

2024

YOUTH EXPERIENCES

SURVEY



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Acknowledgements

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The 2024 YES Study was funded by:



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Method

Instrument

Participants completed the YES survey via paper-and-pencil surveys.



Participants

227

homeless young adults from Phoenix, Tucson, and Flagstaff, Arizona, completed the Youth Experiences Survey. Participants completed surveys from seven agencies across the state. Participants of the YES study were receiving services from:



(n = 3, 1.3%)



(n = 88, 38.8%)



(n = 40, 17.7%)



(n = 23, 10.1%)



(n = 50, 22%)



(n = 9, 4%)



(n = 11, 4.8%)



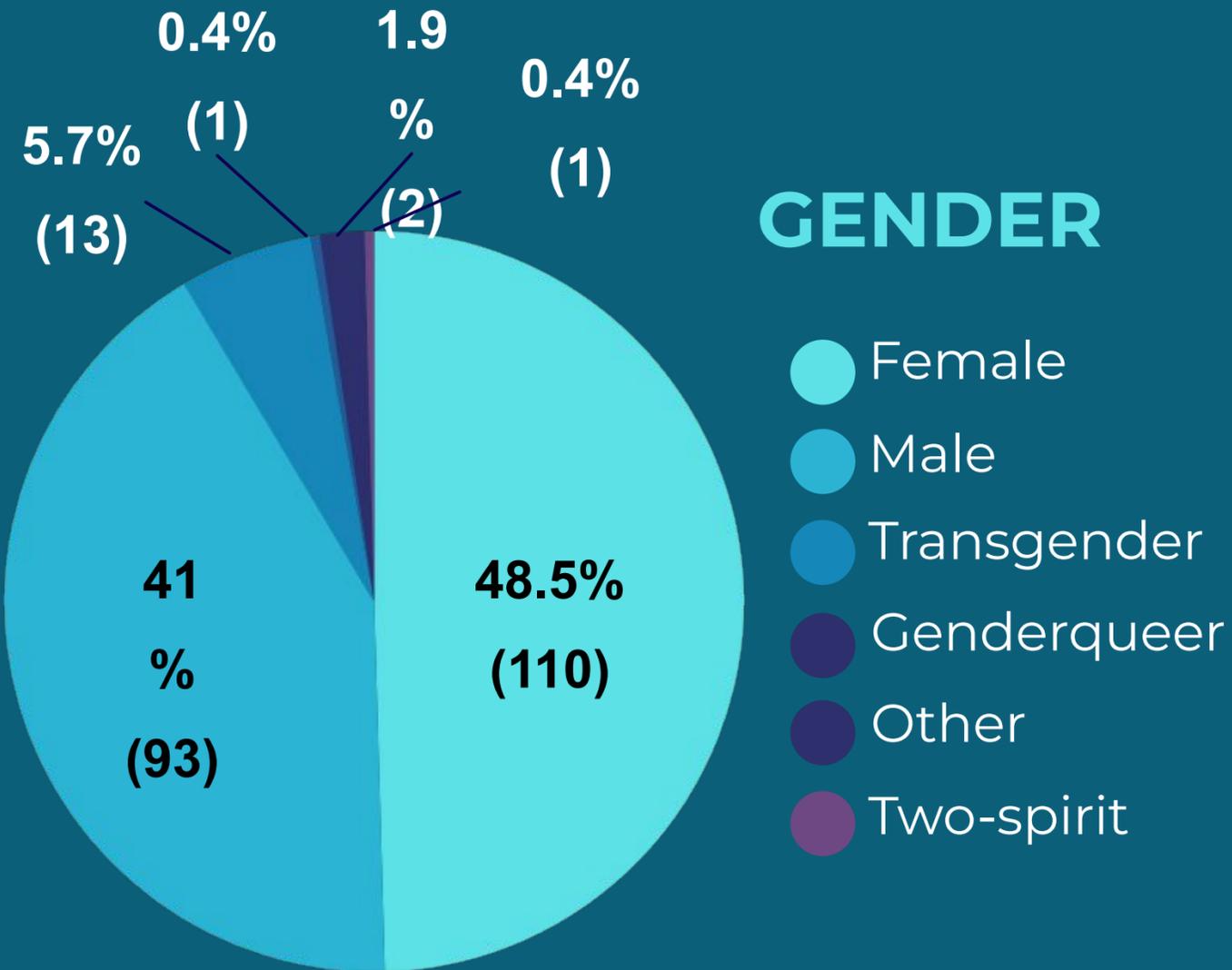
(n = 3, 1.3%)

Setting

Participants responded to the survey from housing programs (n = 163, 71.8%), street outreach (n = 20, 8.8%), resource or drop-in centers (n = 39, 17.2%), and this data was missing for 2 (0.9%) participants.

Participants

(N = 227)



AGE

The age of participants ranged from



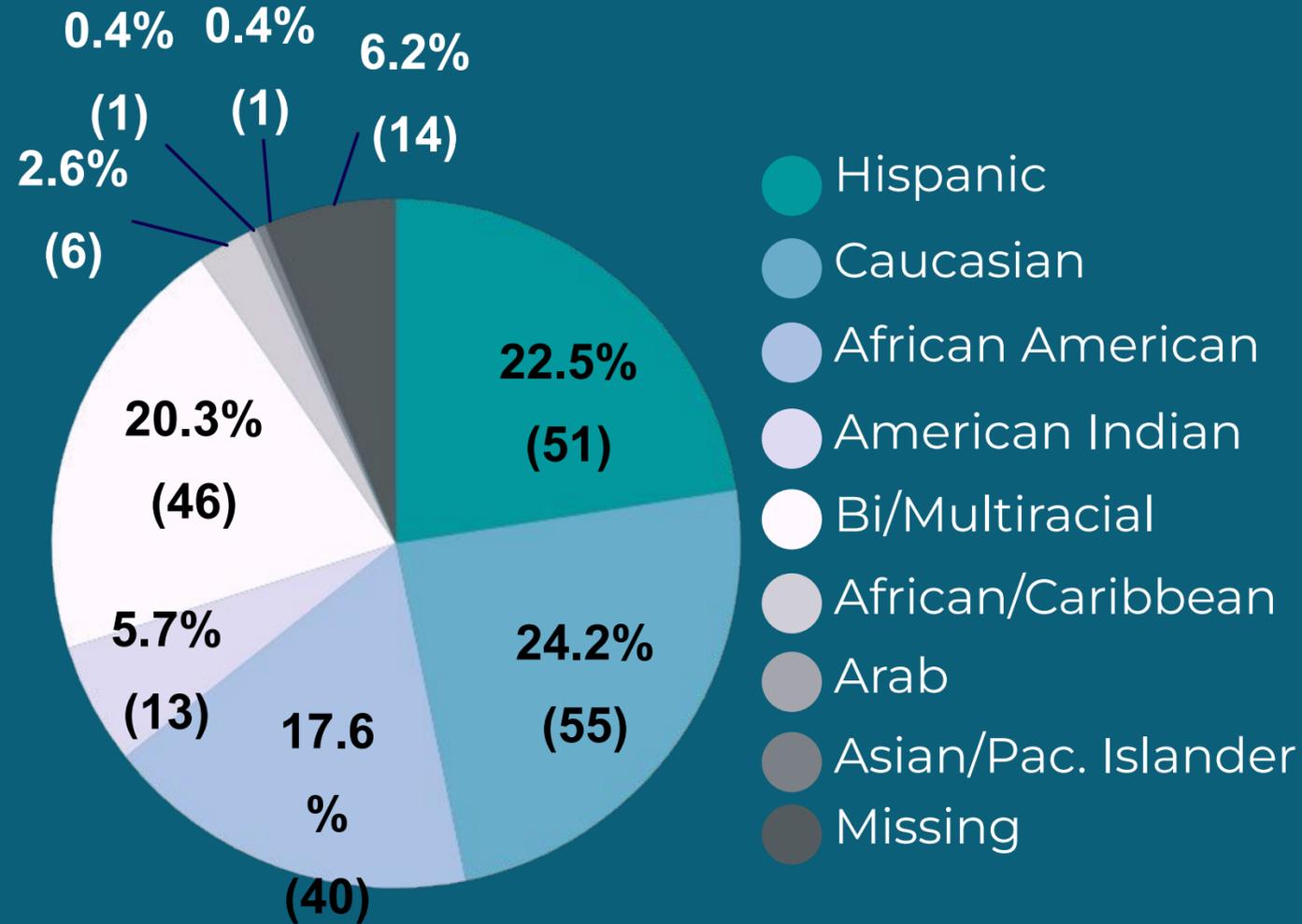
(M = 20.6, SD = 2.0)

The age of the homeless young adult participants ranged from 18 to 25 years old, with the average age being 20.6 years old .

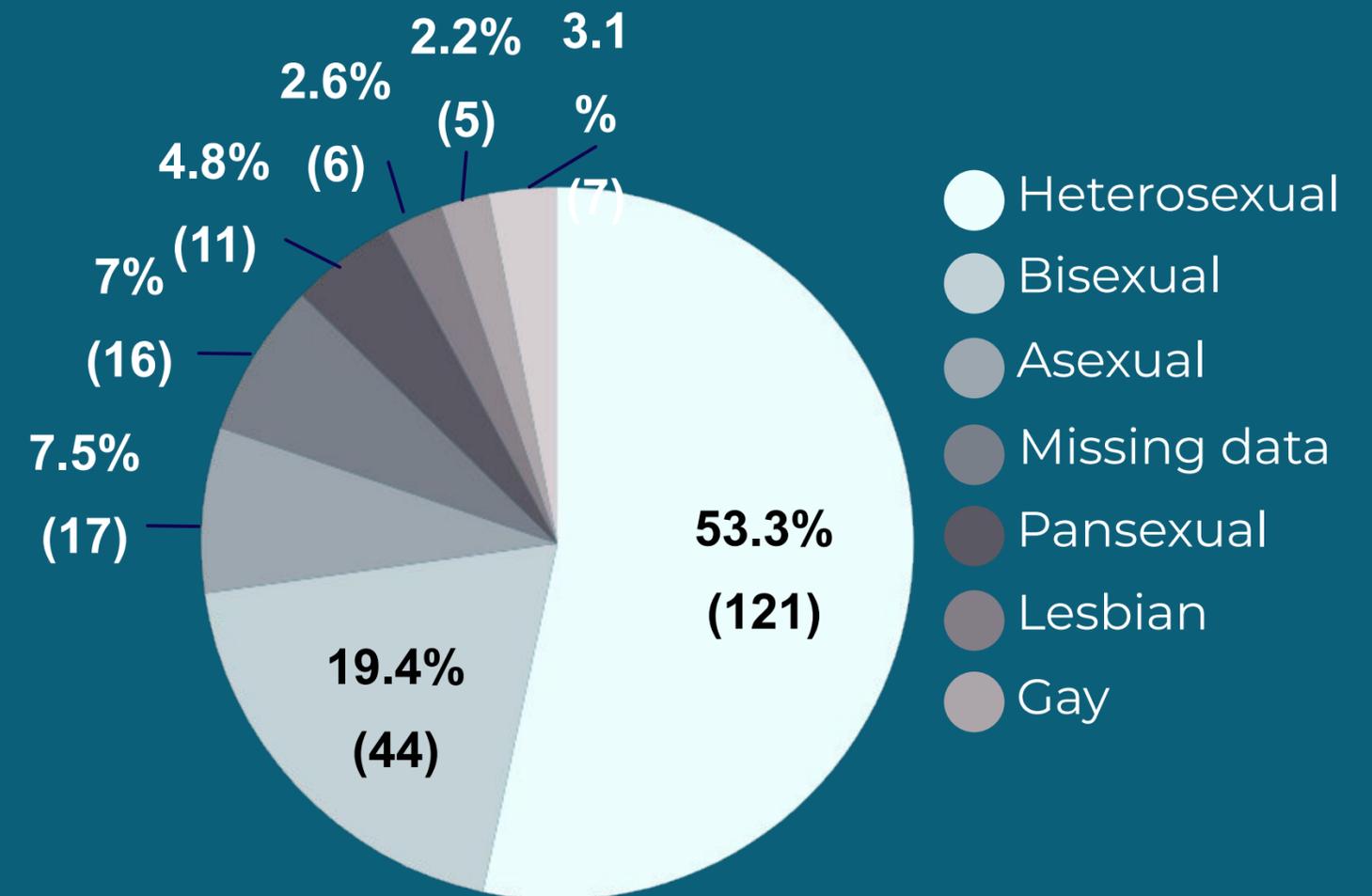
Participants

(N = 227)

ETHNICITY



SEXUAL ORIENTATION



Findings

(N = 227)

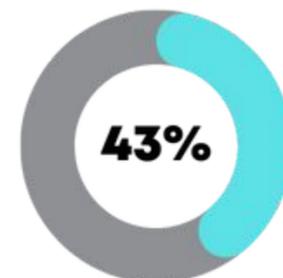
HOMELESSNESS + HOUSING

Participants were asked questions regarding their experiences of homelessness, including age range of first homelessness experience, place of origin, and current housing situation.

Age of 1st homeless ranged

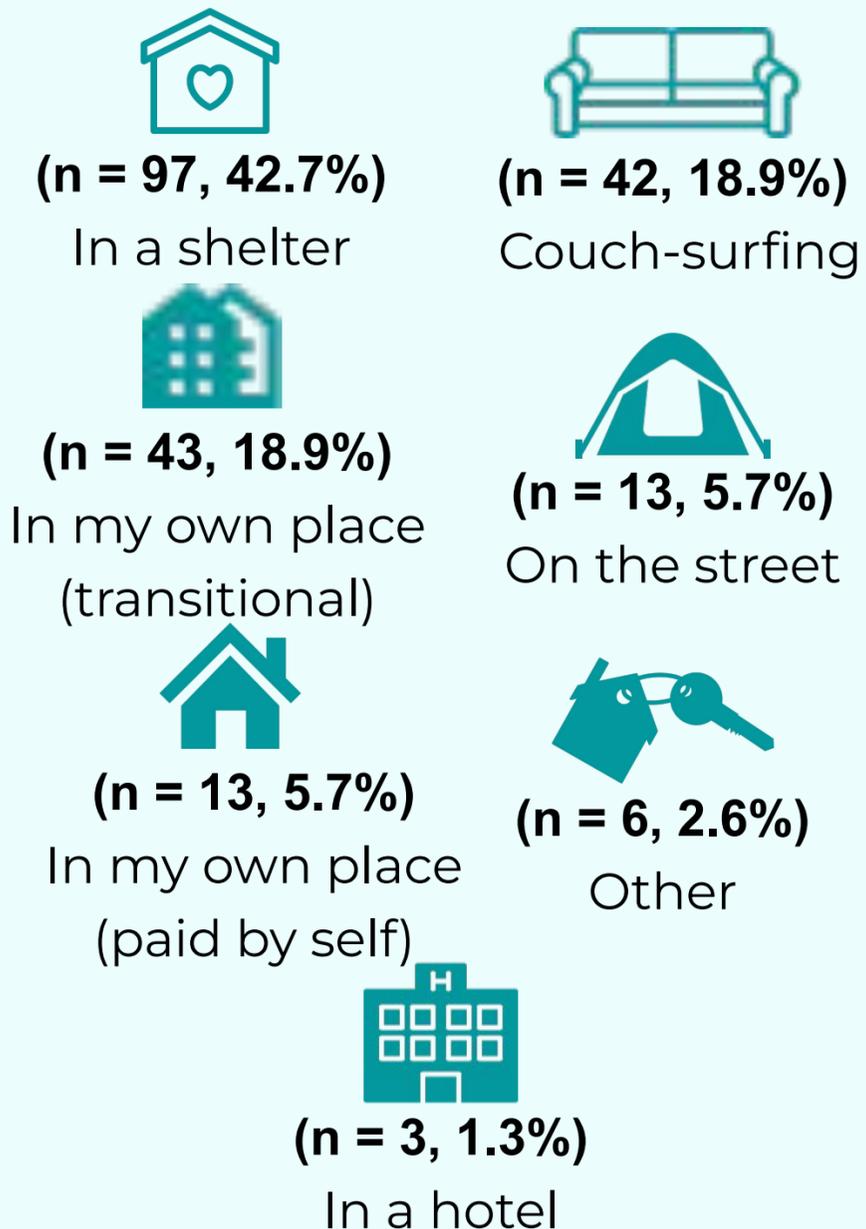


Ninety-eight (43.2%) participants first experienced homelessness **under the age of 18.**



Current Housing Arrangements

Participants reported currently living:

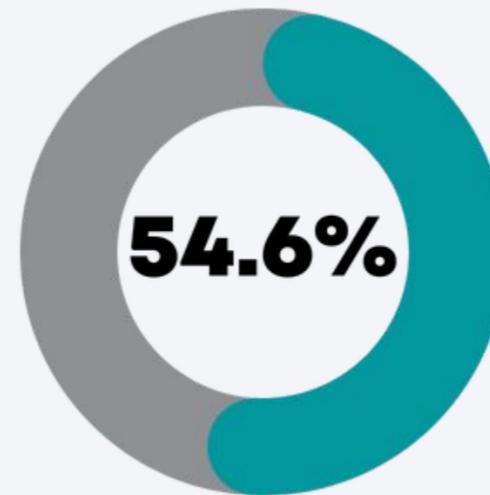


Findings

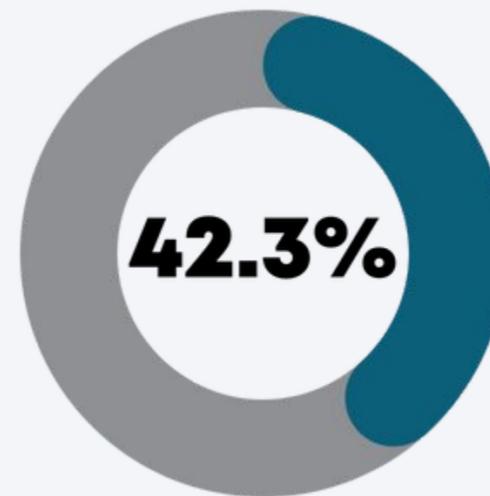
(N = 227)

EDUCATION

The YES study asked a series of questions on educational attainment to gain a better understanding of the education challenges that homeless young adults face, and the underlying causes of potential low educational attainment.



More than half (n = 124, 54.6%) of participants reported successfully graduating from High School.



Almost half of participants (n = 94, 42.3%) reported dropping out of school at one point in time during their educational journey.

Findings

(N = 227)

Dropping Out

Participants' reasons for dropping out of school included:



(n = 55, 57.3%)
I was homeless



(n = 49, 51%)
I moved around
a lot



(n = 27, 28.1%)
Academic difficulty



(n = 26, 27.1%)
I had to work to
support myself



(n = 22, 23.2%)
Bullying



(n = 17, 17.7%)
I was
expelled



(n = 15, 15.6%)
I was using
substances



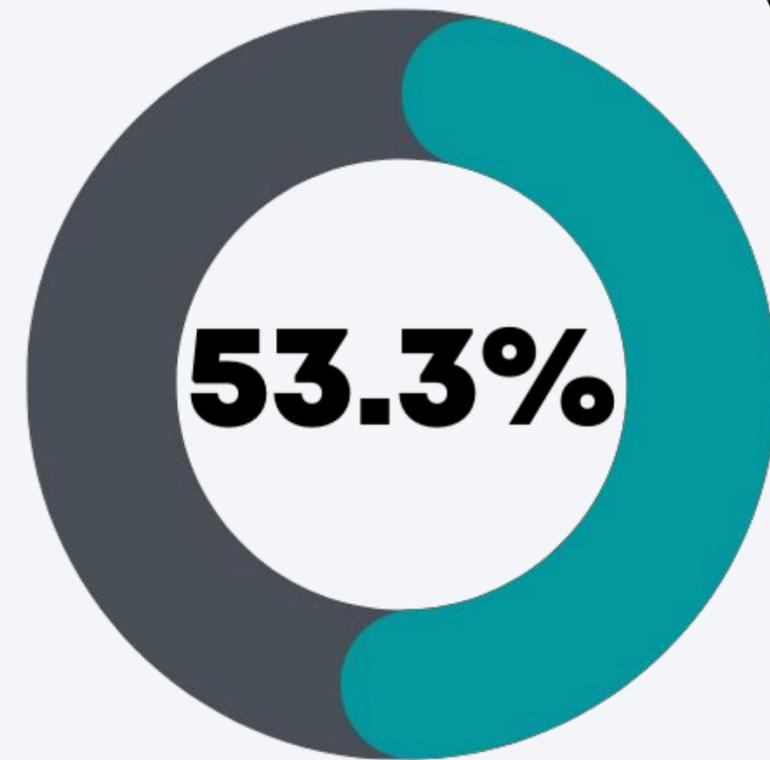
(n = 13, 13.5%)
I was pregnant/
had a baby

Findings

(N = 227)

SUBSTANCE USE

Questions about substance use are included in the YES study to explore use and addiction as possible challenges within this population. Questions on substance type, frequency of use and onset of use are included on the survey.

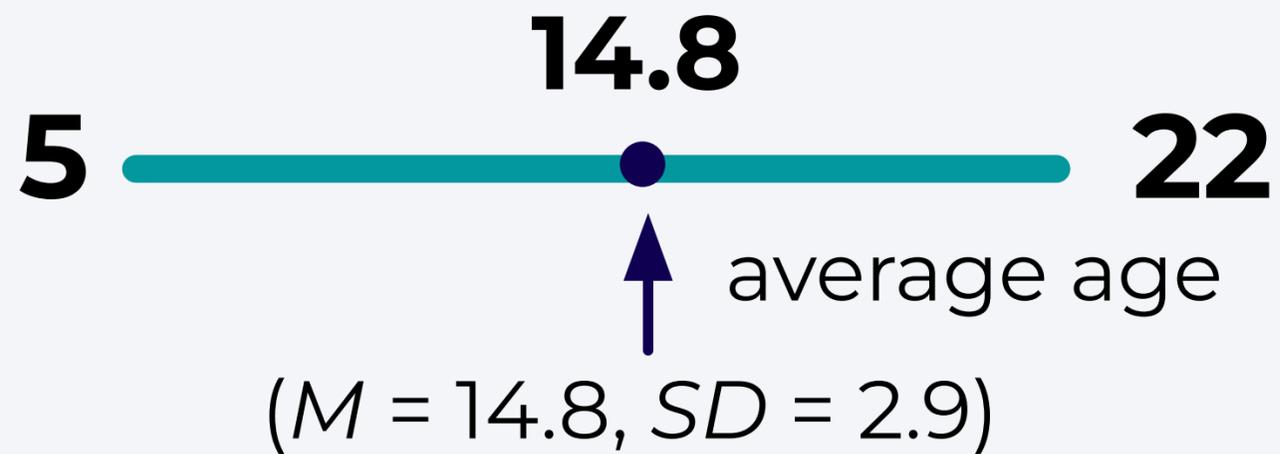


(n = 106) participants reported drug use.

Findings

(N = 227)

Age of 1st drug use ranged from:



Of the 106 participants that reported drug use

83.7%

reported first drug use **before the age of 18.**



Findings

(N = 227)

SUBSTANCES USED

Participants reported drug choice as:

Substance used by type (N = 107)		
Fentanyl	27	27%
Marijuana/Weed	59	26%
Methamphetamines	38	16.7%
Heroin	15	15%
Cocaine/Crack	12	5.3%
Pills	9	4%

ADDICTION

23 participants

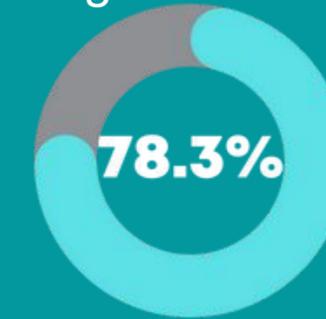


25%

identified as having an **addiction to drugs.**



Of the 23 that identified as having an addiction,



78.3%

(n = 18) began experiencing addiction **after** becoming homeless.

22 participants



25%

identified as having an **addiction to alcohol.**



Of the 22 that identified as having an addiction,



54.5%

(n = 12) began experiencing addiction **after** becoming homeless.

Findings

(N = 227)

Almost half (n = 109)



of participants reported engaging in some form of self-harming behavior.

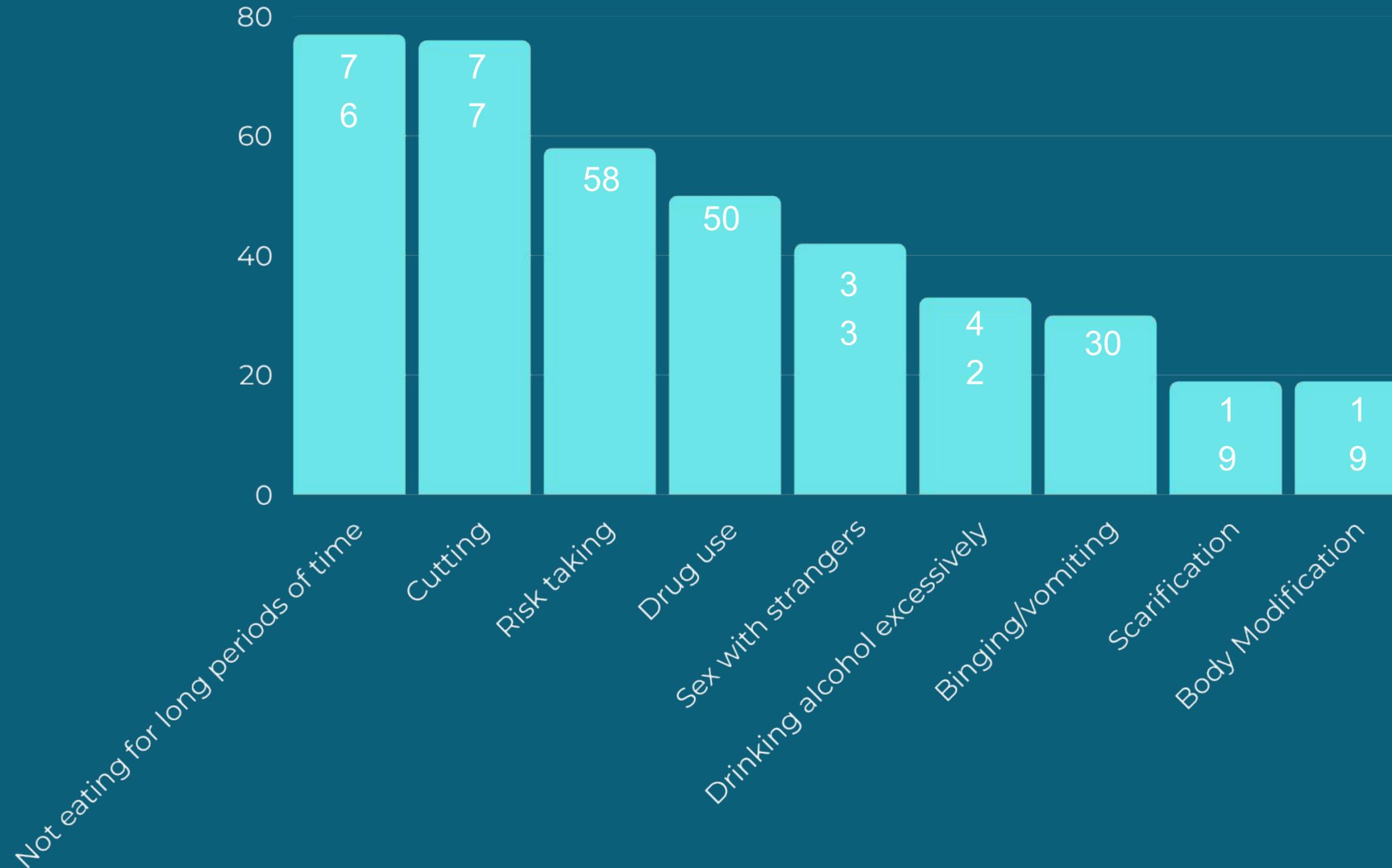
SELF-HARM

- Homeless young adults have been found to face significant mental health challenges due to the instability of their living situations and acquisition of basic needs.
- Crisis situations that overwhelm the individual's ability to cope may result in self-harming or risk-taking behaviors, and suicidal ideations.
- To better understand the incidence of self-harm, the YES survey includes questions pertaining to self-harm engagement and suicidal ideations.

Findings

(N = 227)

Self-harming behavior, by type (N = 227)



Findings

(N = 227)

MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

119 (52.4%) participants reported having a current mental health diagnosis, and almost all participants (n = 118, 52%) reported more than one mental health diagnosis.



40.9%
of participants
reported
attempting
suicide.

Mental Health Diagnosis, by type	n	%
Bipolar Disorder	112	49.3%
ADD/ADHD	99	43.6%
Schizophrenia	77	33.9%
Depression	58	25.6%
Borderline Personality Disorder	49	21.1%
Anxiety	24	10.6%
Obsessive Compulsive Disorder	17	7.5%
Antisocial Personality Disorder	15	6.6%
Dissociative Identity Disorder	15	6.6%
Autism Spectrum Disorder	16	7%
PTSD	13	5.7%

PHYSICAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

112 (49.3%) participants reported having a current medical issue, but more than a quarter, 54 (23.8%) participants reported not receiving treatment.

Findings

(N = 227)

The most common medical issues reported included:



(n = 54, 23.8%)
Poor vision



(n = 54, 23.8%)
Asthma



(n = 35, 15.4%)
Dental problems



(n = 21, 9.3%)
Chronic pain

Findings

(N = 227)

PREGNANCY + CHILDREN



14 (6.2%) participants were pregnant at the time of the 2024 YES Survey.

Almost one in four (n = 57, 25.1%) participants reported having children.



Child amount ranged between

1 to 4 children each

($M = 1.6$, $SD = 0.85$)

with children reportedly living:

- In the participant's care (n = 30, 13.2%)
- With family (n = 19, 8.4%)
- In foster care (n = 3, 1.3%)
- Involved in Child Welfare (n = 10, 4.4%)

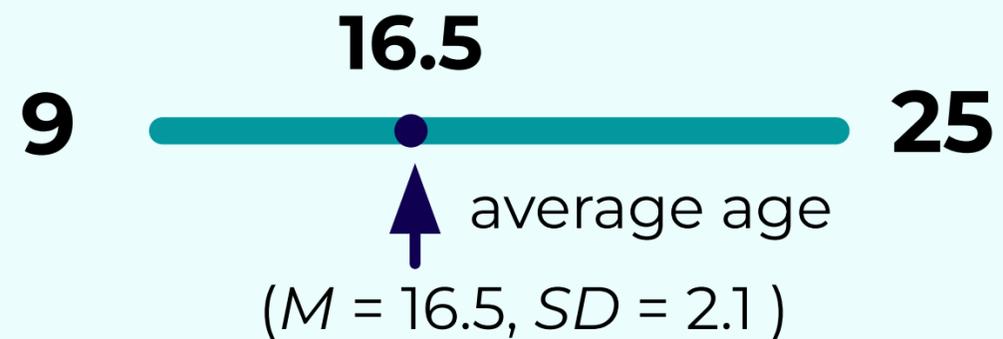
Findings

(N = 227)

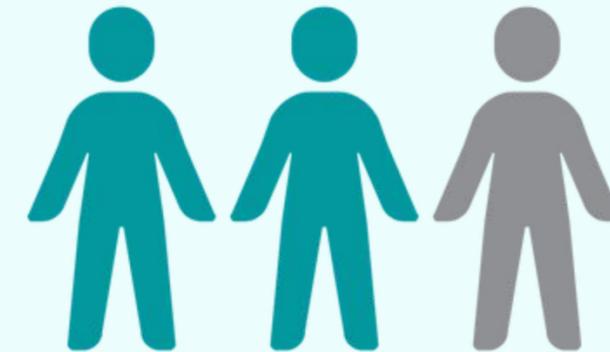
KICKED OUT OF HOME

69.6% (n = 158) of participants reported being kicked out of the home.

The age of first time kicked out ranging between:



Of the 158 participants that reported being kicked out of the home

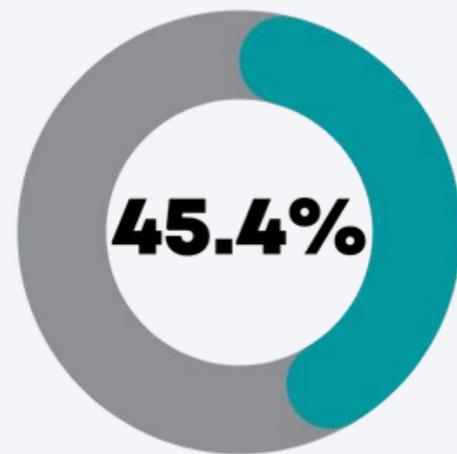


65% (n = 96) reported being kicked out **before the age of 18**

Findings

(N = 227)

VIOLENT RELATIONSHIPS



witnessed domestic violence in their household as a child.



Witnessing Domestic Violence

92 (40%) participants witnessed their father hitting their mother, and 66 (30%) participants witnessed their mother hitting their father.

In adulthood, almost half of participants (n = 81, 35.7%) reported experiencing abuse in their relationship **and 20% (n = 45) reported also being abusive toward their partner.**

Findings

(N = 227)

MAKING MONEY

Participants were asked how they make money to live:

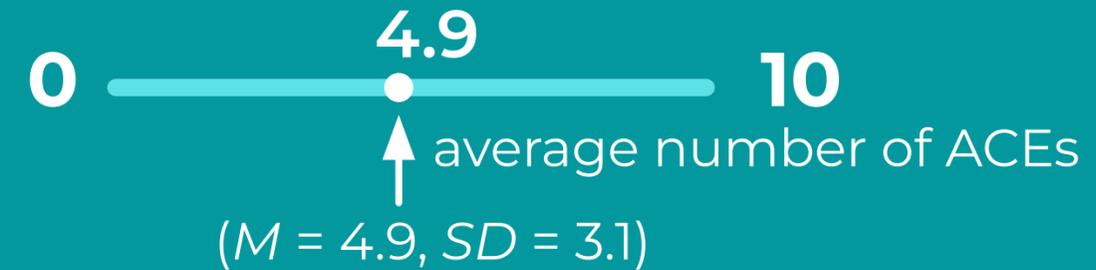
Jobs, by type	n	%
Steady Job	86	37.9%
Day labor	57	25.1%
Selling my own things	52	22.9%
Side jobs for cash	46	20.3%
Panhandling	24	10.6%
Other	20	8.8%
Selling stolen things	19	8.4%
Selling drugs	16	7%
Door-to-door sales	11	4.8%

Other ways to earn income reported by participants included asking family/friends/intimate partners, babysitting/caregiving for family, plasma donation, food delivery service, food stamps and unemployment, and part-time minimum wage work/gig work.

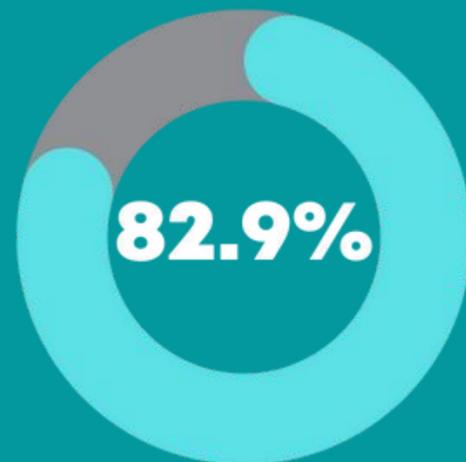
Adverse Childhood Experiences

(N = 227)

Participants reported experiencing between zero to ten ACEs, with **the average number of ACEs being 4.9.**

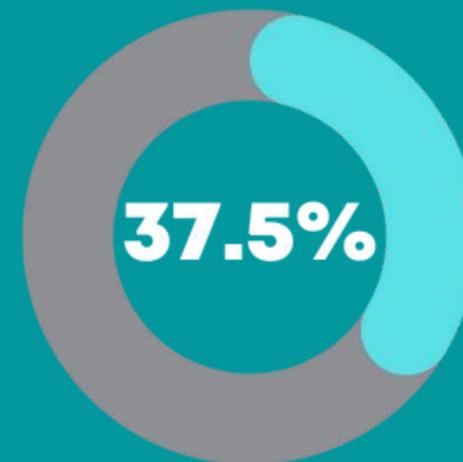


184 participants reported experiencing



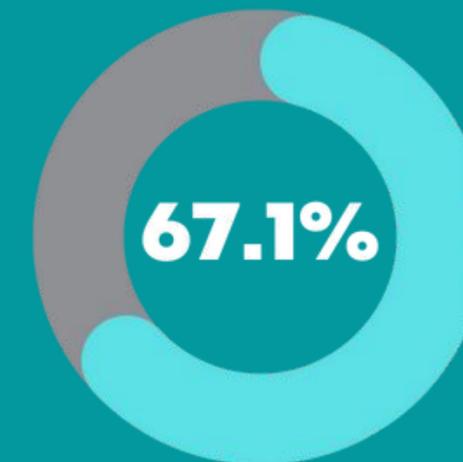
more than one ACE

72 participants reported experiencing



between 0-3 ACEs

143 participants reported experiencing



4 or more ACEs

Childhood Abuse Experiences

(N = 227)

Participants reported experiencing:



68.3%

Emotional Abuse



62.6%

Emotional Neglect



62.1%

Parents Separated /Divorced



55.1%

Substance Abuse in the Household



51.5%

Physical Abuse



46.3%

Mental Illness in the Household



41.9%

Physical Neglect



36.6%

Witness Domestic Violence



30.4%

Incarcerated Household Member



25.1%

Sexual Abuse

Findings

(N = 227)

ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

Participants were asked questions from the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study, which examined exposure to different abuse and household dysfunction categories and the relationship to disease and early death in adulthood (Felitti, Anda, Nordenberg, Williamson, Spitz, Edwards, & Marks, 1998). Findings from that seminal ACEs study and subsequent studies demonstrated significant negative life outcomes, particularly for individuals who have experienced four or more ACEs.



Findings

(N = 227)

NEGATIVE LIFE EXPERIENCES

Participants reported experiencing additional life challenges, including:



Impermanent/Unstable Living Conditions

- Participants reported
- Running away from home (n = 87, 38.3%)
 - Living in a foster care/group home setting (n = 54, 23.8%)
 - Spending time in residential treatment (n = 33, 14.5%).



Justice System Involvement

- Participants reported:
- Experiencing negative contact with law enforcement (n = 56, 24.7%)
 - Involvement in the Juvenile Justice System (n = 33, 14.5%).



Academic and Peer Difficulties

- Participants reported experiencing:
- Academic difficulty (n = 90, 39.6%)
 - Bullying by school peers (n = 86, 37.9%)
 - Harassment by peers (n = 65, 28.6%)
 - Being in Special Education classes (n = 43, 18.9%)
 - Being expelled from school (n = 32, 14.1%)
 - Gang affiliation (n = 13, 5.7%)

Findings

(N = 227)

POSITIVE LIFE EXPERIENCES

Participants also reported positive life experiences that can serve as protective factors against homelessness or long-term negative effects of trauma.

Said no when drugs or alcohol were offered
(n = 109, 58%)

Supportive, loving family/group of friends
(n = 64, 34.4%)

Steady employment
(n = 66, 36%)

Enrolled in school or technical program
(n = 80, 42.3%)

Practiced safe sex
(n = 61, 33.6%)

Feel secure standing up for/protecting self
(n = 56, 30.9%)

Been part of a youth club or organization
(n = 87, 43.8%)

Said no when pressured for sex
(n = 72, 39.3%)

Healthy, safe and permanent place to live
(n = 45, 25.1%)

Aware of community resources
(n = 57, 31.5%)

Volunteered in the community
(n = 50, 27.8%)

Trust/good relationship with law enforcement
(n = 34, 19.3%)

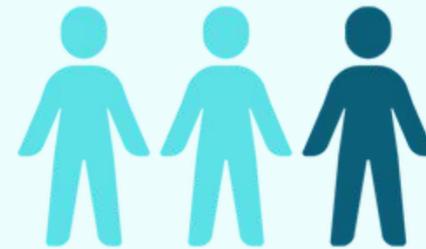
Findings

Human Trafficking Data

HUMAN TRAFFICKING DATA

N = 227

Over one in every three



(n = 75, 33%) participants reported experiencing at least one form of exploitation.

(n = 28, 12.3%) participants reported experiencing **both** sex trafficking and labor exploitation.

Findings

Human Trafficking Data

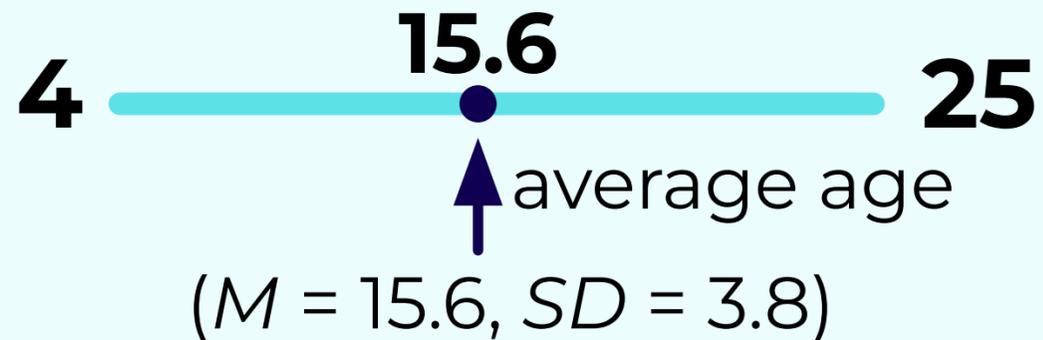
SEX TRAFFICKING DATA N = 227

One in every three



(n = 70, 30.8%) participant reported experiencing sex trafficking.

The age of 1st sex trafficking experience ranged from



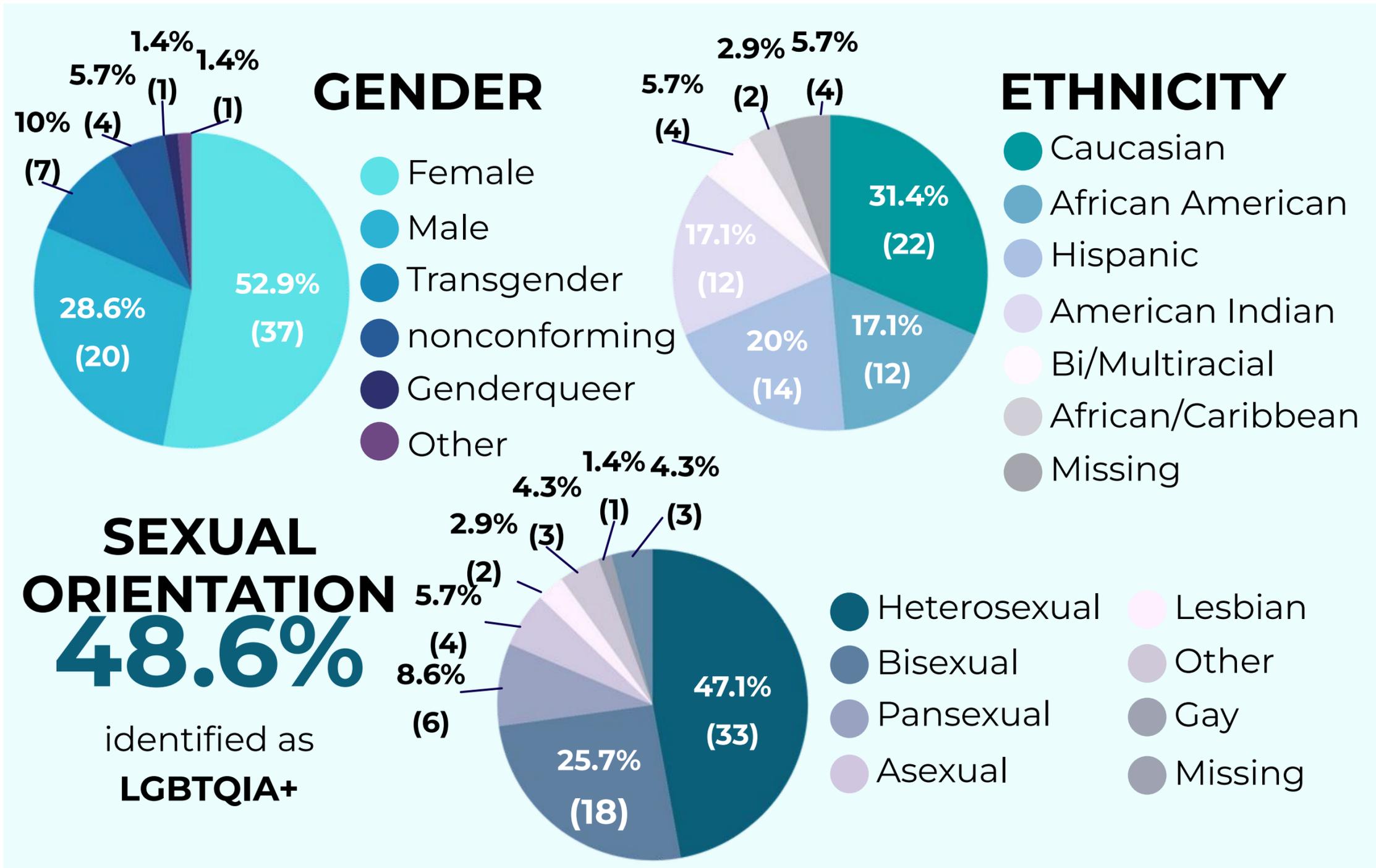
48.6%

(n = 34) of those that reported experiencing a sex trafficking situation were **first sex trafficked under the age of 18.**

UNDER
18

Findings

Sex Trafficking Data (N = 70)



Findings

Sex Trafficking Data (N = 70)

EXCHANGED SEX -



60%

Money



50.6%

Place to stay



50%

Food



37.1%

Protection



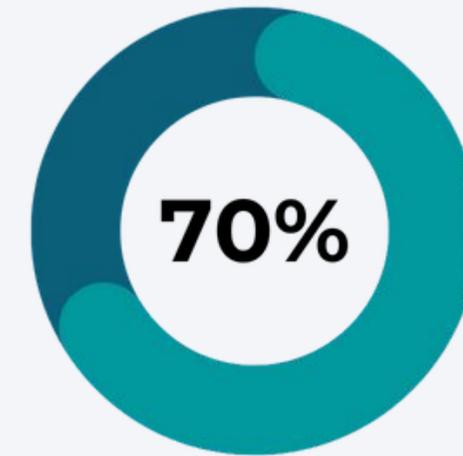
34.3%

Drugs



28.6%

Clothing

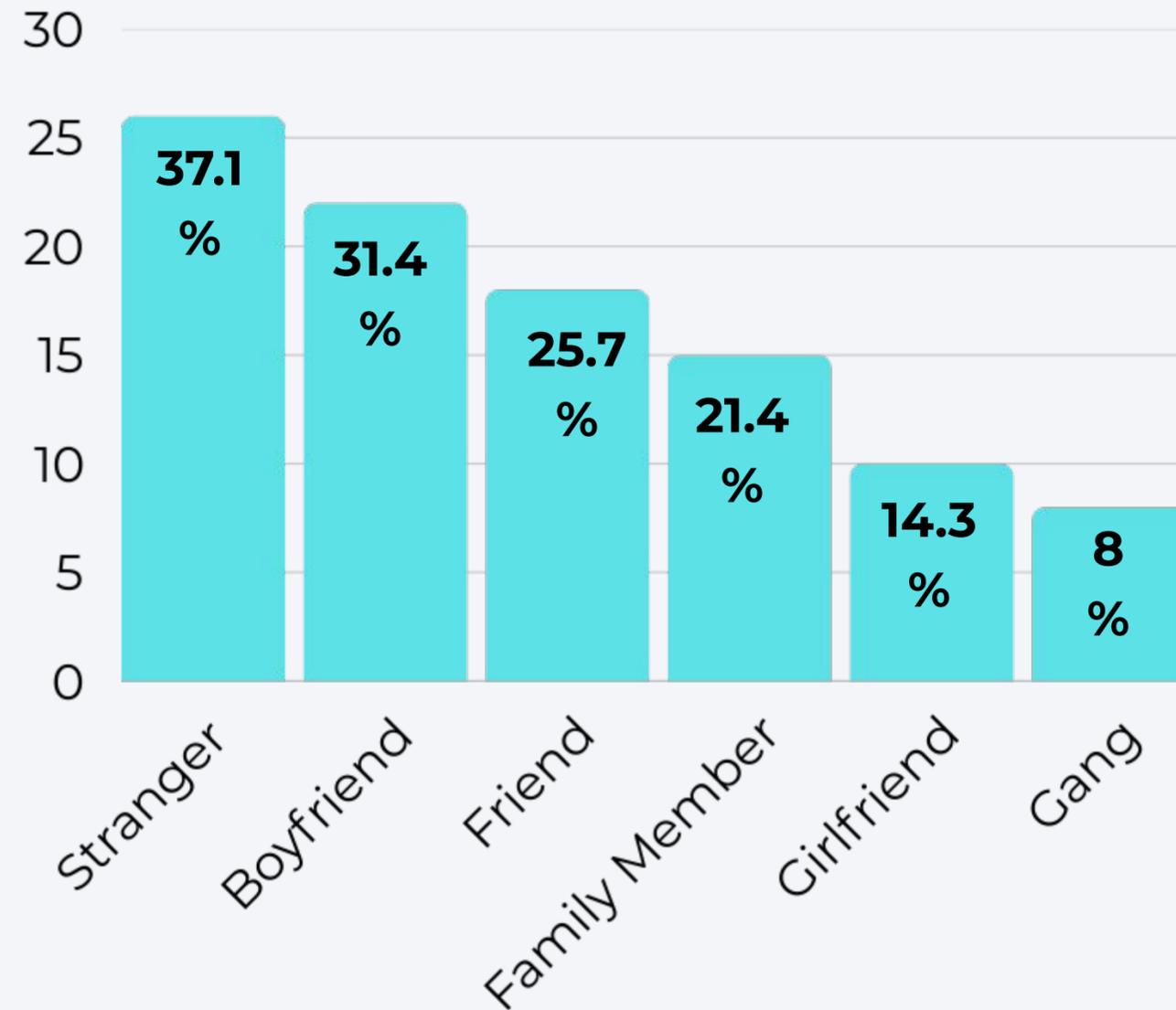


(n = 34) of participants identified as ever having a sex trafficker.

Findings

Sex Trafficking Data (N = 70)

Participants identified their relationship to their sex trafficker as:



Participants wrote in "family member" as parent, guardian, sibling, cousin, grandfather.



23.1%

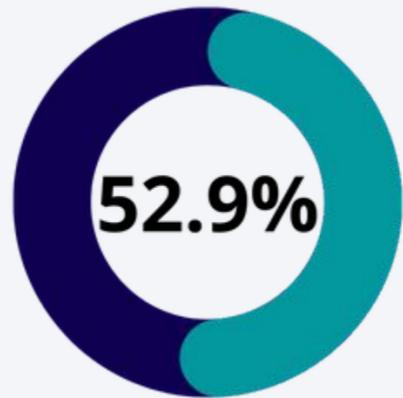
reported feeling afraid to leave the sex trafficking situation due to fear of violence or other threats of harm to self or family.

Findings

Sex Trafficking Data (N = 70)

TECHNOLOGY

Technology is often used as a tool to exploit victims of sex trafficking. Participants were asked a series of questions to explore the role of technology in their exploitation experience.



(n = 37) reported that technology was used to facilitate their exploitation.

Participants also wrote in “Chaturbate”, “Cash App” and “Snapchat” as online venues that have been used in their sex trafficking victimization

Technology, by type	n	%
Smart phone	34	30.8%
Grindr	11	12.8%
OnlyFans	10	10.3%
Pornographic photos	14	7.7%
Facebook	17	7.7%
Instagram	20	7.7%
Craigslist	12	7.7%
Tinder	13	5.1%
Twitter	7	5.1%

Technology was used:

as a tool in the sex trafficking situation
(n = 25, 35.7%)

to recruit into a sex trafficking situation
(n = 24, 34.3%)

to control victim
(n = 13, 18.6%)

Findings

Sex Trafficking Data (N = 70)

LGBTQIA+ EXPERIENCE

Researchers were interested in better understanding the intersectionality of sexual orientation and sexual exploitation, and whether participants perceived sexual orientation to be a factor that created a unique vulnerability to being sex trafficked. Participants were asked a series of questions to explore this aspect of LGBTQIA+ homeless young adults' experiences of sexual exploitation.

31.4% (n = 22) participants reported that they believed that identifying as LGBTQIA+ made them more vulnerable to being forced or coerced to exchange sex for something of value.

- *“Predators take advantage of you and see you as being more vulnerable.”*
- *“People would tend to take advantage of the aspects.”*

32.4% (n = 23) reported that during their sex trafficking victimization, they were forced to engage in sex with persons of a different gender from their sexual preference.



Findings

Labor Exploitation (N = 33)

LABOR EXPLOITATION N = 33

Labor trafficking is a difficult injustice to identify and prosecute. Both labor exploitation and labor trafficking involve unfair wages or wages left unpaid and/or substandard living and working conditions. In order to demonstrate that labor trafficking has occurred, elements of force, fraud and coercion need to be proven.

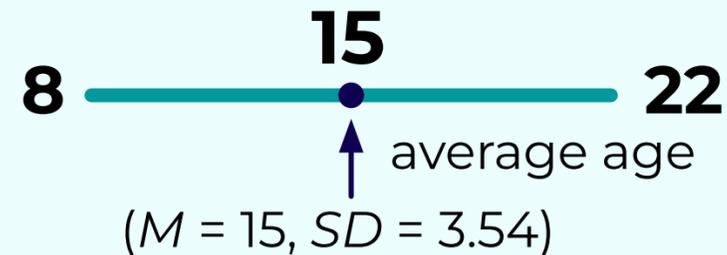
The exploratory questions in the YES study regarding the work experiences of homeless young adults are not sufficient to prove the presence of orce, fraud or coercion.

Therefore, these findings are discussed through the lens of labor exploitation.

33 participants reported experiencing labor exploitation.

14.5%

The age of 1st labor exploitation experience ranged from



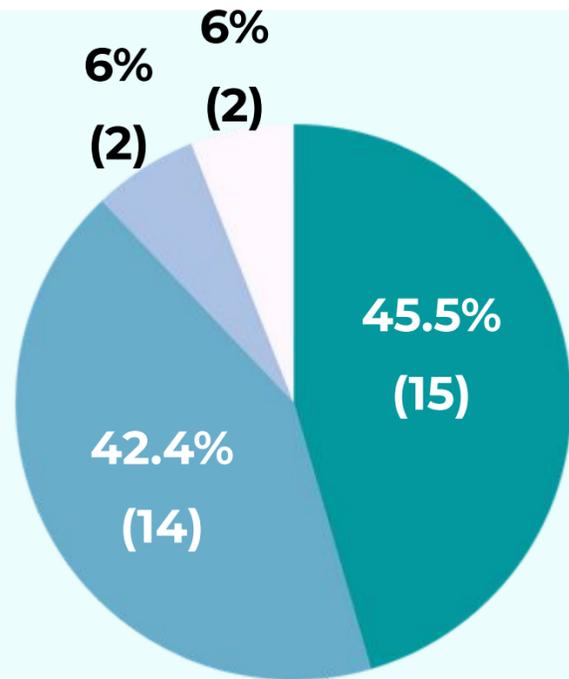
54.4%

(n = 18) of those that reported experiencing a labor exploitation situation were **first exploited for labor under the age of 18.**

UNDER
18

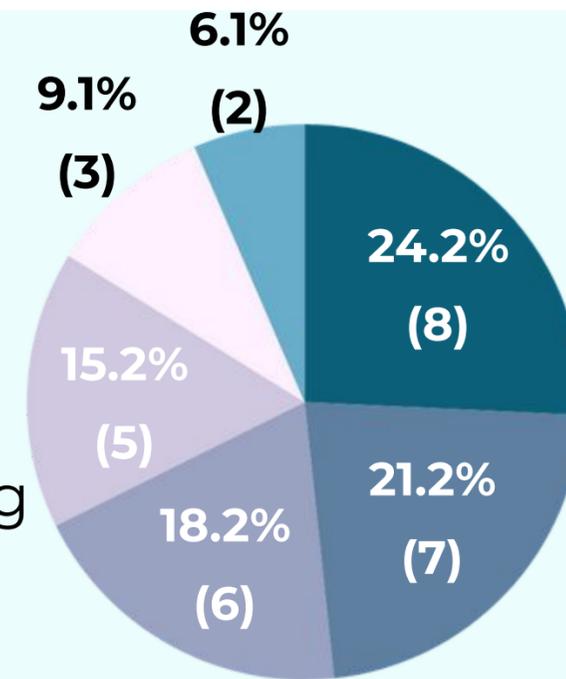
Findings

Labor Exploitation (N = 33)



GENDER

- Female
- Male
- Transgender
- Non-conforming

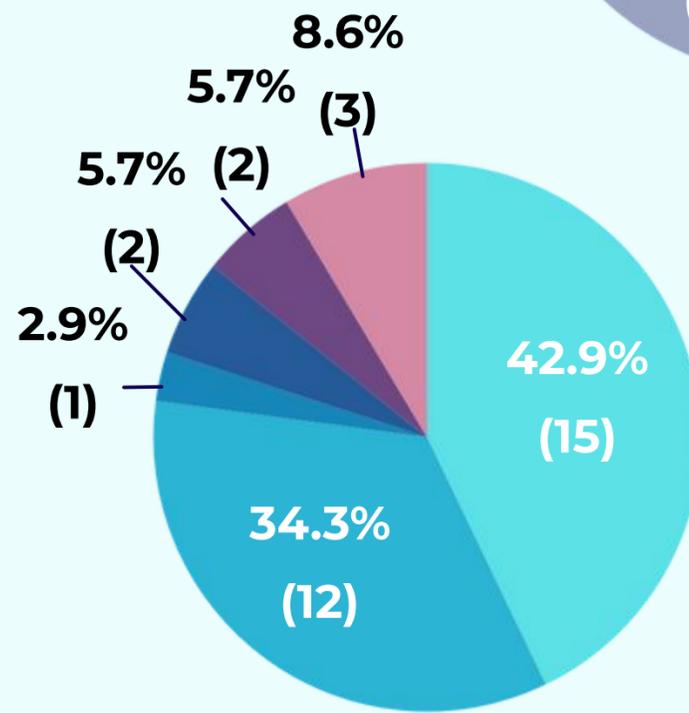


ETHNICITY

- Caucasian
- Hispanic
- Bi/Multiracial
- African American
- American Indian
- Missing

SEXUAL ORIENTATION
48.4%

identified as
LGBTQIA+



- Heterosexual
- Bisexual
- Pansexual
- Lesbian
- Asexual
- Missing

Findings

Labor Exploitation (N = 33)

LABOR EXPLOITATION EXPERIENCE

22 (66.7%) participants reported being tricked or forced into doing work they did not want to do. Participants were attempting to work in exchange for:



100%

Money



72.7%

Place to stay



66.7%

Food



54.5%

Protection



51.5%

Clothing



42.4%

Drugs

Exploitation Narratives

- "Forced to shoplift"
- "Forced to take care of children that were not mine."
- "Thought I could make quick money for food."
- "Underpaid for odd jobs"
- "Forced to steal from grocery stores. If I didn't I'd be abused physically."

Findings

Labor Exploitation (N = 33)

Fraud

27 (81.8%) participants reported being promised work where the work or payment ended up being different than what they expected.



Fraud Narratives

- “Being explicitly told by everyone in managing positions but the pay was different.”
- “Gave me nothing.”
- “Had picked something up but didn’t receive the amount I was supposed to.”
- “Never received payment.”

Control Tactics



16 (48.5%) participants reported having someone they worked for control the money they earned or keep money they earned.



7 (21.2%) participants reported being afraid to leave or quit the labor exploitation situation due to fear of violence or other threats to harm them or their family.

Findings

Labor Exploitation (N = 33)

RELATIONSHIP TO LABOR EXPLOITER

Participants identified their relationship to their labor exploiter as:



SECTOR OF LABOR EXPLOITATION



Domestic Servitude

(n = 7, 21.2%)



Selling Goods

(n = 6, 18.2%)



Restaurant

(n = 5, 15.2%)



Hotel

(n = 4, 12.1%)



Petty Theft

(n = 3, 9.1%)



Sexualized Labor

(n = 3, 9.1%)



Construction

(n = 3, 9.1%)



Drug related

(n = 3, 9.1%)

Discussion

N = 227

LGBTQIA+ Experience



- The homeless young adult population continues to be overrepresented by individuals who identify as LGBTQIA+, with almost half (46.7%) of the sample identifying as LGBTQIA+.



Homelessness as a Child

- The average age that 2024 YES study participants first experienced homelessness was age 16.9, or as a child.
- Nearly half of the 2024 YES participants (n = 98, 43.2%) first experienced homelessness under the age of 18.
- Over two-thirds of the participants (n = 158, 69.6%) reported being kicked out of their home.
- The average age that 2024 YES study participants experienced first being kicked out of their homes was age 16.5, or as a child, with the first time being kicked out ranging from 9 years old to 25 years old.

Discussion

N = 227



Educational Attainment

- Almost half of participants (n = 96, 42.3%) reported dropping out of school at one point in time.
- 34.8% (n = 79) of participants did not graduate from high school.



Mental Health

- Almost half of participants (n = 109, 48%) reported engaging in self-harming behavior.
- A suicide attempt was reported by 93 (40.9%) of the homeless young adult participants.
- The two most common mental health diagnoses included bipolar disorder, (n = 112, 49.3%) and ADD/ADHD (n = 99, 43.6%).
- Concerning Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), the majority of participants (n = 143, 63%) reported experiencing four or more ACEs which has been found to lead to significant long-term mental health and medical challenges, including early death.

Discussion

At least one form of human exploitation was present in 33% of participants (n = 75) in the 2024 YES study.

Sex Trafficking (n = 70)



- The average age of first sex trafficking experience was 15.6 years old, with the youngest age of first sex trafficking experience being 4 years old.
- Almost half of the participants (n = 34, 48.6%) reported first being sex trafficked as a child, or under the age of 18.
- Sex trafficked participants were significantly more likely than non-sex trafficked participants to report addiction, depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, various self-harming behaviors, and significant trauma histories.

Discussion



Labor Exploitation (n = 33)

- The average age of first labor exploitation experience was 15 years old, with the youngest age of first labor exploitation experience being 8 years old.
- Of those that reported experiencing labor exploitation, over half (n = 18, 54.5%) reported being under the age of 18.
- Labor exploited participants were also significantly more likely than non-labor exploited participants to report various self-harming behaviors, attempted suicide, and significant trauma histories.

Conclusion

Ongoing needs for homeless young adults in the state of Arizona:

- Youth focused safe channels for reporting exploitation & technology based outreach tools
- More access to low-barrier transitional housing
- Targeted services for high-risk groups, such as LGBTQIA+ youth
- Accessible trauma informed mental health care
- Ongoing support in education

With regard to sex trafficking and labor exploitation:

- Social serving agencies must be equipped to screen for the presence of these forms of exploitation and their staff must be trauma-informed and trained in culturally responsive practices
- Maintain drop-in centers, mobile resource units, and consistent street outreach as essential services
- Social services, schools, healthcare systems, law enforcement, and housing providers must work together to build collaborations and support victims of exploitation
- Additional funding opportunities from local and state government should be made available to

Conclusion

Homelessness as a Child

- Recognize that many unsheltered young adults experienced homelessness and significant trauma prior to adulthood
- Prioritize early intervention for school-aged children facing poverty, abuse, or academic difficulties as part of homelessness and exploitation prevention efforts.
- Implement prevention programs that include school-based intervention, housing instability screenings, and family stabilization services.
- Support continued research to understand childhood pathways into homelessness and exploitation and to identify key intervention points that can shift long-term outcomes.

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<https://www.socialwork.asu.edu/stir>

<https://www.sextraffickinghelp.com>