



## Summary of Research Report

In 2011, researchers from the Urban Institute launched a three year study of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer or questioning (LGBTQ) youth; young men who have sex with men (YMSM); and young women who have sex with women (YWSW) engaged in survival sex in New York City. Working in partnership with the Streetwise and Safe organization, researchers trained youth leaders to conduct in-depth interviews with a total of 283 youth who engaged in survival sex in New York City and self-identified as LGBTQ, YMSM, or YWSW. This is the first report in the series which focuses specifically on the experiences and needs of youth engaging in survival sex. Youths' interactions with juvenile, criminal justice and child welfare systems are depicted, from the perspectives of both the youths and stakeholders involved in these systems.

## Key Findings & Figures

- ◆ Over 70% of the young people had been arrested at least once, with frequent arrest for “quality-of-life” and misdemeanour crimes, and 9% for prostitution-related charge. (p. 1)
- ◆ Only 9% of the youth had been arrested on a prostitution-related charge, which leads to a false perception by the police and courts that LGBTQ youth aren't engaging in survival sex/trafficking (p. 2)
- ◆ Throughout the process of arrest and booking process, one-third of the youth reported feeling unsafe, experiencing a high degree of verbal harassment, physical assault and sexual assault. (p. 2)
- ◆ Youth perceptions of the court system were less negative than law enforcement, yet there are reports of personnel refusing to use appropriate names and pronouns and making disrespectful remarks about identity, expression and orientation. (p. 3)
- ◆ Most youth who disclosed child welfare involvement reported negative experiences, and often mentioned these experiences as justifications for running away from placements. (p. 4)
- ◆ Youth described their foster/group home placements as unsafe, overcrowded, and highly restrictive. Youth also reported foster parents or group home staff as restrictive, cruel, or abusive. (p. 4)
- ◆ Service providers noted a need to fill structural gaps, including the lack of placements specific to LGBTQ youth and the great reluctance of child protective services to intervene in abuse or neglect of older LGBTQ adolescents. (p. 5)

### Title

**Locked In:  
Interactions With The  
Criminal Justice & Child  
Welfare Systems For  
LGBTQ Youth, YMSM,  
and YWSW Who Engage  
In Survival Sex**

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### Research Tags

LGBTQ, Gender, Expression,  
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System, Child Welfare



## Why Research?

The Yonge Street Mission believes in the incredible value that evidenced-based research and information sharing plays in developing—as well as delivering—the most enhanced and effective programs and services to our community members. We are called to be stewards of knowledge; educated, informed and diligently tapping into innovation and insight. Best practices are continually refined, and studies, research and analysis are regularly being published. Keeping up to date and well-versed with this literature is essential. It is for this reason we've designed this Research Bulletin to promptly scan and disseminate the key findings and recommendations from recently published research materials relevant to the Social Service sector, and to our work at The Yonge Street Mission.

**This summary has been prepared by The Yonge Street Mission. The information given does not purport to be an exhaustive or exact replica of the original research. Omissions or errors resulting from the summation process are the responsibility of The Yonge Street Mission.**

## Proposed Recommendations & Areas For Action

- ✦ End the arrest-based response to youth engaged in survival sex, at the federal, state, and local levels. (p. 98)
- ✦ Design law enforcement policies, training, and oversight and accountability measures to improve relationships with LGBTQ Youth, YMSM, and YWSW Engaged in survival sex and decrease police misconduct. (p.102)
- ✦ Create safe and supportive protocols specific to LGBTQ youth engaged in survival sex for child welfare, court system, and probation personnel.
- ✦ End secure confinement and institutional placements and limit restrictive conditions of child welfare placements in semi-and nonsecure facilities for youth engaged in survival sex. (p.106)
- ✦ Guarantee quality of care and periodic review of secure confinement and out-of-home placements. (p.107)
- ✦ Probation and child welfare agencies should adopt safe and supportive housing and classification protocols for transgender and gender-nonconforming youth. (p.110)
- ✦ Create safe and confidential monitoring, reporting, and youth-initiated complaint protocols for violations of policies. (p.110)
- ✦ Ensure that youth engaged in survival sex participate in the policies and programs that affect their lives. (p.108)

## Notable Quotes

- ✦ “Youth described being locked in a constant vicious cycle of involvement in the criminal justice system with far-reaching collateral consequences ranging from instability in the home and school to inability to pay fines and surcharges, active warrants, incarceration, and consequences for future employment.” (p. 1)
- ✦ “LGBTQ youth are particularly vulnerable to risk factors for justice system involvement, such as homelessness, family instability, and violence.” (p. 7)
- ✦ “A disproportionate number of LGBTQ youth, YMSM, and YWSW interviewed for this study were locked into a system, whether it be the criminal justice system, the child welfare system, or both.” (p. 98)
- ✦ “Their experiences cycling in and out of these systems shaped their perceptions of police officers, judges, prosecutors, defence attorneys, probation officers, child welfare workers, and more generally, adults.” (p. 98)