



ABORIGINAL STREET YOUTH MORE LIKELY TO BE HIV-POSITIVE

BACKGROUND & METHOD

- In Canada, there are upwards of 150,000 homeless and street-involved youth. Along with other physical and psychological health problems, sexual and reproductive health issues are common in this population.
- In fact, the rate of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections is ten times that of the general adolescent population in the country.
- However, research shows that some street-involved youth may be at greater risk for HIV than others.
- This study looked at HIV infection among a group of more than 500 Vancouver street youth.

QUICK FACT

ABORIGINAL YOUTH WERE NEARLY THREE TIMES AS LIKELY TO TEST POSITIVE FOR THE VIRUS THAT CAUSES AIDS.

FINDINGS

- 2% of the non-Aboriginal youth in the study had contracted HIV, while among Aboriginal youth the figure was 5.5%.
- In other words, Aboriginal youth were nearly three times as likely to test positive for the virus that causes AIDS.
- When asked about behaviours that increase the risk for acquiring HIV, only 29% of the HIV-positive Aboriginal youth reported injecting drugs, compared to 75% of the non-Aboriginal HIV-positive youth. This finding suggests that factors other than injection drug use, such as unsafe sexual activity and survival sex work, may explain the higher rate of HIV among Aboriginal youth.

IMPLICATIONS

- This research points to the immediate need for culturally appropriate and evidence-based programs to support HIV-positive Aboriginal youth and to prevent further infections among this marginalized population.
- The results of this study also support statements by the Assembly of First Nations and the Canadian AIDS Aboriginal Network that, relative to the size of the epidemic, HIV programs for Aboriginal young people are chronically under-funded.
- Further investment in existing programs and the creation of new evidence-based strategies, with the full participation of the Aboriginal community, are urgently required.

Marshall BDL, Kerr T, Livingstone C, Li K, Montaner JSG, Wood E. **High prevalence of HIV infection among homeless and street-involved Aboriginal youth in a Canadian setting.** *Harm Reduction Journal*, 2008; 5(1): 35.

