A PROFILE OF ABORIGINAL YOUTH IN A COMMUNITY DRUG PROGRAM

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Abstract/Resume

This article examines the demographic, social, and behavioural characteristics of Aboriginal youth who participated in a community drug program in an urban centre. Three studies demonstrated the extreme disadvantage of these youth in comparison with Aboriginal people in general, noting their substantially greater court involvement and recidivism. The results are considered in terms of intervention and preventative planning.

L'article examine les caractéristiques démographiques, sociales et le comportement de la jeunesse autochtone qui a participé au programme communautaire sur la drogue dans un petit centre urbain. Trois études ont démontré le désavantage extrême de ces jeunes en comparaison des autochtones en général, en constatant leur très grande participation au tribunal et leur récidive. On a considéré les résultats sur le plan de l'intervention et de l'organisation préventive.
Introduction

Aboriginal youth experience higher rates of psychosocial disorders, including delinquency, alcoholism, drug abuse, out of home placement, and dropout before high school graduation, than other young people in Canada and the United States (see, for example, Beauvais, Oetting, Wolf, and Edwards, 1989; McShane, 1988; Yates, 1987). Alcohol abuse, the most visible disorder among Aboriginal people, has been associated with suicide, depression, family instability, delinquency, and accidental death (Kahn, 1982; 1986; May, 1982). Gasoline sniffing and solvent abuse are major problems among children that are often engaged in by older adolescents when other substances are not available (Barnes, 1989; Health and Welfare Canada, 1990).

The proportion of youth among Aboriginal people is higher than that of the overall population in Canada; even so, these adolescents are disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system (LaPrairie, 1988; Muirhead, 1981; National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, 1990). Several positions have been suggested to explain this over-representation phenomenon (LaPrairie, 1990). The first emphasizes structural inequalities at all levels of the judicial system in the treatment of Aboriginal people. The second focusses on socioeconomic marginality and alcohol use which place Aboriginal people at risk for criminal behaviour. Alternatively, Aboriginal people may commit more serious and visible crimes than those committed by non-Aboriginal people. A general overview of the Aboriginal situation is given by York (1990). Although the literature on juveniles is meagre, LaPrairie (1988) provides an account of difficulties with the justice system in meeting the needs of the young Aboriginal offender.

To date, most studies have emphasized the prevalence of dysfunctional behaviours among Aboriginal adolescents living in isolated areas such as reserves and small communities (Beauvais et al., 1989; Health and Welfare Canada, 1990). Little comparative data is available on youth who reside off reserves, in larger communities.

In a recent article, McDonald (1991) reported that more than half of Canada's Aboriginal population live in cities and towns, many of them far from an Aboriginal community. While Aboriginal people in general are the most severely disadvantaged compared to Canadians overall, those living in large cities were on an average much younger, with lower levels of educational attainment, higher unemployment rates, lower average incomes, and in more lone-parent (female) headed family households than Canadians in general. Gfellner and Hundleby (1991) found similar conditions among Aboriginal adolescents living in a small urban centre.
This paper provides a description of the social, demographic, and behavioural characteristics of Aboriginal youth in a small city who are involved or at risk for serious problem behaviour. It includes three studies featuring (1) an overview of the characteristics of Aboriginal adolescents involved in a community drug program targeting troubled youth; (2) an evaluation of participants' involvement with the justice system to determine the extent, type, and outcome of delinquent behaviour among these youth; and (3) a comparison of the characteristics of the adolescents with a history of delinquency and those who have not been involved with the justice system.

The objective was not to evaluate the program, but to identify some of the indicators of problem behaviour from file records of Aboriginal youth involved in the substance abuse program. The aim of the three studies presented here is to increase our understanding of the social context of urban-dwelling Aboriginal youth at high-risk for psychosocial disorders.

Study 1: Characteristics of Youth in a Community Drug Program

In 1988, a Solvent Abuse Program was set up in a small urban centre (population 40,000) in Manitoba in response to community concerns about adolescents' use of solvents and other substances. The program was run by an Aboriginal coordinator who functioned as a street worker as well as receiving referrals from social welfare agencies, schools, the court, parents, and adolescents themselves. The program included leisure activities, group discussions, counselling, home visits, as well as interactions between the program coordinator and adolescents at home, at school, in the office, on the street, and by telephone.

Over a two-year period, 118 youths were associated with the program for varying lengths of time. Most of these participants were of Aboriginal background. The following results are based upon those individuals for whom complete information was available. The purpose of the study was to provide a description of the characteristics of Aboriginal youth in the community drug program.

Participants. Sixty-eight Aboriginal youth represented 91% of the participants for whom records were available in the program. Of these, 12% described themselves as Métis. File information was provided by referral sources as well as through interviews conducted by the program coordinator with the adolescents and their parents. There were 44 boys with an average age of 15.4 years (S.D. = 2.9; range: 10 to 26 years) and 24 girls with an average age of 14.5 years (S.D. = 1.8; range: 10 to 26 years).
Measures and Procedure. The program coordinator completed a structured questionnaire for each adolescent who was referred to the program. This included: (1) information on the source of referral, program activities the participant engaged in, frequency of program attendance, and reasons for leaving the program; (2) basic socio-demographic information such as the participant's age, gender, grade in school, family structure, living situation, parents' employment and source(s) of income; and (3) the frequency of delinquency and drug use among participants, their siblings and friends, and parents' use of alcohol and drugs.

Results

Most of the adolescents were referred to the program by schools (52%), followed by parents (13%), child welfare services (7.5%), the court (7.5%), self or friends (5%), and others (15%). The most frequently attended program activity was leisure outings, such as bowling, movies, swimming and water slides, etc. Forty-four per cent of the participants and many additional adolescents enjoyed these events. Other components of the program included: individual counselling (31%), group discussions (3.6%), counselling at school (14.6%), and treatment at another facility (2%). Overall, participants attended 3.2 (S.D. = 5.6; range: 0 to 20) program sessions over a two year period. The program coordinator's most frequent involvements with participants were: home visits (70%), discussions with parents (52%), school visits (41%), counselling (41%), office visits (39%), street visits (38%), and telephone conversations (24%). At the time of the file review 53 adolescents (79%) had discontinued involvement in the program. Thirty-four per cent left because their friends did not attend, another 31% moved away from the city, 14% resumed sniffing or drug use, 13% were seen once at school, and 3% attended only during the summer.

More than a third (36%) of the adolescents lived with their mother, 20% lived with both parents, including one adopted child, 18% were with their mother and stepfather, 8% were in foster homes (including 3 in open custody), 2% resided with their father, and 16% were in other situations. Sixty-five percent of the families' income was from welfare; 61% of the fathers and 88% of the mothers were unemployed. Nearly a third (31%) of the adolescents were not attending school. They included all who were 18 years of age and older, 44% of the 16 and 17 year olds, and 14% of those less than 16 years of age. Those attending school ranged from grade 2 to grade 9; more than one-half were below the norm in age for their grade.

Ninety-four per cent of the adolescents were reported to have been involved in problem behaviours and delinquency. As seen in Table 1, difficulties related to school (34%) were most frequent followed by problems
with the justice system (19%), difficulties with parents (12%), person offence behaviours (11%) and staying out late or running away (8%). Although drinking and substance abuse were among the lowest reported problem behaviours (3%), most of the adolescents had been involved in them.

Table 1: Reported Problem Behaviours for the Overall Sample in Study 1; and the Target Group (T) and the Comparison Group (C) in Study III

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem Behaviours</th>
<th>Group C</th>
<th>Group T</th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Misbehaviour at school, truancy</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staying out late; not coming home</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulties with parents</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Running away; street living</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems with law, court, custody, probation</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger, hostility, depression</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative influence of peers</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fights, assault, stealing, pushing, impaired driving</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinking, substance abuse</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The adolescents’ reported use of substances during the six months before their involvement in the program is shown in Table 2. As expected, alcohol (84%) followed by cigarettes (67%) were the most extensively used substances. However, these rates exceeded prevalence trends among youth in Canada and the United States (Oetting and Beauvais, 1990; Smart and Adlaf, 1989) as well as those of Aboriginal adolescents in the same community (Gfellner and Hundleby, 1991). The reported use of marijuana (57%) and solvents (53%) were two times and six times higher than the rates for local Aboriginal youth (Gfellner and Hundleby, 1991). In comparison, only a few adolescents were reported to have used LSD (3%), cocaine or crack (3%), amphetamines or speed (2%), tranquilizers or barbituates (2%), and other substances (6%). These rates were more similar to general and local trends for youth.

Considerable drug use was reported among the adolescents’ parents. Overall, 90% of the parents were said to use alcohol. Fifty-nine per cent drank
Table 2: Reported Substance Use for the Overall Sample in Study 1; and the Target Group (T) and the Comparison Group (C) in Study III

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Substance</th>
<th>Group C</th>
<th>Group T</th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cigarettes</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marijuana</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solvents</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amphetamines/Speed</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tranquilizers/Barbituates</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LSD</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cocaine/Crack</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Excessively, 31% were moderate or social drinkers, and 10% abstained from alcohol. Most (98%) of the adolescents’ parents smoked cigarettes. Conversely, seven per cent of the parents were reported to use marijuana occasionally and 2% were heavy users. These findings are comparable with the high prevalence rates for alcohol and other substances among Aboriginal adults reported elsewhere (Lex, 1987; May, 1982).

All of the adolescents were reported to have siblings. In this study, siblings were categorized as: older brothers (50%), older sisters (38%), younger brothers (56%), and younger sisters (50%). Nearly three-quarters of the adolescents’ older siblings were reported to be involved in the use of alcohol (74%), drugs or solvents (71%), and delinquent behaviour (71%) whereas fewer (49%) of their younger siblings were said to engage in each of these behaviours. Finally, 98% of the adolescents were reported to have friends who used alcohol, drugs or solvents, and were involved in delinquent behaviour.

Discussion

The adolescents associated with a community drug program represent an extremely disadvantaged group of Aboriginal youth. The findings revealed substantial family instability and poverty. More youth (36%) lived in single-parent households, compared with the 23% incidence for urban-dwelling Aboriginal people (McDonald, 1991) and a 30% rate among Aboriginal-
inal adolescents in the same community (Gfellner and Hundleby, 1991). Conversely, fewer adolescents resided with both parents (20%) than was found among Aboriginal youth in the latter study (33%). Parental unemployment was higher and more families' income was reported to be from welfare relative to the statistics for Aboriginal people in metropolitan centres (McDonald, 1991) or those residing locally (Gfellner and Hundleby, 1991).

Parents' reported use of alcohol, cigarettes and marijuana was higher than that of Aboriginal adults in general (Lex, 1987; May, 1982). Most of the adolescents' friends and older siblings were involved in delinquent behaviours and substance use. Younger siblings, with somewhat lower rates of involvement in these activities, may be in the process of transition to increased dysfunctional behaviours.

The adolescents experienced considerable school drop out, non-attendance, and below age-grade level placement. This finding is well-documented among Aboriginal youth (Latham, 1985). Overall results are consistent with studies that reported greater delinquency and substance abuse among adolescents who subsequently drop out of school than those who do not (for example, Oetting and Beauvais, 1990). The present findings showed that Aboriginal youth were involved in "serious" delinquency, including encounters with the justice system and criminal violations, as well as school-related difficulties and the negative influence of friends. This profile may underestimate the range of difficulties experienced by these youths because an open-ended format was used to assess specific problem behaviours, thereby focussing on only the most prominent concerns. Furthermore, most participants were said to have been involved in problem behaviours or delinquency.

Consistent with serious delinquent behaviours, the youths' reported use of alcohol and other substances was substantial, exceeding the rates for Aboriginal adolescents in the same community (Gfellner and Hundleby, 1991). The present rates are comparable to those reported by Beauvais, Oetting, Wolf, and Edwards (1989) for American Indian youth who live on reserves. In each of these studies, Aboriginal adolescents showed considerably higher rates of marijuana use in comparison to non-Aboriginal adolescents. However, solvent abuse in the present sample was three times higher than the life-time use of inhalants by American Indian youth (53% versus 17%; 2% for use in the last month) given by Beauvais et al. The excessive use of solvents may reflect the selective sample of program participants who were targetted for use of solvents as well as other substances. The Beauvais et al. study used school populations on reserves and did not include dropouts. Similarly, Gfellner and Hundleby studied adolescents in an urban school system. If all eligible adolescents had been
surveyed in these studies, the rates of substance use would have been elevated.

According to several authors (such as, May, 1982; Winifree and Griffiths, 1983), Aboriginal youths' alcohol and drug abuse is related to a lack of strong integration to either modern or traditional society. These youth and their peer groups, to a greater degree than other youth, face greater uncertainty and integration problems. These problems may lead to escapist behaviours such as substance abuse and delinquency, which tend to be self-supporting and norms in many Aboriginal peer groups. Conversely, Liban and Smart (1982) found similar alcohol and drug use patterns among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth from the same social circumstances.

This profile of youth associated with the community drug program is consistent with explanations of dysfunctional behaviour among Aboriginal adolescents given in the literature, explanations which emphasize culture conflict, boredom, loss of parental discipline, and hopelessness (Kueneman et al., 1986; LaPrairie, 1987). The limitation of this study was that it was based upon objective information from the program records and the coordinator's experience with participants. Input from adolescents, their parents, siblings, and peers, as well as external reports, would provide a more comprehensive view of the psychosocial sphere in which these adolescents function. Finally, it is unclear how Aboriginal youth in cities differ from those in other locations and in relation to different opportunities and levels of social stratification. Further study is required to assess patterns of substance use, delinquency, and factors which may influence them among urban Aboriginal youth and others in different social environments.

The findings on participants' involvement in the community drug program provide insight into some of the difficulties in the provision of intervention or remedial services to such a disadvantaged group. Most prominent was the generally poor attendance of program events. This raises the question of how to motivate participants to maintain active involvement in the program. It is unfortunate that the participants were not asked to respond to this question. However, as this study did not evaluate the program, one can only consider potential ways in which program participation might be improved and suggest directions for future development.

Leisure outings were the most popular activity. They provided participants with the opportunity to engage in events that otherwise may be unavailable. In addition, leisure activities provide opportunities to develop new interests and skills. According to Scott and Myers (1988), fitness training (physical activity) as a means of self-enhancement should be included as a component of a more comprehensive life skills program which includes constructive use of leisure time. Due to its popularity, structured physical
activities may be a good entry point for adolescents where their commitment to the program could be fostered. This aspect of the program would benefit from greater integration with other facilities and resources that are available in the community.

Despite a substantial school dropout rate among participants, school was the primary source of referral. Most of these adolescents were seen at school, but for many this was on a single occasion. Considering the importance of the school environment for adolescents and their peers, it is a useful place to establish functional liaisons with the program. For example, this may involve peer support and peer counselling programs for Aboriginal adolescents. Also, educational programs for teachers and counsellors might assist them in targetting children and adolescents with potential problems well before they drop out of the school system.

Considerable time was spent by the coordinator on home visits and interactions with parents. As seen in the very high rate of family instability, one may infer that many parents were experiencing difficulties interacting with their children. At the same time, many parents may be assumed to be in need of supportive services themselves. The direct involvement of parents, particularly those with children and young adolescents, is crucial for any preventive strategies to be successful. This should involve a focus on young adolescents (and siblings) before they have developed serious difficulties.

As indicated above, among older adolescents, emphasis would best be placed within the social context of peers. The majority of participants left the program because their friends did not attend. Alternatively, nearly a third moved away and may be considered transient; and a smaller proportion resumed substance use. For most adolescents in this study, substance abuse may be perceived as a normative behaviour. According to May (1986), a major component of youth-oriented prevention programs should emphasize a social learning model that builds self-esteem and coping skills in individuals and their peer groups. May (1982; 1986) outlined some of the problems that must be addressed when developing intervention and prevention programs for Aboriginal youth who live in various unique social and cultural situations.

Study II: Youths' Involvement with the Justice System

The disproportionate representation of Aboriginal youth (14 to 25 years of age) in the criminal justice system, compared to the group's population in larger society, has been well-documented (LaPrairie, 1988; National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, 1990). For example, in
Manitoba, 10% of the population are Indian or Métis yet nearly 60% of the inmates in provincial jails are Aboriginal. The lock-up rate is even higher for women and adolescents; about 70% of the women in jails and 75% of the juveniles in the Winnipeg Detention Centre are Aboriginal (York, 1990). As indicated previously, the causes of this over-representation may be summarized as differential treatment by the criminal justice system, differential commission of crime, and differential offence patterns among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people (LaPrairie, 1990). LaPrairie (1988) outlined difficulties with the justice system in meeting the needs of the young Aboriginal offender, but minimal information is available on court involvement and offence patterns among Aboriginal youth.

In a comparison of a small northern sample of Native and non-Native juveniles in court over an 18-month period, LaPrairie (1983) found that Aboriginal youth, in particular girls, were over-represented. However, there were no major differences in the types of offences, dispositions or conditions, and the social history presentations of probation officers were equally followed in the dispositions of both groups of youth. The major differences between these Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal adolescents were in terms of socio-structural characteristics.

Using data from the Youth Court Survey, Hendrick and Lachance (1991) described the characteristics of young offenders in Canada in terms of the types of charges they face and how the court deals with them. Unfortunately, no published comparative data for Aboriginal youth could be located.

In this paper, Study II summarizes involvement with the justice system among Aboriginal adolescents in a community drug program. The objective was to determine the extent and the type of delinquent behaviours, the court action, and the dispositions conferred among these youth.

Participants. Sixty-five youth were found to have court records. They represented approximately 55% of 118 adolescents who had been involved in the first two years of a community drug program. There were 44 boys with an average age of 18.1 (S.D. = 2.4; range: 14 to 26 years) and 21 girls who were on an average 16.1 years old (S.D. = 1.3; range: 13 to 18 years) at the time of the court records evaluation.

Measures and Procedure. Program participants were cross-referenced in the court records to determine those with involvement in the justice system. Data was recorded for the Criminal Code offence, date of charge, the court decision, and the action taken for each of the targetted youth. This provided information on the age at which adolescents were charged for an offence, the type of violation, and the outcome.
Table 3: Frequency of Offences by the Age when the Youth was Charged

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>14.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>19.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>5.0</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2.4</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.2</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.6</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>991</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results

Overall, the 65 adolescents had been charged with 991 offenses; this was on an average, 15.3 (S.D. = 15.3; range: 1 to 56) charges for each youth. At the time of the evaluation, boys over 18 years of age had an average of 17.8 (S.D. = 15.2; range: 1 to 53) charges; boys 18 years of age or less had an average of 19.04 (S.D. = 18.3; range: 1 to 53) charges; and for girls, the average was 9.8 (S.D. = 8.7; range: 1 to 27) charges. Recidivism was high among these youths; only one person in each group had been charged once. As expected, recidivism was greater among older than younger adolescents. Fifty per cent of the older boys had 18 or fewer charges; 52% of the younger boys had 8 or fewer charges; and 53% of the girls had 7 charges or less.

Subsequent analyses are based on the youth’s age when he or she was charged with an offense. Boys, 18 years of age or younger, had an average of 16.6 charges (range: 1 to 56); older boys had an average of 9 charges
(range: 1 to 26); and for girls, the average was 9.2 charges (range: 1 to 27). Overall, the average age of boys at the time they were charged was 16.1 years (S.D. = 2.5) and for girls, it was 13.8 years (S.D. = 1.1). This discrepancy may reflect the lack of older girls in the sample.

Table 3 shows the frequency of offences by the age at which the adolescent was charged. By 13 years of age, 13% of the adolescents had been involved with the justice system. This rose to 18% by 14 and 15 years, and peaked at 19% for adolescents who were charged at 16 years of age. The substantially lower rates of charges among older youth may be due to fewer older participants associated with the program and the likelihood that those with a longer history of delinquent activities would be incarcerated. Eleven of the 15 older boys (73%) had been charged as juveniles.

A frequency distribution of Criminal Code violations for boys and girls as a function of the age when they were charged is given in Table 4. Property offences were the most common charge for both young (45%) and older (32%) males and females (30%). This was followed by violations in the administration of law and justice such as failure to comply with conditions of the court (24%), and failure to comply with a probation order (14%) among older youth. For younger males, the Young Offender's Act (18%), adminis-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Charge</th>
<th>Over 18 Boys</th>
<th>Under 18 Boys</th>
<th>Under 18 Girls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Firearms/Weapons</td>
<td>3.0% (4)</td>
<td>1.8% (12)</td>
<td>1.0% (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration of Law/Justice</td>
<td>24.0% (32)</td>
<td>16.0% (107)</td>
<td>26.0% (50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disorderly Conduct</td>
<td>1.5% (2)</td>
<td>.6% (4)</td>
<td>1.0% (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person Offences</td>
<td>8.0% (11)</td>
<td>10.4% (69)</td>
<td>9.0% (17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property Offences</td>
<td>39.0% (44)</td>
<td>45.0% (298)</td>
<td>30.0% (57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fraud</td>
<td>1.5% (2)</td>
<td>.6% (4)</td>
<td>.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure to Comply</td>
<td>14.0% (19)</td>
<td>.5% (3)</td>
<td>1.6% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petty Trespass Act</td>
<td>.7% (1)</td>
<td>.3% (2)</td>
<td>.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liquor Control Act</td>
<td>3.0% (4)</td>
<td>4.5% (30)</td>
<td>2.6% (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highway Traffic Act</td>
<td>1.5% (2)</td>
<td>2.8% (15)</td>
<td>1.0% (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Offenders Act</td>
<td>10.4% (14)</td>
<td>18.0% (118)</td>
<td>28.5% (65)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narcotics Control Act</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>.2% (1)</td>
<td>.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>(135)</td>
<td>(663)</td>
<td>(193)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Community Drug Program

...application of law and justice (16%), and person offences (10.4%) were the next most frequent charges. Similarly, girls were most likely to be charged with the Young Offender's Act (28.5%) and the administration of law and justice (26%). Person offences were consistent, from 8% to 10% for all of the age and gender groups.

More than half (60%) of the youths' charges had dispositions conferred by the court. Significantly more dispositions were conferred among older (74%) than younger (60%) adolescents. The chi square was 6.55 (1 df), p < .01. In comparison, a chi square of 1.61 (1 df, P < .21 indicated that there was no difference in the rate of dispositions conferred among younger boys (59%) and girls (64%). Further analyses showed that adolescents at younger ages (12% versus 2%) and girls (17% versus 9%) were more likely to be charged for an offence with companions than alone. Also, when adolescents were co-accused, they were more likely to have their charges stayed (19% versus 7%).

Table 5: Frequency of Dispositions for Young and Older Adolescents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disposition</th>
<th>Under 18</th>
<th>Over 18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proband</td>
<td>44.0% (302)</td>
<td>21.0% (24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Custody</td>
<td>22.0% (152)</td>
<td>2.6% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure Custody</td>
<td>10.6% (73)</td>
<td>46.0% (52)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Service Work</td>
<td>15.0% (60)</td>
<td>10.6% (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fines</td>
<td>5.5% (38)</td>
<td>6.0% (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restitution</td>
<td>1.2% (8)</td>
<td>6.0% (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conditional Discharge</td>
<td>.3% (2)</td>
<td>2.6% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weapons Prohibition</td>
<td>.9% (6)</td>
<td>4.4% (5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 shows the conviction and outcome rates for younger adolescents (n = 508 charges) and youth (n = 97 charges). For these analyses, younger boys and girls were pooled as they were similar in the rate of dispositions conferred for charges. Older adolescents were more likely to receive secure custody (54%), followed by probation (25%), and community service work (12%) whereas the most frequent outcome for young adolescents was probation (60%), followed by open custody (30%), community service work (20%), and secure custody (14%). Although fewer younger than older adolescents received secure custody, their average term was
significantly greater (F(1, 124) = 14.02, p < .0003; 205 versus 87 days, respectively). Conversely, older adolescents were required to spend more time on community service work than younger adolescents (F(1, 114) = 72.28, p < .0001; 124 versus 34 hours, respectively). There was no difference between the two groups in the term of probation (13.9 versus 13.3 months, respectively).

Discussion

More than half of the Aboriginal youth in the community drug program had been involved with the justice system. Recidivism was substantial, especially among boys.

As comparative data on urban-dwelling Aboriginal youth were not available, the present findings are considered in relation to the general characteristics of Canadian young offenders (Hendrick and Lachance, 1991). However, it is important to indicate differences between the two studies in the methods used. The Youth Court Survey (YCS) presented annual figures on adolescents' involvement with the justice system whereas the present study focussed on the court histories of a special sample of individuals. In the current study certain Criminal Code categories were combined due to changes in legislation in 1984 when the Young Offenders Act replaced the Juvenile Delinquents Act, and in 1986 when failure to comply with a community disposition became a chargeable offense under the Young Offenders Act. The YCS defined a person as a youth having one or more charges disposed of in the fiscal year; only the most serious charge was counted for those with more than one charge in the same province. Also, in 1984, under the Young Offenders Act, the minimum age was 12, the maximum age was 18 in some provinces and one year later it was set at 17. The current study included a greater age-span and focused on individuals' history of involvement with the judicial system.

Despite these methodological differences, certain consistencies as well as discrepancies are apparent between the present sample of Aboriginal youth and general characteristics of the young offender in Canada. Consistent with the YCS, males were charged under the Criminal Code more frequently than females. However, in terms of the number of charges, Aboriginal girls were twice as likely to have been involved with the justice system as girls in the YCS (35% versus 17%). This finding is consistent with other reports of extreme over-representation of Aboriginal women in the judicial system (LaPrairie, 1987; York, 1990). At the same time, it is interesting that none of the girls in the present sample had been charged at 18 years of age or older.
Boys tended to be older than girls when charged. The mean ages of 16 for boys and nearly 14 for girls were comparable with 16 and 13 years in the YCS, respectively. As with adolescents in general, Aboriginal girls seem to become involved with the judicial system at an earlier age than boys.

Consistent with the general pattern, property offences were the most serious charge among younger (45%) as well as older males (32%), and females (30%). However, the statistic may be over-represented in YCS (62%) relative to the present findings due to the method of tabulating person involvement. Also, the YCS’s focus on only the most serious charge for each adolescent may account for the higher rate of charges under the Young Offenders Act for girls (29%) and younger boys (18%) in the current study (YCS = 6%). Similarly, violent charges or person offences were approximately half the YCS rate (18%) in this sample of Aboriginal youth.

The present study indicated an overall lower rate of dispositions among Aboriginal youth relative to the YCS (60% versus 80%). This discrepancy may reflect the more serious charges in the YCS. Alternatively, other authors have suggested that such differences may indicate changes in court decision-making over time or greater leniency in the treatment of Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal people (Bonita, 1989; Moyer, 1987).

In contrast to general trends which show a higher rate of dispositions for males than females, Aboriginal females and young males were disposed similarly by the court. As expected, older youth had a higher rate of dispositions than younger adolescents. And those who were co-accused were more likely to have charges stayed; this was most frequent for younger adolescents and girls.

For the types of dispositions, the present findings showed a somewhat higher proportion of terms of custody, including secure and open (42.6% versus 23%), and community service work (15% versus 8%), but lower rates for terms of probation (44% versus 50%) and fines (5.5% versus 14%), among young Aboriginal adolescents in comparison with the YCS. As expected, dispositions varied in relation to the age of the offender. For example, young adolescents were more likely to receive terms of probation followed by open custody while older adolescents were more frequently sentenced to secure custody.

As indicated previously, only younger girls associated with the drug program were found to have been involved with the justice system. It is unclear why older girls with similar experiences did not appear in the sample. Perhaps older girls with an early history of court involvement are more likely to marry or become pregnant and subsequently disengage with their former peers due to child-rearing responsibilities. Alternatively, some may be incarcerated or they may be more reluctant to associate with a community drug
program. LaPrairie (1987) outlines a theoretical account of the over-representation of Aboriginal women in the judicial system based upon the relationship between victimization and criminal behaviour.

**Study III: Youth With and Without Involvement in the Justice System**

There is a large literature which links serious delinquency with adult criminal behaviour (for example, Farrington, 1979; Quay, 1987). Consistent with this, the Native Council of Canada (1977) reported that 71% of their sample of incarcerated Aboriginal adults had been involved with the justice system by 16 years of age. Despite extensive work in the field of delinquency, attention is only beginning to be directed toward Aboriginal youth as a group with special needs.

A number of investigators have associated delinquency among Aboriginal youth with culture conflict, boredom, loss of parental discipline, and feelings of hopelessness (Bissonnette, 1985; Bouchard and Pelletier, 1986; Kueneman, Linden, and Kosmick, 1986). Social structural differences were the most prominent variables in the over-representation of Aboriginal adolescents in court in a small northern sample (LaPrairie, 1983). Other review papers have described the status of Aboriginal people in terms of social, political, and economic marginality (LaPrairie, 1987; LaPrairie, 1988; York, 1990). The results of Study I are consistent with these accounts.

In Study III, the objective was to examine whether or not any differences were apparent in the characteristics of Aboriginal youth associated with the drug program who differed in terms of prior involvement with the judicial system.

**Participants.** From the Solvent Abuse Program roster (n = 118), there were 30 adolescents with a history of involvement with the justice system and 37 who had no such history for whom file records from the program were available. These groups provided the information for the analysis in Study III. In addition, 35 adolescents had involvement with the judicial system, but no program records were available, and another 16 were lacking information in either source. These latter 51 adolescents are not considered in this study.

Aboriginal youth with prior involvement in the justice system, the target group, included 21 (70%) boys and 9 (30%) girls, with an average age of 15.5 years (S.D. = 2.3; range: 13 to 23 years). The comparison group consisted of 23 (60.5%) boys and 15 (39.5%) girls who averaged, 14.7 years of age (S.D. = 2.8; range: 10 to 26 years) at the time of their involvement in the community drug program.
Measures and Procedures. The Solvent Abuse Program file records, described in Study I, provided the data for this study.

**Results**

Fifty per cent of the adolescents with a history of court involvement and 30% of the comparison group lived in single-parent mother-headed homes. Youth without court experience were more likely to reside in two-adult households (24% with both parents; 21% with mother and stepfather versus 11% and 14% for the former group, respectively). The extent to which youth lived in other situations (with extended family, friends, on one’s own) was similar between the groups (18% for the target group and 15% for the control group, respectively).

Eighty-three per cent of the target group and 47% of the comparison group had fathers who were unemployed. The adolescents were similar for mothers with 95% and 82% unemployed, respectively. Seventy-six per cent of the target group and 55% of the comparison group had reported family incomes from welfare.

Nearly a third of the adolescents in both groups did not attend school (32% in the target group and 31% in the comparison group). The age-grade distribution among those attending school was similar for the groups.

All of the adolescents who had been involved with the justice system and 89% of the comparison group were described as having serious behavioural difficulties. As seen in Table 1, the frequencies of reported problem behaviours were fairly consistent for both groups. School-related difficulties were most frequent, followed by trouble with the police, courts or custody, staying out late or not coming home, difficulties with parents, and fights, stealing or impaired driving.

Greater reported use of alcohol, cigarettes, marijuana, and solvents was found among adolescents with prior court involvement than for the comparison group. As shown in Table 2, the rates of use were excessive (from 67% to 94%) in the former group and they were very high (from 41% to 76%) in the latter group.

The two groups were similar for older siblings', younger siblings', and friends' reported involvement in delinquent or problem behaviours and the use of alcohol, solvents, or other drugs. Percentages for older siblings ranged from 68% to 74% for the target group and they were 74% for the comparison group. The rates were 36% and 42% for younger siblings' behaviour in the target group and comparison group, respectively. The highest reported rates were found for friends, 97% and 100% for the two groups, respectively.
As with siblings and friends, the groups were comparable with regard to reports of parents' drinking and substance use. For adolescents with a history of court involvement, 61.5% of the parents were reported to drink excessively, 27% were moderate or social drinkers, and 11.5% abstained from alcohol. Similarly, 56.2% of the comparison group’s parents were said to drink excessively, 34.4% drank moderately, and 9.4% were abstainers. Ninety-seven per cent and 100% of the parents in the two respective groups were described as smokers. For marijuana use, 7% of the target youths' parents were reported to use marijuana occasionally, 7% were heavy users, and 19% of the comparison youths' parents were occasional users.

In terms of program participation, school was the main source of referral for each group (53% and 51.4%). Consistent with differences in family structure, parent referrals were somewhat higher among the comparison group (16% versus 10%) whereas target group participants had more referrals from Child and Family Services (10% versus 5%) and the court (10% versus 5%). The rate was similar between the groups on self (0 versus 3%) and friend or other (16% versus 19%) referrals.

Program attendance was consistent for adolescents who had been involved with the justice system \((M = 2.9; S.D. = 3.0; \text{range: 0-12})\) and those who had not \((M = 3.4; S.D. = 6.0; \text{range: 0-20})\). However, more target youth attended leisure activities (52% versus 36%); comparison subjects were more likely to participate in individual counselling (36% versus 26%); and group participation rates were similar for counselling at school (14% and 15%) and group discussions (4%, respectively). Some variability was seen between the groups for adolescents' interaction with the program coordinator. Youth with prior court involvement experienced more home visits (77% versus 64%), parent visits (57% versus 47%), office visits (53% versus 28%), and school visits (43% versus 39%), but less counselling (37% versus 44%) and phone conversations (17% versus 28%) than the comparison group.

At the time of the study, approximately 80% of the adolescents in each group had left the program. Those with a history of court involvement were more likely to leave because their friends did not attend (46% versus 25%) or they had resumed sniffing or drug use (25% versus 6%); comparison group participants were more likely to have moved away (42% versus 18%) or were seen once at school (17% versus 7%).

Discussion

For Aboriginal adolescents in the community drug program, the most salient difference between those who had been involved with the justice system and those who had not was extreme family instability and poverty.
Approximately 90% of the former individuals experienced some type of family dissolution (compared to 78% in the comparison group); more than three-quarters had families who were supported mainly by welfare (55% in the comparison group). These findings greatly exceeded those reported by LaPrairie (1983) in her evaluation of Aboriginal youth in court where 59% were in unstable family situations, 59% were unemployed, and 34% were students.

Few differences were found between the groups in terms of the youths' reported problem behaviours including school attendance or the behaviour of significant others in their social environment. The latter included parents' reported use of alcohol, cigarettes, and marijuana, and siblings' and friends' reported involvement in delinquency and the use of alcohol and drugs.

Apart from the criterion variable, the only behavioural difference between the groups was the reported use of alcohol and other substances. The rates were excessive for adolescents who had been involved in the justice system and they were extremely high in the comparison group relative to prevalence rates for Aboriginal youth in the same community (Gfellner and Hundleby, 1991).

In view of the overall extremely disadvantaged position of Aboriginal youth in this study, the present findings suggest that the two groups represent increasingly negative (very bad and worse) positions on a continuum. These findings underscore the role of poverty, a prominent social indicator. For example, if socioeconomic status were used as the criterion for court involvement, Aboriginal youth would not be over-represented in the judicial system. In addition, although the impact of family structure on psychosocial disorders of children and adolescents is well-documented in general (for example, Hetherington and Arasteh, 1988), research is sparse on the effect of family structure and family functioning in Aboriginal families. The findings raise questions about potential protective factors that may be associated with these differentiating variables among adolescents who have avoided involvement with the justice system and those who have not. Further empirical study is required to address this issue.

It is interesting to observe that a high proportion of targetted program participants did not have file records. This implies a reluctance to get involved with the program and raises questions about how to overcome this obstacle, as discussed in Study I. Similarly, nearly three-quarters of the youth who had been involved with the justice system discontinued the program because their friends did not attend or they had resumed substance abuse. Alternatively, more comparison group participants left the program because they moved away; they may represent a more transient group of Aboriginal
adolescents who do not have local court records, but may have them elsewhere.

In this sample, Aboriginal adolescents who have not been involved with the court system are still at risk. The challenging question is how to provide appropriate intervention to keep them away from further difficulty and to improve their situation.

Conclusions

Aboriginal adolescents involved in an urban drug program represent an extremely disadvantaged group. The findings suggest that youth in cities are as diversified in their needs and problems as those in more restricted settings. According to many accounts, the increased problems found among Aboriginal people in comparison with the general population are largely determined by their socioeconomic situation and control exerted by the community. Following May's (1982; 1986) position, Aboriginal youth in cities may experience increased difficulties due to their marginal position in relation to their traditional culture as well as mainstream society. This is evident in the present sample in terms of extreme dysfunctional behaviours. From this perspective, Aboriginal youth in urban settings may be in greater jeopardy than many of their contemporaries elsewhere as they lack supports at home and from the larger social milieu.

Study II indicated extreme recidivism among offending youth; however, patterns were fairly consistent with YCS. Despite the methodological differences in these studies, two findings warrant closer attention. First, greater court involvement among Aboriginal girls in comparison with girls in general; second, the lack of gender differences in the rate of dispositions among young Aboriginal adolescents. These results are consistent with other reports (LaPrairie, 1983; LaPrairie, 1987), but further study is required with controls for seriousness of charges and recidivism. Furthermore, these findings strongly suggest that investigators consider potential gender differences in the psychosocial development of Aboriginal youth.

Study III suggested that certain protective factors may differentiate youth who have a history of involvement with the judicial system and those who do not. Consistent with the literature, findings underscore the significance of poverty and the family in the profiles of these youth. Such findings are not new, but the magnitude of the problems may be greater than has been realized. These social indicators must be readdressed from the perspective of Aboriginal culture and its various manifestations. This will require more intense empirical investigation of potential factors that may be related to psychosocial adaptation among Aboriginal children and adolescents in various social environments.
In conclusion, the results suggest that Aboriginal youth in urban areas may be even more disadvantaged than their contemporaries elsewhere. Intervention and preventative approaches must focus on children and young adolescents before they develop serious difficulties. It is imperative to involve the family and to address family issues. Among older adolescents, programs must include adolescents' friends and their functioning within the peer group; the school might provide an important social context for structured activities such as peer support groups. Finally, concentrated effort is required by researchers, practitioners, policy makers, and communities to address the basic social issues of poverty and the family.

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