

Offence charges among Albertan youth

Child and Youth Data Laboratory (CYDL)

Report for *Experiences of Albertan Youth Project*

Key findings

This report is an overview of 6,311 Albertan youth (12 to 17 years) charged with offences in 2008/09. Youth with offence charges include those charged with criminal offences or administrative offences related to criminal offences (e.g., failure to appear in court, breach of probation, etc.). Number of offences in the study year was available, but individual incidents were not available. This means that youth charged with multiple offences may have had multiple charges in a single incident, or they may have been charged in multiple incidents.

The relationships between number of charges and age, gender, region of residence, socio-economic status, educational achievement and mental health status were considered. Youth charged with offences in the study year were compared to youth of the same ages not charged with offences in the study year. The cross-ministry service use of youth with offence charges was also studied.

- 2.1% of youth were charged with an offence in the study year. Of these, 44% had one charge in the year, 29% had two or three charges, and 27% had four or more charges.
- Offence charges were most common among youth aged 16 to 17.
- Males were more than twice as likely as females to be charged with offences, particularly multiple offences.
- Youth charged with offences were more likely than youth not charged with offences to live in lower socio-economic status neighbourhoods, to perform below educational expectations, to receive services for a mental health condition, or to visit an emergency room or be hospitalized.
- Youth with offence charges, particularly those with four or more charges, were more likely to receive maltreatment-related intervention services than youth without offence charges.



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Context

Youth who are charged with offences constitute a small proportion of the total youth population. According to Statistics Canada, the number of charges per 100 youth in Canada in 2010 ranged from 2.2 (for 12 year olds) to 14.3 (for 17 year olds), with some youth committing multiple offences.¹ Property offences, such as theft or break and enter, are the most common offences for which youth are charged.²

Societal concern over young offenders is high. A solid knowledge of risk and protective factors for these youth is critical in reducing the number of young offenders and in reducing the number of young offenders who become repeat offenders in the youth or adult criminal justice systems.

Previous research has identified a number of risk factors for offending. Young offenders are more often male than female, and are more often older youth than younger youth.² Aggressive childhood behaviour, disruptive family life, family adversity, poor school performance, poor peer relations, substance use, and low socio-economic status are risk factors that increase the likelihood of youth committing an offence.^{3,4} The more risk factors youth experience, the more likely they are to become repeat offenders.³

Protective factors, associated with reduced risk of being charged with an offence, include positive social attitudes, supportive relationships with adults, appropriate discipline and limit-setting from parents, positive social skills, and problem solving skills.⁵

The project

The current project, **Experiences of Albertan Youth**, is focused on basic understanding of the experiences of Albertan youth within and across ministries, as they relate to key indicators (age, gender, socio-economic status, educational achievement, and mental health status). It is the first project in a planned series that will link and analyze administrative data on children and youth in Alberta to inform policy, programs, and research.

List of reports for the project

Socio-economic status of Albertan youth

Educational experiences of Albertan youth

Mental health status of Albertan youth

Family Support for Children with Disabilities services received by Albertan youth

Maltreatment-related investigations among Albertan youth

Maltreatment-related intervention services received by Albertan youth

Physician visits by Albertan youth

Emergency room visits by Albertan youth

Hospitalizations of Albertan youth

Offence charges among Albertan youth

Corrections involvement among Albertan youth

Post-secondary students in Alberta

Income support among Albertan youth

Educational experiences of Albertan youth with income support activity

Least advantaged and most advantaged Albertan youth

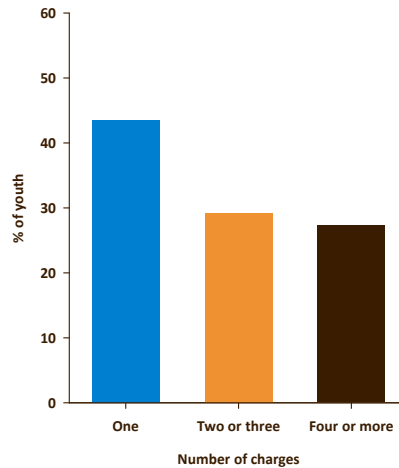
Offence charges among Albertan youth

Number of charges (Table 1)

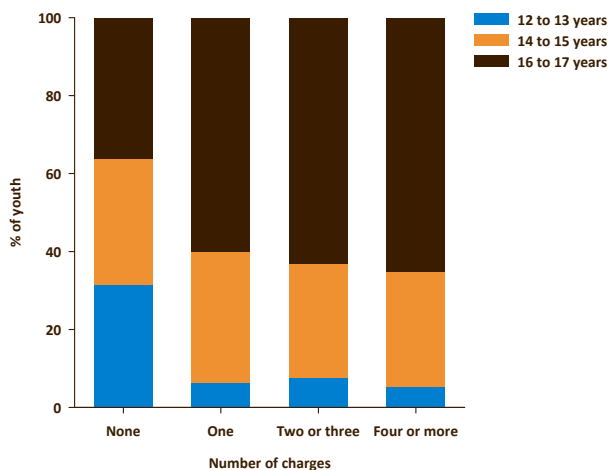
This and the following analyses consider all Albertan youth (12 to 17 years) in 2008/09. See *Definitions and Notes* (p. 13).

- 6,311 youth (2.1%) were charged with an offence.
- 2,747 youth who were charged with an offence received one charge (44%), 1,843 received two or three charges (29%) and 1,721 received four or more charges (27%).
- 301,392 youth (97.9%) of the same age group had no charges (graph not shown).

Number of charges
Albertan youth aged 12 to 17



Number of charges by age
Albertan youth aged 12 to 17



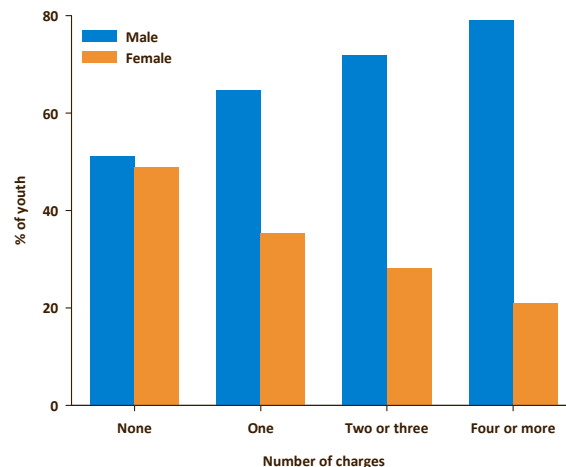
Number of charges by age (Tables 2 and 3)

- Older youth were more likely to be charged with an offence than younger youth.
- 0.4% of youth aged 12 to 13 were charged with an offence compared to 2.0% of youth aged 14 to 15 and 3.5% of youth aged 16 to 17 (graph not shown).
- Among youth with one or more charges, the most common age group was 16 to 17 years old, with the percentage of youth in this group increasing slightly with increasing number of charges.

Number of charges by gender (Tables 4 and 5)

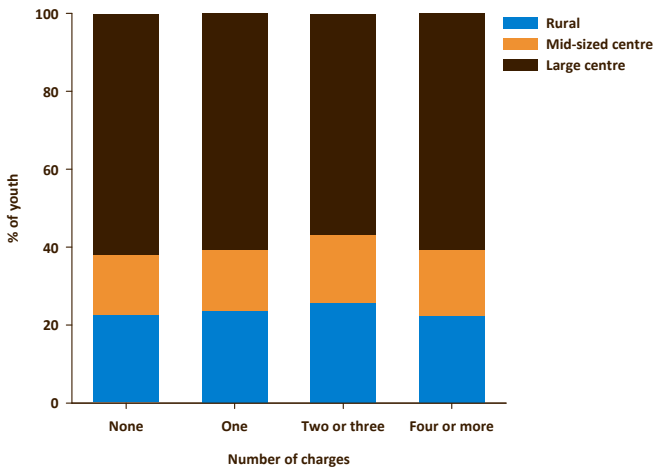
- Males were more likely than females to be charged with an offence.
- 3% of males and 1% of females were charged with at least one offence (graph not shown).
- Males were more likely to have multiple charges than females. 79% of youth with four or more charges were male.

Number of charges by gender
Albertan youth aged 12 to 17



Offence charges among Albertan youth

Number of charges by region of residence
Albertan youth aged 12 to 17



Number of charges by region of residence
(Table 6)

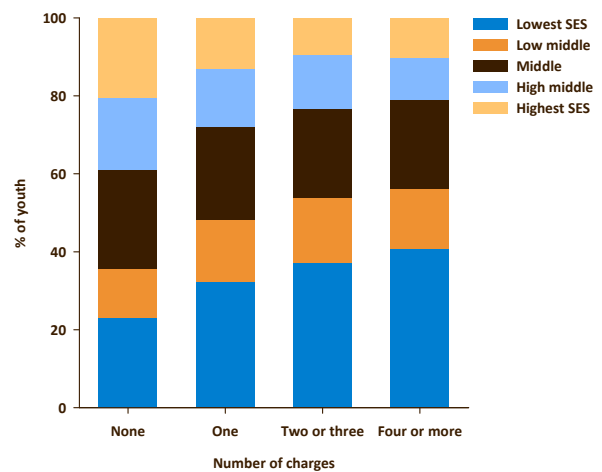
- The percentage of youth charged with multiple offences differed slightly by region of residence.
- Youth with two or three charges were slightly more likely to live in rural regions than youth with more or less charges.

Number of charges by socio-economic status (Table 7)

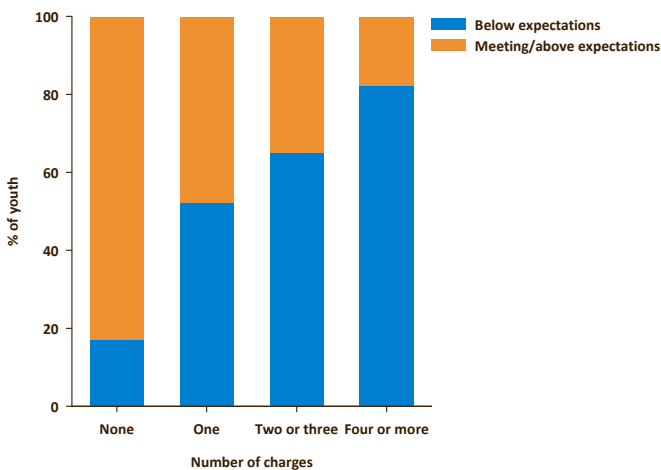
Socio-economic status captures the social and material environments in which youth live. See *Definitions and Notes* (p. 12).

- 23% of youth with no charges lived in the lowest socio-economic status areas compared to 32% of youth with one charge, 37% with two or three charges, and 41% with four or more charges.
- Youth who were charged with an offence were less likely to live in the highest socio-economic status neighbourhoods than youth who were not charged.

Number of charges by socio-economic status (SES)
Albertan youth aged 12 to 17



Number of charges by educational achievement
Albertan youth aged 12 to 17



Number of charges by educational achievement (Table 8)

This analysis considers youth (aged 12 to 20 years) who were enrolled in the K-12 education system in Alberta in 2008/09. See *Definitions and Notes* (p. 12).

- A higher number of charges was associated with poorer school performance.
- 83% of youth with no charges were meeting or above educational expectations, compared to 48% of youth with one charge, 35% with two or three charges, and 18% of youth with four or more charges.

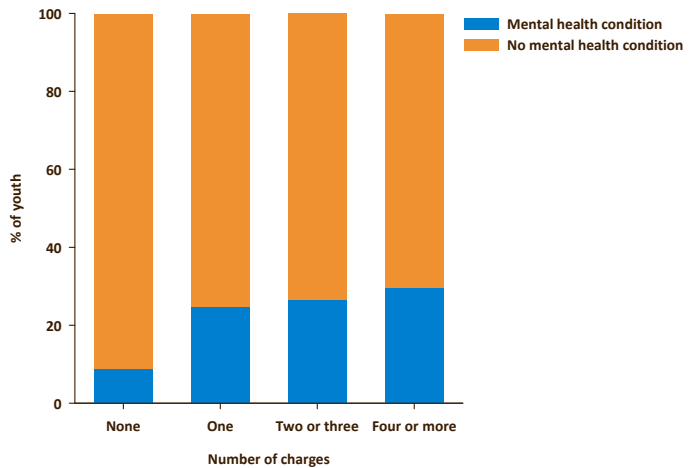
Offence charges among Albertan youth

Number of charges by mental health status (Table 9)

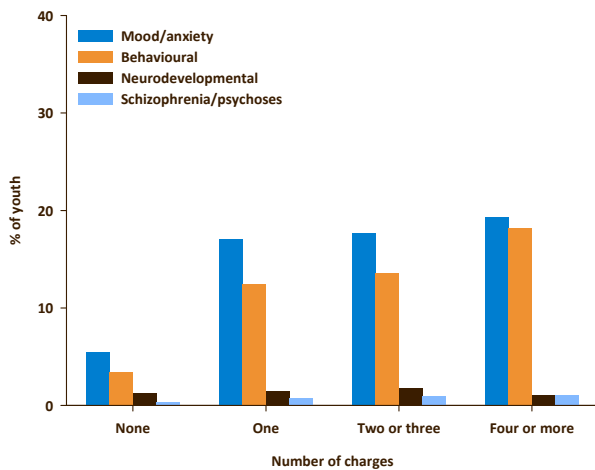
Mental health status refers to presence or absence of a mental health condition. Mental health conditions are defined as receipt of services related to mental health conditions; that is, receipt of services is used here as a proxy for confirmed presence of a mental health condition. See *Definitions and Notes* (p. 13).

- Youth with one or more charges were more likely to have a mental health condition than youth with no charges. This may be partially due to increased access to mental health services for youth charged with an offence.

Number of charges by mental health status
Albertan youth aged 12 to 17



Number of charges by mental health condition
Albertan youth aged 12 to 17



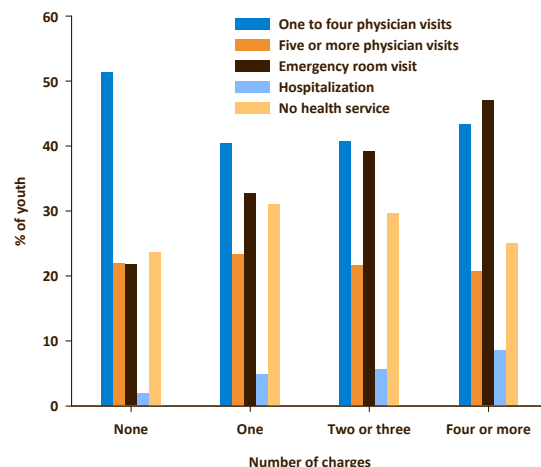
Number of charges by mental health conditions (Table 9)

- Mood/anxiety* conditions were the most common mental health condition in all groups and were markedly more common among charged youth.
- Youth with four or more charges were more likely to have *behavioural* conditions (18%) than youth with two or three charges (14%), youth with one charge (13%) and youth with no charges (3%).
- Rates of *schizophrenia/psychoses* also increased with number of charges.
- Rates of neurodevelopmental conditions varied little across number of charges.

Number of charges by health service use (Table 10)

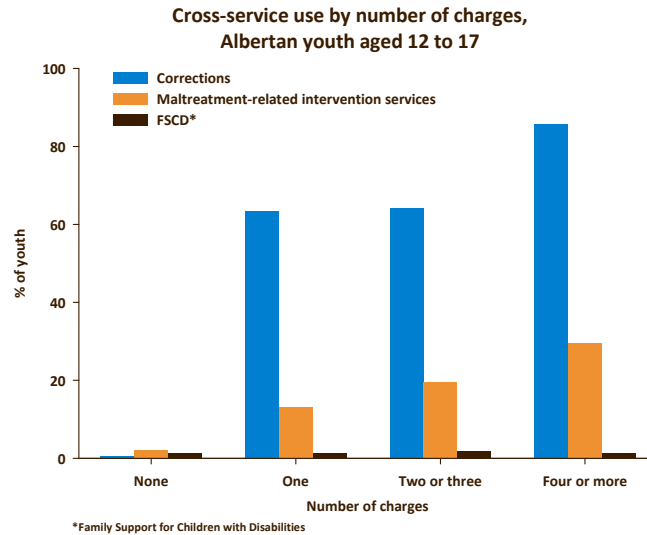
- The rate of high numbers of physician visits (five or more) varied little with number of charges.
- Emergency room use did vary across number of charges. 47% of youth with four or more charges visited an emergency room, compared to 39% of youth with two or three charges, 33% of youth with one charge, and 22% of youth with no charges.
- Youth with more charges were also more likely to be hospitalized than youth with fewer or no charges.

Number of charges by health service use
Albertan youth aged 12 to 17



Offence charges among Albertan youth

Number of charges by cross-service involvement (Table 11)



Youth were considered in this analysis if they were registered with the Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan (AHCIP; see *Definitions and Notes*, p. 13). The effects should be interpreted with caution; they cannot be generalized to youth not registered with AHCIP. 17% of youth with offence charges were not registered with AHCIP.

- Receipt of services from Family Support for Children with Disabilities varied little by number of charges.
- 2% of youth with no charges received maltreatment-related intervention services, compared to 13% with one charge, 19% with two or three charges, and 29% of youth with four or more charges.
- Corrections involvement increased with number of charges. 78% of youth with four or more charges had some involvement with corrections.

Offence charges among Albertan youth

Tables

Table 1. Number and percent of youth by number of charges, Albertan youth aged 12 to 17 years, 2008/09

Number of youth	Number of charges	
	Number of charges	Count
	No charges	301,392
	One charge	2,747
	Two or three charges	1,843
	Four or more charges	1,721
	One or more charges	6,311
	Total	307,703
Percent of Albertan youth	Number of charges	Percent
	No charges	97.9
	One charge	0.9
	Two or three charges	0.6
	Four or more charges	0.6
	One or more charges	2.1
	Total	100.0
Percent of youth with one or more charges	Number of charges	Percent
	One charge	43.5
	Two to three charges	29.2
	Four or more charges	27.3

Table 2. Number and percent of youth by number of charges and age, Albertan youth aged 12 to 17 years, 2008/09

	Age group (years)	Number of charges					Total charged with an offence
		None	One	Two or three	Four or more	Total charged with an offence	
Number of youth	12 to 13	95,040	170	141	92	403	
	14 to 15	97,417	929	538	507	1,974	
	16 to 17	108,935	1,648	1,164	1,122	3,934	
	Total	301,392	2,747	1,843	1,721	6,311	
Percent of youth	12 to 13	31.5	6.2	7.7	5.3	6.4	
	14 to 15	32.3	33.8	29.2	29.5	31.3	
	16 to 17	36.1	60.0	63.2	65.2	62.3	
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	

Offence charges among Albertan youth

Tables (continued)

Table 3. Number and percent of youth by age and charge status, Albertan youth aged 12 to 17 years, 2008/09

	Charge status	Age group (years)			
		12 to 13	14 to 15	16 to 17	Total
Number of youth	One or more charges	403	1,974	3,934	6,311
	No charge	95,040	97,417	108,935	301,392
	Total	95,443	99,391	112,869	307,703
Percent of youth	One or more charges	0.4	2.0	3.5	2.1
	No charge	99.6	98.0	96.5	97.9
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 4. Number and percent of youth by number of charges and gender, Albertan youth aged 12 to 17 years, 2008/09

	Gender	Number of charges				
		None	One	Two or three	Four or more	Total charged with an offence
Number of youth	Female	147,360	972	520	362	1,334
	Male	154,031	1,775	1,323	1,359	3,134
	Total	301,391	2,747	1,843	1,721	4,468
Percent of youth	Female	48.9	35.4	28.2	21.0	29.9
	Male	51.1	64.6	71.8	79.0	70.1
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 5. Number and percent of youth by gender and charge status, Albertan youth aged 12 to 17 years, 2008/09

	Charge status	Gender		
		Female	Male	Total
Number of youth	One or more charges	1,854	4,457	6,311
	No charge	147,360	154,031	301,391
	Total	149,214	158,488	307,702
Percent of youth	One or more charges	1.2	2.8	2.1
	No charge	98.8	97.2	97.9
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Offence charges among Albertan youth

Tables (continued)

Table 6. Number and percent of youth by number of charges and region of residence, Albertan youth aged 12 to 17 years, 2008/09

	Region of residence	Number of charges				
		None	One	Two or three	Four or more	Total charged with an offence
Number of youth	Rural	68,398	582	432	370	1,384
	Mid-sized centre	46,002	379	297	274	950
	Large centre	186,367	1,487	959	997	3,443
	Total	300,767	2,448	1,688	1,641	5,777
Percent of youth	Rural	22.7	23.8	25.6	22.5	24.0
	Mid-sized centre	15.3	15.5	17.6	16.7	16.4
	Large centre	62.0	60.7	56.8	60.8	59.6
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 7. Number and percent of youth by number of charges and socio-economic status (SES), Albertan youth aged 12 to 17 years, 2008/09

	Socio-economic status	Number of charges				
		None	One	Two or three	Four or more	Total charged with an offence
Number of youth	Lowest SES	68,009	782	612	661	2,055
	Low middle	37,682	386	279	250	915
	Middle	75,109	573	378	366	1,317
	High middle	54,220	361	229	176	766
	Highest SES	60,599	316	156	165	637
	Total	295,619	2,418	1,654	1,618	5,690
Percent of youth	Lowest SES	23.0	32.3	37.0	40.9	36.1
	Low middle	12.7	16.0	16.9	15.5	16.1
	Middle	25.4	23.7	22.9	22.6	23.1
	High middle	18.3	14.9	13.8	10.9	13.5
	Highest SES	20.5	13.1	9.4	10.2	11.2
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Offence charges among Albertan youth

Tables (continued)

Table 8. Number and percent of youth by number of charges and educational achievement, Albertan youth aged 12 to 17 years, 2008/09

	Educational achievement	Number of charges				
		None	One	Two or three	Four or more	Total charged with an offence
Number of youth	Below expectations	39,829	1,076	841	966	2,883
	Meeting/above expectations	192,517	986	452	209	1,647
	Total	232,346	2,062	1,293	1,175	4,530
Percent of youth	Below expectations	17.1	52.2	65.0	82.2	63.6
	Meeting/above expectations	82.9	47.8	35.0	17.8	36.4
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 9. Number and percent of youth by number of charges and mental health condition, Albertan youth aged 12 to 17 years, 2008/09

	Mental health condition*	Number of charges				
		None	One	Two or three	Four or more	Total charged with an offence
Number of youth	Mood/anxiety	14,853	371	266	287	924
	Behavioural	9,222	271	203	271	745
	Neurodevelopmental	3,239	31	26	15	72
	Schizophrenia/psychoses	859	15	14	16	45
	Any condition	24,063	539	398	442	1,379
	No condition	247,617	1,637	1,105	1,049	3,791
	Total	271,680	2,176	1,503	1,491	5,170
Percent of youth	Mood/anxiety	5.5	17.0	17.7	19.2	17.9
	Behavioural	3.4	12.5	13.5	18.2	14.4
	Neurodevelopmental	1.2	1.4	1.7	1.0	1.4
	Schizophrenia/psychoses	0.3	0.7	0.9	1.1	0.9
	Any condition	8.9	24.8	26.5	29.6	26.7
	No condition	91.1	75.2	73.5	70.4	73.3
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

*Mental health condition categories are not mutually exclusive

Offence charges among Albertan youth

Tables (continued)

Table 10. Number and percent of youth by number of charges and health service use, Albertan youth aged 12 to 17 years, 2008/09

	Health service use*	Number of charges				
		None	One	Two or three	Four or more	Total charged with an offence
Number of youth	One to four physician visits	154,857	1,113	750	746	2,609
	Five or more physician visits	66,462	642	400	357	1,399
	Emergency room visit	65,559	901	722	809	2,432
	Hospitalization	5,793	133	103	147	383
	Any health service	229,795	1,894	1,297	1,291	4,482
	No health service	71,597	853	546	430	1,829
	Total	301,392	2,747	1,843	1,721	6,311
Percent of youth	One to four physician visits	51.4	40.5	40.7	43.3	41.3
	Five or more physician visits	22.1	23.4	21.7	20.7	22.2
	Emergency room visit	21.8	32.8	39.2	47.0	38.5
	Hospitalization	1.9	4.8	5.6	8.5	6.1
	Any health service	76.2	68.9	70.4	75.0	71.0
	No health service	23.8	31.1	29.6	25.0	29.0
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

*Health service use categories are not mutually exclusive

Table 11. Number and percent of youth by number of charges and cross-service involvement, Alberta youth aged 12 to 17 years, 2008/09*

	Cross-service involvement	Number of charges				
		None	One	Two or three	Four or more	Total charged with an offence
Number of youth	Corrections involvement	1,171	1,212	884	1,174	3,270
	Maltreatment-related intervention	4,955	280	286	431	997
	FSCD**	3,159	29	25	21	75
	Health registry	279,865	2,212	1,540	1,514	5,266
Percent of youth	Corrections involvement	0.4	54.8	57.4	77.5	62.1
	Maltreatment-related intervention	1.8	12.7	18.6	28.5	18.9
	FSCD**	1.1	1.3	1.6	1.4	1.4
	Health registry	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

*Only youth registered in the Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan were included in this analysis

**Family Support for Children with Disabilities

Offence charges among Albertan youth

Definitions and Notes

- The study population for this project consisted of all Albertan youth who were registered with the Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan in 2008/09 or who received selected services from one or more of the participating ministries in 2008/09. “All Albertan youth” refers to this study population.
- The study year was fiscal year 2008/09. With the exception of Education and Enterprise and Advanced Education data, all data were for services provided between April 1, 2008 and March 31, 2009, with age determined on March 31, 2009.
 - Data for Enterprise and Advanced Education were for services provided between September 1, 2008 and June 30, 2009, with age determined on March 31, 2009.
 - Data for Education were for services provided to youth who were 12 to 19 years old on September 30, 2008. As a result, youth turning 12 between October 1, 2008 and March 31, 2009 *were not* included in the Education data but were included in other ministries’ data. This resulted in the number of 12 year olds in the Education data being lower (approximately 50% lower) than that of 13 to 17 year olds.
 - Furthermore, although Education only provides services to youth who are under 20, the provision of services is defined by age at September 30. Youth who turned 20 between October 1, 2008 and March 31, 2009 *were* included in the Education data, resulting in the inclusion of 20 year olds in some analyses of Education data.
- **Cross-ministry analyses included only youth that were linked across the relevant ministries.** This means that not all youth in the project were represented in every analysis. As well, only youth with a value for a given indicator were included in analyses involving that indicator (i.e., **missing values** were excluded).
- Age, gender, and postal code (translated into Statistics Canada dissemination areas) were provided for each individual by each participating ministry. In the case of discrepancies between ministries, the most common value for an indicator was chosen. In the event of two or more most common values, the value for the indicator was chosen randomly from the most common values.
- Dissemination areas of residence were used by CYDL to determine **region of residence**. Urban areas included large centres with urban core populations greater than 100,000 (i.e., Edmonton and Calgary metropolitan areas) and mid-sized centres with urban cores greater than 10,000; all other areas were categorized as rural.
- **Socio-economic status (SES)** captures the social and material environments in which youth live. A youth was assigned a socio-economic status via an index based on the Statistics Canada dissemination area in which he or she resided⁶. Six indicators were included in the index: percent without a high school diploma, the employment ratio, average income, percent of single families, percent of persons living alone, and percent of persons separated, divorced, or widowed. Socio-economic status values fell into five quintiles.
- **Educational achievement** was computed by Alberta Education using age, grade, school type, special education codes, provincial achievement test scores, home education status, number of high school credits earned, number of higher level courses taken, average grade in higher level courses, possession of an Alberta Education certificate or diploma, and Alexander Rutherford scholarship eligibility. Educational achievement was categorized as *above, meeting, or below expectations* for a student’s age and grade. An educational achievement rating was not available for 12 to 14 year old youth without scores on provincial achievement tests, for youth in ‘other’ schools (accredited post-secondary institutions offering high school courses for credit to adults; most youth in these schools were between 18 and 20 years), and for home-schooled high school youth with no credits.

Offence charges among Albertan youth

Definitions and Notes (continued)

- **Mental health status** was defined by the presence or absence of mental health diagnosis codes in Health's databases (Inpatient—Discharge Abstract Database, Ambulatory Care, and Practitioner Payments), or in the Family Support for Children with Disabilities Information System. Only youth who were registered with the Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan or the full fiscal year were included in the mental health analyses. **Mental health service use is a proxy for presence of a mental health condition:** Some youth with mental health conditions may not have accessed mental health services in Alberta during the year, and some mental health service use may have occurred for youth who did not in fact have mental health conditions.
 - **Mental health conditions** were grouped based on The Johns Hopkins ACG® Case-Mix System (version 8.2)⁷. Mental health conditions were *mood/anxiety* (anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, etc.), *behavioural* (attention-deficit disorder, regulatory disorder, mental or behavioural problems due to substance use, etc.), *neurodevelopmental* (autism, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, cerebral palsy, etc.), or *schizophrenia/psychoses* (schizophrenia, psychosis, delusional disorder, etc.). Conditions were not mutually exclusive; a youth could have a diagnosis in more than one category.
- Youth with **offence charges** include those charged with criminal offences or administrative offences related to criminal offences (e.g., failure to appear in court, breach of probation, etc.). **Number of offences** in the study year was available, but individual incidents were not available. This means that youth charged with multiple offences may have had multiple charges in a single incident, or they may have been charged in multiple incidents.
- **Physician visits** reflect fee claims made by physicians when patients visit their offices. In this report, multiple claims by a given physician for a given patient on the same day were counted as a single visit.
- **Emergency room visits** refer to visits to emergency departments for assessment or treatment.
- **Hospitalizations** refer to admissions to hospital for assessment or treatment.
- New and returning Alberta residents, if they are eligible, must register for **Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan** coverage to receive insured health services. Youth in the "**health registry**" refers to all youth who are insured in Alberta. This includes any eligible youth who is a permanent resident of Alberta, living at least 183 days per year in the province. Members of the Canadian Armed Forces, Royal Canadian Mounted Police and federal penitentiary inmates are not eligible (they receive coverage from the federal government), but dependents of these non-eligible residents, who reside in Alberta, are eligible.
- **Family Support for Children with Disabilities (FSCD)** is a ministry of Human Services program that provides a range of supports and services to families that strengthen their ability to support and care for their child with a disability based on their needs.
- **Maltreatment-related interventions** occur when the safety or well-being of a youth is threatened.
- Youth with **corrections involvement** have appeared before the Court or a Justice of the Peace for an offence charge and have been remanded in custody or placed under pre-trial supervision in the community awaiting further court dates, or have been found guilty and sentenced to a community disposition (i.e. Fine, Probation, Community Service Work, Deferred Custody) and/or custody (in which the sentence is served in a young offender facility).

Offence charges among Albertan youth

Data sources

Ministry	Database	Use in this report
Education	Corporate Data Warehouse (CDW)	Primary and secondary education achievement data
Health	Inpatient – Discharge Abstract Database (DAD)	Hospitalization data
Health	Ambulatory Care (ACCS)	Emergency room visit data
Health	Practitioner Payments (SESE)	Physician visit data
Health	Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan Population Registry (AHCIP registry)	Population registry
Human Services	Child Youth Information Module (CYIM)	Maltreatment and intervention data
Human Services	Family Support for Children with Disabilities Information System (FSCDIS)	Family Supports for Children with Disabilities data
Justice and Solicitor General	Justice Online Information Network (JOIN)	Offence data
Justice and Solicitor General	Alberta Community Offender Management System (ACOM)	Corrections data (community)
Justice and Solicitor General	Correctional Offender Management Information System (CoMIS)	Corrections data (custody)

References

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Offence charges among Albertan youth

The Child and Youth Data Laboratory

The **Child and Youth Data Laboratory** (CYDL) links and analyzes administrative data from child- and youth-serving ministries in the Government of Alberta. The ministries participate in research design and provide data elements that contribute to answering research questions.

The CYDL's research provides groundbreaking opportunities to understand relationships between critical factors in the lives of children and youth in Alberta. The research results can be used to inform policy and program development and evaluation, both within and across ministries, and to inspire further research.

The CYDL is managed by the **Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research** (ACCFRC). The Centre has evolved over its eight year history as a public-sector, innovative resource for evidence. The Centre develops, supports and integrates research across sectors and disciplines to provide a strong, evidence-based foundation for identifying and promoting effective public policy and service delivery to improve the well-being of children, families, and communities in Alberta, Canada, and internationally.

Our partners

This project was carried out on behalf of six ministries of the Government of Alberta. Each ministry collaborated extensively with the CYDL on this project, and their dedication to the project is gratefully acknowledged:

Enterprise and Advanced Education
Education
Health
Human Services
Aboriginal Relations
Justice and Solicitor General

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Contact CYDL

www.research4children.com

Click on "Data"

Xinjie Cui, Director
780 944 8631
xcui@research4children.com

Leslie Twilley, Senior Scientist
780 408 8734
ltwilley@research4children.com

Christine Werk, Research Scientist
780 408 8767
cwerk@research4children.com



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