q2), day of birth (Q3), birth city and state (Q4), along with the subjects self-reported gender identity (Q5-Q6), sexual orientation (Q7), and race/ethnicity (Q8-Q9) to create an anonymous identifier that could be used to identify likely duplicate survey respondents. In the end, we eliminated 51 surveys that were determined to be ineligible or largely incomplete (i.e., people who clearly were misrepresenting their age to receive the $10 incentive or did not complete more than 1-2% of the survey) as well as an additional 110 duplicates who we believed were surveyed more than once. These procedures resulted in a final dataset of 694 unique homeless youth.

The survey data were entered into an online data entry program (SurveyGizmo) and cleaned and analyzed using *IBM SPSS 23*.

This study was reviewed and overseen by the Institutional Review Board at Georgia State University (Study Number H15427). All of the data collected were aggregated and analyzed by an interdisciplinary team of researchers and advanced undergraduate and graduate students.

2. ESTIMATE OF THE SIZE OF THE HOMELESS UNACCOMPANIED YOUTH POPULATION IN METRO ATLANTA

One of the main goals of any survey sampling technique is to be able to generalize survey findings to a larger population, or universe, of individuals. Traditional random sampling methods are ideal, but they require a sampling frame where all individuals in the universe have a known probability of being included in the sample. Consider the example of a large neighborhood survey undertaken by a homeowners' association: the universe of potential survey respondents is known because all homeowners in the neighborhood are required to belong to the association, and therefore uninhabited houses are also easily identified. A simple random selection method – such as administering the survey at every fifth inhabited home on each street in the neighborhood – would yield a survey dataset that is generalizable to the universe of all homeowners in the neighborhood.

In hidden and hard-to-reach survey populations, however, we rarely know the probability that any individual will be included in the study through a given sampling design. We do not know the size of the universe (i.e., the list of inhabited home addresses) nor the probability that any individual from the universe would be sampled using a "random" selection method (i.e., we cannot select every fifth individual since we do not know each individual's location). For hidden or hard-to-reach populations researchers must use more sophisticated sampling methods *if* the goal is for the survey results to be generalized to the larger (yet hidden and unknown) universe. Two classes of sampling methodology are well established in these types of situations: respondent-driven sampling (RDS) and capture-recapture. We used capture-recapture methodologies because one of the key assumptions of RDS is that prospective research participants are highly networked among each another (Heckathorn, 1997). While this assumption may be true among homeless and runaway youth in metro Atlanta, we did not yet have data to indicate as much, nor did we know how many networks exist for inclusion in a representative sample. We included several questions in the survey instrument that will help inform future research studies.

Capture-recapture, on the other hand, is not based on the social networks of prospective participants at all. First developed for estimating animal wildlife populations, capture-recapture allows researchers to estimate the size of a universe based on whether a member of a universe has been sampled once, multiple times, or not at all over the course of an extended period of research observation (Darroch & Ratcliff, 1980; Seber, 1982, 1986, 1992). These observational data are used to estimate the size of the unknown universe based solely on probabilities calculated from the number of members observed – or "captured" – either once or multiple times during the observation period.

We can illustrate how capture-recapture works through a simple two-sample capture-recapture design to estimate the number of koi fish in a pond. Each koi fish has distinctive markings that researchers can see and record when the fish ventures close enough to the surface of the water to be observed. On any given day, only a fraction of all koi fish rise to the top of the pond surface in view of the research team. The question is, what is this fraction if we do not yet know the size of the universe? To figure out the answer to this question, researchers spend one day observing as many fish as possible and recording the markings of all the fish that rise to the surface of the water. These fish have been unobtrusively "captured" by the research team recording their distinctive markings. For the second sample, researchers return to the pond within a couple of weeks and do the exact same exercise again. After

both samples are recorded, researchers figure out how many fish "captured" in sample one re-emerge to be "recaptured" in sample two. If, hypothetically, 50% of "captured" fish from sample one are "recaptured" in sample two, then we now know the total number of fish observed in sample two represent approximately 50% of the total universe of koi fish in the pond.

Over time, capture-recapture estimation methodologies have been extended successfully to various populations in social science research, including those involved in criminal activity, drug use, and high-risk health behaviors (Bloor, Leyland, Barnard, & McKeganey, 1991; Rossmo & Routledge, 1990; Smit, Toet, & van der Heijden, 1997). Furthermore, various adjustments have been made to capture-recapture estimation formulas to ensure accurate estimates in different measurement scenarios, such as with small sample sizes (Chao, 1989; Smit et al., 1997; Wilson & Collins, 1992; Yip, Chan, & Wan, 2002; Zelterman, 1988), high out-migration rates (Chao, 1987; Kendall, Nichols, & Hines, 1997), and deterrence effects associated with "being captured" (Brewer, Potterat, Muth, & Roberts Jr, 2006; Roberts & Brewer, 2006). Capture-recapture can be extended to one-sample designs as well, where instances of "capture" and "recapture" are recorded over an extended period of time (Brewer et al., 2006; Chao, 1987, 1989; Roberts & Brewer, 2006; Zelterman, 1988).

Because this type of methodology relies on the same participant(s) taking the survey multiple times, we created a duplicate survey identifier that ensures the anonymity of the participant, but is extremely unlikely to occur multiple times within the dataset. To do this, we combined non-identifying descriptive variables such as a participant's age (A1), last initial (Q2), day of birth (Q3), birth city and state (Q4), along with the subjects self-reported gender identity (Q5-Q6), sexual orientation (Q7), and race/ethnicity (Q8-Q9) to create a value that enabled us to identify potential duplicate survey respondents and therefore calculate capture-recapture equations with anonymity. The name of this variable is *concat1*.

There are multiple mathematical approaches to computing population estimates with two-sample capture-recapture data, each with advantages and disadvantages (Buckland, Goudie, & Borchers, 2000; Chapman, 1951; Lohr, 2010). In situations where the population to be estimated is relatively small in size, such as with the current study, the Chapman (1951) less biased estimator is a preferred computational approach for preventing exaggerated population estimates (Lohr, 2010). Estimating the variance around the Chapman estimator is less-than-straightforward since standard methods assume that the both samples are normally distributed, which is obviously fraught with risk in a smaller sample size (Lohr, 2010). Hua and Nelson (2013) found that in structured tests to compare various methods of computing confidence intervals for two-stage capture-recapture estimates, the inverted chi square test method described by Lohr (2010) provides superior accuracy to other commonly-used methods.

***Two Sample Capture-Recapture: Token and One-Wave Estimation*.** Several youth-serving organizations in the metro Atlanta area regularly conduct street outreach efforts to ensure the safety and well-being of homeless youth. We enlisted the help of these street outreach teams to facilitate a two-sample capture-recapture estimation technique. Prior to the survey administration period the research team provided street outreach teams with LED keychain flashlights (i.e., "Capture Token") to distribute to homeless youth they encounter during regularly scheduled street outreach sessions. These flashlights were not numbered or otherwise differentiated from each other, but they were fluorescently colored so as to be memorable to anyone who saw them. Street outreach teams were instructed to offer a keychain to any homeless youth they encounter, making sure to show the keychain to each person

regardless of whether or not the youth accepted the offer. Any homeless youth who saw the memorable-looking keychain during this period of time was "captured" in sample one.

Sample two occurred during the two survey administration periods, which were combined to create a one-wave estimate. Participants were asked whether or not they saw the keychain offered by street outreach teams during the past few weeks. If the participant remembered seeing the flashlight, then the participant's survey was coded as "recaptured."

The Chapman (1951) estimation equation for a two sample capture-recapture estimation is

$$N = \frac{(C_1 + 1)(C_2 + 1)}{R_{12} + 1} - 1$$

Where N is the population estimate, C_1 is the number of captures in sample one, C_2 is the number of captures in sample two, and R_{12} is the number of recaptures in sample two.

The first capture number, C_1, is the total number of tokens distributed: 134. This number was found by a document created when we were in the field that counted the number of tokens that were distributed by the outreach service provider teams. The second capture number, C_2, is the total number of respondents in the one-wave estimate who had data for the *q1*, the variable of whether or not the respondent had seen the token: 673. The recapture number, R_{12}, is the number of people who said they had seen the token in the one-wave estimate: 59. The total population estimation, N, for the Token and One-Wave two sample capture-recapture is 1,516 with a 95% confidence interval of [1,293, 1,860]. The confidence interval was constructed using an inverted chi-square test.

***Two Sample Capture-Recapture: Sample One and Sample Two*.** The second way we utilized a two-sample capture-recapture was by using the data we collected in wave one of survey administration as sample one and the data we collected in wave two of survey administration as sample two. The formula for calculating the total estimated population size is the same as above.

The total number of captures, C_1, in sample one is 271. This was determined by doing a crosstab of the *cap1flag* and *cap2flag* variables. The total number of captures, C_2, in sample two is 450. This was determined the same way as sample one. The total number of recaptures, R_{12}, is 31, which was determined by analyzing the crosstab of *cap1flag* by *cap2flag* to determine which cases showed up in both sweep one and sweep 2. The total population estimation for the Two Sample Capture Recapture for Sample One and Sample Two is 3,833 with a 95% confidence interval of [2,895, 5,456]. The confidence interval was constructed using an inverted chi-square test.

One Sample Capture-Recapture. The field period lasted several weeks, and survey participants were allowed to take the survey multiple times. This administration design creates the possibility that a respondent could appear in the sample just once, or multiple times. The same the combination of variables used to identify duplicate survey responses described above were used again to determine the number of recaptures in a one sample capture-recapture estimation.

Roberts and Brewer (2006) developed a software called the V-Method to calculate a one sample capture-recapture estimate for the size of the population of male clients of prostitutes in Canada. The

software requires five pieces of data: the number of days in the study period (T), the daily exit probability (X), the number of initial contacts (F), the number of additional contacts (R), and the deterrence/escalation effect (D).

The total number days spent in the field (T) is 43. Field researchers spent 26 days in the field in sample one (8 June – 2 July + 25 May) and 17 days in sample two (9 July – 25 July). There is a 0 probability of exit (X) because the approximate two-month time span that data were collected in is not enough time to warrant a notable emigration flux. The total number of captures (F) is 694. The number of recaptures (R) is 78. This number was calculated based on the frequency of the "selected duplicates" in the *keep* variable. Finally, the escalation effect (D) is 1.06407. This was calculated by taking the proportion of recaptures that were captured 3 or more times and dividing by the total number of capture and recapture respondents in the overall one-sample. Because it is an escalation effect, the program requires the value to be greater than 1 and instructs the user to add one to the value calculated, therefore, we get 1.06407 as the escalation effect. The total population estimation for the One Sample Capture-Recapture is 3,717 (with 6.407% escalation) and a 95% bootstrapped confidence interval of [3,386, 4,359].

Table 2.1: Population Estimates for Three Capture Recapture Techniques, Atlanta Homeless Youth Count and Needs Assessment, 2015

	Estimate	95% CI
Token-One Sample	1,516	[1,293 - 1,860]
One Sample	3,717	[3,386 - 4,359]
Sample One and Sample Two	3,833	[2,895 - 5,456]

Discussion. Table 1 shows the range of estimates for the three population estimation techniques used. The Token-One Sample technique estimates that there are 1,516 homeless youth in Atlanta in the summer months. The One Sample technique estimates that there are 3,717 homeless youth in Atlanta in the summer months and the Sample One and Sample Two techniques estimates 3,833 homeless youth.

In a typical summer month in metro Atlanta, we estimate that there are approximately 3,374 homeless and runaway youth living on the streets, in shelters, or in other precarious housing situations. This number is the midpoint of the 95% confidence intervals across all three capture-recapture methods described above (95% CI across methods [1,293-5,456]). We estimate that the range of homeless and runaway youth in metro Atlanta in a given summer month is between 1,516 and 3,833 youth. This range is derived from the three different capture-recapture methods. All three methods have key advantages and disadvantages given underlying assumptions about each one. All three estimates also are based on field research that included portions of Fulton, Cobb, Clayton, DeKalb, and Gwinnett counties and multiple municipalities.

We estimate that there are approximately 3,374 unaccompanied or runaway homeless youth in the metro Atlanta area in a given summer month.

This estimate is derived from several different statistical calculations, ranging from 1,516 to 3,833 and based on field research that included portions of Fulton, Cobb, Clayton, DeKalb, and Gwinnett counties and multiple municipalities.

3. DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

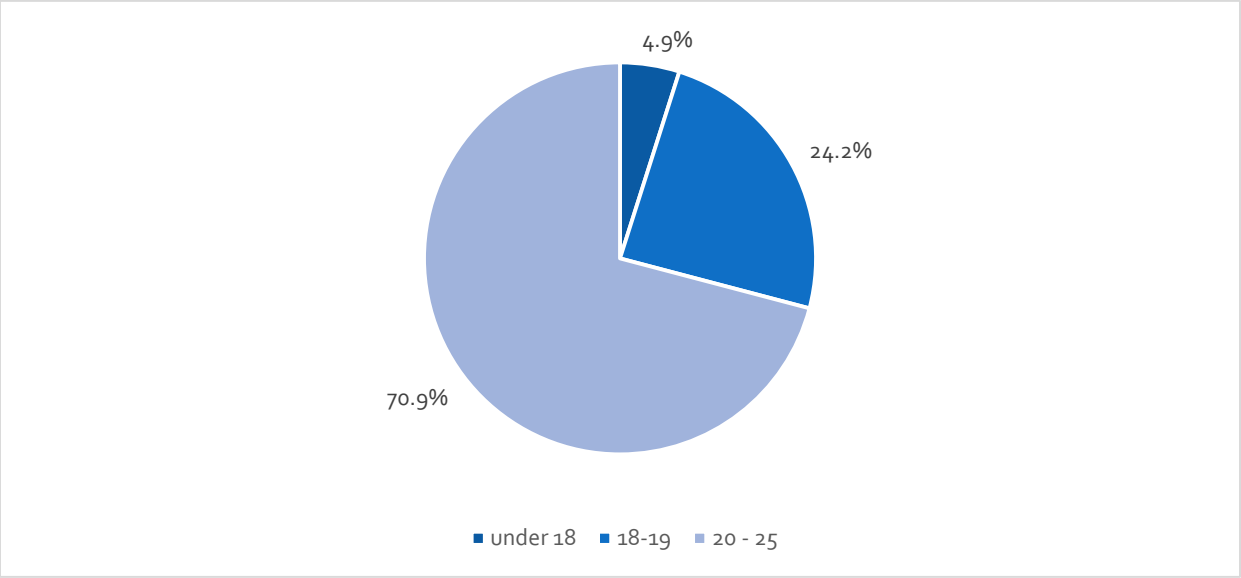
There were 694 unique homeless youth interviewed in Atlanta in the summer of 2015. Table 3.1 presents some basic demographic information on these homeless youth.

Table 3.1: Demographic Characteristics of Homeless Youth, Atlanta Homeless Youth Count and Needs Assessment, 2015

	Mean (%)	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Age (n=694)	21.5	2.6	15	25
Race / Ethnicity (n=692)				
White	5.3			
African American	71.0			
Native American	0.7			
Asian	0.7			
Pacific Islander	0.3			
Hispanic	3.9			
Biracial	4.3			
Multiracial	11.8			
Other	1.6			
Gender (n=693)				
Cis-Male	60.5			
Cis-Female	32.9			
Transgender or Gender Nonconforming	6.5			

The average age of the homeless youth surveyed was 21.5. As Figure 3.1 shows, almost 5 percent of the homeless youth are minors (14-17 years old), an additional 24% are under the age of 20, and about 71% are between the ages of 20 and 25. Consistent with racial diversity of Atlanta as a whole, the homeless youth population is also diverse. Seventy-one percent are African American, 16% are multi or bi-racial, 5.3% are white, 3.9% are Hispanic, and less than 1% are Native American, Asian, or Pacific Islander. The majority of the homeless youth surveyed were cisgender male (60.5 %), followed by cisgender females (32.9%) (NOTE: cisgender is a new term used to describe individuals whose current gender identity is the same as the sex assigned at birth). Approximately, 6.5% of the respondents identified as transgender or gender nonconforming individuals.

Figure 3.1: Breakout of Homeless Youth by Age Category, Atlanta Homeless Youth Count and Needs Assessment, 2015



As Table 3.2 Shows, Atlanta's homeless youth come from 39 states and 6 foreign countries. The majority of the homeless youth are from Georgia (52.2 %). The next largest group come from other southern states (17.9 %), east coast states, (13.8 %), and then the Midwest with 9.1 percent, and west coast and mountain states with 5.9 percent. Within the state of Georgia, homeless youth come from over 40 cities, towns, and counties. The majority (70.8 %) come from Atlanta and Decatur (5.2 %).

Table 3.2: Birth Place of Homeless Youth, Atlanta Homeless Youth Count and Needs Assessment, 2015

	%
Where Born (n=669)	
Georgia	52.2
Southern States	17.9
West Coast/ Mountain States	5.9
East Coast States	13.8
Midwest States	9.1
Outside US	1.1
Of those from Georgia: (n=349)	
Atlanta	70.8
Decatur	5.2
Columbus	1.2
Marietta	1.1
Savannah	0.9
Rockdale	0.9
Rome	0.9
College Park	0.9
Cartersville	0.9

Table 3.3 presents information on education, work and sources of income. Of the homeless youth, 31.5 percent are currently enrolled in school. The most common level of education attained is less than a high school degree (44.1 %) with 37.6% earning a high school degree or GED. Figure 3.2 presents a breakdown of educational attainment by age group. Of the under 18 group (n=29), 69% are enrolled in school, and 9.4% have graduated high school or received their GED. Among the older teens (n=155), 43% were currently enrolled in school, and 40% have at minimum graduated high school or received their GED. Of the oldest group (n=478), about 25% are enrolled in school and 64% of the older group have at minimum graduated high school or received their GED.

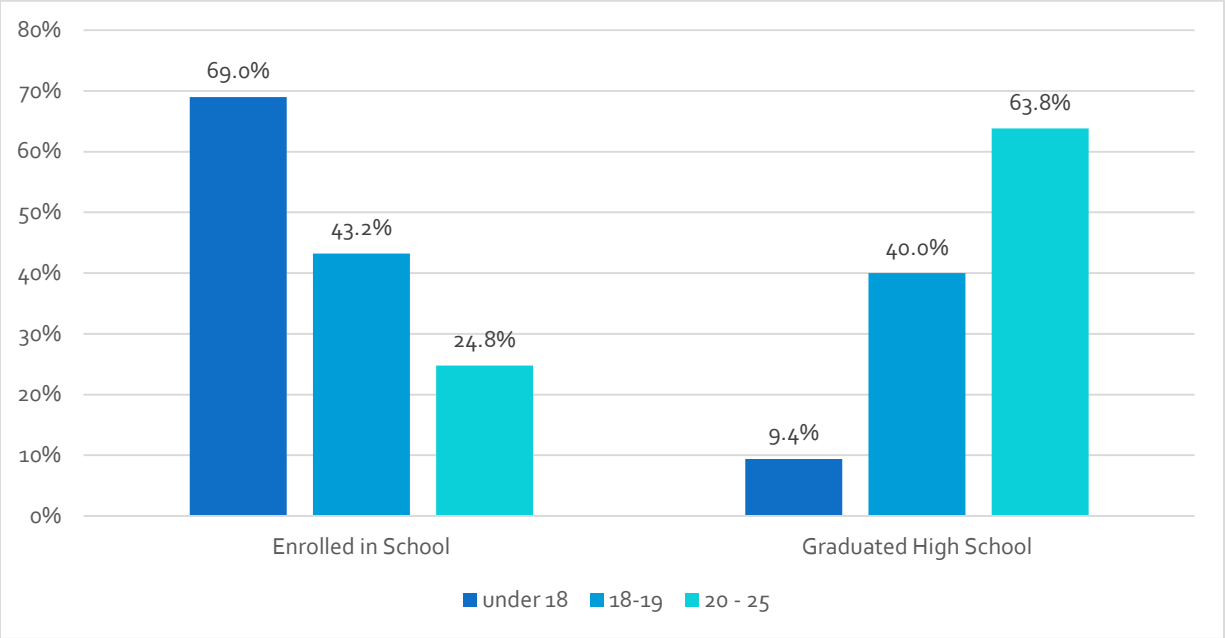
Table 3.3: Socioeconomic Characteristics of Atlanta's Homeless Youth, Atlanta Homeless Youth Count and Needs Assessment, 2015

	Mean (%)	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Education				
Currently Enrolled in School (n=612)	31.5			
Highest Grade Completed? (n=678)				
Less than High School	44.1			
High School/ GED	37.6			
Some College	12.1			
Associates or Technical Degree	2.7			
College Degree	1.0			
Post Graduate degree	0.1			
Currently Working (n=655)	26.1			
Served in U.S. Armed Forces (n=676)	1.4			

Income Making Activities Engaged in Last Month				
None	33.7			
Illegal or Informal Economy (selling drugs, paid sex activities, hustling, panhandling, scrap metaling)	20.0			
Average # of Hours Worked /Week in Illegal/Informal Economy (n=117)	45.2	56.6	1.0	168.0
Formal Economy (food service, retail sales, lawn care, construction)	46.3			
Average # of Hours Worked /Week in Formal Economy (n=117)	26.4	17.3	1.0	85.0
Income Received Last Month (n=616)	578.2	45.95	0	21,000
Received Less Than $100 Last Month	25.2			
Received Between $100 and $300 Last Month	21.8			
Received Between $300 and $700 Last Month	27.9			
Received Between $700 and $2,000 Last Month	22.1			
Received $2,000 or More Last Month	3.1			
Received Income from Work Last Month	34.0			

Received Food Stamps Last Month	36.0
Received Social Security Income Last Month	5.2
Received Social Security Disability income Last Month	1.0
Received Child Support Last Month	1.3
Received Government Housing Voucher Last Month	0.3
Received Income from Family/Friends Last Month	20.5
Received TANF/Welfare Last Month	0.9
Received Unemployment Last Month	0.6
Received Workman's Compensation Last Month	0.4
Received Veteran's Benefits last Month	0.3
Received No Sources of Income Last Month	12.7

Figure 3.2: Educational Attainment by Age Group, Atlanta Homeless Youth Count and Needs Assessment, 2015



Fewer than 2% served in the U.S. armed forces. The armed forces do offer educational opportunities, but homeless youth appear to not be interested in these at this point in time.

Income Receiving Activities in the Past Month. Approximately one quarter (26%) of Atlanta's homeless youth were working at the time of the interview. When asked about types of income earning activities they were engaged over the preceding month, two thirds reported some type of activities. Approximately 20% were engaged in the informal or illegal economy. These activities include panhandling, hustling, selling things, escort work, sex work, and selling drugs. On average, youth spent 45 hours per week engaged in these activities. Another 46% of the youth worked in the formal economy. The most common activities in the formal economy consisted of food service, lawn care, construction, and retail sales. On average, youth in the formal economy worked 26.4 hours per week.

Homeless youth receive income from a variety of sources. Table 3.3 first presents the amount of income received followed by the sources of that income. Across the whole sample, the mean monthly income earned was $578.20 dollars last month. This is not enough money to survive on. One quarter of the sample received $100 or less in the past month, 20% received between $100 and $300, 28% received between $300 and $700, 22% received between $700 and $2000, and 3% received $2,000 or more in the past month.

Figure 3.3: Income by Work Activity in Prior Month, Atlanta Homeless Youth Count and Needs Assessment, 2015

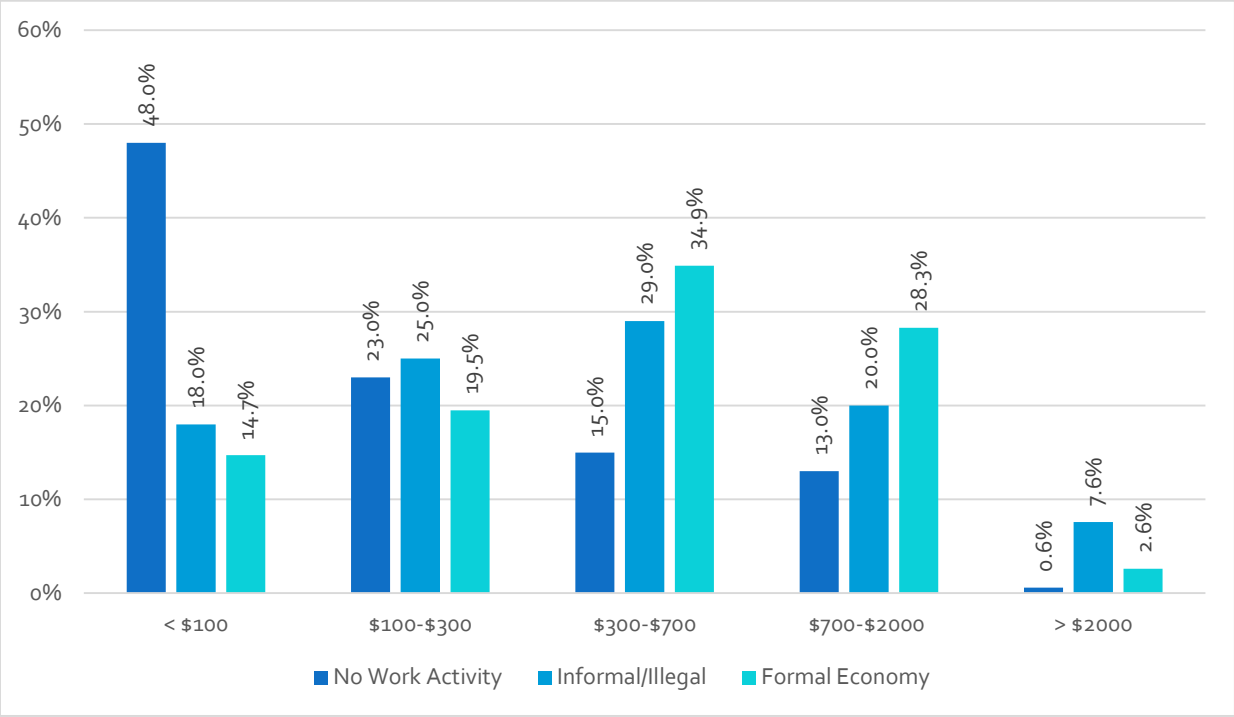
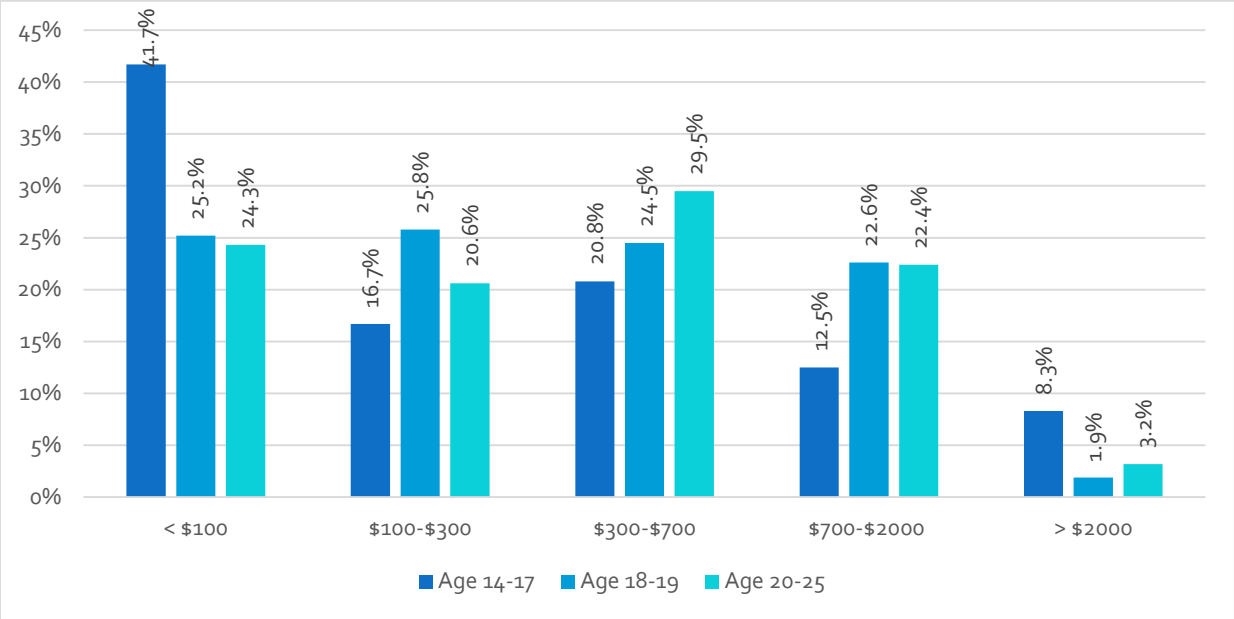


Figure 3.3 provides us with a better idea of how income received relates to work activities in the past month. Those with no work activities were most likely to receive income of less than $100 in the past month (48%). Although those working in the formal economy were most likely to report higher incomes, those working in the informal or illegal economy were most likely to earn over $2,000 in the prior month but only 8% were in that category. The majority (29%) earned between $300 and $700, followed by 25% earning between $100 and $300, and 20% earning between $700 and $2,000. About 35% of those working in the formal economy received between $300 and $700 and another 28% received between $700 and $2,000 in the past month. Very few earn a livable wage in either the formal or informal economy.

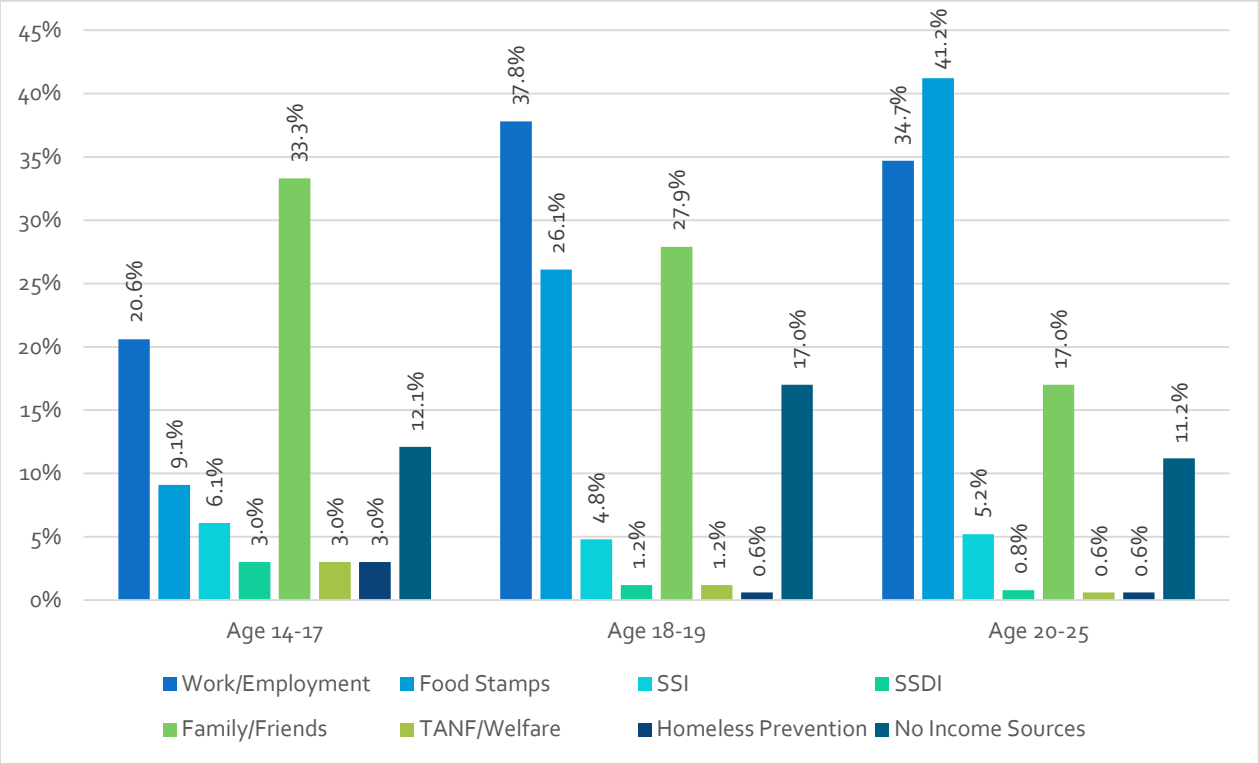
Figure 3.4: Income Categories by Age Groups, Atlanta Homeless Youth Count and Needs Assessment, 2015



We asked about several sources of income including earnings, government programs, friends/family, and other sources. Food stamps were the most utilized source of resources for these homeless youth (at 36%) followed closely by work earnings at 34%. Food stamps do not provide much in the way of income support. Twenty percent of homeless youth receive some level of financial support from family and friends. Around 5% or less received support from social security, social security disability income, child support, welfare, unemployment, housing vouchers, workman's compensation, or Veteran's Benefits. Over 12% reported receiving no income at all in the previous month.

Figure 3.5 presents the sources of income by age category and it is clear that minors depend heavily on family and friends (33%) as a source of income followed by working (21%). Twelve percent of minors report receiving no income in the prior month. Older teens' major sources of income are working (38%), food stamps (26%), and family and friends (28%). Homeless youth age 20-25 are heavily dependent upon food stamps (41%) with other sources of income including work (35%), and friends and family (17%). Support from family and friends is not high for any group and is not enough to house these youth, but the level of support drops off as the youth age into their twenties.

Figure 3.5: Sources of Income in Prior Month by Age Groups, Atlanta Homeless Youth Count and Needs Assessment, 2015



4. CURRENT HOUSING SITUATION

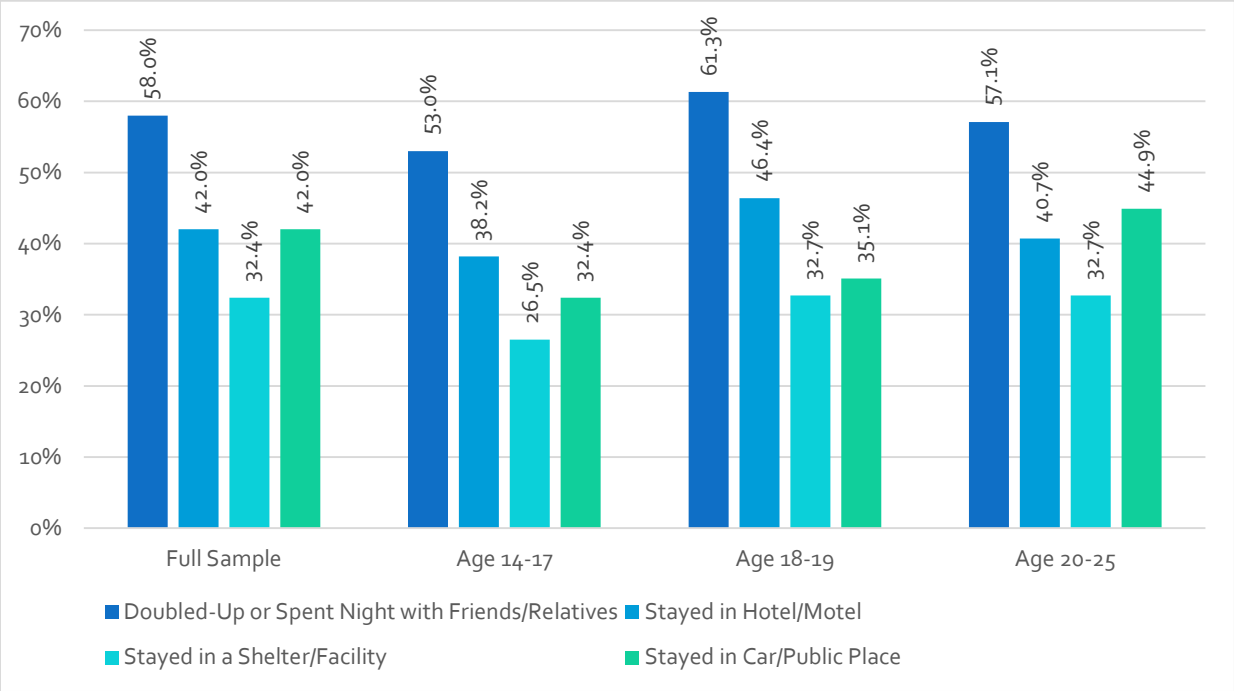
We asked youth four questions about their sleeping situation in the last month based on The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) definitions of homelessness. If youth said yes to one or more of these questions, and were supporting themselves they meet the definition of being homeless. The four questions were:

1. Did you double up or stay overnight with friends, relatives, or someone you didn't know well because you didn't have a regular, adequate, and safe place to stay at night?
2. Did you stay in a motel or hotel because you had nowhere else to sleep?
3. Did you stay in a shelter or other facility that provides short-term housing for people who do not have their own place to sleep?
4. Did you stay overnight in a car, park, public place, abandoned building, bus or train station, or airport because you didn't have a regular, adequate, and safe place to sleep?

Because we asked about the last month, it is possible that youth could say yes to more than one question or once they answered yes to at least one question, the interviewer moved on to the survey because the youth met our operational definition of being homeless. This means the percentages will not add up to 100% and we may be under reporting those that spent a night in a motel, in a shelter or unsheltered (Q4).

As Figure 4.1 shows, 58% of the youth doubled up at some point in the prior month, 42% stayed at least one night in a hotel/motel in the previous month, 32% spent part of the prior month in a shelter or other facility, and 42% spent part of the previous month in a car, park, public place, or abandoned building. These patterns are largely consistent across age, with doubling up being the most prevalent housing arrangement regardless of age.

Figure 4.1: Housing Situation in Previous Month, Atlanta Homeless Youth Count and Needs Assessment, 2015



We also asked the youth where they slept the prior night. Table 4.1 presents our findings. Only 2.2% were sheltered in their own home and nearly 20% were living in someone else's home (18.7%). An additional 22.4% spent the prior night in a hotel. Another 20% spent the night in a shelter, group home, or transitional housing. Approximately one-third were unsheltered the previous night. Finally, 42% of the youth told us they would not be able to stay in the same place as the previous night for at least two weeks.

Table 4.1: Where Atlanta Homeless Youth Slept the Previous Night, Atlanta Homeless Youth Count and Needs Assessment, 2015

Where Did You Sleep Last Night (n=674)	%
Hotel/ Motel	22.4
On the Street/ Sidewalk/ Park/ Behind Businesses	19.9
Emergency Shelter/ Domestic Violence Shelter	13.6
With Friends in Their Home	13.0
With Biological Family in Their Home	4.7
Transitional Housing	4.7
Abandoned Building or Farm Structure	4.2
Group Home / Personal Care Home	2.7
In a Car, Truck or Other Vehicle	2.4
Under a Bridge or Overpass	2.4
My Own House/Apartment	2.2
Bus/ Train Station/ Airport	1.9
In the Woods/ Campsite	1.3
Medical Facility/ Psychiatric Hospital	1.2
With My Chosen Family in Their Home	1.0
24 Hour Restaurant/Business	0.6
Permanent Supportive Housing	0.3
Church Grounds	0.3
Jail/ Prison	0.03
Will You Be Able to Stay There for at Least Two Weeks? NO	42.2

5. HOMELESS HISTORY

We were particularly interested in understanding the youth's history of homelessness. As shown in Table 5.1 approximately half the sample has experienced homelessness prior to this current episode of homelessness. Older age groups are somewhat more likely to have experienced homelessness prior to the current episode. For the current homeless episode, one third have been homeless for 2 months or less. A quarter of the youth have been homeless for more than one year, representing chronic homelessness. Minors show a bifurcated pattern of either a short time being homeless; less than 1 month (31%), or homeless for over one year (25%).

Table 5.1: Homeless History by Age Group, Atlanta Homeless Youth Count and Needs Assessment, 2015

	Full Sample	Age 14-17	Age 18-19	Age 20-25
	%	%	%	%
First Time Homeless	49.5	61.3	56.3	46.4
Length of Current Homeless Episode				
<1 Month	18.2	31.3	22.4	15.8
1-2 Months	16.5	15.6	22.4	14.6
2-3 Months	10.4	15.6	7.9	10.9
3-6 Months	15.2	9.4	12.7	16.5
6 Months-1 Year	15.1	3.1	15.8	15.6
1 Year+	24.6	25.0	18.8	26.5
Number of Homeless Episodes (Including Current Episode)				
2	52.0	75.0	48.3	54.6
3	21.3	16.7	22.4	21.3
4	6.9	8.3	10.3	5.9
5+	17.5	0.0	19.0	18.1

For those who have been homeless prior to the current episode, we asked for details of their first time being homeless. Table 5.2 presents these details. Of the 318 respondents with multiple homeless episodes, the average age for the first time experiencing homelessness was age 16.9. The range of ages was very large however, with some homeless at 2 and others homeless for the first time at age 25. Decomposing this by age group we find that the average age of first homeless experience for minors was age 12.8, for older teens it was age 15, and for homeless in their early twenties it was age 17.6.

Table 5.2: Age First Time Homeless, Atlanta Homeless Youth Count and Needs Assessment, 2015

(n=381)	Mean Age First Time Homeless	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Full Sample	16.9	3.7	2.0	25.0
Age 14-17	12.8	2.1	7.0	15.0
Age 18-19	15.0	3.3	3.0	19.0
Age 20-25	17.6	3.5	2.0	25.0

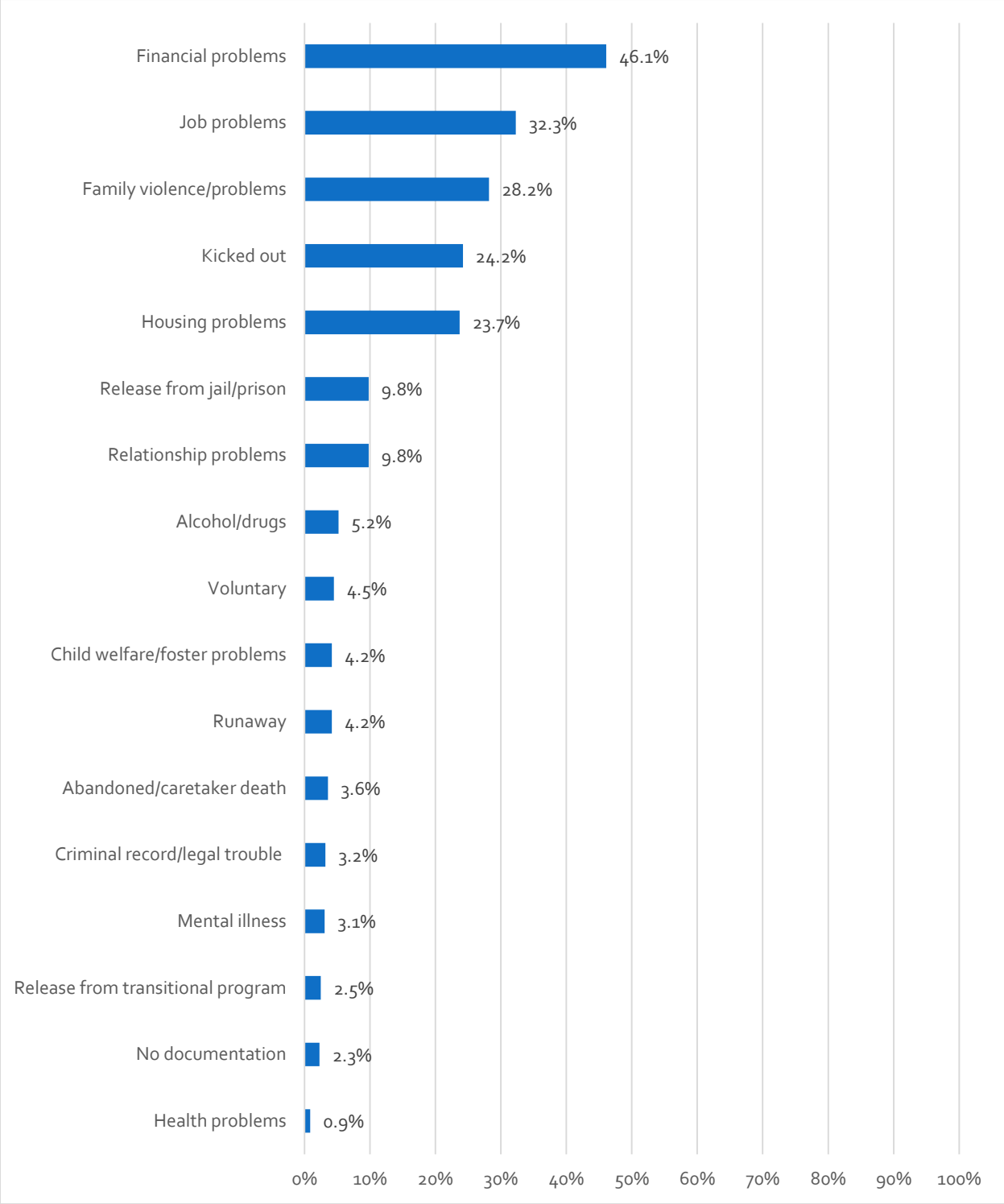
Among those with multiple homeless episodes, the pattern of where the homeless youth lived when they became homeless for the first time replicates the pattern of where they were born. The majority, just under half, were homeless in GA their first time. Another 15% respectively were homeless for the first time in other southern states, and East Coast states. Thirteen percent were homeless for the first time in Midwestern states, and only about 7% were initially homeless in West Cost or Mountain states. Of those homeless for the first time in Georgia, 76% lived in Atlanta or the metro area as their first homeless city.

Table 5.3: Location First Time Homeless, Atlanta Homeless Youth Count and Needs Assessment, 2015

Where were you Homeless the first time (n=338)	%
Georgia	48.8
Southern States (Beyond Georgia)	14.6
West Coast/ Mountain States	6.7
East Coast States	15.9
Midwest States	12.6
Outside US	0.2
Of those from Georgia: (n=169)	
Atlanta	76.0
Decatur	4.7
Columbus	0.9
Marietta	1.1
Augusta	0.5
Rockdale	0.9
Rome	0.5
College Park	2.4

Reasons for Being Homeless. We also asked about the "primary reason(s)" that youth were homeless this time?" This was an open-ended question, and all of reasons youth mentioned were coded and provide some important insights into the most common reasons youth felt they were homeless. Figure 5.1 provides the overall frequency that specific reasons were mentioned, with many youth mentioning multiple factors contributing to their being homeless

Figure 5.1: Reasons Currently Homeless, Atlanta Homeless Youth Count and Needs Assessment, 2015 (n=687)



Youth most commonly described financial problems (46%), job problems (32%), and family violence/problems (28%) as the primary factors leading to their current episode of homelessness. The next most common factors were being kicked out (24%) and housing problems (23%). This pattern was largely consistent for each age group, race, and gender identity. Being kicked out was the second most common answer given by youths who identify as gay/lesbian (18%) and bisexual (16%). Youth coded into the voluntary (4.5%) and runaway (4%) categories were those who chose not to elaborate on the reasons they ran away from their last place of habitation or why they chose to live on their own.

Use of Homeless Services. The homeless youth are dependent upon services to meet their needs considering how low their income and other resources are. We asked the youth what local services did they reach out to (or reached out to them) in the previous month. Responses can be found in Table 5.4. Twenty percent of the homeless youth reported receiving services from Covenant House, an organization serving homeless youth between the ages of 18-21. Covenant House was the most reported agency that the homeless youth had received services from in the last month. Lost-N-Found provided services to 9.3% of the sample, again mainly reaching out to those ages 18-19 (8.3%). Stand up for Kids and Chris Kids also provided support for homeless youth (7.4% and 3.5% respectively). They followed the same pattern of mostly servicing youth ages 18-19, though Stand Up for Kids also successfully reached out to the older homeless youth. Seven percent of homeless youth reported receiving services from The Salvation Army, which was the most common source of support for minors (9.1%). Hope Atlanta mostly works with homeless adults and they successfully provided services for the older homeless youth (4%). Several other programs were mentioned but provided very few services for the homeless youth surveyed, such as Gateway, United Way, Task Force for the Homeless, City of Refuge, Youth Adults' Guidance Center, several churches, and Safe House. Finally, we noted earlier in the socioeconomic characteristics of homeless youth, we found that housing vouchers provided little income support. Only three percent reported receiving any type of rental assistance or hotel/Motel assistance.

Table 5.4: Local Homeless Service Use by Youth, Atlanta Homeless Youth Count and Needs Assessment, 2015

Over the Past Month Have You Been Contacted By or Received Services From (n=694)	Full Sample	Age 14-17	Age 18-19	Age 20-25
	%	%	%	%
Covenant House	20.0	0.0	38.1	15.2
Chris Kids	3.5	3.0	6.5	2.5
Hope Atlanta	2.9	0.0	0.6	3.9
Lost-N-Found	9.3	3.0	8.3	10.0
Mercy Care	4.9	3.0	2.4	5.9
Salvation Army	7.1	9.1	3.6	8.2
Sconiers Homeless Prevention	0.6	0.0	1.2	0.4
Someone Cares	1.6	0.0	1.2	1.8
Stand Up for Kids	7.4	0.0	8.9	7.4
Young People Matter	1.6	0.0	2.4	1.4
Some Other Organization (<3 %)	10.3	12.1	7.1	11.3
Gateway				
Task Force for the Homeless				
United Way				
City of Refuge				
Young Adults Guidance Center				
Church				
Safe House				
Do you currently receive any type of Rental Assistance or Hotel/Motel Voucher	3.0	3.2	1.8	3.4

6. TRAUMATIC LIFE EXPERIENCES AND CONTACT WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT

Homeless youth are extremely vulnerable. Many come from bad neighborhoods and stressed out and fractured families. For example, several told us they were homeless for the first time as children *with their families*. We are often interested in what their background experiences might be that would lead them to be homeless. Table 6.1 provides information on lifetime traumatic experiences homeless youth have in their background. Consistent across all age groups, over half have witnessed violence in the home. Also consistent across age, over three-quarters witnessed violence in their neighborhoods (78.4%). With the exception of homeless minors (37%), over half witnessed a parent going to jail or prison. Also with the exception of minors (15.6%), over 40 percent reported experiencing abuse as a child.

Information on experiences with child welfare and foster care was also collected. Over a quarter of the homeless youth reported being in foster care because of abuse or neglect as a child. Homeless minors were less likely to report this (16.1%) compared to homeless youth age 18-19 (29.7%) and age 20-25 (26.5%). Approximately 16% were placed in foster care because of delinquent or criminal behavior. The homeless minors were most likely to report this situation (25.8%) compared to homeless youth age 18-19 (18.3%) and age 20-25 (15.5%). Finally, 19.2% reported receiving child welfare services other than foster care placement.

We asked about traumatic experiences the homeless youth may have experienced in the prior year, such as being robbed or assaulted. Over 60% reported being robbed or having something stolen from them in the prior year. This was consistent across the age groups. Approximately 31% reported being physically assaulted or beat up in the previous year, and, again, this is consistent across the age groups. Next we asked about experiences being stopped by the police in the prior year. About 60% reported being questioned or stopped by the police in the past year. Homeless minors were more likely to report this (72.4%) than were the homeless youth age 18-19 (56.7%) and age 20-25 (60.1%). Of those questioned or stopped by police, homeless youth report being stopped an average of 12.7 times last year. Of those stopped by the police, the average number of times the youth were charged or arrested is just under two times and this is consistent across the age groups. Of those arrested or charged, homeless youth reported spending an average of 31 days in jail over the preceding year. Again, the homeless minors reported spending the most time in jail at 36 days compared to homeless youth age 18-19 (24.2 days) and age 20-25 (33.5 days).

Table 6.1: Traumatic Background for the Full Sample and across Age Groups (Percent or Means and Standard Deviations in Parentheses), Atlanta Homeless Youth Count and Needs Assessment, 2015

Have You Ever Witnessed Violence in the Following Places: (n=670)	Full Sample	Age 14-17	Age 18-19	Age 20-25
	%	%	%	%
In Your Home	57.0	51.6	54.8	58.1
In your Neighborhood	78.4	78.1	75.4	79.5
Have You Ever Witnessed a Parent Going to Jail/Prison: Yes	50.7	37.5	52.1	51.0
Have You Ever Experienced Abuse as a Child: Yes	42.2	15.6	38.0	45.5
Have You Ever Been in Foster Care Because of Abuse/Neglect as a Child: Yes	26.8	16.1	29.7	26.5
Have You Ever Been in Foster Care Because of Juvenile Criminal Behavior: Yes	16.6	25.8	18.3	15.5
Have You Ever Received Services from Child Welfare Other Than Placement in Foster Care: Yes	19.2	16.1	18.3	19.4
In the Past Year have You Been Robbed or Had Something Stolen from You: YES	60.5	69.0	58.8	60.6
In the Past Year have You Been Physically Assaulted or Beat Up: YES	31.4	31.0	27.3	32.8
In the Past Year have You Been Questioned or Stopped by the Police: YES	59.8	72.4	56.7	60.1

If YES to Stopped by Police: How Many Times Were You stopped?	12.7 (57.7)	9.6 (14.4)	4.5 (7.8)	15.7 (67.9)
If YES, to Stopped by Police: **How Many Times Were You Arrested or Charged?**	1.8 (5.3)	1.8 (2.6)	0.8 (1.1)	2.2 (6.2)
If YES to Arrested or Charged: **How Many Days Did You Spend in Jail Over Past Year?**	31.4 (63.6)	36.4 (70.1)	24.2 (52.2)	33.5 (66.5)

7. GENERAL HEALTH STATUS AND MAJOR HEALTH PROBLEMS

Table 7.1 presents the findings on general health and access to healthcare. A little over half (52.3%) the homeless youth report their health as very good or excellent. Among the minors, only about 13% report their health as excellent compared to over 30% for the older teens and 28% for youth age 20-25. Among youth that report health concerns, 16% reported that health problems contributed to being homeless.

The majority of homeless youth surveyed (59.8%) had gone to a hospital emergency room in the past year, most only went once or twice (38.6%), but 11.5% had gone 5 or more times. The likelihood of going to a hospital emergency room and the number of visits increased with increasing age of homeless youth. Only one-quarter (25.4%) of homeless youth had a doctor or medical facility that they could go to for regular health care. This also decreased with increasing age of homeless youth, potentially explaining the pattern seen in hospital emergency room use.

Table 7.1: Self-Reported Health Status by Age Group, Atlanta Homeless Youth Count and Needs Assessment, 2015

	Full Sample	Age 14-17	Age 18-19	Age 20-25
	%	%	%	%
Self-Reported Health is:				
Excellent	28.0	12.9	31.9	27.6
Very Good	24.3	38.7	23.5	23.6
Good	30.0	29.0	25.3	31.6
Fair	14.8	19.4	16.3	13.9
Poor	3.0	0.0	3.0	3.2
Health Problems Contributed to Being Homeless: Yes (n=571)*	15.9	11.5	17.6	15.6
How Often Have You Gone to Hospital ER in the Last Year? (n=661)				
Never	40.2	51.6	39.0	40.0

	Full Sample	Age 14-17	Age 18-19	Age 20-25
One-Two Times	38.6	33.3	40.2	38.4
Three-Four Times	9.7	15.1	9.1	9.4
Five or More Times	11.5	0.0	11.7	12.2
Do You Have a Doctor or Medical Facility That You Go to Regularly for Health Care: Yes (n=672)	25.4	36.7	25.9	24.6
***Treated those who said they have no health problems as missing.**				

Table 7.2 summarizes the youth's HIV testing experiences. The majority of homeless youth (88.5%) reported having been tested for HIV infection. Three-quarters (75.3%) of those who had ever been HIV tested were tested within the past 6 months. As a particularly vulnerable group for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, more frequent HIV testing is recommended, and this is evidence that the service is reaching this group. Though relatively few homeless youth in the survey reported being HIV positive, the overall HIV prevalence rate in homeless youth (2.7%) was five times the overall Atlanta metro prevalence rate in 2014 (0.5%). Homeless youth living with HIV infection may also be at high risk for poor health outcomes because of difficulties in accessing and adhering to HIV care and treatment.

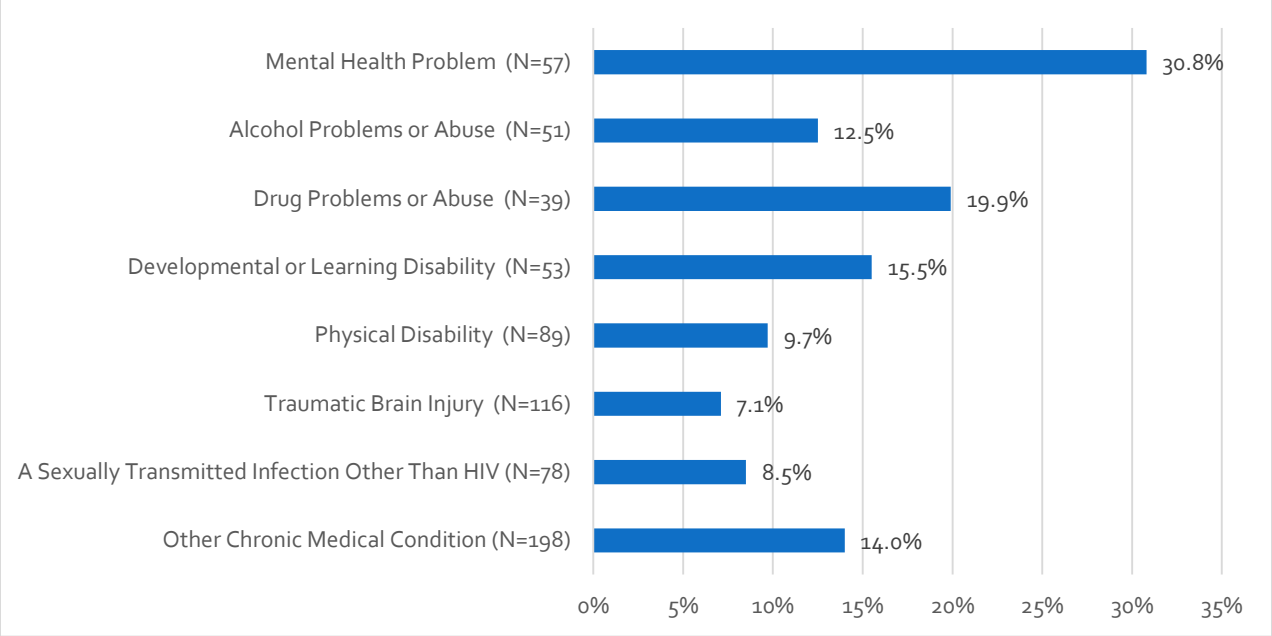
Table 7.2: HIV Testing History and Self-reported HIV Status, Atlanta Homeless Youth Count and Needs Assessment, 2015

	Full Sample	Age 14-17	Age 18-19	Age 20-25
	%	%	%	%
Ever Been Tested for HIV (n=676)				
Yes	88.5	50.0	86.8	91.6
No	11.2	47.0	12.6	8.4
Don't Know	0.3	3.0	0.6	0.0
Approximately When Did You Take Your Last HIV Test? (n=586)				
In the Last 6 Months	75.3	81.3	85.4	71.6
About One Year Ago	8.0	0.0	4.9	9.4
Between 1 and 2 Years Ago	12.5	18.8	8.3	13.6
More Than 2 Years Ago	4.3	0.0	1.4	5.4
What is Your HIV Status (n=599)				
HIV Positive	2.7	0.0	0.7	3.4
HIV Negative	94.5	100.0	95.9	93.8
Don't Know/ Results Inconclusive	2.8	0.0	3.4	2.7

Figure 7.1 describes self-reported lifetime major health problems. Nearly a third (30.8%) of the homeless youth indicated they had experienced a significant mental health problem in their lifetime. Nearly two thirds (63.2%) of the youth reported experiencing a mental health, alcohol, or substance abuse related health problem. Significant numbers of youth also reported a range of other lifetime

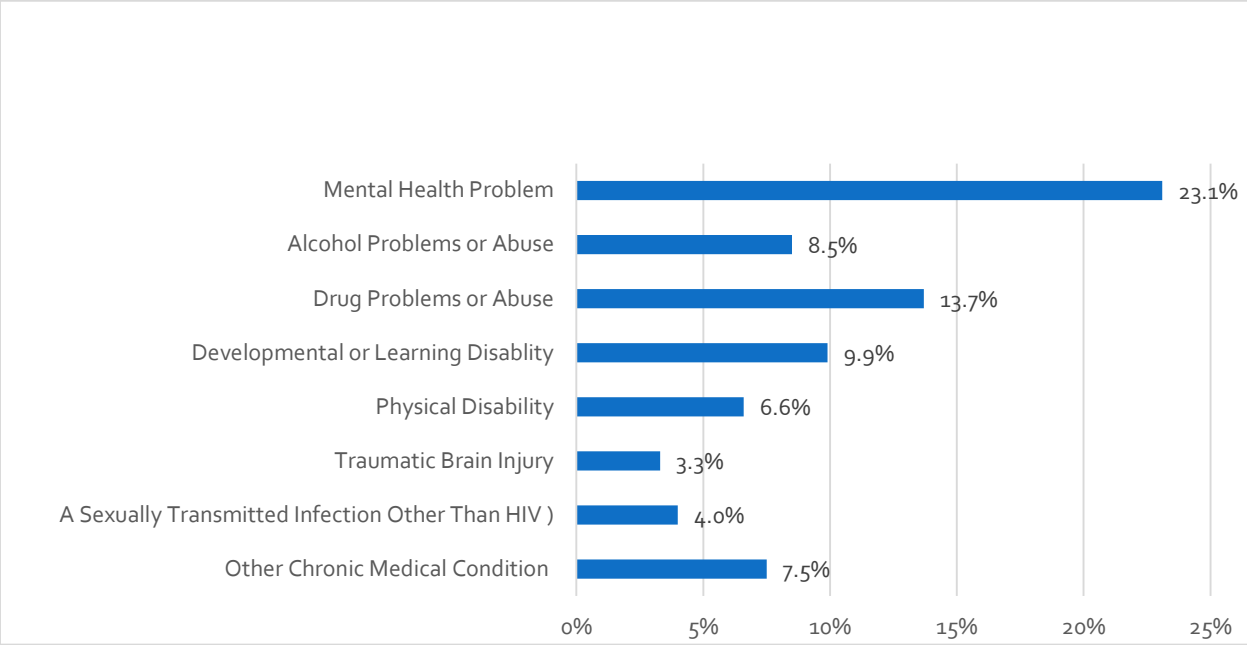
health problems, including developmental/learning disabilities, other chronic conditions, a physical disability, a sexually transmitted disease, or traumatic brain injury.

Figure 7.1: Self-Reported Major Health Problems (Lifetime), Atlanta Homeless Youth Count and Needs Assessment, 2015



If the youth reported that that they experienced a health problem in their lifetime, they were asked if they experienced that particular health problem in the past year. Figure 7.2 shows prevalence of health problems in the past year. Mental health problems were still the most common problem (23.1%) and overall trends were generally consistent with lifetime patterns.

Figure 7.2: Major Health Problems Experienced in the Last Year, Atlanta Homeless Youth Count and Needs Assessment, 2015

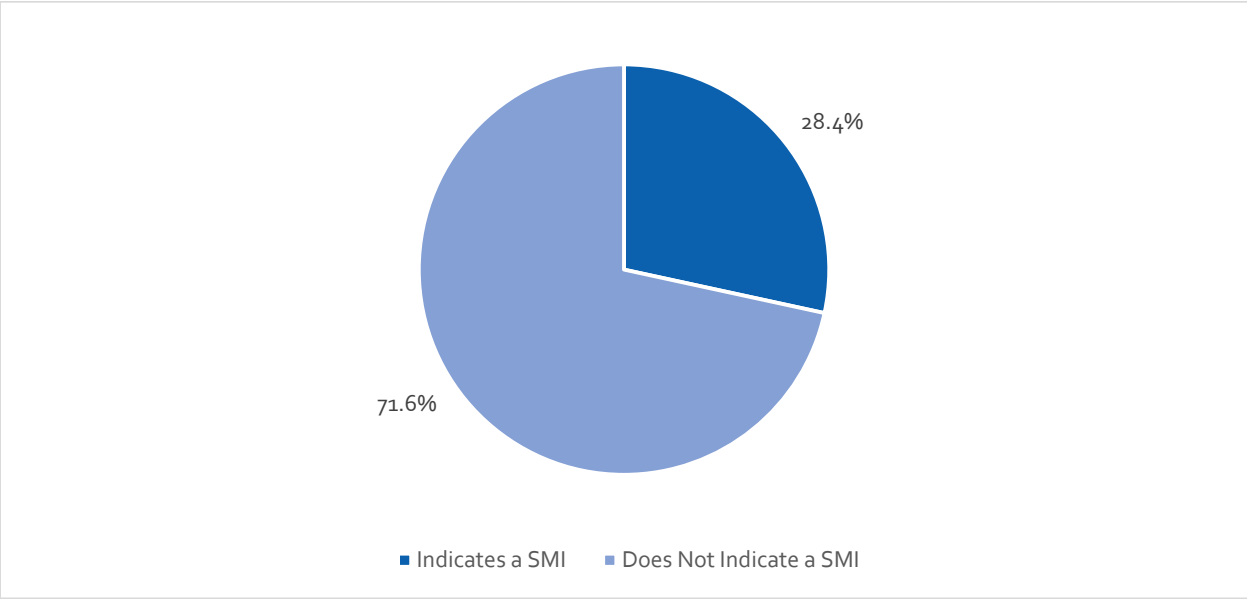


8. MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE USE

Because prior research indicated that homeless youth and adults have significant mental health and substance use challenges, we also included several short instruments to better understand the youth's needs in these areas.

One scale that has been used to reliably screen and estimate the population prevalence of major mental disorders or severe mental illness (SMI) in community samples is the Kessler 6 scale (Green et al. 2010; Khan 2014). Figure 1 presents the estimated prevalence of SMIs among Atlanta's Homeless Youth. More than one-quarter (28%) of Atlanta's Homeless Youth met criteria for a SMI.

Figure 8.1: Estimated Prevalence of a Serious Mental Illness, Atlanta Homeless Youth Count and Needs Assessment, 2015 (n=676)



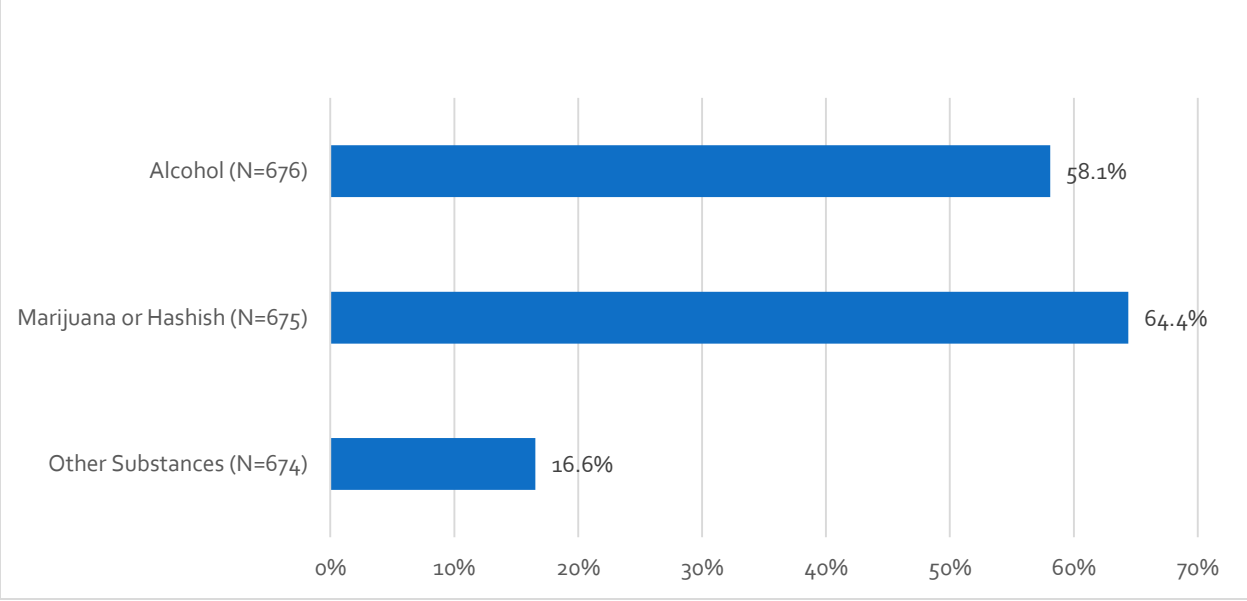
The youth were also asked to indicate the extent that their feelings of nervousness, hopelessness, restlessness, depression, worthlessness, and that everything was an effort interfered with their life and/or daily activities. As Table 8.1 shows, over half (53.5%) reported that their mental health symptoms interfered with their life and activities "some" or "a lot."

Table 8.1: How Much Feelings Interfered with Life, Atlanta Homeless Youth Count and Needs Assessment, 2015 (n=622)

How much do these feelings [mental health symptoms] interfere with your life or activities?	%
A Lot	25.7
Some	27.8
A Little	25.4
Not At All	21.1

In addition, we asked several questions about the nature and extent of the youth's substance use, based on the CRAFFT Screening instrument. The CRAFFT was designed for identifying youth at significant risk for alcohol or drug abuse. Figure 8.2 summarizes the reported drug use in the past year among the youth surveyed. Marijuana or hashish is the most common drug used by participants (64%), followed by alcohol use (58%).

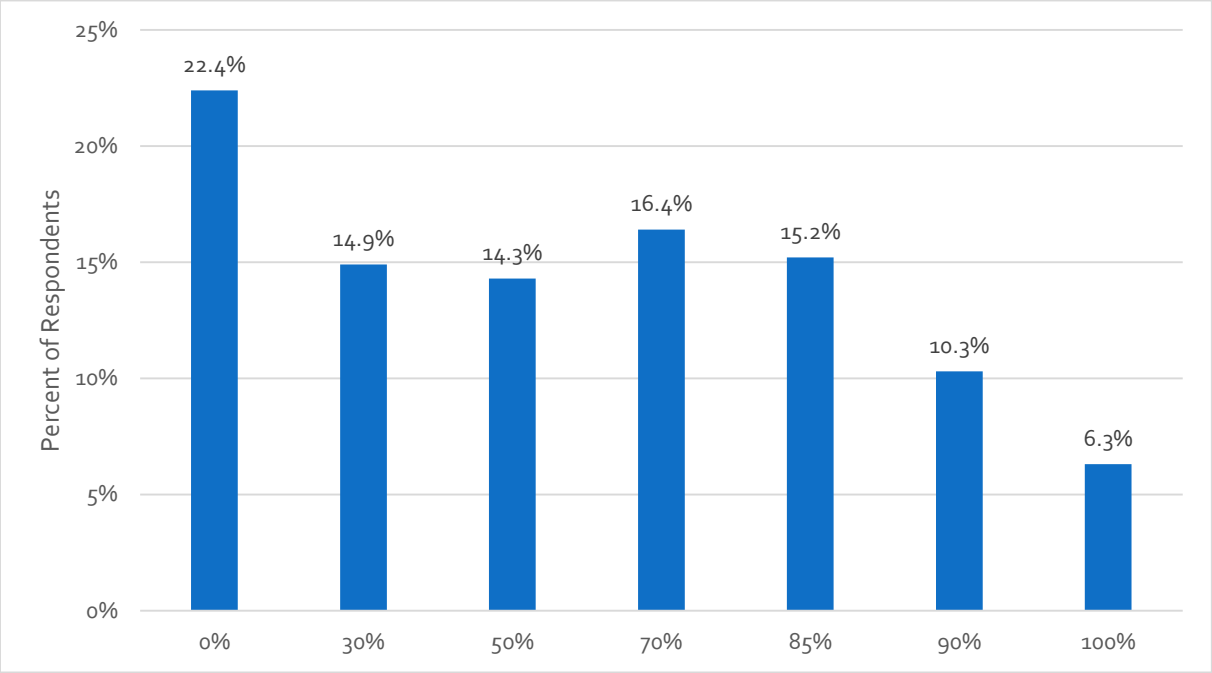
Figure 8.2: Drug Use, Atlanta Homeless Youth Count and Needs Assessment, 2015



If the homeless youth answered that they have used alcohol, marijuana or hashish, or another substance in their lifetime, they were asked to answer a series of additional screening questions to assess the severity of their substance use and their relative risk of having a substance abuse/dependence diagnosis. Based on their responses, we were able to estimate each youth's relative

risk of having a substance abuse disorder (see Figure 8.3). The largest group (22.4%) have little or no probability of having a substance abuse/dependence diagnosis. The second largest group (16.4%) have a 70% probability of having a substance abuse/dependence diagnosis. Taken together, 62.5% of the homeless youth surveyed are believed to have greater than a 50% probability of having a current substance abuse/dependence disorder.

Figure 8.3: Probability of Having a Substance Abuse/ Dependence Diagnosis Based on Responses to the CRAFF, Atlanta Homeless Youth Count and Needs Assessment, 2015 (n=669)



An overwhelming majority of the youth surveyed (n=590, 85.0%) reported that they were sexually active in the past 12 months. Because the sexuality and sexual behavior of homeless and runaway youth has been the subject of public and policymakers' interest, the research team included a number of questions intended to provide some basic information about these youth's sexual lives.

Sexual Identity. Scientific research suggests that sexuality is a multidimensional and fluid construct, particularly among youth. Early in the survey, we asked youth how they identified themselves with regard to some of the current sexual identity categories. The vast majority (73.2%) indicated that they were "straight"; however, the data in Table 9.1 suggest some diversity in sexual identification. The remaining 1 out of 4 youth (26.9%) stated that they were either "Gay or Lesbian," "Bisexual" or offered some other sexuality label, including terms or phrases such as "Pansexual", "Asexual", "Whoever I fall in love with" and "No label." Federal and state policies have formally identified a new category of "sexual and gender minorities" or sometimes LGBT[Q] (for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and sometimes Queer). Combining the information regarding gender (reported in Table 9.1) and sexuality self-identification, we find that approximately 28.2% of the youth surveyed identified as LGBT.

Table 9.1: Sexual Self-Identification Overall and by Gender Identity, Atlanta Homeless Youth Count and Needs Assessment, 2015

	Cisgender Men (n=417)	Cisgender Women (n=228)	Transgender/ Gender Non-Conforming (n=45)	Overall (n=690)
	%	%	%	%
Straight	82.0	66.7	24.4	73.2
Gay or Lesbian	9.6	14.5	48.9	13.8
Bisexual	7.0	18.4	8.9	10.9
Something Else	1.4	0.4	17.8	2.2

Sexual Attraction. Because prior research suggests that sexual self-identity does not adequately described a person's sexuality, we also asked about the extent they were attracted to females or males or somewhere in between. Prior research suggests that there is a strong correlation between sexual attraction and sexual identity; however, it also suggests that there may be greater diversity in sexuality when one considers sexual attraction. Consequently, we asked the youth to describe the extent they find women or men more sexually attractive on a five-point continuum (see Table 9.2).

Table 9.2: Sexual Attraction by Gender Identity, Atlanta Homeless Youth Count and Needs Assessment, 2015

	Cisgender Men (n=400)	Cisgender Women (n=221)	Transgender/ Gender Non-Conforming (n=43)	Overall (n=664)
	%	%	%	%
Only Attracted to Females	80.3	13.6	7.0	53.3
Mostly Attracted to Females	4.8	4.5	4.7	4.7
Equally Attracted to Females and Males	3.3	10.4	11.6	6.2
Mostly Attracted to Males	4.3	17.2	11.6	9.0
Only Attracted to Males	5.3	51.1	55.8	23.8
Gender Does Not Matter	2.3	3.2	9.3	3.0

Sex Partners and Sexual Activities. To better understand the overall patterns of sexual activity, interviewers asked the respondents to estimate the number of people they had sex with and the types of sexual contact they had over the past year. Of the 694 respondents, 570 (82.1 %) indicated they were sexually active with one or more partners in the past year. Table 9.3 describes the overall distribution of youth based on the total number of sex partners they had over the past year. Nearly two-thirds (62.3%) of the cisgender male participants reported having 3 or more partners, while 69.6% of the cisgender women participants reported having either 1 or 2 partners. Among those identifying transgender or gender non-conforming, the distribution is bimodal with similar percentages reporting 1-2 partners and 6 or more partners.

Table 9.3: Number of Sex Partners in the Past Twelve Months, Atlanta Homeless Youth Count and Needs Assessment, 2015

	Cisgender Men (n=342)	Cisgender Women (n=191)	Transgender/ Gender Non-Conforming (n=37)	Overall (n=570)
	%	%	%	%
1-2 Partners	37.4	69.6	40.5	48.6
3-5 Partners	34.8	19.4	21.6	28.8
6 or More Partners	27.5	11.0	37.8	22.6

The majority of the sexual partners in the past year were heterosexual or opposite sex partners; however, significant numbers of the sexually active cisgender men (15.5%) and cisgender women (30.4%) reported one or more same-sex sexual partners. Seven (1.9%) cisgender men reported having had one or more transgender sex partners in the past 12 months.

In addition to asking about the number of partners in the last year, our interviewers asked the respondent to reflect on the types of sex acts they engaged during the same time period. Table 9.4 describes at a very general level the most common sexual activities engaged in by the homeless youth we interviewed. For cisgender women, vaginal (91.6%) and oral sex (53.7%) were the most common sexual behaviors. A similar pattern was observed among cisgender men, with 81.2% and 69.4% reporting engaging in vaginal and oral sex. Among transgender/gender non-conforming youth, however oral (84.2%) and anal sex (63.2%) were the most frequently reported sex acts.

Table 9.4: Prevalence of Specific Sexual Acts among Homeless Youth, Atlanta Homeless Youth Count and Needs Assessment, 2015

	Cisgender Men (n=356)	Cisgender Women (n=203)	Transgender/ Gender Non-conforming (n=38)	Overall (n=597)
	%	%	%	%
Vaginal Intercourse	81.2	91.6	31.6	81.6
Anal Sex	22.5	16.3	63.2	22.9
Oral Sex	69.4	53.7	84.2	65.0
Manual Sex	37.4	36.0	39.5	37.0

In addition, to assess higher risk sexual acts for HIV transmission, we also asked each respondent if they had had vaginal or anal sex without a condom in the past year (see Table 9.5). In general, the majority (63.1%) indicated that they had vaginal or anal sex without a condom in the past year, with cisgender

women reporting doing so most frequently (70.9%) followed by cisgender men (59.9%) and transgender/gender non-conforming youth (51.4%).

Table 9.5: Percent of Homeless Youth by Gender Who Reported Vaginal or Anal Sex without a Condom in Past Year, Atlanta Homeless Youth Count and Needs Assessment, 2015

	Cisgender Men (n=344)	Cisgender Women (n=199)	Transgender/ Gender Non-conforming (n=19)	Overall (n=580)
	%	%	%	%
Vaginal or Anal Sex without Condom	59.9	70.9	51.4	63.1

Sexual Abuse and Involvement in Paid Sex Activities and Sex Trafficking. For the past decade, the public and policymakers have become increasingly concerned about homeless youth, in part, because of reports that they are often victims of sexual abuse and sexual exploitation, including trafficking. In the AYCNA, surveyors asked the youth whether they were sexually abused, had any involvement in paid sex activity, and whether anyone else was involved in their having sex for money or other goods. If they said yes to any question, we also asked whether it happened while they were homeless. Overall, 49.2% of the sample indicated they had experienced one or more of these difficult events in their lifetime. The detailed breakdown of the overall prevalence of these experiences are reported in Table 9.6.

Table 9.6: Types of Sexual Abuse, Paid Sexual Activities, and Sex Trafficking Experiences of Youth Ever and While Homeless, Atlanta Homeless Youth Count and Needs Assessment, 2015

	Ever? (n=664)	While homeless? (n=664)
	% Yes	% Yes
Victim of Sexual Abuse		
Been in a Sexual Relationship in Which You Were Physically Abused?	21.4	11.3
Been in a Sexual Relationship in Which You Were Sexually Abused?	12.7	5.1
Been Sexually Assaulted or Raped?	25.9	6.2
Involvement in Paid Sex Activities		
Had Sex with Someone to Get Money or Cash?	23.5	17.5
Had Sex for Drugs, Food, a Ride, or a Place to Stay?	14.8	11.6
Involvement in Sex Trafficking		
Had a Friend, Mentor, or Family Member Who was Involved with Your Having Sex for Money?	9.6	7.5
Had a 'Street Daddy', 'Boyfriend' or 'Pimp' Who was Involved in Your Having Sex for Money?	6.8	5.1
Been an Escort or a "Paid Date"?	17.5	13.4

Finally, Table 9.7 presents the overall statistics for prior sexual abuse, involvement in paid sex activities and sex trafficking by gender identity. The cisgender women were the most likely (56.6%) to report being a victim of sexual abuse followed closely by transgender/gender non-conforming youth (53.3%). Transgender/gender non-conforming youth were significantly more likely to report being involved in sex work (60.5%) and potential sex trafficking situations (32.6%) than either the cisgender men or women in our study.

Table 9.7: Overall Prevalence of Prior Sexual Abuse, Paid Sexual Activities/Sex Trafficking Experiences by Gender, Atlanta Homeless Youth Count and Needs Assessment, 2015 (n=664)

	Cisgender Men (n=400)	Cisgender Women (n=221)	Transgender/ Gender Non-conforming (n=43)	Overall (n=664)
	%	%	%	%
Victim of Sexual Abuse	21.5	56.6	53.3	35.2
Involvement in Paid Sex Activities	36.8	46.2	93.1	43.5

10. SOCIAL SUPPORT

In this section, we examine the homeless youth's social network support. First, we asked the youth surveyed about the people in their lives they can talk to about important matters or turn to for help with a problem. In general, 60% of homeless youth said they can turn to family members to talk about important matters or for help (see Table 10.1). Minors were more likely to report family members (79%) and friends of the same age (79%) as sources of support than older youths. Homeless youth are most likely to turn to same age friends (65%), followed closely by adult friends (62%) and family members (60%). Less than half (43%) turn to professionals for help with a problem or to talk to about important matters.

On average, 47% of homeless youth are in a romantic relationship. Those age 18-19 were most likely to be in a romantic relationship at about 62% than youth who were younger or older. Only 4.5% reported being legally married. An alternate source of support comes from what's known as a chosen or alternative (non-biological) family. Overall, almost 50% receive support from an alternate family (48.8%), with minors most like to receive this type of support (71%).

Lastly, we present the average number of social ties the homeless youth have. On average, homeless youth have about 8 people they can talk to in person or on the phone and/or internet. Of those 8, about half live in the Atlanta area. Of those living in the Atlanta area, only a quarter were also homeless. Most of the time, if the homeless youth reported having another homeless person that they could talk to, this person was also under age 26.

Table 10.1: Social Support and Social Ties among Homeless Youth by Age Group, Atlanta Homeless Youth Count and Needs Assessment, 2015

	Full Sample	Age 14-17	Age 18-19	Age 20-25
	%	%	%	%
People Homeless Youth Can Turn to for Help				
Family Members (n=660)	60.0	79.0	61.6	58.5
Friends Same Age(n=660)	65.0	79.0	70.7	62.6
Adult Friends (n=659)	62.0	57.0	58.0	61.5
Professionals (n=660)	43.0	43.0	47.6	36.8
Currently in a Romantic Relationship: Yes (n=660).	47.0	39.0	61.8	42.4
Legally Married (n=315)*	4.5	0.0	3.0	13.7
Do You Have an Alternative Family: Yes (n=660)	48.8	71.4	50.3	46.9
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
About How Many People Do You Have that You can Talk to in Person or by Phone/Internet (n=655)	7.8 (40.6)	7.1 (8.6)	6.4 (11.0)	8.3 (47.8)
Of Those Above, How Many Live in Atlanta (n=643)	4.2 (7.4)	5.6 (5.9)	4.5 (8.3)	4.0 (7.1)
Of Those in Atlanta, How Many Are Also Homeless (n=631)	1.4 (4.8)	3.0 (9.3)	1.3 (3.6)	1.3 (4.7)
Of Those Homeless in Atlanta, How Many Are Under Age 26 (n=600)	1.2 (4.2)	1.0 (2.7)	1.8 (6.5)	1.0 (3.1)

* Asked only of those in a romantic relationship

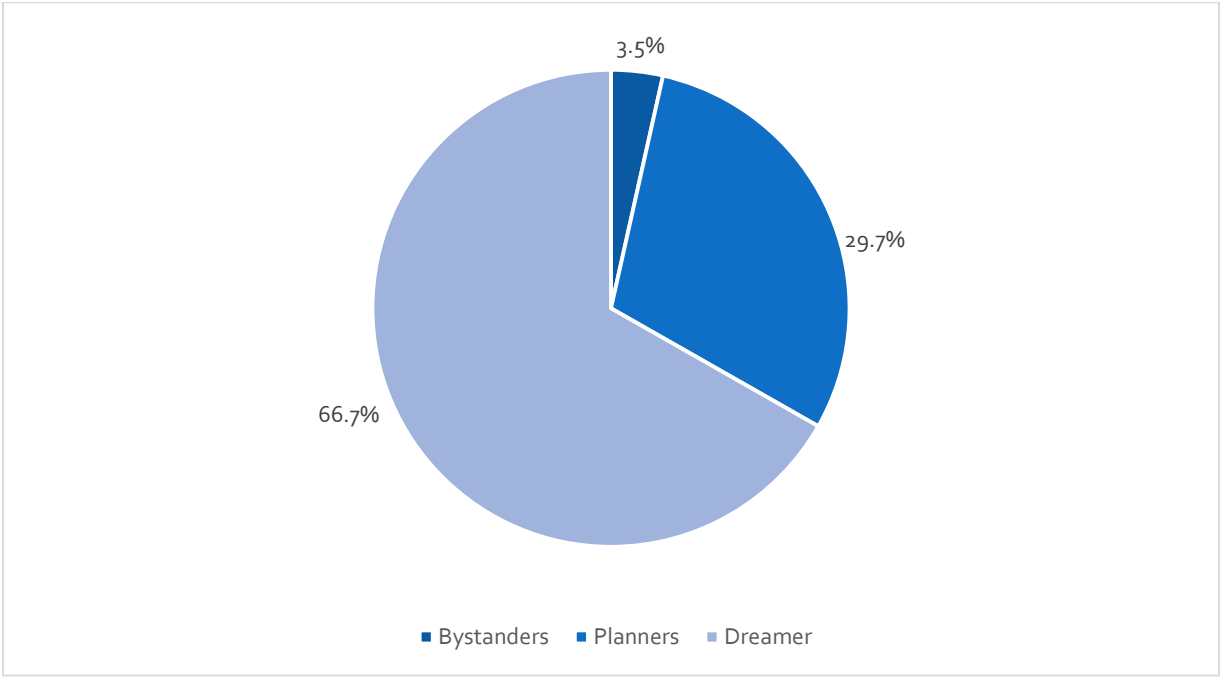
11. DREAMS AND ASPIRATIONS

In order to provide a voice to the dreams and aspirations of homeless youth, study participants were asked: "Each person is unique with different dreams and aspirations in life. What are your biggest dreams and aspirations for your life?" The field researchers took verbatim notes on the responses from the youth.

After reading and coding all responses, three categories were created. The first category we refer to as "Bystanders," where respondents reported that they did not have dreams or were content in their current situation. Bystanders accounted for 3.5% of respondents. The next category we refer to as "Planners," these individuals had a life plan to achieve their goals or wanted very modest goals (i.e. having a job, affording food, etc.). Planners accounted for 29.7% of respondents. The last category represents what we refer to as "Dreamers." Dreamers had lofty goals such as owning their own business, becoming a millionaire, or becoming a famous rapper. Dreamers accounted for 66.7% of respondents.

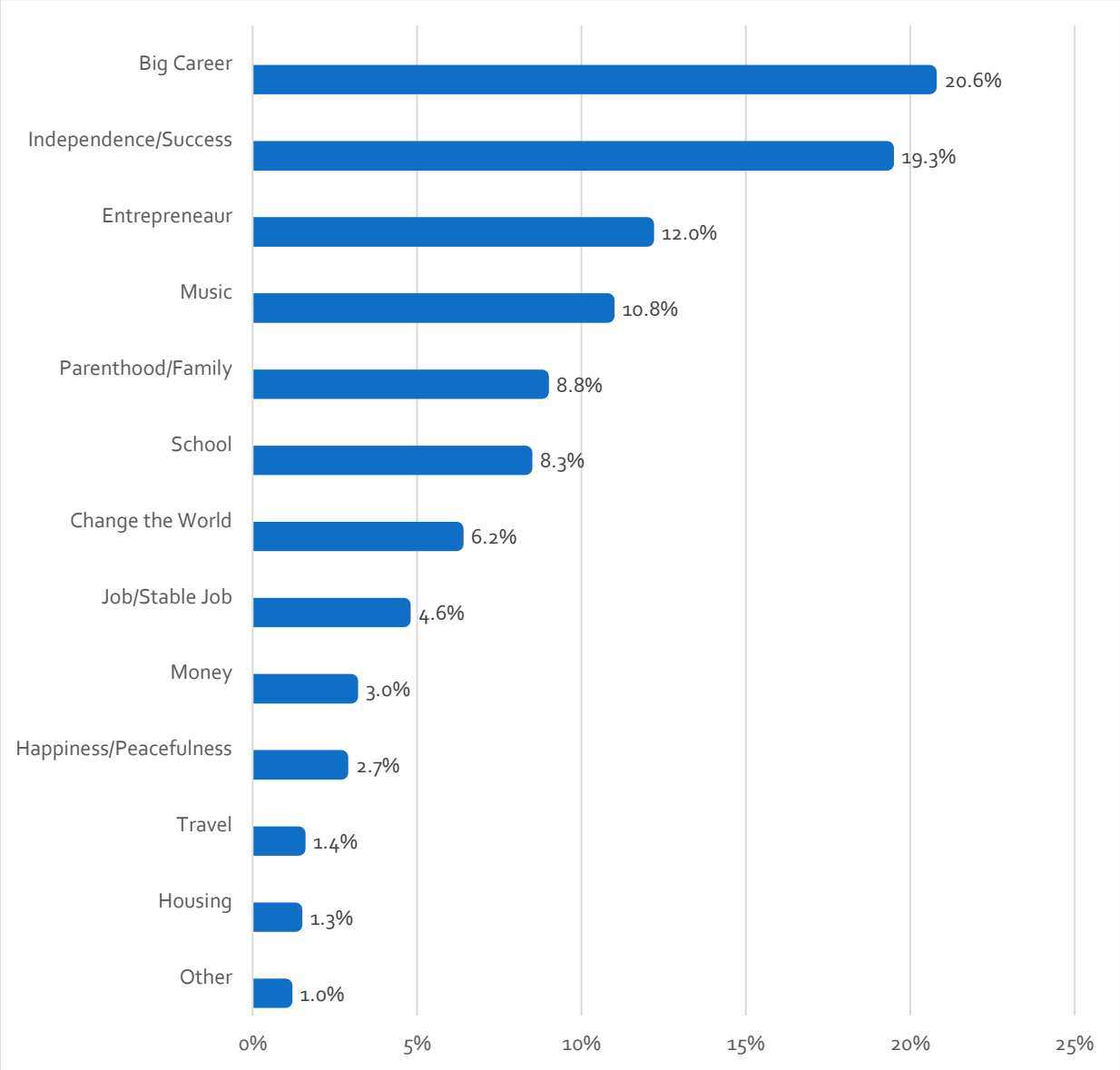
Based on open-ended descriptions, many individuals had dreams and aspirations that took them away from homelessness. Planners oftentimes had relatively detailed plans for the ways in which they would get out of their situation, and thrive later in life. Dreamers exhibited a kind of exuberance and hopefulness that we would expect to find in other individuals of the same age range, even given their bleak circumstances.

Figure 11.1: Categorization of Homeless Youth Based on Reported Dreams and Aspirations, Atlanta Homeless Youth Count and Needs Assessment, 2015



Beyond coding for types of dreamer individuals, we also categorized the type of aspirations that individuals had (Figure 11.2). Responses were coded into fourteen categories found in data. The highest percent of respondents reported wanting to be independent/successful and to have big careers (lawyers, doctors, police officers, etc.). Many individuals also wanted to become entrepreneurs and take care of their families (12% and 20.6%, respectively). The most surprising aspiration that kept coming up was success within the music industry, reported by 10% of respondents.

Figure 11.2: Types of Life Aspirations Voiced by Homeless Youth, Atlanta Homeless Youth Count and Needs Assessment, 2015



The dreams and aspirations of homeless youth were incredibly heartwarming, and showed us their resilience. Even while homeless, facing mental illness and abuse, the majority of individuals were still categorized as “Dreamers”, with large, out of this world dreams. They had grand views of what their life could become, and the kind of impact that they could have. Individuals wanted to make a difference in the world, and oftentimes talked about love, acceptance and compassion.

One respondent, a 23-year-old male staying in an abandoned building wanted to: “…Take care of everybody. The first finish last, the last finish first. You can't anybody out, no matter what they been through.”

A 24-year-old young lady who was staying in an abandoned building told researchers her dreams were to “To find a way to universally teach love to everyone…”

Another respondent, a 19-year-old man staying in an Emergency Shelter reminded researchers “If dreams don't seem too big to accomplish, then your (sic) not dreaming enough'”

Even in the face of so much adversity, the youth that we surveyed remained remarkably positive and upbeat, even hopeful for their future. The vast majority of individuals did not want to continue life on the streets, and they were striving for a much bigger and brighter future. As a society, we are responsible for the high prevalence and needs of homeless youth. We are also responsible for making their dreams and aspirations come true. In doing so, we can help them become significant contributors to the larger society.

12. CONCLUSIONS

The 2015 Atlanta Youth Count and Needs Assessment resulted in an enormous amount of data and critical insights on the number of homeless youth and their needs. In this final section, we summarize some of our main conclusions based on the data and our experiences conducting this study.

SUBSTANTIVE CONCLUSIONS

1. The size of the homeless youth population in the Atlanta metro-area is significantly larger than most governmental and community homeless service providers believe.

As noted above, we estimate that there are approximately 3,374 unaccompanied or runaway homeless youth on the streets, in shelters, or doubling up across in the metro Atlanta area in a typical summer month. This figure is significantly larger than any previously reported formal or ballpark approximation. Our estimate, we believe, is both larger and more accurate because of the more systematic and extended field research we conducted and because we tried to learn from the youth about where they were living and spending their time. We also focused our attention beyond the normal downtown Atlanta, Midtown, and central Decatur areas that are typically the focus of both routine outreach activities and formal counts, such as the annual Point-in-Time counts conducted by the metro-area homeless continuum of care organizations. In this regard, our canvassing homeless youth touched on large portions of five counties, including Fulton, Cobb, Clayton, DeKalb, and Gwinnett. We do acknowledge that there were large areas of the city that our field research never visited or even scanned for possible homeless youth. Future counts and studies should attempt to expand on our aggressive, ethnographically informed, snowball geographic targeting strategy by including additional strategies to systematic sample areas not identified by providers or youth.

2. Homeless youth are significantly more mobile and geographically dispersed than adult homeless.

One critical difference we observed about homeless youth was that they are significantly more mobile and geographically diverse than homeless adults. Indeed, our field work took us to areas not normally touched by homeless youth service providers and cut across many of the social and political boundaries that define the metro Atlanta area. We also frequently heard stories from the youth about how they intentionally and quickly moved around the city and metro area (and sometimes even left the state for periods of time) to avoid identification by police or social service agencies or to segregate themselves from homeless adults, other homeless youth engaged in problem behaviors, or even adults who took advantage of them. Their movement also was heavily influenced by their regularly searching for opportunities for safer and/or more comfortable places to stay or to find short- or long-term employment. In the end, we believe that the youth's frequent and rapid mobility is a major reason why this population is systematically underrepresented in local and state PIT counts, which overwhelmingly tend to focus on well-established areas with concentrated populations of homeless adults.

3. There appear to be discrete "clusters" of homeless youth in the Atlanta metro-area.

Our survey data do not permit a detailed description of the many sub-populations of homeless youth, but our field work and conversations with the youth suggests that there are a number of major clusters of youth, defined by the nature of their movement, geographic location, and/or homeless history (i.e., "train kids"). Other groups tended to "hang" or even live together based on key social characteristics or behavior (i.e., lesbian/gay youth, transwomen, youth involved in paid sex activities). These clusters were unexpected but clearly evident in our fieldwork, as they provided both a strong sense of meaning for many youth and clearly served to organize the social spaces of the homeless youth community within the metro area. Future research and services should explore these social identities and their importance in understanding the experiences of homeless youth.

4. Homeless youth frequently form and maintain "fictive kinship" systems.

The classical stereotype of a homeless adult is an individual walking or sitting alone along a dark street or in an abandoned building or park. In stark contrast, the majority of the youth we encountered struggled to survive on the streets in small groups, which some referred to as their "squads" or "street family." Indeed, our field research team found that if we could engage one youth to participate that the youth interviewed would often encourage their friends and "fictive kin" (i.e., brother, sister) to do so as well. Unfortunately, this was an unanticipated finding, and our survey instrument did not adequately capture these unique and critical support systems; although, we did find that most youth did report a surprisingly large numbers of peers with whom they felt they can talk to "about important matters."

5. Homeless youth have significant unmet health needs; are engaging in a number of mutually reinforcing health risk behaviors; and, had contact with and/or were involved with multiple service providers and systems.

This report details a wide array of significant health problems and limited access to care. We also find that the youth are engaging in behaviors or have backgrounds that pose significant risks for their health, including smoking marijuana, drinking alcohol, engaging in high risk sex and sex work, psychological distress, a wide variety of traumatic experiences and sexual abuse, and histories of being involved in the social service and/or criminal justice system. The cross-sectional nature of our data do not allow us to assess the degree that these experiences were a cause of or the result of their life on the streets. However, the data do clearly indicate that this population of youth have many unmet and complex needs that are not easily addressed or being met fully by our current system of homeless services.

6. The majority of homeless youth are exceptionally "resilient" in managing difficult life circumstances and remain hopeful about the future.

Perhaps the most unexpected finding is the extent that the youth we interviewed, despite their day-to-day struggles and difficult life circumstances, are remarkably resilient, even positive and up-beat about their lives and future. We would not have learned this if the youth who participated in a small pre-field test of our survey instrument had not told us that our questions were "depressing" and "too negative." In the end, we are glad we added the last question about dreams and aspirations. Their responses, and our experiences in the field, profoundly shifted our collective view of homeless youth from a deficit to a strengths-based perspective. Indeed, their desires for a better future underscore the potential both for

engaging these youth in care and for helping them begin to build a new life for themselves. Doing so, however, will require significant changes in our systems of care, which overwhelming focus on addressing their problems and not enough attention on helping them find a new pathway into adulthood.

METHODOLOGICAL AND SYSTEM-RELATED CONCLUSIONS

While we hope our substantive conclusions will inform future policy and research, our research team also reached several critical methodological and system-related conclusions.

7. **Traditional PIT methods are profoundly inadequate for counting unaccompanied homeless and runaway minors.**

Because of the frequent and expansive geographic mobility and the social clustering of homeless and runaway youth, conducting research and counting this population demands more time than is typically allocated for the annual PIT counts completed in Atlanta and the surrounding counties as well as elsewhere around the country. Our extended and repeated data collection sweeps proved to be essential to finding more homeless and runaway youth, as did having deeper, ethnographic knowledge of the communities where we were searching. Indeed, we had surprisingly few "duplicates," and our analysis of the pattern of participation across the sweeps further underscored the rapid social mobility of this population and the need for a more extended data collection period and one that relies on information from the youth about their community.

8. **In the Atlanta metro-area, the complex social and political divisions impose significant challenges in providing services and in conducting comprehensive research.**

From the very beginning of the planning process, the research team and community partners reached out to many community, governmental, healthcare, and non-profit organizations committed to or involved in serving homeless youth. Given the size and political complexity of the Atlanta metro-area and our short project time-line, it was simply not possible to involve every group and organization. Indeed, we learned about and had productive conversations with many organizations while we were collecting data when we encountered their staff on the streets or even learned about their services from the youth. By the end of the official study field period, it was very clear that there are many, many well-meaning, on-going efforts in the region but that they are largely uncoordinated and frequently duplicative and/or overlapping. There also are some obvious gaps in services for and special challenges in working with some sub-populations of youth, particularly youth under 18 years of age, those with significant drug/alcohol problems, and those involved in sex trafficking or paid sex activities. Perhaps most important, the rapid and wide-spread mobility of the youth means that their lives invariably cut across multiple traditional service and political jurisdictions across many municipal and county lines. Ultimately, we believe our data and our field experiences point to a critical need for a coordinated metro area-wide approach to addressing the needs of this extremely vulnerable population.

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PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

Atlanta Police Department

Atlanta Public Schools

CHRIS Kids

City of Atlanta Office of the Public Defender

City of Refuge

Community Advanced Practice Nurses (CAPN)

Community Friendship

Covenant House Georgia

Fulton County Schools

Gateway Center

Hearts to Nourish Hope

Hope Atlanta

Lost N Found

Mercy Care

Norman Spruill House Foundation

Project Community Connections (PCCI)

Salvation Army

Sconiers Homeless Preventive Organization, Inc.

Someone Cares, Inc. of Atlanta

Stand Up for Kids

United Way

Young Adult Guidance Center

Young People Matter

Youth Connections/Kings Manor Shelter

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Homeless because
I'm gay