"I want them to know that I'm a person too":

Understanding Youth Perspectives on Interactions with Police

by

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Abstract

Ongoing cases of police brutality and violence, including those with fatal consequences, have sparked global calls for police reform. In particular, police killings of unarmed racialized individuals and individuals experiencing mental health crises, have fuelled widespread questions regarding police training, competency, necessity, and role. These questions remain largely unanswered, as there is a lack of consensus among the public and interested parties regarding the nature of changes needed within police systems. Despite this lack of consensus, there is increasing evidence that young people are disproportionately impacted by police brutality and its subsequent consequences, including the compounding effects on mental health concerns and preexisting structural inequities. Although some police systems have begun attempting to address these concerns and have often consulted a range of interested parties in doing so, there is typically one notable group missing: youth.

Despite the introduction of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the increasing involvement of young people in activism, there is still a persistent lack of formal opportunities for young people to be meaningfully and effectively involved in decision-making and policy development. In particular, there is limited evidence relevant to how police systems serve youth, with many youth-focused policing initiatives lacking a foundation in evidence-based practice. Furthermore, although some police systems have begun integrating youth-specific strategies and policies, and even training youth-specific officers, few police systems have consulted youth in doing so. Given the right of young people to be involved in decision-making that directly impacts them, I felt it was necessary to develop a study that could address both of these aforementioned gaps. Specifically, I aimed to add to the evidence base of youth-specific

policing practices, and most importantly, to ensure that youths' voices and experiences are heard and integrated in doing so.

To meet this goal, I developed a hybridized research approach by combining principles of the Critical Incident Technique and Participatory Action Research. I partnered with a community-based not-for-profit organization that supports young people facing barriers and conducted individual interviews and a focus group with youth who had experienced police interactions. Youth discussed significant encounters they had with police in the past to contextualize 'critical incidents,' or factors they believed to have contributed to the outcomes of these encounters. The critical incidents included actions that both youth and police had taken that youth perceived to either help or hinder the encounter, as well as wish-list items, or those that youth wish would have been different. Youth also discussed their perspectives on how previous interactions with police had impacted their current level of criminal-legal involvement and their overall well-being. Following these individual conversations, a focus group was held in which youth discussed their overall perspectives on youth policing and police system evolution. Two young people expressed interest in the participatory components of the research and thus acted as co-researchers in developing the coding framework and analyzing the focus group data to present it in their own words. In doing so, the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, along with the theoretical underpinnings of the current study, could be upheld to ensure youths' perspectives relevant to issues that directly impact them can be heard.

Youth provided numerous actionable suggestions relevant to youth-policing practices and police system evolution. The findings are then discussed within the context of other proposed improvements to policing practices in the current literature. Additionally, this study is part of a broader, ongoing study with Dr. Melissa Tremblay, in which community partners and police

officers who work with youth will also be interviewed, and a scoping review of police practices

relevant to working with youth will be included. Much of the existing literature has addressed

one portion of these study components in a silo, making it difficult to integrate findings from

relevant interested and impacted parties with existing research and practice. By completing these

studies in tandem, we aim to address this issue by combining all findings and providing police

systems with actionable recommendations informed by both evidence and practice.

Preface

This research is an original work by Emily Pynoo. The research project, of which this dissertation is a part, received ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name, "Actioning Youth Perspectives on Police System Evolution," Pro00105780, November 1, 2022.

Acknowledgments

This research would not have been possible without the many young activists and advocates who have been working for decades to make meaningful social and political change. The young people who participated and collaborated in the current study genuinely made this study what it is, and I am so grateful that I was able to work alongside them. Simply thanking them here does not feel sufficient to adequately acknowledge both the experiences they have gone through, and their strength in sharing their experiences with the goal of impacting change.

I would also like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Melissa Tremblay, for encouraging me to pursue this area of research and supporting me every step of the way. I could not have completed this study without your consistent guidance and encouragement, and I look forward to continuing to work together in the future.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Ongoing cases of police brutality and violence, including those with fatal consequences, have sparked global calls for police reform (Reilly, 2020). In particular, police killings of unarmed racialized individuals and individuals experiencing mental health crises, have fuelled widespread questions regarding police training, competency, necessity, and role (Learning for Justice, n.d.). These questions remain largely unanswered, as there is a lack of consensus among the public and interested parties regarding the nature of changes needed within police systems. Ideas range from abolishing police systems entirely, to incorporating crisis workers into police response teams, to restructuring police training.

Although there is a lack of consensus regarding how policing should be reformed, there is some agreement among people who work in the criminal-legal system and adjacent services, the public, and other stakeholders, that such systemic issues as ongoing racism within police systems, both on individual and structural levels, and a lack of police training related to mental health and wellbeing, are at the centre of this need for reform (Department of Justice, 2018; Reach Out Response Network [RORN], 2020). These concerns have been exacerbated throughout and since the COVID-19 pandemic, as more individuals are struggling with their mental health relative to before the pandemic, and existing mental health inequities have thus been compounded (Statistics Canada, 2021). Furthermore, racism, and community and police violence have each been conceptualized as pandemics given their dire consequences on psychological and physical health (American Psychological Association [APA], 2020). Some researchers have argued that the convergence of these three pandemics—the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, racism, and community and police violence—have created a syndemic (Boes et al., 2021; Horton, 2020; Quinn et al., 2023; Shim & Starks, 2021).

Syndemics are described as "the clustering and synergistic interaction of two or more epidemics [or pandemics] that exacerbate adverse health outcomes" (Quinn et al., 2023, p. 2). Although syndemics have typically been conceptualized in the context of primarily biological interactions, there is growing recognition among researchers and public health advocates of the social and structural interactions at play, especially in relation to disproportionate impacts on individuals and groups experiencing structural marginalization (Quinn et al., 2023).

As adolescence is a critical developmental period, it is of particular importance to examine these disproportionate impacts on youth and young adults. Throughout the early COVID-19 pandemic, 63.8% of individuals aged 15-24 reported a decline in mental health compared to 35% of those aged 65 and up (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2021). Structurally marginalized youth, including "young refugees, youth living in rural areas, Indigenous, racialized people and ethnic minority youth, young persons with disabilities, and young people of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities," are at an even greater risk of experiencing a decrease in overall mental health (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2021, p. 3). Marginalization additionally increases the likelihood of criminal victimization, which can in turn increase the risk for truancy and early school departure, unstable housing, substance use, suicidality, and other mental health concerns, all of which then increase the risk of criminal-legal involvement, beginning with police interactions (e.g., Hong et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2023; McParland, 2020; Palmer et al., 2016; Peguero & Hong, 2020). These interactions can inform youths' attitudes toward police, and their willingness to cooperate with police or seek police help if needed. Interactions with police can also lead to cycles of arrest and incarceration, which can continue into adulthood with significant psychological and physical health impacts if they are not disrupted. Although some police systems have begun implementing youth-specific strategies to

address these concerns, it is often unclear how such strategies are being developed and implemented. Furthermore, despite police systems consulting various stakeholders in the development of such strategies, there is typically one notable group missing: youth.

The Present Study

This dissertation consists of a youth participatory action research study, which is part of a broader, ongoing study intended to begin addressing the aforementioned gaps in the existing youth-police literature. Throughout the remainder of this introductory section, the broader research study is described, followed by a brief background and rationale to contextualize this dissertation, and an overview of how it informs next steps for the broader study. The section ends with a statement regarding the author's positionality as it relates to completing this research.

Broader Research Study

The broader research study, of which this dissertation is a part, was conceptualized in recognition that there can exist a cycle of risk and marginalization experienced by youth who encounter the criminal-legal system, beginning with police contact. My doctoral supervisor, Dr. Tremblay, engaged in conversations with a researcher from Edmonton Police Service (EPS), who had established relationships with youth-serving agencies in Edmonton. Together with community partners, Dr. Tremblay successfully applied for a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council grant to fund the study. The objectives of the broader study are as follows:

1. To build understandings of how structurally marginalized youth experience interactions with police.
2. To generate knowledge through community dialogues to implement changes within police systems toward better serving structurally marginalized youth.

3. To develop, deliver, evaluate, and refine resources and training opportunities for police to effectively work with structurally marginalized youth.

Enhanced understanding in these areas has the potential to inform decisions on police system reform, thereby improving criminal-legal outcomes for youth and disrupting harmful cycles of arrest and incarceration.

Background and Rationale

Although the publicization of concerns regarding police violence has brought increased attention to policing reform in Canada, little is known about how the public's perceptions of police may have shifted as a result. Researchers such as Vogel (2011) have argued that effective policing practices are contingent upon public support, as individuals who have negative perceptions of the criminal-legal system, including negative perceptions of police, are less likely to report criminal activity, aid in police investigations, or seek police support when in crisis. The majority of studies on perceptions of policing and the criminal-legal system have used adult samples, despite numerous researchers suggesting that perceptions of police are typically formed by the adolescent years (Gau, 2010; Rosenbaum et al., 2005; Samuels-Wortley, 2021). Understanding public perceptions of police has significant consequences for police policy development, implementation, and practice.

Although some researchers in the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia have demonstrated that positive perceptions of police among racialized youth are low, there is a lack of research regarding youth perceptions of police in the Canadian context, especially among youth who have experienced criminal-legal involvement (Samuels-Wortley, 2021). Samuels-Wortley (2021) found that Black and Indigenous youth in Canada expressed concern regarding

police criminalizing racialized youth and failing to provide sufficient protection from criminal victimization.

Similarly, few researchers have explored the intersection of the mental health and police systems as related to youth (Lieggio et al., 2017; 2020). Although Liegghio and colleagues (2017; 2020) focused on police encounters with youth living with mental health concerns, they did not directly elicit the perspectives of youth. Rather, they conducted secondary data analysis and determined that one in six young people accessing mental health services had police involvement (Liegghio et al., 2017). In exploring how young people involved with the mental health system and their caregivers experienced police encounters, the researchers interviewed mental health practitioners and caregivers, not youth themselves (Liegghio et al., 2020).

In sum, studies on police-initiated interactions with youth are limited. Notably, there is a conspicuous lack of knowledge regarding the perspectives of youth who experience such interactions. Given the cycle of risk and marginalization that youth experience when they come into contact with the criminal-legal system, further exacerbated by the ongoing syndemic, it is of the utmost importance to gain an understanding of how these youth perceive interactions with police during the critical developmental years of adolescence. Police encounters throughout the adolescent years have the potential to significantly shape youths' future criminal-legal involvement and overall wellbeing. Involving and empowering youth, in part through research such as this, is an important step in disrupting the disempowerment they often face within such systems that directly impact them.

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of perspectives on policing from youth who have experienced criminal-legal involvement, thus addressing the first objective of

the broader study. Structured by a past, present, future framework, the following research

objectives guided the youth participatory action research study shared in the following chapter:

1. Past: To understand youths' perspectives on their previous encounters with police.

2. Present: To understand youths' perspectives on how police encounters have impacted:
   (a) their current level of involvement with the criminal-legal system and (b) their
   overall wellbeing.

3. Future: To understand youths' perspectives on police system evolution.

A relatively novel research approach combining the principles of Youth Participatory

Action Research and the Enhanced Critical Incident Technique was used to gather youths'

perspectives. In doing so, youth participants and a youth-serving community agency were

actively involved in the research process, from the generation of research objectives and

interview questions, through to data analysis. This provided an opportunity to engage youth in

the research process, provide a platform for youth to share their voices on topics that are

important to them and that directly impact them, and to collaboratively advocate for change.

Youth participants shared their perspectives on interactions they had with police, and in doing so,

demonstrated that in light of these (often negative) experiences, they had thoughtfully considered

realistic approaches to police system reform. Youths' experiences and suggestions are presented

in their own words and discussed in the context of local, national, and international police

systems. Practical implications and recommendations are discussed.

Next Steps

This participatory action research study provides an essential foundation for the

completion of the broader research study in which this dissertation is situated. Next, the research

team will conduct further qualitative research through community dialogues with youth-serving

community agencies, other stakeholders, and police systems, including EPS. We will also publish the findings of a scoping review that summarizes the current research relevant to police-initiated interactions with young people. Finally, the findings from these studies will be compiled to provide actionable recommendations to police systems and to support evidence-based change.

Positionality

As stated by Farganis (1975), "all scientific knowledge about social reality carries with it, either implicitly or explicitly, certain ideological, political and evaluative convictions" (p. 483). Because youth involvement with the criminal-legal system, and specifically the critical role of police in youths' progression through this system, are inherently politically charged subjects, it is necessary for researchers in this field to utilize a research approach that acknowledges and incorporates the political nature of the topic (Brydon-Miller, 1997) and to acknowledge their relevant positionality. Following in Chou and colleagues' (2015) footsteps, I feel it is important to explicitly acknowledge both my "insider" and "outsider" positions within this dissertation and the broader research study.

As an "insider," I have previous involvement with the partner community agency as both a former research assistant and employee. I am currently a doctoral student in a school and clinical child psychology program and am passionate about supporting and advocating alongside young people. Due to this passion and interest, I previously conducted research for my master's thesis regarding how police officers working in schools (as school resource officers) can impact the resilience of sexual and gender diverse youth. Finally, as a Registered Provisional Psychologist in Alberta and a clinical psychology resident in Ontario, I have worked in inpatient and outpatient forensic psychiatric units and clinics that serve youth and adults with criminal-legal involvement and mental health concerns. Although there is no conflict of interest or dual

role between myself and the participants of this study, it is important to acknowledge my experiences working with youth and adults who have experienced various forms of structural marginalization, and working within the criminal-legal system, along with the potential biases that I may bring to the research as a result.

As an "outsider," I have not experienced criminal-legal system involvement myself nor have I experienced police-initiated encounters. As such, I am not a member of the population that I worked alongside in completing this research, and I do not have the lived experience that many participants brought to this study. I am a recipient of multiple privileges that society grants upon specific groups, such as those who are cisgender and white, and as such I have experienced limited marginalization. I am therefore less predisposed to the risks and harms that often contribute to involvement with the criminal-legal system. Finally, I am a doctoral student and am privileged to have access to higher education -- another system in which youth may have experienced marginalization.

In considering these "insider" and "outsider" roles with regard to my positionality as a researcher for this project, it is important to be reflexive, thoughtful, and open to guidance. I am fortunate to be in a position in which I can advocate alongside youth and support youth to share their voices in ways they may have been previously silenced or excluded. I reflected on my positionality throughout the completion of my dissertation, and I remain committed to ongoing reflection as I continue to be involved in the broader research study and dissemination of findings. In doing so, I have and will continue to regularly consult with my doctoral supervisor, community partners, and most importantly, youth, to prioritize sharing youth voices in an inclusive and uplifting manner.

A Note on Language

In being a recipient of multiple privileges that society grants upon specific groups, as mentioned above, I believe it is essential for me to bring attention to the power relations inherent in writing this dissertation and in the language I use throughout it. To do so, I also provide a brief overview and explanation of some of the key terms I frequently use throughout the dissertation.

In a piece published through the American Psychological Association (APA), Efua Andoh (2022) argues for the importance of inclusive language and notes that it goes beyond only avoiding offensive terms. Andoh (2022) writes that using inclusive language should also include acknowledging the power differentials and dynamics within society, embracing and appreciating diversity, and creating safe, authentic, and non-judgmental spaces in which people are comfortable to be themselves. To situate Andoh's own writing, she begins by sharing a quote by American linguist, author, and philosopher, Julia Penelope, which is helpful in situating my own writing in the context of this dissertation:

> Language is power, in ways more literal than most people think. When we speak, we exercise the power of language to transform reality. Why don't more of us realize the connection between language and power? (as cited in Andoh, 2022).

Both Andoh and Penelope (2022) eloquently articulate the power of language and the importance of being mindful and intentional in how we use language. Telser (2023) adds to these arguments by delineating not only the structural power of language itself (e.g., sentence structure, meaning), but also the power relations developed in both interpersonal exchanges and broader systemic and institutional language use and communication. Furthermore, Telser (2023) describes how social positions influence the power of language and the trustworthiness of the message being shared. As stated by Telser (2023) "this trustworthiness and the power gained from it goes beyond the

individuals involved in the interaction to the institutions and ideas that these speakers represent"
(para. 4).

In conducting this research and writing this dissertation, I have tried to be mindful of the
language I use and the power it holds. In having access to higher education and completing this
dissertation, I am already in a privileged position that holds some level of power. Higher
education institutions have traditionally been viewed as powerful entities and thus have been
granted some level of trustworthiness in the public domain. Therefore, in following Telser's
(2023) argument, the language I use and the words I share inherently carry some power solely
due to the nature of the platform I am sharing them from.

I wanted to conduct a study that could add to the existing literature, and more
importantly, be used to advocate for change. This was a key factor in my decision to complete a
participatory research project with youth on a topic on which youth are not typically consulted,
but which directly impacts them. In doing so, I needed to consider the power relations both
within my interactions with the youth as a researcher, as well as those within and between the
systems and institutions in which this research is situated (e.g., justice, higher education).
Language was at the centre of all of these interactions, from developing information letters and
consent forms, to interviewing youth, interacting with community partners, and most
importantly, working with youth to share the findings in ways meaningful to them. Each
interaction required me to be mindful of who I was interacting with, what the purpose of that
interaction was, and based on those variables, how to be intentional with the language I used in
both oral and written communication. Although this process is one we regularly engage in, often
at least somewhat subconsciously, I wanted to keep it at the forefront of this study. In doing so, I

tried to balance sharing the words of youth authentically with ensuring their words reached the audiences that hold the most power to enact change.

Key Terms

Relevant to the discussion of the importance of language, it is necessary to acknowledge the evolving nature of language and the variations that can be used to discuss a range of topics and concepts. Several key terms used throughout this dissertation have been defined slightly differently at different times, used interchangeably with similar terms, or are not in keeping with best practice relevant to inclusive language use. As such, these terms are outlined below to orient the reader and contextualize the remainder of the dissertation:

- Criminal justice system/justice system: Although the terms *criminal justice system* and *justice system* are commonly used to describe policing, prosecution, courts, and corrections, the term *criminal-legal system* (or simply *legal system)* has been increasingly used by some scholars and advocates in recognition that this system does not always deliver "justice" as intended (Bryant, 2021). This is especially relevant to Black, Indigenous, and other racialized people who have long experienced disproportionate contact with this system. As such, the term *criminal/justice system* is used throughout this paper when referencing specific sources that use this term; otherwise, the terms *criminal-legal system* or *legal system* are used instead.

- Structural marginalization/structurally marginalized: The term *structural marginalization* is intended to highlight structural inequities resulting from "structures and institutions that unevenly distribute benefits and burdens to different groups," thereby marginalizing certain people or groups and disadvantaging them, while advantaging others (Arrington-Sanders et al., 2020, p. 8). This term is often used interchangeably with phrases like

'underserved', 'disadvantaged', or 'vulnerable populations,' which refer "directly to the connection between social and economic factors (such as education, employment, and housing) and health" (Katela, 2021, para. 13). Sometimes phrases like "a person experiencing structural marginalization" or "those who have been placed in vulnerable circumstances" might be used rather than describing someone directly as being marginalized or vulnerable. In doing so, the language is shifted to place the responsibility for such circumstances on the society that has contributed to that outcome, rather than the individual or group themselves.

- <u>Youth/young person/young adult/teenager/adolescent:</u> The distinction between various developmental levels and age ranges often varies and there is no universally agreed upon definition of what constitutes a "youth." As such, numerous terms and phrases are used throughout the literature to describe the developmental period between childhood and adulthood. Relevant legislative definitions of youth and those used for statistical purposes are discussed throughout the dissertation; however, it is important to note that these terms are often used interchangeably, both throughout the literature, and as a result, throughout this dissertation.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

I begin this chapter with a brief overview of the role of the media in the police reform and abolition movement in North America. Next, I discuss youths' role in this movement, and their involvement in social movements more generally. This is followed by an overview of the international history of children's rights and the history of the juvenile justice system in Canada. Next, I discuss youth policing practices within Canada's juvenile justice system, and the role of provincial and federal legislation in regulating these practices, as well as the integration of international standards relevant to children's rights. Finally, I conclude this chapter with a review of the existing literature on youths' perspectives on policing.

Although police reform and abolition movements have a long history in North America, such movements have gained particular prominence with the rise of media coverage (Mortenson, 2022). Photo and video footage of police violence, particularly against Black Americans, has become increasingly accessible and thus used as direct evidence of the need for systemic change. In 1963, photographers in Birmingham, Alabama, captured Public Safety Commissioner, 'Bull' Connor, ordering the use of fire hoses and police dogs against members of the Children's March; a social movement led by over 1000 Black grade school students who aimed to speak with the mayor about segregation in their city (Viator, 2021). This sparked backlash across the country and primed the United States for "sweeping, institutional changes," which evidently did not occur (Viator, 2021, para 10).

Almost thirty years later, in 1991, the severe beating of 25-year-old Rodney King (a Black man) by a group of (primarily white) Los Angeles police officers was caught on video and the footage was used in a high profile trial against the officers (Viator, 2021). "That moment between the traffic stop and the trial verdict is important. The powerful visual evidence of racism

and brutality convinced Black activists and political leaders nationwide that there might finally be some accountability" (Viator, 2021, para. 3). Civil rights organizations like the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) compiled evidence from numerous cases of police brutality and violence which were then brought forth by the Congressional Black Caucus as evidence of the racism epidemic in American policing. Despite these cases garnering previously unforeseen media attention, all four officers charged in Rodney King's near-death beating were acquitted in 1992 (Viator, 2021).

After nearly another thirty years had passed, the United States (and the world) were then faced with another widely viewed video providing direct evidence of continued police violence against racialized Americans; namely, the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin in 2020. Despite each of these incidents of police violence leading to nationwide and even worldwide protests calling for police reform, these conversations remain just as relevant today as they were over 60 years ago, and long before that when such violence went even more unchecked without the accountability of widely accessible media. With the increasing accessibility of social media and a growth in digital platforms, there has been a significant rise in connectivity and globalization, allowing information to be shared and accessed in unprecedented ways (Falcone, 2023). This surge in global connectivity has led to a substantial increase in long-standing awareness and advocacy initiatives occurring around the world (Falcone, 2023). As evidenced by the 1963 photos of the violence against young participants in the Children's March, the 1991 video footage of police nearly killing Rodney King, and the 2020 police murder of George Floyd, technological advances have allowed such violations of human rights to be shared with increasing ease and broader access.

Chapter 2

In 2024, violations of human rights are often shared in real-time, and advocates are able to intervene or speak out against such violations in a similarly timely manner. Although issues like police brutality are deeply rooted in society today and calls to address such injustices are far from being new, social media has arguably allowed these movements to gain and maintain more momentum than they previously have. This is especially the case for younger generations who are often more well-acquainted with social media platforms than their older peers for whom social media was introduced later in life. Although young people have long been at the centre of social and political movements, social media and the growth of digital platforms has enabled young people to engage in activism more readily and with a much wider reach (Carnegie, 2022).

The participation of young people in such movements demonstrates one of the core principles of children's rights put forth by the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989); namely, "the right to influence decisions that affect their lives, in accordance with their age and maturity" (UNICEF, 2019, p. 5). It is therefore important for young people to not only have the right to be involved in activism, but also to be consulted and involved in policy development and decision-making that directly impacts them.

Despite the introduction of the UNCRC and the increasing involvement of young people in activism, there is still a persistent lack of formal opportunities for young people to be meaningfully and effectively involved in decision-making and policy development (Diplo, n.d.). In particular, there is limited evidence relevant to how police systems serve youth, with many youth-focused policing initiatives lacking a foundation in evidence-based practice. Furthermore, although some police systems have begun integrating youth-specific strategies and policies, and even training youth-specific officers, few police systems have consulted youth in doing so. Given the right of young people to be involved in decision-making that directly impacts them, I

felt it was necessary to develop a study that could address both of these aforementioned gaps. Specifically, I aimed to add to the evidence base of youth-specific policing practices, and most importantly, to ensure that youths' voices and experiences are heard and integrated in doing so. In order to situate my study in the relevant historical and contemporary contexts, I now briefly review the history of children's rights.

A Brief History of Children's Rights

Given young people's significant role in activism today, which has only increased with the advent of social media and the availability of digital platforms, it can be difficult to imagine a time in which young people did not have such a platform, let alone a time when young people did not have rights of their own.

Prior to the Geneva Declaration on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the League of Nations in 1924, children were not owed "the right to: means for their development; special help in times of need; priority for relief; economic freedom and protection from exploitation; and an upbringing that instils social consciousness and duty" (UNICEF, n.d.-b). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights followed in 1948, in which the United Nations (UN) General Assembly acknowledged the need for mothers and children to have 'special care and assistance' and 'social protection' (UNICEF, n.d.-b). Then, in 1959, the UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, which recognized children's rights to education, play, healthcare, and a supportive environment, along with other rights (UNICEF, n.d.-b). Marking the 20th anniversary of the 1959 Declaration of the Rights of the Child, the UN General Assembly declared 1979 the International Year of the Child (UNICEF, n.d.-b). Finally, in 1989, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) was adopted by the UN General Assembly, which allowed for children's rights to not only be acknowledged, but also for children to be

recognized as having some capacity to act independently, and to be viewed as more than only individuals in need of protection (UNICEF, 2019).

The UNCRC defines a child as "every human being below the age of 18 years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier. " (UN, 1989, p.2). The UNCRC is considered a "virtually universal reference and instrument," (Noel, 2022, para. 2) and is the most ratified treaty in history, with 196 of 197 UN member States having ratified it. Although the United States has signed the UNCRC, it remains the only member State that has yet to ratify it, which remains a significant area of controversy and warrants additional review outside of the context of the current paper (Lichtsinn & Goldhagen, 2023). Broadly, the UNCRC addresses children's rights relevant to:

- Protection (e.g., from abuse, exploitation and harmful substances)

- Provision (e.g., for education, health care and an adequate standard of living)

- Participation (e.g., listening to children's views and respecting their evolving capacities)

- Specific protections and provisions for vulnerable populations such as Indigenous children and children with disabilities. (UNICEF, n.d.-a, para 5).

The introduction and ratification of such rights significantly impacted perceptions of children and young people and subsequently led to the implementation of additional legislation across UN member States. The Government of Canada ratified the UNCRC in December 1991, thus implying that they would "adhere to the norms set out in the UNCRC in its domestic law," (Noel, 2022, para. 6). Although there is no legislation explicitly incorporating the UNCRC into Canadian law, the principles of the UNCRC are said to be integrated into existing measures within Canada, including the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and federal, provincial, and territorial legislation, policies, and programs (Noel, 2022).

Within the numerous areas of children's rights addressed under the UNCRC, Articles 37 and 40 (UN, 1989) specifically address children's rights within the legal system. These articles are particularly relevant to children held in detention facilities and children who break the law. Like within other areas of children's rights, individuals under the age of 18 were typically undifferentiated from adults in various legal systems prior to the introduction of the UNCRC. A few years prior to the introduction of the UNCRC, in 1985, the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice were released and detailed the principles of a justice system in which the Best Interests of the Child (BIC) could be promoted and the concept of proportional treatment for child detainees was introduced (UNICEF, n.d.-b). The BIC principle, outlined in Article 3 of the UNCRC (UN, 1989), has gone on to inform numerous pieces of legislation, especially in the context of family law. Notably, the BIC principle has played a significant role in the development of Canada's youth justice system, even before the introduction of the UNCRC (Lacombe, 2017).

A Brief History of Juvenile Justice in Canada

Although children's rights, including those relevant to the justice system, were not internationally recognized and formalized until the introduction of the UNCRC in 1985, their history in some countries, including Canada, dates back further. In the period preceding the establishment of the Canadian Dominion in 1867, there was little distinction between how youth and adults who committed crimes (in what came to be known as Canada) were treated (Alain & Desrosiers, 2018). The only exception was the "doli incapax" defence, which translates to "incapacity to do wrong" (Alain & Desrosiers, 2018, p. 24). This defence was primarily used for children under seven years of age when it could be argued that they did not know the difference between right and wrong. It could also be applied to children aged 7-13; however, in that age

range, the doli incapax defence could be rebutted if there was sufficient evidence that the child could understand that their conduct was wrong. If this argument was made (which it quite often was), the child would then be charged and sentenced as an adult; such sentences could include imprisonment, physical punishment, or death. During this time, all incarcerated children and adults were imprisoned in the same facilities (Alain & Desrosiers, 2018).

As the reform movement of the 19th century progressed, with Enlightenment thought spreading from Europe to North America, increased attention was focused on improving the lives of children and acting with their best interests in mind. At the same time, with the development of the field of criminology, scholars began to propose that so-called delinquency could be a result of one's environment rather than one's character (Alain & Desrosiers, 2018). This idea brought about a shift in the treatment of children and youth who had committed crimes; rather than punishment, reformists argued for treatment and social interventions that could 'save' young people from crime (Alain & Desrosiers, 2018, p. 25). These reformist ideas led to a split in public sentiment as to the appropriate way to meter out justice, with some advocating for harsher punishments, and others advocating for more lenient sentences, especially when the accused was a child or youth. Those advocating for harsher punishments often purported that physical punishments were both more effective and more economical, as they did not require the long-term provision of meals, shelter, and security that prisons required. Conversely, those who advocated for leniency purported that physical punishment for children and youth should be banned, and that a clear distinction should be established between children or youth and adults (Alain & Desrosiers, 2018).

The notion that young people who had engaged in criminal activity were "more often victims than perpetrators" (The International Cooperation Group, 2004. p.19) led to the

introduction of the Juvenile Delinquents Act (JDA) in Canada in 1908. This marked a significant shift in Canada's juvenile justice system, in which the best interests of the child became the primary focus, and the reformist approach rooted in child welfare took hold. Despite the intended welfare approach of the JDA, its implementation significantly varied across Canadian jurisdictions and led to increased controversy (Alain & Desrosiers, 2018). There was a lack of consistency in sentence implementation and in the role of child protective services across Canada, resulting in some children receiving protective care and others being criminally charged. Additionally, researchers and critics at the time reported that the JDA seemed to have no impact on reducing recidivism rates among young offenders (Alain & Desrosiers, 2018). Following the UN International Year of the Child in 1979, the introduction of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982, and increasing dissatisfaction with the JDA, Canada's Young Offenders' Act (YOA) came into force in 1984. Following the implementation of the Charter, it became clear that some statutes under the JDA would have been deemed unconstitutional and needed to change (Alain & Desrosiers, 2018).

The two main principles of the YOA were to: (1) make youth more responsible for their actions and protect society by reducing recidivism; and (2) protect the rights of young offenders to have access to fair treatment and due process (Alain & Desrosiers, 2018). Despite the introduction of the UNCRC just a few years later in 1989, which aligned with the latter principle in its mandate to protect the rights of all children, the United States' increasingly 'tough-on-crime' rhetoric gained traction (Lacombe, 2017). The World Summit for Children was held in New York, and the Guidelines for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency (The Riyadh Guidelines) were then introduced (UN, 1990) and provided further guidance for preventing criminality and protecting young people (UNICEF, n.d.-b). Regardless of international attention

on children's rights, the perception that the YOA was too lenient on young people became the dominant rhetoric and Canada's juvenile justice system faced yet another overhaul in the early 2000s.

Although rising tough-on-crime sentiments contributed to the overhaul of the YOA, the legislation that replaced it (the Youth Criminal Justice Act; YCJA, 2002) arguably aligned more with the international focus on children's rights and thus revived the attention on the UNCRC's BIC principle (Lacombe, 2017). Under this Act, the language of 'young offender' was removed and replaced with the more neutral 'young person,' which Lacombe (2017) argues is representative of the "deeper philosophical rebalancing" (p. 217) of the Act in keeping with the UNCRC. By emphasizing the importance of supporting youth through the transition to adulthood, Lacombe (2017) argues that the YCJA "echoes the BIC principle's objective of fostering children's holistic development" (Lacombe, 2017, p. 217). The YCJA also includes new sentencing principles intended to acknowledge the importance of proportionality between the seriousness of a youth's offence and the severity of the subsequent sentence (Alain & Desrosiers, 2018). With this shift in focus, the YCJA aimed to reduce custody sentences and allow for more community-based sentences after Canada had reached the highest youth incarceration rate of any Western country while under the YOA (Alain & Desrosiers, 2018). The shift in sentencing principles with the introduction of the YCJA better aligned with the BIC principle and emphasized the need to reduce an over-reliance on custody for non-violent youth (Lacombe, 2017). In contrast to the YOA's emphasis on custody and formal court proceedings, the use of timely and informal responses, including extrajudicial measures, were encouraged under the YCJA. This shift was in part due to criticism from both academics and justice

professionals that, under the YOA, there was little guidance regarding the use of police discretion (Hincks & Winterdyk, 2018).

Overall, in the first year following the enactment of the YCJA in 2003, there was a 38% decrease in youth custody rates across the country (Alain & Desrosiers, 2018) and similarly significant declines in the rates of youth being formally charged by police (Lacombe, 2017).

Policing Under the YCJA: Integrating Federal and Provincial Legislation

Notably, although the YCJA is federal legislation that applies across Canada, each province and territory within the country is individually responsible for the administration of justice, including the implementation of the YCJA, leading to some differences in how youth cases are handled. As frontline responders, police officers are involved in numerous aspects of the implementation of the YCJA. One such point of involvement is in the provision of extrajudicial measures. Extrajudicial measures are defined under the YCJA as "measures other than judicial proceedings…used to deal with a young person alleged to have committed an offence" (2002, p. 3). Extrajudicial measures include: taking no further action; the provision of an informal warning by a police officer or Crown prosecutor; a police caution, which is a more formal warning given by police; and referral to a community program, which could include police-based youth crime programs, restorative justice, substance use treatment, and so forth. Extrajudicial sanctions are the most formal of the extrajudicial measures and are thus used "only if the young person cannot be adequately dealt with by a warning, caution or referral…because of the seriousness of the offence, the nature and number of previous offences committed by the young person or any other aggravating circumstances" (YCJA, 2002, p. 10).

Following the implementation of the YCJA in 2003, the federal Department of Justice commissioned a report to explore the discretionary role of police in interactions with youth

across Canada. Specifically, the objectives of the report were to provide a comprehensive description of the ways in which police in Canada exercise their discretion with youth and to identify and assess factors that may impact such discretion (Carrington & Schulenberg, 2003). The report consisted of nationally representative data from 95 police services across Canada and found that police were considered to have two main objectives:

(1) To investigate the incident, identify and apprehend the perpetrator(s), and assemble the necessary evidence if there is to be a prosecution and

(2) To deliver an appropriate sanction, or consequence, semi-independently of the Youth Court and correctional system (Carrington & Schulenberg, 2003, p. i).

The researchers found that a majority of police officers in their sample used informal action with youth, such as warnings, and approximately half referred youth to pre-charge diversion programs (Carrington & Schulenberg, 2003). However, the researchers also noted that provincial governments had an impact on police departments' decision-making, as the exercise of police discretion was often impacted by relationships between Crown prosecutors and local police, as well as the availability of diversion programs within the province (Carrington & Schulenberg, 2003).

In provinces such as Alberta, in which police officers can directly refer youth to an extrajudicial sanctions program, the officers are also responsible for supervising the youth to ensure compliance with their assigned sanctions (Hincks & Winterdyk, 2018). Under an amendment to the YCJA issued in 2012, police are required to keep records of any extrajudicial measures used with youth to better inform decisions regarding possible subsequent offences (Department of Justice, 2013). Due to the additional responsibility and onus placed on police officers when applying extrajudicial sanctions directly, many officers choose to refer youth to the

Crown, allowing the Crown to make such decisions and assign appropriate follow-up (Hincks & Winterdyk, 2018). Building on the Department of Justice's 2003 report authored by Carrington and Schulenberg, DeGusti (2008) conducted further research regarding the impacts of the YCJA in Alberta. Some police officers who participated in focus groups as part of DeGusti's research noted that "they often avoid charging youth because the process is too lengthy and more complicated" (DeGusti, 2008, p. 40). Some officers also noted that although they believed the legislation of the YCJA itself to be effective, they felt the interpretation of the legislation varied by jurisdiction, constable, and judge (DeGusti, 2008).

In discussing these discrepancies in the implementation of the YCJA, some police officers who participated in DeGusti's (2008) study noted that provinces had earned a range of reputations regarding the level of severity of youth sentences they typically enact. Participating officers indicated that there is a lack of consistency amongst police officers as well, noting that responses to youth can vary depending on "the day, and the mood of the officer" (DeGusti, 2008, p. 41). Among other concerns, participating officers also expressed that there were not enough resources in place for them and other professionals to adequately support and implement the principles of the Act (DeGusti, 2008).

The Role of International Standards in Canada's Current Youth Justice System

Although overall declines in youth custody sentences and charges following the introduction of the YCJA represent areas of improvement in alignment with the BIC principle of the UNCRC, some scholars and advocates note that there is still room for improvement. Despite the preamble of the YCJA including reference to Canada's ratification of the UNCRC, researchers such as Lacombe (2017) highlight the persistence of punitive and crime control models that have prevented Canadian youth justice legislation from fully prioritizing the best

interests of children. Lacombe (2017) argues that the YCJA "places considerable weight on the principles of societal protection and individual accountability," (p. 227) and in doing so, reduces the emphasis on children's best interests being of primary consideration.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child is a body of independent experts that monitors the implementation of the UNCRC by its States parties. Like Lacombe (2017), the Committee expressed some concern with Canada's implementation of the UNCRC and outlined relevant recommendations to address such concerns in its most recent report (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2022). Within the Committee's 15-page report, several recommendations are outlined specific to the administration of child justice in Canada, in which "the Committee urges the State party to bring its child justice system fully into line with the Convention and other relevant international standards" (2022, p. 13). The recommendations are summarized as follows: ensuring that no person under 18 years of age is sentenced as an adult (as is currently possible under the YCJA); developing an effective action plan towards eliminating the disproportionate representation of Black and Indigenous young people in Canada's legal system; ensuring the provision of qualified legal aid and access to appropriate, rehabilitative, community-based programs and the maintenance of family connections for incarcerated young people; continuing to promote non-judicial measures; ensuring that detention is only used as a last resort; and collecting disaggregated data on both children in conflict with the law and the children of detainees in order to develop targeted strategies for addressing systemic discrimination (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2022).

Taken together, it appears that the introduction of extrajudicial measures under the YCJA is less in keeping with the BIC principle of the UNCRC than initially intended. As police are front-line responders in justice system encounters, they continue to play a critical role in

determining how youth proceed through the system, and consequently, in how the BIC principle of the UNCRC is integrated within Canadian legislation and legal practice.

Although some police systems have taken steps to implement more youth-specific strategies and have engaged various stakeholders in the process, such consultations have typically not included youth. Although the integration of more youth-specific strategies is theoretically aligned with the BIC principle, the lack of youth inclusion in developing such strategies goes against another core principle of the UNCRC, colloquially referred to as the child's right to be heard and taken seriously (UNICEF, n.d.-c).

Youth Perspectives on Policing

To date, most of the research on civilian interactions with police has been conducted with adults (Liegghio, 2021) and within an American context (e.g., Fine et al., 2020; Reilly, 2020). Liegghio and colleagues (2017; 2021) recognized the lack of Canadian research centered around youth. In 2017, the researchers conducted secondary data analysis of intake statistics and qualitative intake notes from children and youth accessing mental health services; they gathered data on how many youth had police involvement at the time of accessing services and why that involvement occurred. In 2021, Liegghio and colleagues interviewed child and youth mental health practitioners and caregivers who accessed the mental health system and had a history of police involvement. Although these studies acknowledge the youth perspective, neither of them directly interview youth.

Adorjan and colleagues (2017) recognized that not only are Canadian studies of public perceptions of police limited, but those in rural settings are even more sparse. To address this gap, Adorjan and colleagues (2017) conducted a case study to explore youth perceptions of and experiences with police in rural Canada. Although this research included youth's "satisfaction"

with prior interactions with police, the prior interactions included seeing police at school or in the community or having to contact police for safety concerns; no participants had police-initiated encounters. The same authors expanded on this study in 2019 by further exploring the tension that can exist within the continuum of police roles between law enforcement and public protection versus community policing and crime prevention (Ricciardelli et al., 2019). Through conducting focus groups with rural youth, the researchers found that although police officers being more embedded in the community is typically considered beneficial, youth often expressed that such embeddedness made it more difficult for them to cooperate with police or to report incidents to police (Ricciardelli et al., 2019).

To capture the experiences of Black and Indigenous Canadian youth and highlight their perspectives, Samuels-Wortley (2021) interviewed youth who had police-initiated encounters, including involuntary police stops, questioning or arrests, and any other calls for service; all youth had direct lived experience with police. Samuels-Wortley (2021) shared that Black and Indigenous youth expressed concern regarding police criminalizing racialized youth and failing to provide sufficient protection from criminal victimization. A study by Greer and colleagues (2021) found that young people who use drugs had similar concerns to the youth in Samuels-Wortley's (2021) study. Specifically, youth described police power and authority as being "limitless, unpredictable, untethered, easily abused, and lacking accountability" (Greer et al., 2021, p.170).

Although the literature on police interactions, especially with individuals and groups who have experienced structural marginalization, has expanded with the increased media attention on police practices, there is still a paucity of research exploring youths' perceptions of police in the Canadian context. Specifically, no existing researchers have used participatory action research

approaches to involve youth in research that directly impacts them. Additionally, only some of

the existing research has explored the perspectives of youth who have experienced police-

initiated contact. In keeping with the children's rights outlined in the UNCRC (1989) as

discussed above, I believe it is important to address this gap in the literature and create

opportunities for youth most impacted by police interactions to have a say in police policy

development relevant to their work with youth.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical underpinnings of the current study were informed by the works of Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator, humanitarian, and philosopher. Freire proposed the concept of a 'critical consciousness' in which individuals who had experienced marginalization could confront inequalities and collaboratively develop solutions to address them (Brydon-Miller, 1997). In Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970/2000), he "posited individuals not as empty vessels and objects of inquiry, but as full participants in inquiry, able to determine their own needs in order to improve their own lives" (Macauley, 2017, p. 256). Much of Freire's work went on to influence that of other educators, humanitarians, and philosophers, and thus continued to impact both theory and research going forward. Rappaport (1990) similarly emphasized the importance of an "empowerment social agenda" in research in which the priority is to identify, facilitate, or create contexts in which typically silenced or excluded individuals are able to "gain understanding, voice, and influence over decisions that affect their lives" (p. 52).

Freire and Rappaport's ideas fit well with the core principles of the UNCRC and the purpose of the current study (i.e., to gain an understanding of perspectives on policing from youth who had experienced criminal-legal involvement). Involving youth as active participants throughout a research project is a means to empower youth to share their perspectives on a topic that directly impacts them, yet one in which their perspectives are often excluded or overlooked. To effectively include youth throughout the research process in a way that is valuable and meaningful to them, Rappaport (1990) argues that it is necessary to implement an empowerment social agenda from the development of the project through to knowledge translation. As such, it

is necessary to guide the project with theoretical underpinnings that coincide with the empowerment social agenda.

The participatory, emancipatory, and empowerment-focused nature of the current study aligns well with the critical theory paradigm (Kidd & Kral, 2005; Ponterotto, 2005). As summarized by Ponterotto (2005), there is no single critical theory; rather, the principles of critical theory can be broadly applied by researchers with shared priorities. These shared priorities include using research to critically view social or cultural constructs; understanding that all knowledge and thought cannot be isolated from their social and historical roots and contexts; acknowledging that privilege exists within society and can result in the oppression of some individuals and groups over others; and understanding how mainstream research practices are primarily rooted in systems of class, race, and gender oppression (Ponterotto, 2005). Critical theorists therefore acknowledge the presence of intersecting systems and the power relations that exist within these systems. To balance power relations, critical theorists are driven by emancipatory principles and thus commit to engaging individuals who have experienced oppression or exclusion in the research process with the aim of supporting these individuals in feeling empowered (Ponterotto, 2005).

Jennings and colleagues (2006) combine the above principles of the empowerment social agenda and critical theory to propose a critical social theory of youth empowerment. A key component of Jennings and colleagues' (2006) theory is the incorporation of strengths-based approaches within a field that is typically risk or deficit focused. Historically, research and program development centred around supporting youth who have experienced marginalization, oppression, and exclusion has primarily been structured by rehabilitation or 'containment' efforts (Jennings et al., 2006). These programs and associated research thus engaged in risk-based,

reactive approaches, rather than aiming to foster healthy youth development and capacity building. More recently, a strengths-based shift has occurred in both research and practice, in which youth development and empowerment are emphasized (e.g., Fortune, 2018; Jennings et al., 2006; Njeze et al., 2020). Similar shifts can be observed within the history of children's rights more broadly and that of Canada's youth justice system, both of which moved towards better supporting the healthy development of children and youth over time. In alignment with these shifts, Jennings and colleagues' (2006) critical social theory of youth empowerment incorporates core components from both the empowerment social agenda and critical theory and aligns more broadly with many of the principles outlined in the UNCRC.

The following dimensions of critical youth empowerment theory were thus prioritized throughout the current study:

(1) A welcoming, safe environment

(2) Meaningful participation and engagement

(3) Equitable power-sharing between youth and adults

(4) Engagement in critical reflection on interpersonal and sociopolitical processes

(5) Participation in sociopolitical processes to affect change

(6) Integrated individual- and community-level empowerment (Jennings et al., 2005, p. 32).

Developing a Hybridized Research Approach

To integrate the empowerment social agenda and critical theory paradigm both in the development of the current study and throughout the research process, it was necessary to find a research approach that aligned with the principles underlying these theories. Although some research approaches and methods stood out to me in my search, I found myself wanting to

combine the emancipatory elements of participatory approaches with the commitment to social

change often found in action-oriented approaches, all within a rigorous structure that allowed me

to explore and effectively address my three research objectives. I was beginning to think these

elements might be too complicated to combine when I came across a study by Chou and

colleagues (2015). Specifically, Chou and colleagues (2015) developed youth-led solutions to

improve high school completion rates by combining principles of Participatory Action Research

(PAR) and the Critical Incident Technique (CIT). In doing so, the researchers noted the value of

PAR as an inquiry-based approach for engaging vulnerable youth in research and the CIT as a

valuable, structured method with the potential to inform policy to better support youth.

Following Chou and colleagues' initial 2015 study utilizing both PAR and the CIT, the

authors published another paper in which they further explored and justified the combination of

PAR and the CIT; in doing so, they made reference to both the original PAR and CIT and the

iterations of Youth PAR (YPAR) and the Enhanced CIT (ECIT; Chou et al., 2016). They also

discussed the combination's applicability to the field of counselling psychology and social

sciences more broadly (Chou et al., 2016). The authors referred to this combination as PaCIT

(Chou et al., 2016). Chou and colleagues argue that PaCIT addresses the pragmatic and

methodological concerns of implementing both (Y)PAR and the (E)CIT individually. Namely,

that (Y)PAR can be difficult to establish and integrate as it can seem "unscientific" and lack

rigor due to its flexible, relatively unstructured nature, and that the (E)CIT lacks theoretical

underpinnings and may only touch on surface-level experiences without facilitating

understanding of deeper meanings from participants (Chou et al., 2016). They also discuss the

paradigmatic assumptions and implications of both (Y)PAR and (E)CIT and provide a thorough

overview of their similarities and differences.

At the time of Chou and colleagues' (2016) publication outlining the hybridized approach, PaCIT, they noted that such a combination had only been found in two other articles, both of which highlight the use of CIT within community-based PAR (i.e., Belkora et al., 2011; Yonas et al., 2013). Although each of these research teams advocate for the combination of various iterations of PAR and CIT, it appeared, at the time of the current study's development, that this combination remained in limited use. Rather, many researchers have used an iteration of either PAR or CIT, or have informally integrated components of both without doing so in a rigorous and fulsome manner (Viergever, 2019). Part of the issue, Viergever (2019) argues, is that there is a lack of clarity and consistency in the conceptualization of research terms. Specifically, some researchers refer to the CIT and integrate it as a *method* and some do so as a *methodology*. Similar concerns are evident in PAR literature, with it often being referred to as a research *method*, *approach*, *methodology,* or even *process* and such terms often being used interchangeably.

Viergever (2019) differentiates between method (i.e., "technical rules and procedures for data collection and analysis," p. 1066) and methodology (i.e., relevant to "description, explanation, justification, and evaluation of the process of scientific inquiry," p. 1066) and argues that both the CIT and PAR are methodologies. He argues that although the CIT and PAR (and adaptations of each) can be used in combination as methodologies, many researchers do not undertake a rigorous integrative approach in doing so and thus minimize the effects of both methodologies and the overall study (Viergever, 2019). He therefore proposes that three criteria be applied when integrating the CIT with another methodology:

>   (a) there is a good fit of the approaches with the research problem and questions; (b) the
>   approaches fit well with each other, especially concerning the underlying philosophical

paradigm; and (c) the integrity of each approach is maintained, meaning that there are

distinct objectives for each approach (corresponding to the different foci of the

approaches), as well as distinct phases of analysis and, depending on the methodologies

that are mixed, potentially different data collection phases (Annells, 2006; Morse, 2010;

as cited in Viergever, 2019, p. 1074).

Although Chou and colleagues (2016) integrate many of the factors Viergever (2019)

emphasizes by providing detailed descriptions of how their approach aligns with the above three

criteria, they also use the terms method and methodology interchangeably throughout their study.

This was initially a source of confusion in conceptualizing my own research study, as I wanted to

ensure I was adequately upholding the principles of the methods and methodologies I combined,

especially in the context of the relevant theoretical framework. To do so, I needed to clearly

define the parameters of each research component to enhance the rigour and trustworthiness of

my study.

As such, I used Chou and colleagues' 2015 and 2016 studies as a starting point before

thoroughly reviewing the paradigmatic assumptions of both YPAR and ECIT to ensure they

aligned with the overall critical theory paradigm of the current study. Based on the intersecting

social justice and advocacy principles of both YPAR and the ECIT, the philosophical and

theoretical underpinnings of YPAR, and the structure and rigor of ECIT, I created my own

adaptation and hybridized approach. This approach, which I refer to as the Youth Participatory

Enhanced Critical Incident Technique (YPaECIT), builds on Chou and colleagues' (2016)

foundational work with additional consideration of Viergever's (2019) methodological insights,

and integration of the theoretical underpinnings relevant to the criminal-legal and developmental

considerations inherent in the current study. To contextualize this hybridized research approach

within the current study, I will next review its components and the relevant theories underlying each methodology.

(Youth) Participatory (Action) Research

Participatory research emerged in the 1970s in Tanzania as "a practice that attempted to put the less powerful at the center of the knowledge creation process; to move people and their daily lived experiences of struggle and survival from the margins of epistemology to the center" (Hall, 1992, p. 15-16). Through a range of international meetings in Venezuela, Peru, Slovenia, Nicaragua, India, and elsewhere, participatory research developed in an international and interdisciplinary context (Hall,1992). Although its roots are in the field of adult education, principles of participatory research have since spread across numerous fields and settings. As it is known today, participatory research is an umbrella term that includes "research designs, methods, and frameworks that use systematic inquiry in direct collaboration with those affected by the issue being studied for the purpose of action or change" (Vaughn & Jacquez, 2020, p. 1).

Through participatory research, knowledge can be co-created through partnerships between researchers, community members, those with lived experience, and other interested parties (Vaughn & Jacquez, 2020). As such, individuals and groups who are not traditionally trained in research but who have relevant information to share within the research context are provided with opportunities to share their valuable perspectives. Rather than including participants as "subjects" in the research process, participants have the opportunity to play an active, engaged role throughout the research process; research is therefore conducted *with* participants rather than *on* or *about* participants (Vaughn & Jacquez, 2020).

Since its conception in South America and other nations from the Global South in the 1970s, participatory research approaches and related activism have informed the development of

numerous variations of participatory research around the world. Although each variation is unique, the emancipatory and participatory approaches emphasized through critical consciousness and social action, are shared traits throughout many of these approaches, due to the theoretical origins of participatory research more broadly. Notably, Freire's (19070/2000) work had significant influence on the development of these research approaches (Chevalier & Buckles, 2019).

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is one iteration that combines the principles of participatory research with those of action research to emphasize the importance of conducting research *with* participants (rather than *on* or *about* participants) to understand and address societal issues. This combination is informed by the principles of critical social and emancipatory pedagogy and has "a specific change-oriented social agenda" (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014, p. 832). Through the pattern of action, reflection, and collaboration prioritized within PAR, Freire's (1970/2000) concept of 'critical consciousness' is exemplified. As explained by Coghlan and Brydon-Miller (2014), action researchers emphasize that reflection alone "results in verbalism, which cannot produce transformation," and action alone "results in unreflective activism, which cannot produce transformation either" (p. 20). The authors add that "as Freire claims, this praxis of reflection and action must also happen in dialogue with others, which is why action research requires a participatory dimension" (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014, p. 20).

With its roots in education and pedagogy, critical consciousness raising has often been applied in developmental contexts with children and youth (Diemer et al., 2016). As such, PAR has similarly been recognized as an approach that can effectively be applied with youth (e.g., Raanaas et al., 2020; York et al., 2021). In such cases, it is referred to as Youth PAR or YPAR

(Chou et al., 2015; Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014) and is structured as an empowering process to engage youth in research, provide a platform for their voices to be heard on topics that are important to them and that directly impact them, and to support youth in advocating for change (Raanaas et al., 2020). YPAR is similar to PAR, with the added consideration of factors relevant to child and adolescent development. In particular, it can be utilized to "enhance young people's ability to make informed judgments about the social and environmental injustices that affect them and their communities and to take action to address them" (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014, p. 832).

Developmental Considerations in YPAR. The consideration of power dynamics within PAR is especially relevant when conducting YPAR, as researchers must understand both social and political power dynamics, as well as developmental factors that could further contribute to power imbalance in the research process (Raanaas et al., 2020; Suleiman et al., 2021). Although youth under the YCJA are defined as those between the ages of 12-17, developmental considerations are relevant from early adolescence through to emerging adulthood when conducting research with justice-involved youth. In particular, young adolescents' experiences may shape their future justice involvement, whereas older adolescents may have ongoing justice involvement from charges received earlier in their adolescence and may engage in research based on their prior justice involvement. Suleiman and colleagues (2021) therefore stratify adolescence into three age periods to explain how social, political, and developmental factors can intersect differently throughout adolescence. In doing so, they apply a developmental lens to conducting YPAR and address possible power imbalances and other developmental considerations within the research context. Suleiman and colleagues' (2021) division of age groups is primarily relevant to the age at which the young person participates in the YPAR-

informed project. Although participants in the current study reflected on police encounters they experienced as both children and adolescents (throughout all three developmental periods), their ages at the time of participation primarily fell within the latter two developmental periods. As such, a brief overview of these two periods is provided.

Middle adolescents, or those ages 15-19, typically have a stronger sense of self and have established stronger beliefs than young adolescents (Suleiman et al., 2021). Additionally, they have typically developed more cognitive skills and capacities that facilitate research engagement (Suleiman et al., 2021). However, middle adolescence also tends to be a more turbulent period, in which risk-taking behaviour and preventable health issues, such as sexually transmitted infections, increase, and mental health challenges emerge (Suleiman et al., 2021). Suleiman and colleagues (2021) propose that these shifts can actually be beneficial for youth engaging in YPAR, as it can provide them with an opportunity to collaboratively address and understand complex social issues. This aligns with the development of one's critical consciousness as a core component of PAR and YPAR, as research can allow for participants to critically reflect, develop political efficacy, and take critical action (Freire, 1970/2000; Suleiman et al., 2021). As middle adolescents develop stronger cognitive capacities, they can become better able to deal with the challenges that accompany this turbulent period. Therefore, involving them in relevant research can promote the development of youths' critical consciousness, autonomy, and the ability to navigate complex social and political contexts, such as police encounters and those within the criminal-legal system more broadly.

Older adolescents and emerging adults, ages 20-24, present another unique opportunity for YPAR researchers, as this period typically involves young people realizing the rights, roles, and responsibilities of adults as unique from adolescents (Suleiman et al., 2021). Although

cognitive capacities are typically more developed during this stage of life than in earlier adolescence, they are still not fully developed. Neural flexibility can therefore allow for older adolescence and emerging adulthood to be opportune times for life experiences, such as YPAR, that have the potential to impact social, political, and developmental trajectories (Suleiman et al., 2021). Emerging adults also face more serious consequences for their actions within the justice system, having surpassed the 12-17 age range of the YCJA, and are typically held more accountable for their actions in other social systems and contexts relative to their younger peers. Engaging emerging adults in YPAR can therefore be beneficial as a means to increase autonomy and support young people in making independent, informed decisions as they navigate the transition from adolescence to adulthood.

Criminal-Legal Considerations in YPAR. Given its relevance to and integration of activism and advocacy principles, both PAR and YPAR have been used in studies regarding the criminal-legal system (e.g., Haskie-Mendoza et al., 2018; Devuono-Powell et al., 2018; Telep et al., 2020). To guide this work, Coghlan & Brydon-Miller (2014) provide an overview of considerations in conducting PAR in criminal justice contexts. Although their review is specific to the United States, the authors note that many of the broad principles discussed apply across justice systems around the world. Similarly, although the discussion is centred on PAR, it can be applied to YPAR, especially given that unique developmental considerations of YPAR relevant to the current study were discussed above. Coghlan & Brydon-Miller (2014) also list police departments, youth courts, and juvenile detention centres in their discussion of the criminal justice system more broadly, indicating that such institutions were considered in their overall recommendations.

Chapter 3

Although Coghlan & Brydon-Miller (2014) indicate the need to "not overlook individual agency and minimize personal responsibility for criminal behaviour" they note that PAR researchers must design studies in which individual acts can be positioned as "systemically linked to oppressive or privileged contexts, cultural ideologies, institutional logics, legal definitions and the many outcomes of current social, educational and economic inequalities" (p. 199). In the context of the current study, the inequities faced by youth are situated through the review of the history of juvenile justice and children's rights relevant to current policing practices.

The authors also highlight the importance of diverse expertise, which is accomplished by including individuals with lived experience (e.g., youth have experienced criminal-legal contact) as well as individuals who work within criminal-legal systems (e.g., police, policymakers, who are included in the broader study in which the current study is situated), researchers who have experience with multiple strategies for social inquiry (e.g., I have developed and contributed to various research projects integrating a range of strategies relevant to social inquiry and am part of a broader research lab which does the same; additionally, my supervisor and dissertation committee members all bring significant research experience in guiding me through this project).

Finally, given the strong roots and history of criminal justice systems within societies at large, the authors note the importance of being systemically minded in considering proposed action or change (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014). This entails viewing the action and contribution of the research study as a step within a series of efforts, including "relationship-building, community awareness activities, support for legal activism, networking with grass-roots organizations, organizing political events and many other short- and long-term, small and large events - grounded in data - that are needed to support sustainable social movements"

(Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014, p. 199). This long-term, systemically-focused notion is relevant as the current study is located within the context of a broader research study, which will involve other interested parties and policymakers with the eventual goal of contributing to evidence-based change relevant to youth policing. Therefore, explaining the current study in the context of the broader study was an important step in developing the current research approach, to ensure that all participants and collaborators were aware of the overall purpose and could develop realistic expectations regarding possible outcomes from only the current study.

The (Enhanced) Critical Incident Technique

As PAR and subsequently YPAR are rooted in collaborative notions of social action and change, (Y)PAR researchers acknowledge that data collection, generation, analysis, and interpretation cannot be separated from the epistemologies, social theories, and ethics that shape the research contexts (Brydon-Miller et al., 2011). As such, YPAR researchers emphasize that methods and methodologies applied to the broader YPAR approach should adapt and evolve depending on the context of the (Y)PAR study (Brydon-Miller et al., 2011). The issues facing the community and the research questions collaboratively created to address those issues should inform the choice of method, along with developmental considerations, as mentioned above (Suleiman et al., 2021). Regardless of the choice of method, the focus should be on creating dialogues and "generating knowledge through interaction" (Brydon-Miller et al., 2011, p. 390). YPAR is often used to involve youth in identifying issues with youth-focused service delivery, using research methods to "address the scope and effect of the problems and using the results to suggest changes" (Coghland & Brydon-Miller, 2014, p. 834). One such strategy that has gained traction in recent years, and has been used within both PAR and YPAR, is the (Enhanced) Critical Incident Technique [(E)CIT] (Butterfield et al., 2005; Chou et al., 2015).

At the time of its initial development, Flanagan (1954) noted that the Critical Incident

Technique (CIT) did not consist of a rigid set of rules governing data collection, rather, it could

be modified and adapted to apply to specific situations, and thus be integrated within specific

theoretical frameworks. Although the CIT was first established as a job analysis technique to

identify 'critical requirements' for job success within the World War II Aviation Psychology

Program of the US Army Air Forces, the flexibility of the approach has allowed for it to be

expanded and used in numerous other settings. The CIT provided structure to the already

common procedure of identifying critical components or factors that contributed to a certain

outcome.

Flanagan (1954) outlines the original five-step approach to the CIT (i.e., establish general

aims; make plans and specifications; collect data; analyze data; interpret and report findings)

and provides a detailed explanation of how each step should be enacted to ensure maximal rigor

and objectivity within the research process. Because Flanagan's original CIT was designed for

job analysis procedures, it primarily relied on observation as a data generation strategy, with the

possibility to include individual or group interviews, questionnaires, and other written records

(Flanagan, 1954). Other researchers have since built upon Flanagan's original approach to add

further detail and guidance for applying this approach in other settings and integrating additional

data generation strategies. Following an application of the CIT within the field of counselling

psychology in the 1980s (Woolsey, 1986), it was used to study a wide range of psychological

constructs and experiences (Butterfield et al., 2005). With its expanded reach, researchers

recognized the need to adapt the CIT to fit more closely with qualitative research methods within

the field of psychology and the ECIT was thus developed (Butterfield et al., 2009).

To strengthen the rigor, credibility, and applicability of the original five-step CIT

approach, Butterfield and colleagues (2009) proposed the inclusion of contextual questions in an initial research interview with participants to provide background information and situate the CIT data, as well as questions regarding wish list items, in addition to the critical incidents/factors identified in the CIT that either helped or hindered the outcome being studied. Butterfield and colleagues (2009) also included nine credibility checks, which were developed to remain consistent with Flanagan's original CIT, and to align with other commonly used credibility checks within qualitative research more broadly. The authors argue that doing so allows for the robustness of potential CIT findings to be enhanced, especially within psychology and other social science contexts (Butterfield et al., 2005).

In its current form, the ECIT is conceptualized as an exploratory qualitative research method or methodology that is used to study what helps, hinders, or could have been improved in a particular experience or activity. It is applicable when the researcher aims to learn more about little-understood events, incidents, factors, or psychological constructs that impact the outcome or experience of a specific situation or event (Butterfield et al., 2009). As both the CIT and ECIT have been recognized as useful qualitative research approaches that can be adapted to a range of research questions and contexts, a range of components and credibility checks can be included depending on the nature and purpose of the study.

The Youth Participatory Enhanced Critical Incident Technique (YPaECIT)

Following a thorough review of the literature relevant to both (Y)PAR and (E)CIT, I developed an initial outline to guide the current study, recognizing that the components may shift throughout the implementation of the study given its participatory and reflexive nature. The components of (E)CIT that were integrated into the current study are summarized in Table 1 and integrate the works of both Flanagan (1954) and Butterfield and colleagues (2009). Those from

the original five-step CIT approach are written in non-italicized text and those added from the

ECIT are italicized:

Table 1. (E)CIT components as integrated into the current study.

(*E*)CIT Step	Purpose/Description	Relevance to Current Study
General Aims	Establish and describe the aim or objective of what is to be studied.	The aim of the current study is to gain an understanding of perspectives on policing from youth who have experienced criminal-legal involvement.
Contextual Question	*Before beginning data generation procedures, determine a contextual question that can be used to situate the CIT data and provide relevant background information. This allows participants to tell their stories on their own terms, which can then be followed up with ECIT-specific queries.*	*Youth were asked to recount a significant encounter they had with police.*
Plans and Specifications	Determine which aspects of behaviour contributed to the outcome of the situation to be studied. These aspects of behaviour are defined as 'critical incidents,' which are behaviours that either helped or hindered in the situation more broadly.	Critical incidents in this study include: actions taken by both youth and police that the youth perceived to have either helped or hindered their experiences interacting with police.
Wish List Items	*Explore factors that were not part of participants' original experiences, but that they would have found helpful in hindsight. This is in addition to the helping/hindering critical incidents identified above.*	*In the context of discussing their experience with police, youth were asked what they wished would have been different about the encounters and why. More broadly, youth also discussed what they wished would be different about youth policing overall.*
Collect the Data	Use data generation strategies to collect the data in alignment with the aims, plans and specifications established above.	In the current study, both individual interviews and a focus group took place.

	Ensure data generation strategies allow for the inclusion of both wish-list items and the contextual question.	*The past, present, future framework of the current study allowed for wish-list items and the contextual question to be integrated into the research design.*
Analyze the Data	Summarize and describe the data so that it can be used for practical purposes, like relevant training procedures or policy development. This includes (a) determining the frame of reference/use of the data; (b) formulating categories derived from grouping similar incidents; and (c) determining the level of specificity or generality to be used in reporting the data.	In the current study, (a) the results will be used to contribute to the existing knowledge base on youth policing and to eventually provide actionable, youth-led recommendations to police systems; (b) in collaboration with youth co-researchers, data were organized into relevant categories; and (c) critical incidents are broadly defined as youth/police helping/hindering behaviours with specific examples of each presented in the findings.
Interpret and Report the Findings *Credibility Checks*	Note the limitations and values of the findings and consider whether certain perspectives might be missing or how biases may have been introduced throughout the prior steps. *Because Flanagan's original CIT primarily included direct observation of behaviour, the developers of ECIT added nine credibility checks that can be used when the study involves the report of perceptions of an experience.*	*The following credibility checks were integrated into the current study: audiotaping interviews; independent extraction of critical incidents; exhaustiveness; participation rates; cross-checking by participants; theoretical agreement.*

Additional Considerations in Developing a Hybridized Research Approach

Although developing a hybridized research approach such as the Youth Participatory

Enhanced Critical Incident Technique (YPaECIT) can address some of the concerns or limitations of its individual parts (Chou et al., 2016), enacting a hybridized approach does not eliminate potential challenges (Viergever, 2019). For example, recognizing and addressing power and privilege should be key within any research approach, especially participatory approaches, including YPaECIT. To do so, I wanted to emphasize the theoretical underpinnings rooted in Freire and others' works, as well as the integration and consideration of relevant legislation (e.g., the YCJA) and international standards (e.g., the UNCRC). This required examining the broader systems of interested parties including community partners, police organizations, and the criminal-legal system at large, and considering the directions in which they may want to influence the project (Chou et al., 2016; Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014).

Inherent in this discussion is the recurring theme of referring to youth who have experienced criminal-legal involvement as "vulnerable" throughout the research literature. The term "vulnerable" often carries connotations of having diminished power and privilege, and therefore requiring support. In this context, referring to youth as vulnerable can be disempowering and therefore contradicts the purpose of using an approach such as YPaECIT as a means to deconstruct systems of power and provide equitable opportunities for youth to share their perspectives. Rather, terminology such as "structural marginalization" may be used to capture the unique circumstances often experienced by legally-involved youth more accurately. Although implementing a novel approach such as YPaECIT comes with potential challenges, it also presents unique opportunities to address systemic research issues, even those as seemingly simple as language use.

Addressing these dynamics of power and privilege requires the researcher to actively reflect on positionality through reflexive processes such as supervision, debriefing, consulting,

and journaling (Chou et al., 2016). To uphold these principles, I engaged in conversations with my supervisor and peers, as well as youth collaborators and community partners throughout the current study. I also kept a research journal, in which I reflected on these conversations and the research process more generally. Doing so allowed me to engage in reflexive practice throughout the course of this study and to hold myself accountable to the standards I wanted to uphold. Reflections from these conversations and journal entries are integrated throughout the relevant sections below to provide a narrative on my adaptation of the combination of YPAR and ECIT, and its implementation in the current study.

Furthermore, in alignment with the participatory, iterative nature of the YPaECIT approach, relevant adaptations to the initial outline presented in Table 1 are incorporated throughout the following sections. Although the overall methodology was conceptualized and clearly delineated at the outset of the study, and the core principles of both methodologies (YPAR and ECIT) were upheld throughout, the final research process evolved throughout the study's implementation. As such, this section follows a narrative structure to guide the reader through the research process.

Implementing a Hybridized Research Approach

Creating the Research Partnership

The Community Health Empowerment and Wellness (CHEW) Project is a community-based initiative in Edmonton, AB, that offers frontline services (e.g., counselling, crisis intervention, harm reduction, Indigenous peer support) and education for sexual and gender minority youth facing barriers related to mental health, poverty, homelessness, and substance use. I was first connected to CHEW through my master's degree supervisor, Dr. Andre Grace, who cofounded CHEW. Throughout my master's degree, I worked as a research assistant with

Dr. Grace, primarily on research with CHEW. During this time, I spent extensive time at CHEW getting to know the youth accessing services as well as the staff and volunteers. My research assistant position shifted into a communications and social media manager position, which I held until the end of the first year of my doctoral degree. Through these roles, I formed foundational connections with CHEW and developed a strong understanding of the organization and its structure. I also began to connect with some of the young people who regularly accessed services there, many of whom had done so since before the time I was first connected with CHEW and who continued to do so after I stepped down from my formal position there.

Because many of the young people accessing services at CHEW had longstanding involvement with the organization, there were many familiar faces when I returned to discuss my proposed dissertation research with the youth and staff. I had recognized that police interactions and legal involvement more generally were topics frequently mentioned in conversation throughout my time at CHEW, as many of the youth who accessed services there had historical or ongoing involvement with the criminal-legal system in some capacity. As mentioned above, CHEW's mandate is also to support young people who have experienced a range of structural marginalization beyond criminal-legal involvement. Many of the informal conversations I engaged in with youth throughout my time at CHEW sparked significant thought and reflection that stuck with me after I left. In particular, many of the young people I spoke with shared strong passions for a range of social and political causes, and often jumped on any opportunity to get involved in such causes through CHEW. Along with staff and volunteers, the youth often planned and organized (and performed in) drag shows and fundraisers, Pride events, harm reduction training, events to honour Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and tabletop gaming gatherings, to name a few. As I began planning my dissertation research, I found

myself thinking of the connections I had formed at CHEW and wondering about returning there to conduct my research.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic had altered CHEW's service delivery model and they had faced significant challenges due to an increase in youth needing support paired with restrictions that made it difficult to provide such support, the organization remained open and committed to supporting youth. I was initially hesitant to approach CHEW with my research proposal, as I knew they had experienced these significant challenges throughout the pandemic and I questioned the appropriateness of proposing a new, and potentially emotionally-heavy and time-consuming project. After some reflection and conversation, I realized that although I initially felt my intentions were good in wanting to avoid what I worried might be a burdensome project or too large of an ask, that was not my decision to make. Rather, in making that assumption without talking to the youth, staff, and volunteers at CHEW, I was inadvertently going against the participatory research principles I wanted to implement and uphold.

This study received approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board in the context of the broader study in which this dissertation is situated (Project Name, "Actioning Youth Perspectives on Police System Evolution," Pro00105780) on November 1, 2022. Upon receiving approval, I first contacted the director of the Fyrefly Institute of Sexual and Gender Diversity at the University of Alberta, which oversees CHEW, and discussed the proposed research. In keeping with the study's ethics approval, the director signed a letter of support which documented CHEW's agreement to support and be involved with the research team throughout the study. This letter is provided in Appendix A.

Despite having approval to work alongside two youth-supporting agencies, the second proposed agency had recently undergone significant restructuring and the person who had

initially spoken with the research team about participating in the broader study had left their role.

Paired with the increased demands on their services following challenges presented by COVID-19, it was difficult to reach the organization's leadership team to seek their involvement in the study. In consultation with CHEW staff, it was determined that many of the youth accessing CHEW's services had also accessed services through the other proposed organization, and that, due to the ongoing changes within the organization, it may not have been feasible for them to participate at that time. As such, the study moved forward with CHEW as the sole community partner. It will still be possible for the other proposed organization to participate in the broader study, should it become more feasible and they remain interested in doing so at that time.

After obtaining a letter of support from the Fyrefly Institute, I then reached out to the director of CHEW and discussed the project in person. At this meeting, I brought a draft of the study information letter and participant consent form (provided in Appendices B and C) and worked with staff to ensure the project was clearly outlined and the forms could be understood by youth. Because the forms needed to be quite lengthy to include all information required by the Ethics Board, we agreed that it would be beneficial to both verbally explain the proposed study and the associated consent to participating youth, and to provide them with the written forms, as well as time to review the forms and ask any relevant questions.

Because it was possible for youth under the age of 18 to participate in the study, I also developed a decision-making capacity form in alignment with ethical guidelines and developmental considerations to ensure younger participants (aged 15-17) had capacity to consent independently. This form was also reviewed with CHEW staff and is provided in Appendix D.

In consultation with CHEW staff, we determined that although they supported and encouraged a participatory research approach, it would be most feasible and meaningful for the youth if the approach was adapted to integrate youth in a participatory role following the development of the initial interview guide and throughout the remainder of the study, rather than at the project development stage. This decision was made for several reasons:

1) Many of the youth accessing CHEW's services at the time were experiencing unstable housing and precarious living situations, making it difficult for them to consistently participate in the study at scheduled times.

2) Similarly, youth were typically experiencing numerous additional systemic barriers and forms of structural marginalization, which were both physically and emotionally taxing, and staff expressed concern that some youth may not have had the additional capacity to participate more actively in the current study.

3) Because the purpose of the study and the proposed research objectives were already well-defined in the context of the broader study, and staff were aware that many youth had encountered police and had thoughts to share, we agreed that youth would have control over the information they shared regardless of the research method. We agreed that semi-structured interviews and focus groups would be best to both give youth the opportunity and space to share what was meaningful to them, and to ask questions relevant to the study objectives, without requiring additional involvement of the youth who may have already had limited capacity to participate.

4) Although it may seem contradictory to the participatory approach to not formally involve youth in this initial decision, CHEW staff had also indicated that the

organization had been approached by numerous researchers throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, they reported that many of the youth had shared with staff that they were feeling burned out and were uninterested in participating in additional research. However, staff noted that because many of the youth were passionate about advocacy and activism related to social and political issues that were important to them, staff believed youth would be interested in the current study. Specifically, staff indicated that youth would likely be intrigued by the opportunity to share their thoughts with police systems without having to speak with police officers directly.

Youth had also expressed to staff in the context of other conversations that they were more interested in participating in research when they had the opportunity to share their experiences in their own words and be able to see some form of tangible impact of their involvement. As such, we determined that given the participatory approach and the significant flexibility in both YPAR and ECIT methodologies, youth would be able to share their relevant thoughts and experiences regardless of how the initial individual interview was structured. In fact, by combining YPAR and ECIT, this allowed for the individual interviews to be clearly structured and outlined to maintain rigour and consistency in data collection, and for youth to participate in a way that was most meaningful and accessible to them.

Therefore, we decided that it would be best to involve youth in the participatory component of the study following their individual interviews. In doing so, we prioritized youth's autonomy in structuring the "future" component of the research objectives by having the opportunity to guide the focus group and the more actionable step of determining how the findings would be analyzed and presented. This also allowed me to ensure that youth who were

interested in participating in an interview and/or focus group, but not actively in the participatory processes relevant to data collection, analysis, and dissemination, were not dissuaded from participating in the overall study.

In keeping with the principles of PAR, the study was adapted to meet the unique circumstances and needs of the youth and staff at CHEW. In keeping with the principles of the ECIT, all five of the original CIT steps were incorporated, as well as some of the enhanced steps included in ECIT. CHEW played a critical role in the development and implementation of this project with the goal of fostering social change and better supporting youth experiencing structural marginalization. To meet this goal, CHEW remained involved throughout the study, with opportunities for both youth and staff to contribute in ways meaningful to and feasible for them.

Recruitment Process and Considerations

Participants were recruited through CHEW as the community partner for this project. Recruitment was made feasible by the involvement of CHEW staff who were committed to supporting the project in numerous ways, including by sharing recruitment materials with youth and by being available to support mental health needs of youth, discussed in additional detail below. After meeting with staff to review and approve the study materials (e.g., participant information letter and consent forms, recruitment poster), copies of the materials were left with staff to distribute to interested youth throughout the provision of their regular services. These study materials are included in Appendices B, C, and E, respectively.

Although I had a connection with CHEW prior to starting this study, it had been some time since I was there in-person aside from the initial meetings with staff at the outset of this study's implementation. Staff informed me that although many youth would likely be interested

in participating in the study, their precarious living situations and other factors discussed above might make it difficult to schedule times or find opportunities to meet with them. Additionally, given the nature of the study in which participants would be asked to discuss significant encounters they had with police, it was important to consider the emotional toll such conversations might have on youth participants. Although I am a student in a clinical psychology graduate program and am training to support youth's mental health needs, doing so in the context of this study would have been inappropriate as it would have resulted in me enacting a dual role with participants. As such, I needed to ensure that participants had appropriate mental health support accessible to them throughout their involvement in the current study. This added to recruitment and scheduling considerations, as CHEW staff agreed to support youth if needed and would thus need to be on-site and available at times I was meeting with youth.

As such, in consultation with CHEW staff, we determined that the best way to recruit youth would be to spend time on-site at CHEW's downtown office and be available to youth during their regular drop-in hours. Staff suggested this would also allow me to become a familiar face again at CHEW and thus build trust and rapport with interested youth before engaging in potentially emotionally taxing conversations with them. This approach aligned well with the theoretical underpinnings of my study by allowing me to meet youth where they were at, both physically (at the CHEW office where they accessed support and resources) and emotionally (by being available and open to connect with youth when they felt ready and comfortable to do so).

Sample Size

In the ECIT, the sample size is determined by the number of critical incidents rather than the number of participants (Butterfield et al., 2005). For example, one participant may share multiple critical incidents (i.e., helping or hindering factors) that occurred in their history of

interactions with police. Rather than identifying a target sample size prior to undertaking

research, it is therefore common practice for ECIT researchers to continue collecting data until

the content domain has been covered for a given population (Butterfield et al., 2005). To

determine when a content domain has been adequately covered, Butterfield and colleagues

(2005) suggest tracking the number of critical incidents throughout data generation procedures.

This involves keeping note of what helping and hindering factors are referenced, iteratively

categorizing them into broader themes, and choosing to stop data collection once no new

categories are being created. The authors also note that data collection could continue beyond

that point if rich data is still being collected and that, overall, sample size requirements should be

tailored to align with each study.

In the case of the current study, it was important to consider that the pool of justice-

involved youth in Edmonton is small and that access through one agency would be limited,

especially due to changes in program attendance and structure as a result of the ongoing COVID-

19 pandemic, which was more active during the study's implementation in 2022-2023 than it is

at the time of writing in 2024. It was also important to consider that the topic of the study was

likely to be personal and potentially emotional for participants, and that their participation should

therefore be on their terms and within their level of comfort. In order to prioritize these

considerations, it was best not to have strict sample size guidelines and rather to be flexible and

adjust to the youth's circumstances and availability, and the number of youth who were

accessing CHEW's services at the time.

Based on preliminary discussions with CHEW staff in the fall of 2022, we anticipated

five to six youth would participate in each phase of the study (i.e., individual interviews and a

focus group). In keeping with the above considerations, we recognized that this number may

shift throughout the research process (Butterfield et al., 2005). Rather than setting this number as a goal or requirement, it was estimated in order for staff to have a general idea of what the study entailed and how long it might take.

Building Relationships

At the suggestion of CHEW staff, I began recruitment by spending time at CHEW and connecting with youth during the program's drop-in hours in the late fall of 2022 and early winter of 2023. This approach facilitated connections with potential participants in numerous non-traditional ways before engaging in the formal research process and was important in keeping with the study's overall theoretical framework. I had many conversations with youth on topics unrelated to the study, such as Dungeons and Dragons, drag performances, and various day-to-day occurrences youth wanted to discuss. We chatted while youth accessed CHEW's services, including picking up food or supplies, having a meal, or checking in with CHEW staff. CHEW was expanding their physical office space at the time, and so I was also involved in moving furniture and helping staff and youth reorganize the space. Although I was eager to begin interviewing youth, this approach allowed me to enact many of the principles underlying the study's development, purpose, and theoretical framework relevant to prioritizing youth's involvement on their own terms. Once I fully embraced this approach and let go of my inclination to schedule meetings and be more structured in my approach, the research began to evolve and progress more naturally and with less self-imposed pressure than it otherwise might have.

Notably, many of the youth chose to participate in the study following these informal conversations and interactions at CHEW rather than via more structured and traditional recruitment strategies, such as contacting me through the information provided on the

recruitment poster. Similarly, most interviews were not scheduled in advance and instead occurred on-the-spot as youth expressed interest or asked questions about the study while engaging in these unrelated informal interactions. In fact, some youth with whom staff had shared the study and who initially said they did not want to participate later asked me if they could participate after I had spent more time at CHEW. All youth who expressed interest and were eligible to participate did so.

Youth Participants and Co-Researchers

As noted earlier in this chapter, definitions of "youth" can vary significantly. Under the YCJA (2002), a youth is defined as an individual between the ages of 12-17 years. The UNCRC defines a child as "every human being below the age of 18 years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier " (UN, 1989, p.2); there is no distinction between child and youth in the Convention. For statistical purposes, the United Nations' broadly defines youth as individuals between the ages of 15-24 and notes that the terms 'youth' and 'young people' are often used interchangeably "with the understanding that member states and other entities use different definitions" (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, n.d.). Increasingly, researchers have demonstrated that applying strict exclusionary criteria to distinguish between children, youth, and young adults, can be harmful, especially in the context of transitions between mental health and other services, often resulting in "transition-age" individuals being left without appropriate service access (see Toulany et al., 2022). As a result, some organizations have extended the age range of what is typically considered youth to ensure continuity of care for the young people accessing their services. CHEW is one example of an organization with an extended age range, offering services to youth and young adults up to age 29.

Although the intent of the current study was initially to gather perspectives of individuals who had experienced police contact between the ages of 12 and 17 to align with the age range in the YCJA, this shifted throughout the study's development and implementation. First, to increase project feasibility with a larger potential participant pool, any individual between the ages of 12 and 25 who had an interaction with the criminal-legal system as a youth between the ages of 12 and 17 was eligible to participate. However, upon engaging with staff and youth at CHEW, it became evident that there were several individuals above age 25 who were interested in participating and were otherwise eligible to do so. As such, in keeping with the principles of YPAR and the theoretical underpinnings of the current study, the age range was subsequently expanded to align with CHEW's maximum service age of 29 years old.

Involvement with the criminal-legal system was defined as any interaction, ranging from police-initiated contact to a custody sentence. Although youth-initiated contact with police (e.g., as the victim of a crime, through encounters with other agencies, such as Children's Services, etc.) was initially going to be excluded, it again became clear through conversations with CHEW youth and staff, and in considering the study's theoretical framework, that any police interaction that youth found to be significant should be included. Youth self-identified as having had experience or involvement with the criminal-legal system, and CHEW staff provided support with this process while ensuring that principles of confidentiality were upheld.

To differentiate between the levels of youths' involvement in the current study, the terms youth participants and youth co-researchers are both used. Youths who elected to participate in one or more phases of the study (i.e., individual interview or focus group) without engaging in participatory data analysis procedures are herein referred to as youth *participants.* The youths who elected to participate in one or more phases of the study *and* the participatory data analysis

procedures are referred to as youth *co-researchers.*

Participant Demographics

Six young people participated in individual interviews. An additional six young people (and one of the individual interviewees) participated in a focus group. Two of the focus group participants were subsequently involved in participatory data analysis procedures. In total, 12 young people participated throughout the study. Participants ranged in age from 16-27 years old at the time of their participation in the study (mean age = 21.75). In keeping with the contextual question added as an adaptation of ECIT, participants who completed individual interviews also reported the age at which they experienced their most significant encounter with police. All six individual interview participants reported multiple significant encounters with police, with the most significant encounter occurring between the ages of 8 and 25 years of age. Some participants reported their gender identity, including one trans man, one gender fluid participant, one female, one androgynous participant, one non-binary participant, and one who reported having no preferred gender identity. Most participants also reported their ethnicity, with four identifying as Indigenous, two as white/Caucasian, one as Black, one as Welsh Métis, one as Japanese Canadian, and one as Métis. The remaining two participants did not report their ethnicity. These demographics are summarized in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Participant Demographics

Pronouns	Gender identity	Ethnicity	Current age	Age at time of police contact
He/him	Trans man		25	8; multiple
She/her		Indigenous	27	25; multiple
They/them	Gender fluid		16	14; multiple
She/her	Female	Black	21	Multiple
Any	Androgynous	Indigenous	27	16, 18, multiple
She/they	Non-binary	Indigenous	16	14; multiple
Any		White	25	
She/her/they/them		White	19	

She/her		Indigenous	20
None	No preferred gender identity	Welsh Métis	26
He/him		Japanese/Canadian	21
They/them		Métis	18

Data Generation and Analysis

In keeping with YPAR and ECIT, data generation and analysis occurred concurrently (Butterfield, 2005; MacDonald, 2012). The most common data generation strategies used with the ECIT are interviews and focus groups (Butterfield et al., 2005). As such, both interviews and a focus group were utilized for the current study and were audio recorded and transcribed to align with Butterfield and colleagues' credibility checks (2009). In addition to journaling throughout the development and implementation of the current study, I also began memoing transcripts as they were completed (Mayan, 2009). Following the completion of the focus group, I worked with youth co-researchers to develop a coding framework, which we used to analyze the focus group data together. I then applied this framework independently to analyze the individual interview data. Due to the participatory nature of the study and the novelty of the overall research approach, the concurrent data generation and analysis procedures are discussed as they unfolded in the following sections.

Data Generation

Individual Interviews. As mentioned earlier, youth had the opportunity to be involved in the participatory components of the study following the initial individual interviews. The interview guide, structured by ECIT, was therefore generated in consultation with CHEW staff to maintain participatory principles at this developmental stage of the current study.

Following the development of the interview guide, semi-structured interviews were completed with individual youth participants to elicit critical incident and wish list items relevant

to Objectives One and Two of the current study (i.e., young people's past experiences with police and relevant impacts on their present functioning). In keeping with Butterfield and colleagues' (2009) methodology, individual interviews began with a contextual question to provide background information and situate the data. The contextual question prompted youth to describe an encounter they had with police that they deemed to be significant. Because a "significant" encounter was likely to be different for each participant, this term was intentionally left undefined for youth to interpret so that they could share information they deemed to be most relevant and meaningful to them. Allowing youth to define and select their encounter is essential from an ethical standpoint and in considering the participatory and emancipatory framework of the study. Youth who have experienced criminal-legal involvement may have a history of being guided or directed to share information in potentially harmful ways through both power differentials in youth-adult encounters in general and within the criminal-legal system (Quinn, 2015; Suleiman et al., 2021). Furthermore, the ECIT-guided interview was structured to allow for the reasoning behind each youth's choice to become evident throughout the interview process; therefore, establishing strict criteria for what was considered "significant" was both unnecessary and would have gone against the theoretical underpinnings of this research. Following a prompt to describe a significant encounter, the individual interview questions are included below. The complete individual interview guide is included in Appendix F.

1. Tell me about the encounter that you had with police, what happened?

    a. When did it happen?

    b. Where did it happen?

2. What makes this encounter significant to you?

3. What happened before this encounter – e.g., what were you doing earlier that day?

4. What happened after the encounter with police – e.g., what was the outcome?

5. What did the police officer(s) do in the encounter that you found to be *helpful*?

    a. How did that help/why was it helpful?

6. What did the police officer(s) do in the encounter that you found made it more *difficult* (or *hindered* the encounter)?

    a. How did that hinder it/why did that make it more difficult?

7. What did you do in the encounter that you feel helped the situation?

    a. How did that help/why was it helpful?

8. What did you do in the encounter that you feel made the situation more difficult?

    a. How did that hinder it/why did that make it more difficult?

9. How do you feel about the encounter overall?

10. How do you think that encounter impacted your life today?

11. We've talked about what things were helpful in the encounter and what things may have made it more difficult.

    a. [If they've had more than one police encounter] – how does this encounter compare to other encounters that you have had with police?

        i. What makes this encounter stand out amongst others?

        ii. Is there anything you wish would have been done differently in this encounter? If so, what?

        iii. If so, how might that have changed the outcome of the encounter?

    b. [If this is their only encounter to date] – If you could change something about this encounter (e.g., something you wish would have happened differently), what would you change?

   i. Why would you change that aspect of it?

   ii. How do you think that might have changed the outcome?

Youth participants could also memo and/or review their own transcripts in keeping with

participatory member checking procedures and credibility checks relevant to both YPAR and the

ECIT. I explained this process to youth who were unfamiliar with it, and began involving

interested youth more directly by discussing the research approach with them at this stage.

   Youth who expressed interest in memoing and/or reviewing their transcripts provided me

with their email address and permission to email them a password-protected document

containing their transcript. Youth could also access printed transcripts in person and I arranged

times in which I was present and available on-site at CHEW to facilitate this process and ensure

the process was accessible to all interested youth. This participatory member-checking step was

to be conducted following individual interviews and prior to the focus group, in alignment with

the ECIT, to allow youth to reflect and potentially generate further discussion points. Through

this process, youth could be involved in developing the focus group guide and determining what

they wanted to discuss relevant to Objective 3 (i.e., police system evolution) in a subsequent

group conversation.

   Following individual interviews, I communicated with youth who had expressed interest

in reviewing their transcripts via email. I arranged various times to be on-site at CHEW with the

youths' transcripts, both through scheduled meetings and drop-in hours. Some youth expressed

having last minute scheduling changes that prevented them from attending, and others did not

reply to emails or attend scheduled meetings or drop-in times and this step therefore did not

proceed. As such, analysis of the individual interview data took place following the focus group

and is discussed below. All youth who participated in individual interviews were invited to

participate in the subsequent focus group regardless of whether they reviewed/memoed their transcripts or wanted to be involved in the more direct participatory research components of the study.

Focus Group. Just as I had contacted interested youth from individual interviews via email about transcript review, I also contacted youth who had expressed interest in participating in the focus group during their individual interview. After only hearing back from one of the youth, I began to realize that conducting a focus group or any subsequent interviews with the same youth (as suggested by Butterfield and colleagues, 2009) was unlikely. In developing the study and engaging in conversations with CHEW staff prior to its implementation, we had discussed the possibility that youth who participated in the initial individual interviews may not be able to continue participating in the study. Rather, I needed to lean towards the YPAR components of the study and adapt the process to fit the needs, interests, and capacity of youth participants and co-researchers.

As with the sample size overall, we did not want to set a required number of participants for the focus group. However, one of the credibility checks I had initially planned to include (i.e., iteratively analyzing the interviews to inform the focus group and determine exhaustiveness) was likely to be removed as the initial youth participants seemed unlikely at this stage to return for this process (Butterfield et al., 2009). Since this exhaustiveness step is included in the ECIT to replace the need for pre-established sample size guidelines, I wondered how I could address this gap if different youth participated in the focus group. From my experience as a research assistant on other qualitative projects, I recalled general guidelines relevant to conducting focus groups, in which researchers often suggested having five to eight participants (Krueger & Casey, 2014). This guideline is set with the idea that a focus group should have enough participants to aid in

the flow of conversation and idea-sharing, but not so many that some participants are prevented from sharing. I therefore hoped to have between five and eight participants.

In light of this potential change, I engaged in ongoing conversations with CHEW staff and youth who were present during non-research-related drop-in programming to collaboratively brainstorm how to go about organizing a focus group that would still be in keeping with the principles of both YPAR and the ECIT, even if some of the components had to be adapted. I created a preliminary focus group guide after my own review of the individual interview transcripts, and asked youth and staff informally about any questions they might want to include ahead of time so that we would at least have a starting point if all new youth chose to participate. Since individual interviews primarily addressed Objectives 1 and 2, the focus group guide needed to be centred around Objective 3.

The contextual question used in individual interviews was developed to aid youth in identifying critical incidents within the context of specific police encounters. This step was more personal to the youth, and was never intended to be directly incorporated into the group discussion, even if the same youth were to participate. Rather, if the same youth participated, they would have had an opportunity to review and reflect on their answers in the individual interview transcripts, both to add anything they had missed and wanted to include, and also to prepare them for the broader discussion relevant to Objective 3 (i.e., to understand youths' perspectives on police system evolution). Instead, I developed some preliminary focus group questions in consultation with my research supervisor, CHEW staff and youth, with the plan to have youth lead the discussion and add further questions at the time of the focus group. We also determined that, should any of those participants be interested in the iterative process of data generation and analysis, they could still do so following the focus group, with the focus group

data. The preliminary focus group questions are listed below and the full focus group guide is provided in Appendix G.

- What do you want police to know about you? /what do you think is helpful for police to know about you? /what do you think is helpful for police to know about youth in general?

- What needs do police help you meet/have they helped you meet? What needs do you wish they helped you meet?

- What services do you think police should offer youth? /how do you think police should help/support youth? /what services do you wish police provided for youth?

- What kinds of training/experience do you think police should have to work with youth?

- What could police do to make you think more positively of them/trust them?

- What could police do to make you feel safe?

- If you could redesign the police system, what would you change? How would that change things? /what would that look like? "Dream world" scenario?

In consultation with CHEW staff, I eventually decided that it would be best to schedule the focus group at a time in which CHEW was typically busy so that we could advertise it ahead of time, but also have a backup option to include youth who had not planned to attend ahead of time, should they be interested on the day-of. I informed youth who had participated in individual interviews via email in case they were still interested, and with the support of staff, informed other youth while they were accessing in-person services in the weeks leading up to the focus group. We also informed the initial youth participants that they could review their transcripts at the scheduled time if they were still interested in doing so, and emphasized that this was not a requirement to ensure it was communicated that ongoing participation was still on their terms.

To facilitate this process, we picked a Wednesday afternoon in February, 2023. CHEW hosted 'chosen family dinners' on Wednesday evenings at the time, in which community members would come together and share a donated meal. The afternoons leading up to these dinners were typically times when many youth accessed CHEW's services and when numerous youth were present on site at the same time. This was especially the case in the winter months, as cold weather presented additional challenges for youth and more youth typically accessed services at that time. Although we debated conducting the focus group in the context of the dinner, we decided it should be kept separate to ensure youth did not feel pressured to participate when attending CHEW to access a meal. Therefore, we set aside a few hours on a Wednesday afternoon, leaving it flexible so that youth could review transcripts before the focus group, and to give youth time to arrive or access services before and after the focus group as needed.

One of the six youth who had participated in an individual interview was present on the scheduled day of the focus group, and six new youth also elected to participate. Since six of the seven focus group participants were new to the study, I needed to explain the overall study and go through the consent process with each of them individually before beginning the focus group. In keeping with participatory principles, the youth who had participated in the individual interview discussed the broader study with some of the new participants while I prepared information letters and consent forms; this initial youth participant did not want to participate in the analysis procedures, but wanted to be involved by helping to explain the study to others. Each new participant then had time to review the information letter and consent form independently, and to go through them with me and ask questions before the focus group began. The prior participant was also provided with a new consent form to participate in the focus group

given that the parameters of focus group participation are distinct from those of individual interviews.

Once these procedures were complete, we realized that the larger room we had planned to use for the focus group was no longer available, and the youth collaboratively decided to squeeze into a much smaller room and problem-solve by rearranging so we could all fit together. Although this initially felt like another hiccup in the process of the study, it was an opportunity for myself and the youth to connect with one another and share some laughter as we tried to rearrange the room and prepare for the conversation. All eight of us (the 7 participants and myself) ended up huddled together in a small office space, with some folks sitting on the floor and others sharing a couch or office chair. Again, although this was somewhat unexpected and not in keeping with the more structured approaches I was accustomed to, this created a sense of community and felt like the right approach for this study.

In discussing police system reform, which was a deeply personal topic to each of the youth, many big emotions accompanied us in that small room. However, rather than make it feel overwhelming or crowded, sharing space in the small room seemed to bring everyone together. Even when youth had differing opinions and dialogue became somewhat heated, youth recognized this and took time to check in with one another, make sure everyone was comfortable, and take pause when needed. During one heated dialogue in which a few youth were beginning to interrupt one another, another youth took a moment to recentre the conversation and allow everyone a moment to calm down before continuing. One participant had to leave part way through the focus group due to a pre-scheduled ride home, and all other youth paused the conversation to offer her hugs and make sure she was doing okay before she left. Similarly, one youth became emotional in talking about childhood abuse she had experienced,

which contextualized a later story she told about police. Again, all youth paused, offered hugs, and asked what she needed from the group before continuing.

Data Analysis

Following the completion of the focus group, two youth expressed an interest in learning more about the research process and data analysis. We arranged a time to meet at CHEW once I had transcribed the focus group audio, and began learning and analyzing together. I explained the steps of the ECIT and the three of us discussed how to go about applying the ECIT approach to the data in front of us. We decided to follow Butterfield and colleagues' (2009) framework for categorizing the data by critical incidents and wish-list items. We found some coloured markers and wrote out how each of the critical incidents and wish-list items would be categorized in a different colour before we began reading through the transcript together. This framework is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Critical Incident Categorization Framework.

Critical Incident Categories	Description
Youth – helpful	Actions that youth have taken that helped in interactions with police.
Youth – hindering/not helpful	Actions that youth have taken that hindered their interactions with police. This also includes beliefs that youth hold about police that may perpetuate negative interactions with police.
Police – helpful	Actions that police have taken that helped in interactions with youth.
Police – hindering/perpetuating	Actions that police have taken that have hindered their interactions with youth and/or perpetuated negative interactions with youth.

Wish-List Items	Factors that youth wish had been different in encounters they have had with police. This also includes factors youth wish would be different about the police in general.

After establishing the initial framework and associated colour-coding process, we read through the transcript together and began colour-coding accordingly. The youth simultaneously began to describe and apply labels to some of the broader themes we were seeing and asked if they could read through and colour-code, and if I could add comments noting the themes they identified. We realized that doing this on paper was going to be difficult, so we switched from the printed transcript to my laptop and worked through a few pages while huddled around the laptop. At the youths' suggestion, we then met on two additional occasions via Zoom while working in a shared Google Document to finish categorizing and organizing the focus group data. Because the focus group was primarily centred around Objective 3 (i.e., to understand youths' perspectives on police system evolution) the findings from the focus group are presented in the "future" section below.

As mentioned above, Objectives 1 and 2 (i.e., to understand youths' perspectives on their previous encounters with police and how those encounters impacted their current level of involvement with the criminal-legal system and their overall wellbeing) were primarily addressed in individual interviews. Rather than applying the specific categories/themes to the individual interview transcripts, I instead only used the initial colour-coded categorization system developed in tandem with the two youth co-researchers. This categorization system also directly corresponded with the individual interview questions. This allowed me to identify the critical incidents and wish-list items in the individual interviews within a framework that was youth-led, without applying additional labels to the youths' words beyond what they identified

themselves. The identification of critical incidents and wish-list items was more straightforward than the focus group analysis, as the individual interviews were structured to elicit these incidents individually in the context of each encounter and thus left little room for interpretation of which critical incident they were speaking to. As such, findings are presented structured by the past, present, future framework, with those from individual interviews included in the past and present sections, and those from both individual interviews and the focus group included in the future section.

Chapter 4: Findings

Past

Each individual interview began by asking youth to describe a significant encounter they had with police. In keeping with Butterfield and colleagues' (2009) iteration of the ECIT (as outlined in Table 1), this contextual question was used to support participants in identifying specific critical incidents (i.e., helping and hindering actions taken by police and youth) within each police encounter. Although I had initially planned to have each youth participant describe only one significant encounter with police, five of the six youths described more than one significant encounter, with four youths describing three encounters each, and one youth describing eight. These significant encounters were used to contextualize the critical incidents youth identified. Within the 28 total police encounters, youth identified 65 critical incidents, or actions they and police officers took within each encounter that youth felt either helped or hindered the outcome of the encounter. Specifically, across all 28 police encounters, youth identified a total of three *youth—helpful* critical incidents, four *youth—hindering* critical incidents, 10 *police—helpful* critical incidents, and 48 *police—hindering* critical incidents. Critical incidents were counted based on youths' description of each incident and are presented in Table 4 below along with youths' descriptive quotes of each critical incident. Rather than presenting this information in narrative form, youth quotes are presented in table format by critical incident category to preserve the words of the youth without imposing my own voice. Some of my own interpretations are presented following the table to summarize this section.

Table 4. Critical incidents, presented in youths' own words.

Critical Incident Categories	Youth quotes

| Youth – helpful | "I didn't even try to, you know, resist them… Nothing whatsoever…If anything, I was quiet most of the time."

"But I don't blame them, you know? It's like, people make mistakes…I'm just grateful that I was okay…they were solid enough to say that I wasn't the person they were looking for"

"I backed off, I was walking away from the situation." |
|---|---|
| Youth – hindering/not helpful | "A couple of times I had gotten angry and I had to yell to get, like, just to get their attention. I don't like yelling."

"I was like, screaming, yelling at cops, like getting in a cop's face."

"I didn't help the situation. I mocked him the entire time, I spat at him; I made it more difficult for myself. But I was also mad at the time that I was body slammed - not the people who were physically throwing punches at the cops, but me. I was 5'5 and I was like maybe 120 pounds. I was a tiny little thing."

"They tracked me down to buying bear mace and a gun. I can admit that, yes, I did buy bear mace, but the gun I bought was a BB fake, something showy to try and protect myself because like, guns are scary. Like, [I'm the] biggest supporter of gun control. Guns are a no. So I just got myself a fake to hide in, you know, my boots, in case anything bad ever happens to me. Because Edmonton is a dangerous city." |
| Police – helpful | "They were good at dealing with kids, they kept me calm. Talking to me, you know, calmly, you know, reassuring me… It put a bit of faith in police, I always wanted to thank them. I always wanted to find out who the officers were."

"In the moment I didn't want them to save me, but now I'm thankful they did."

"[The officer] kept me safe…Always checked in. He dealt with a lot of bullshit with me and I feel bad about that. But no, he |

was always nice and willing to talk. He wouldn't let me hurt myself."

"They weren't as aggressive [as other officers]."

"I did have another interaction with a female officer, which is kinda rare. She was very nice. She bought me a Christmas present, she was so sweet."

"She actually talked to me like I was a human being. Sometimes just acknowledging someone is all you really need to do to gain that respect…They consider you to be human beings, like actually ask you questions, like how would this come to be? And stuff like, not handcuff type shit, you know?"

"They were like 'this is what happens when you do this [huffing paint]' and they weren't making fun of me... But they were trying to like, make me see how ridiculous I was being. They said that if that's the way I want my life to go, that's how it'll go. It's like, it's entirely up to me, but I was like super high…It was something I thought about for a long time afterwards because I wasn't able to think of it at the time. And it was significant because I could remember it all and I could remember that it was not like a situation where I felt like I was being controlled or made fun of or made 'less than.' They were just trying to talk to me. They just went away, they walked away, they took the can of whatever I was huffing, the aerosol."

"They weren't forceful at all. And they weren't like... Mean. They were like... I felt like they felt bad for me. And that was significant too. They were willing to tell me what I was doing wrong. And that was entirely my choice, and that it was up to me. And it was like at the time I wasn't... I didn't have anybody like that."

"I mean like, gravel in my face, being handcuffed as I'm being shouted at, wasn't [helpful], you know? I mean, hey, he offered me a 1/2 drunken bottle of water to wash my face with."

	"The one good encounter I had was when I was picked up by a guy in a paddy wagon and a guy in a truck. I was sitting in a park field smoking weed. I was considered a missing person, so they needed to pick me up and take me somewhere safe and the one guy was like, 'stop smoking weed' and 'you know you can get arrested for that? I could arrest you right here on the spot' and the other guy was like 'yo, [name], relax. I got this,' he sat down and he's like, 'you can keep smoking your weed. So what's going on?' And it's like... I like cops like that… [someone that treats you like...] a human. With respect. Somebody who treats me with the dignity I deserve."
Police – hindering/perpetuating	"Not letting me say goodbye to my brother." "No, [my brother] got left behind. Which I am mad at them for. Because he was only three when I got taken away. And my dog." "The HELP [Human-centred Engagement and Liaison Partnership] Unit with the Edmonton Police… I don't know, they just kind of ditched me. I don't really know... they were trying to support me and then all of a sudden they just weren't... a support. They wouldn't answer my calls, they wouldn't answer my emails, they wouldn't answer my worker's messages or anything…They just kind of, they just went 'poof', they just disappeared." "The first, what comes out of his mouth is, like, 'we can either do this the easy way or the hard way.'" "He puts me in the back of EMS, he handcuffs me with his handcuffs to one side of the railing, and then they, because he didn't have another set of handcuffs he… used one of the slings to tie my other wrist around the [other railing]. And he [the police officer] did that, not the EMS. And see, when I'm in that state [actively suicidal], when people get aggressive or get like that with me, it makes me get even worse in that state. Like, I get to the point where I almost, like, I almost start hyperventilating."

"Basically I got dragged from inside the library, where the bathrooms are, basically over to the front by the [coffee shop] there. And she, the peace officer, was trying to like, get my foot to trip me to the ground to get me to go to the ground. Like I was standing upright and she was trying to get me to put me on the ground, and I wouldn't, and so she tried kicking my foot out… and then all of a sudden, I get thrown to the ground and got told that's assault on a peace officer. I didn't even fuckin' touch the fuckin' chick…I got charged with assault on a peace officer and then when it came down to going to court, they somehow [gesturing with air quotes] 'lost the footage' of me assaulting the peace officer and it [the case] got thrown out."

"And he didn't even give me time to even try to calm, like, you know, like not at all."

"I don't know, that's probably really sad to say, but whatever, just knowing that [a female police officer is present], 'cause I know a few people... and *girls*, that have, you know…let's just say they had to deal with a guy cop. And yeah, that's all I'm going to say. But just like, knowing that [a female police officer is present], is a relief."

"I told the police officer I didn't feel safe in that household and it went completely ignored."

"He [the police officer] cussed a couple of times while we were having conversations."

"He turned towards me, [and said] 'just let me talk' and then he turned back to my mom before I even finished."

"The one time when my mom was kind of yelling and stuff, he just flat out told her to shut up."

"As a youth, my mom…had more verbal power [to the police officers] when it comes to explaining a situation."

"They would tell me like, 'Oh yeah, well, I heard this from so and so, and this from so and so.' Okay well... I don't feel safe

here. I have like a couple of bruises and lacerations but... they didn't really...catch on, I guess."

"He sat us all down at the table and told us, 'Hey, I'm just here to drop off your kid and, if there is any problems…call back.' I called him three more times that night after he had left ...It went straight to voicemail."

"He never actually took time to have a conversation, like, a full, proper conversation, without being in a rush to leave…It was just quick, like, 'hey yeah, here's my card' and then he left."

"He wasn't really…listening."

"I was having a really bad anxiety attack. And after that, the police said 'no, I'm just going to leave you there' or something. You know 'you belong in a mental hospital…' You don't talk to someone like that when they're having a panic attack…that's just adding to…the fire more, you know? Making the person more angry."

"His *first* thing was 'you belong in a mental hospital.'"

"[The police officer said] 'Oh, I read all about you on your file.' Apparently they have access to our files when we're in Children's Services and stuff, but a lot of that's a bunch of lies anyways, so I just felt like I was discriminated due to my past and my disabilities."

"There was one time they should have called an ambulance on me. Because I was suicidal. And nope, they put me in the back of the [police car]...The protocol for my program [residential group home] was if I get suicidal, you immediately ambulance to the hospital. And the police would follow behind…No, they put me in the little frickin cage in the back. And that was just - I already have trauma being locked up in tiny rooms and they didn't give a shit…I'm big. It was hard to get in and out. It wasn't very accessible for me. And I almost fell a couple times."

"I'm in…Children's Services, they [abusive foster parents] should have been charged. Like they [attending police officers] didn't investigate, they just looked at my file and they were like 'yup, it's her.' That was my very first charge…I think it was battery or something, destruction of property. You can't judge a book by it's cover. Like, you don't know. I was abused all my life…But you know, it was me who got that charge. When I wasn't even – I was just scared and defending myself. I even had marks on my chest."

"I showed them [police officers], I had, like, claw marks from them [foster parents] scratching me. They [police officers] didn't take a picture...I told them to take a picture. They didn't do nothing…And I asked them to take a picture to document it and they were like 'no, she probably did it herself.'"

"Just the way they looked at you and the way…their tone when they talked to you was like 'oh you're just scum,' type of shit, you know? And it's like, just because we have mental illness or shit going on in our lives does not mean that's what we are."

"I feel like they're not equipped to deal with someone with severe brain damage."

"I have been woken up…with the cops bursting in through my friend's door, and they thought I was her boyfriend…I guess he was doing dangerous things, and it's like, wrong place, wrong time, you know. I didn't know. I feel like they should've told me at least."

"I can only tell you that this happened and I'm just going to include this because like I don't remember because I was super fucked up. I had one [police encounter] with my friend when I was 20, I think, and we had done a bunch of these pills, and I blacked out. And apparently they woke me up in Corona Station, and my pants were around my ankles, and they brought me to the Boyle Street and I was like wandering around and I was being harassed by the police, but I don't know how I was being harassed or in what way."

"I just have…memories of them stopping me and…asking me my name and confusing me with somebody else….But I don't remember those ones clearly because every time I got arrested I was super fucked up [using substances]."

"I was body slammed by a cop…He was a full grown man. He was 6'3". He had at least a hundred pounds on me. And I was body slammed to the ground. My face was scattered up. I didn't fall straight, I fell and slid. I cannot feel anything on the left side of my face. Kind of going from my eyebrow to, like, my jawline, all of it's numb."

"[After being body slammed by the police officer] They were trying to charge me with assault against an officer. If it wasn't for the news footage [of the assault], I would have been charged with assault against an officer."

"[Following the assault by a police officer] And I never got an apology from the cop, he was never discharged, he's still working."

"What started the [Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls] protest…what made it go violent is some [Indigenous] woman that was there got in the cops' face saying 'if I was white then you would try and find me'. They made it racial and... cops have big egos. They, they think they're the toughest, biggest guys in the world. So he slammed her. So many women got arrested with assault against an officer that day."

"He approached it aggressively and I responded aggressively. [If he hadn't approached it aggressively], I wouldn't have responded aggressively. [If he hadn't responded aggressively] I would have left. If he told us that we needed to leave because the riots are breaking loose, we would have left."

"You know how hard it is to talk in front of 300 people who feel the same pain [attendees at a protest for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls]? Like I had to stop what I was saying midway through because I got too emotional.

And then not even half an hour later, these cops are being in my face telling me I need to leave and they're saying this dumb protest needs to go down now. And I'm like 'dumb?' You…lose your mom, you lose your sister, you lose your daughter, you lose your family in front of you…I was at the protest, like... really personal, but my mother is a missing and murdered Indigenous woman. That protest meant a lot to me. I was there and I was preaching my heart out. I took the stand. I gave the story. It was supposed to be a beautiful event to commemorate these women that we've lost, and police couldn't stop being pigs for four hours, so we could commemorate women that we've lost that they couldn't help us find."

"It's only been white cops that's done it [been violent] to me. The Indigenous cops, the Asian cops, the Black cops there were like politely trying to move the Elders along. They were being really helpful with our community…It was this, like, little crew of eight of them [white police officers]. They were hanging out the whole protest. They were cracking jokes the whole time."

"...they dropped the charges, like, as soon as the footage was sent in, they had somebody analyze it and they were like 'yikes'...They [police officers] sat me down with my lawyer and my lawyer was like, 'well, you're getting off Scot free' and I was like 'I am?' and she was like, 'yeah, you are. Footage came out that you did nothing' ...The officer…who did it was present for the situation and…he didn't apologize, he was like, 'I'll show you to the door.' He's still working. He should have been discharged. That event should have gotten him discharged and it never did. And that's what pisses me off. This is something that I didn't do that I was being blamed for."

"And he threw me…He slammed me against the car and threw me in for a fucking drug possession charge. He was the cop that checked me as well [at the protest]...The cop that body checked me was the same cop who arrested me for a drug possession charge like 3 months prior."

"When I was caught with my drug possession charge, he [the cop] was laughing at me. Like he was on the radio with his

friend and they were laughing and he was like 'oh, just picked up another'."

"It was 4 grams of weed because I have migraines that I can't control, and weed helps me calm down. I have a fucking medical card saying that I can smoke underage…I couldn't find my medical card in time and I couldn't show it to him and I tried, I was like 'it's in my bag somewhere, I forgot,' and he's like 'stop talking to me, you just, you're just crazy, you're all cracked up on drugs, aren't you?' And I was like 'what?'…You find 4 grams of weed on me and you start assuming I do meth and heroin? It's great."

"I was sitting at a bus stop with my friend. I did not know that [my friend] just stole liquor. Cops were looking for him. He's an average run-of-the-mill looking white guy. They thought I was him. They mistook me for him. I'm a Native woman. He's a white guy. I was just with him."

"They calmly arrested him and I got slammed up against glass. He [my friend] was like 'you fucking pigs, you swines', and I was like [gesturing that she had her hands up]. And I was slammed…Like hands up, like I had my smoke in my hand, I was still dragging it, and I was like, 'I mean no harm'. He told me to get down and I was like, 'I'm not fucking getting on the ground, I'm in shorts, no'…And then it was resisting arrest because I wouldn't get on the ground."

"The cop that was working on my mother's case, she was discharged because she told me that my mother overdosed...My mother...was hog-capped in her apartment…Which I don't know if you know what that means, but it's a bunch of, somebody goes in and breaks in, puts a bunch of fentanyl in you. And leaves. Through a needle…That happened to my mother and the cop who found her looked me dead in the eyes and said that she overdosed. Walked in, took a look at the place, 'your mother overdosed', and chalked it up to that. And we had to hire a private investigator to look into it deeper because we knew that it wasn't like her, it was horrible. It was the first time the justice system failed me [age 12]."

"He [the private investigator] found evidence that it was an unsolved murder…After the investigator found out, cops got back on the case. They spent two years looking. It's still unsolved and now…it's been three years they've been looking. They haven't found anything. But our investigator has found everything. All of the evidence pointing to who it is, like…and the police are like 'Oh well, we didn't see that the first time around' and he's like 'you didn't look the first time around'. It's just another dead Native woman to you. She's just a statistic to them."

"Cops don't care. And it's horrid because that's how they treat Indigenous women. I'm a homeless youth and we get treated just the same. My friend…she was stabbed and it took the cops 30 minutes to get there…I had…I took advanced first aid. I had her leg tied, I was holding pressure. She was overdosing at the same time, she was losing blood. It was a horrible scene…Having to put Naloxone in her as I was trying to hold down her wound, it was just...Cops took 30 minutes, the ambulance took 45…If none of us were experienced and knew what we were doing she would have died there."

"Two youths got into a fight, one of them got stabbed in front of the youth shelter on Whyte Ave. Police come...Sitting there twiddling their fingers…there's been macing incidents [at the youth shelter], took cops 30 minutes to arrive. Stabbing… 30 minutes to 45. They don't care for us. We're numbers to them. And we just want to be seen as people."

"SWAT was called on me because I was considered mentally unstable at the time and they were scared of me going on a 'homicidal rage' because of anger issues and just mental problems I have. And since I do have a history of violence with these lovely police officers, they called SWAT…I was trying to go back to my group home and they stopped me there. They waited for me there. [imitating yelling] SWAT, 'get on the ground, get on the fucking ground'. And I'm sitting there, I'm high as shit and I'm like 'yo?' They were like [imitating yelling] 'where are your weapons? Drop your weapons,' and I was like '...OK,'...

> "Being in the back of a paddy wagon sucks…Man, they, I swear they were purposely swerving and drifting the cars, because in the back of the paddy wagon, you're handcuffed behind your back, you can't stable yourself out. No seats, no seatbelts, no straps. You're just there, and it's this metal box."
>
> "They were swerving turns and I was like hitting the sides of the wall…And it was like, it was a hot summer night. That box was hot and sweaty. Like, they didn't stick me in the one in the middle, they stuck me in the one in the end and I could hear them laughing up front."

Critical Incidents

Youth - Helpful. As evidenced by the above quotes, the actions youth took that they reported to have helped in their encounters with police were primarily passive or non-reactive approaches. In particular, they discussed not resisting or fighting back while being arrested or interacting with police officers, not being upset about being wrongly identified by police officers, and walking away from an aggressive police officer rather than engaging further.

Youth - Hindering/Not helpful. In discussing actions youth took that they felt were unhelpful or that made their encounters with police officers more difficult, they identified reactive behaviours they engaged in following prior negative encounters with police, including yelling at officers after they felt they were not being listened to, or otherwise becoming aggressive with officers (e.g., mocking, spitting at them). One youth also identified having engaged in some illegal activities such as purchasing bear mace and an imitation firearm, which she felt she needed for protection due to the dangers of the area she lived in, but recognized that this put her at risk for further police contact.

Notably, the unhelpful actions youth identified in examining their own behaviour all occurred in the context of having experienced previous negative encounters with the legal system

and with police in particular. No youth identified hindering behaviours they engaged in during their first encounter with police. This can be best summarized by a critical incident later noted as a police hindering action, in which the youth stated "He approached it aggressively and I responded aggressively."

Police - Helpful. Youth also identified several actions police officers had taken that they found to be helpful. One youth talked about growing up in an abusive household and police officers accompanying Children's Services to remove them from the home when they were a child. Although they identified several unhelpful actions police officers took in this encounter (discussed below), they noted that, overall, the responding officers were "good at dealing with kids," and helped to keep them calm and reassure them. Other youth discussed encounters with police officers that occurred in the context of their own mental health crises. One youth noted that an officer had kept them safe and prevented them from hurting themselves; another noted that an officer checked in with her following a mental health crisis and even brought her a Christmas present.

Two youths talked about encounters in which they were using substances and rather than penalize them for such use, responding police officers engaged with them in what they found to be more helpful ways. In one instance, a youth mentioned that although the officers laughed at "how ridiculous" he was being, he felt that they helped him gain self-awareness rather than speaking condescendingly to him. Another youth shared an encounter in which two officers responded to her smoking weed alone in a field. She noted that although the first officer began by telling her to stop and threatening to arrest her, the second officer instead sat down with her and asked her what was going on.

The other actions youth identified police officers to have taken that were helpful were primarily relevant to the officers being less harmful than other officers they encountered. They described officers who were less aggressive than previous officers; officers who talked to them "like I was a human being" and treated them with "dignity" and "respect." One youth noted that, in the context of one significant encounter with police, the only helpful action the officer took was to offer her "a half drunken bottle of water" to wash her face with after he had "body slammed" her to the ground.

Police - Hindering/Perpetuating. Youth identified numerous actions that police took which they found to be hindering or unhelpful in the police encounters they experienced. Some of these actions were reported by youth who had also experienced Children's Services involvement and had been exposed to abusive home environments. One youth noted that, although police supported his removal from an abusive home, he was separated both from his younger brother and from his family dog without the opportunity to say goodbye. He further noted that he could not recall being offered any explanation at the time, although he noted that since the encounter was a number of years prior, he may not have remembered and thus did not identify the lack of explanation as a critical incident in that encounter.

Another youth who had involvement with Children's Services noted that they felt their concerns and reports of abuse were "ignored" by police officers and that the officer prioritized hearing the abusive adult parent's perspective over their own. They noted that even though they had physical injuries that they tried to show the police officer, along with expressing that they felt unsafe at home, their concerns went unheard. Further, after saying that the youth could contact the officer if any additional concerns arose and provided his phone number, the youth reported that their calls went unanswered and they continued to be stuck in an abusive home

environment. Another youth similarly reported that although he initially received support from an Edmonton Police unit, this support suddenly ceased without explanation or a transition to other services.

One youth reported that she had experienced physical abuse from her foster parents and that when she tried to defend herself, police officers listened to her foster parents rather than her, and she was charged for the incident rather than her foster parents. Like the other youth, she reported that she had physical evidence of the abuse and even asked responding officers to photograph scratches on her body as evidence, and the officers responded that she had probably harmed herself. Further, she reported that responding officers accessed her Children's Services file and she felt that officers discriminated against her by responding to what was included in her file rather than the incident occurring at that time. She added that she had Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder and that she felt police were not equipped to deal with someone who had "severe brain damage," noting that she also felt they overlooked her history of abuse and trauma she had experienced.

Some of the youth discussed encounters in which police were responding to mental health crises, and noted that the officers' approach immediately set the tone upon arrival at the scene. One youth explained that an officer began by staying "we can either do this the easy way or the hard way" when they were experiencing suicidal ideation and had to be taken to the emergency department. They explained that, when they are anxious and agitated, as they were when experiencing suicidal intent, they often speak with their hands more than usual and gesture quite overtly. They explained that the responding officers seemed to view this behaviour as being erratic and a threat to their safety, rather than an anxiety response, and therefore responded aggressively and handcuffed them in the back of the ambulance. Another youth emphasized the

importance of the responding officers' initial statement, noting that an officer made a comment about her belonging in a "mental hospital" when responding to a mental health crisis. This youth also described an encounter in which police officers took her to the hospital in the "cage" in the back of a police car rather than an ambulance following her experiencing suicidal ideation. She added that she had previous traumatic experiences of being locked in small spaces when growing up in an abusive home environment, and mentioned that she was "big", making the back of the police car feel inaccessible for her, which further added to the encounter being traumatic.

Another youth discussed various encounters in which they were mistaken for someone else by police officers, and noted that, because they were heavily using substances at the time, they did not recall details of the interactions and thus felt it was unfair to include them in detail. However, they reported one encounter in which they woke up to police breaking into their friend's apartment and holding a gun to their face after thinking they were someone else. Another youth discussed a similar incident in which police officers claimed to have mixed her (a young Indigenous woman) up with her friend (a young white man). She noted that despite her friend having stolen alcohol (which she was unaware of at the time) and him yelling at the officers, he was arrested calmly, while she was "slammed up against glass" of the police car and arrested aggressively after refusing to kneel because she was wearing shorts and did not want to hurt her knees on the pavement. She noted that she was not aggressive in the encounter and even put her hands up to show that she was calm and not a threat.

One youth described several negative incidents with police officers and noted that her first negative encounter with the legal system (at age 12) occurred when her mother's death was wrongly ruled to be an overdose. She noted that it was later determined, by a private investigator hired by the family, that her mother had been killed. As a result, she noted that the initial police

officer was discharged following evidence being found that it was indeed a suspicious death. She reported that police officers reopened her mother's case with the new evidence, but that an arrest had still not been made. This early, life-changing encounter impacted her in numerous ways (discussed below) and was exacerbated by subsequent harmful encounters with police, both in terms of the action and inaction they took in responding to a range of situations.

Present

Building on the understanding of youths' perspectives on their previous encounters with police, as described with the critical incidents above, this section contains quotes from individual interviews in which youth discussed their perspectives on how these encounters impacted (a) their current level of involvement with the criminal-legal system and (b) the impacts of such involvement on their overall wellbeing. Because this section is an adaptation/addition to the original ECIT methodology, the youths' discussion of these areas of impact are integrated in narrative form rather than a table. These findings are still presented primarily in the youths' own words.

One youth reported that both negative and positive experiences with police had impacted their desire to become a police officer, or to work with children. He shared that "*It made me realize later on, like closer to today, how much I wanted to work with kids or with at-risk people, help people get over their barriers or get out of unsafe situations or unwell situations.*" He added that after a unit of the Edmonton Police Service had suddenly stopped helping him, *"that's why I don't really like the HELP Unit. But if I worked in it, I would help change it."* He noted that, prior to being abandoned by the HELP Unit, *"I've gotten told by like 3 different cops now that I should work for the HELP Unit once I've gotten my mental health under control and I'm stable for a period of time…Or be a counsellor."*

One of the youth who had experienced significant physical and emotional abuse at home stated:

It impacted my mental health because it gave me a sense of death. Like...it didn't feel like I was safe with the police... It felt like, if I had called in and said, 'hey, my mom, she's being abusive. I need to be able to get out of here,' that I'd just be blown off again and that I couldn't really trust them. But yeah, it made me feel like... that I wasn't really safe.

In explaining this feeling further, they added: "*I'm not angry, but I'm disappointed. I'm very disappointed. It would have saved me a lot of abuse, if he [the police officer] had actually listened. But other than that... it's just disappointing.*" They then connected the impacts both on their criminal-legal involvement and view of police, as well as their overall wellbeing:

It gave me a more...sense of independence from the police, I guess. Kind of like, considering a little bit of rebellion against them. Um, but other than that... It increased my self-harm quite a bit. I ended up going to the hospital about a week later [after trying to report parental abuse to the police and the officer not listening to their concerns]. But yeah... it wasn't really a long-term effect, in a sense... But it kind of was. Because I don't feel like I can trust, like, the police system, like, any of that. It all seems way too... I don't know...I don't how to explain it...Like it...it wore down on me quite a bit. I couldn't sleep because of it. It started on...Me getting addicted to cigarettes and weed, and then I tried some other stuff but never really stuck to it.

They added:

It [the interaction with police] affected my mental health a lot. It's very difficult to try and get, like, police officers to listen to me and even just, you know, engage in conversations...Well, it gives me more of a shield when I'm talking to them. It makes me

more defensive about opening up to them, and actually trying, because I've tried multiple times and nothing was really done, so I just, you know, give up on that because I don't really want to waste my time on something that's not going to get resolved...I felt kind of useless. Like I didn't really...couldn't really do anything, because it wasn't just me who was being abused, it was my other siblings as well. And, I couldn't really say anything on their part because with how they're... like, how my mom's affected them, they don't like talking to police officers, let alone other people like strangers, is a big... like a big 'no' to them.

Finally, this young person noted that, had police intervened when they first tried to get help at home, they felt:

It would have gotten us away from her [abusive mother]. It would have stopped most of that abuse. That abuse would have ended and I would have been able to have that time to get out of smoking, to actually do schooling, because I was going for...three, maybe two days a week...to a public school, and that's not good. I was failing, no matter how hard I tried. No matter how many tests I passed, going only those days, I would have failed. My mental health actually drained my schooling because of that interaction, because I knew I was... I wanted to die and I was really, really determined to do it. And I mean, there was nothing holding me back so, yeah. I just quit on school and, kind of tried to wait it out a bit. But I feel like, there would have been a lot more options for me and my siblings if we had actually had access to a secure group home and just, resources in general, because we were living off of ramen noodles and bread. Like we had tea. But it was a shitty kind.

When asked what they wished would have happened differently in their encounter with police, another young person stated, "*I don't think there's anything I really could do to change*

the outcome. They have the power. I had none. Their say was absolute." In discussing how that

powerless feeling and lack of support impacted her, she stated:

> *Well people just thought I was a crazy person, nobody... I was homeless after that. I was*
>
> *homeless for like... I was homeless on the streets for two weeks, at the [youth emergency]*
>
> *shelter after that because the foster parents, well, nobody could find a place for me. All*
>
> *because the police lied…Well, they didn't do enough research. They didn't do their*
>
> *investigation properly…And after that I've been…I was homeless for two weeks and I*
>
> *was homeless in the hospital for three months, 2 weeks, and three days…No agency*
>
> *wanted to put hands on me. They put me out cause it was winter time, they wanted to keep*
>
> *me somewhere warm so I was stuck in the hospital.*

This young person added that, due to being on probation in addition to experiencing

homelessness, they were also unable to get a job for a period of time, which further contributed

to their difficulties overall.

One young person stated *"I got banned from the library and a bunch of other shit."* In

attempting to pinpoint exactly why their encounters with police were impactful to them, they

became tearful and said *"I mean, all I know is that it had somewhat of an impact on my life. I*

obviously…because you know…like just talking about it, it's just like…" They then expressed

that they wanted to move on to avoid becoming more visibly upset.

Although one youth felt that his encounters with the police were not overly negative, he

noted that others' perceptions of police made him feel like he had to be *"police averse…because*

I don't want people targeting me." He explained:

> *When you call the cops, people call you a rat and then they like, ostracize you and then*
>
> *they like...you'll be the target of the gossip and people will stop hanging out with you.*

> *There's like, a whole mentality…I think that every job is necessary in some way. But it's like... there's a whole…It's a mentality about calling the cops that's built off from a whole mentality about cops. And there's like a very 'us versus them' [attitude]…It's like the people I know, even here, it's like people who are at-risk and part of the inner city, you know? Are police averse, even if they don't come off as it.*

He added:

> *Like, I do drugs, so naturally I would be police averse, you know? Especially when you have drugs on you. But I won't act like it, you know? It would just be like, 'nobody calls the cops around me. And I won't call cops.' You know? It's like… It would be like an unspoken agreement that we'd have. Cause as soon as somebody calls the cops for whatever reason… It would [be] like 'don't talk to them, they're a fuckin' rat', like 'you want to make plans to go get this person?' you know? 'Let's go [jump] them, you know? And it's like, some people just get over that shit, you know…Yeah, they'll be like 'snitches get stitches', you know…And it's like...People will shout 'rat' at you when you're in the streets, like people, it's stuff I've seen people do too…And Remand is even worse….It's kind of like the continuance of that whole, like, mentality from inmates and how they're police averse and when they come out, they spread it around. Do you know what I mean?*

In addition to discussing how his perception of the police was impacted more by the people around him than by his own encounters with police, he noted that the one encounter in which officers discouraged him from huffing paint had a positive effect on his life:

> *It's...made me think, like, I think about that and what he said, he's like 'you can choose to do that. It's your choice, but it's your life'. You know? Like if you do that, that's how your life is going to turn out…And then I use that for…a lot of other things...I think it was*

really crucial for my year in Remand because I had to deal with a lot of anger. And I had

to realize that I was responsible for a lot of the crazy shit that happened to me in my life...

Because I didn't see the situation clearly for what it was, and I didn't recognize the

warning signs that were getting me to that point and [I] didn't take any of those chances

of getting out of that, and I just let those things happen to me because I was confusing

'stable and safe' with 'fun and interesting.' Because it was something new. You know?

One young person explained that *"I was wrongfully incarcerated and...they were trying*

to charge me with assault against an officer." She explained that this was relevant to the protest

discussed above and noted that a news organization had captured footage of the police brutality

at the event, that was unreleased, in which she could be seen being "body slammed" by the

police officer, and other police officers could be seen engaging in violent acts against other

protestors as well. In discussing further details of the protest, she noted

Like that happened in front of her [auntie's] 11 year old daughter. Like I feel like shit!

My cousin watched me and her mom and her brother and her uncle get arrested that

day...You know? And then cops are saying they needed to call Child Protective Services

to get the kid. And my auntie's like, 'you're not taking my baby' and he's like, 'well,

you're getting arrested and so is your husband, ma'am'.

She also noted that she had experienced several encounters in which police would typically be

expected to help and protect her, such as having her house broken into, or a friend being stabbed:

I don't trust the cops. Like if I get stabbed, I trust myself better at handling it than police

officers would. If I'm getting my house broken into, I would probably do a better job at

handling it than they would...It's like the biggest American thing to like, joke about not

calling the cops, but after like, I've had my house broken into...an hour fucking wait for

police officers to show up as I'm hyperventilating and hiding under my fucking bed

because I'm scared I'm gonna get murdered…I've had my house broken into twice. The

first time, I was terrified. The second time, I was sitting in my room with a baseball bat,

ready. That's fucked. I didn't even…call the cops. He didn't take anything, I came

downstairs and I started fucking screaming and he left. Got shit…dealt with better than

the first time. The first time the guy broke in and stole like $3000 worth of shit from me.

Nothing was done about it; Cops are... cops are supposed to stop people that do

that…I'm really resentful.

In discussing how these encounters impacted her view of the legal system, she stated:

I see the justice system as a fucking joke since then. The police in Edmonton are a fucking

joke… A lot of the times officers are just really disappointing. Like, I've been lashed at,

I've been mocked, I've been body checked more times than I've had good encounters with

cops.

Although she noted that her own behaviour contributed to some of her negative encounters with

police, she stated that her behaviour escalated in response to theirs:

They fucked up my life. It's hard to get a job when you have a record. It's going to get

cleared when I'm 18, but still. Every time I get arrested for something little, they treat it

like something major because of my record, and that's not how it should be, I'm not that

person. I wouldn't have acted aggressively if they didn't act aggressively. I wouldn't be a

problem if they weren't a problem. It's just, it's horrid. I'm a person too…Like, you have

somewhere to go at the end of the day, I do too.

Finally, this young person summarized her overall feelings about her encounters with police and

their subsequent impacts by stating:

Cops need to understand that we're people too. We're humans, we have rights. We're not just statistics, we're not just numbers. We are people. We might be not doing the best in our lives. We might be in a dark chapter, but everyone has their battles they need to overcome. You don't get to judge me because you didn't...because you didn't go [through] what I went through. You get body slammed by a cop three times. You get mocked and laughed at and made fun of for the past like 4 years of my life by police. And you not have a resentment against them.

Future

Individual Interviews

During individual interviews, youth identified critical incidents that occurred within previous encounters they had with police and the impacts of such encounters on their current involvement with the criminal-legal system and their overall wellbeing. In addition, each youth identified wish-list items, or things they wished would have been different when interacting with police. Although these discussions began with the individual officers youth encountered, much of their wish-list items were broader and expanded to systemic issues they hoped could be addressed going forward. Youths' wish-list items from individual interviews are shared below.

The youth who was removed from his abusive family home wished that he would not have been separated from his brother and his dog. He also wished that he would have been given an opportunity to say goodbye to his brother and dog before being separated from them.

The young person handcuffed by police who responded to a mental health crisis stated, *"even giving me...a little bit...like a couple minutes to actually...calm down or somewhat calm down"* would have helped the situation. They added:

If someone's wanting to become a cop…they should, you know…teach the basic [skill so] that…cops wouldn't be so…judgmental of people, or, you know…Because, honestly…it just seems like all cops, especially…towards Indigenous [people]…it seems like they just use the same approach with everybody and that's…basically going on a power trip…And that's not…getting them anywhere, and that's not getting the person that they're dealing with anywhere…If anything, it's just making it worse.

They emphasized the importance of police officers responding to the person in front of them:

Even if… it just goes through your head once…just to like, remember that…everybody handles and deals with whatever…differently, and so some…strategies might work for some people, but then…sometimes other people, it might not. And just to remember that.

They also described the benefit of having a female police officer respond:

I just think having a woman's presence…and especially…for some women, you know that…could be terrif[ied with only a male officer]…it all depends…having that… maybe it might not make things a lot better, but, for me anyway…I'm not so nervous…having a woman's presence there.

In summarizing what they wished would have been different in the police encounters they experienced, this young person added that they wished the officers *"just [had] an open mind. Best way I can say that."*

One of the youths whose police encounters were relevant to Children's Service involvement noted that, although it was not specific to police, they wished that there would be better youth-centred services in general:

Mainly because group homes are really difficult to get into, and shelters weren't really safe for a kid my age at the time…And with CFS [Child and Family Services] being like,

so jam packed with kids... The waiting time period would take forever. Took…about eight

months for me to get into a group home.

In discussing the officer's response to the abuse this youth was experiencing at home, she said:

I wish he would have actually taken me seriously. I wish he would have looked deeper

into it. I wish he would have actually had a conversation with me, like, sat down, and let

me point out where I was bruised and what happened, and actually, me being able to

get…my phone back from my mom, because I had a video, I had photos, I had everything.

And…it would have helped me out a lot. It would have helped out my siblings.

They noted that their wish-list items went beyond just the individual officer:

I feel like the police system should do more, to actually looking into what youth say…If

they did more to support youth, I feel like there would be more of a stable economy. It

would mean that more kids are getting out of mental abuse and physical abuse, so they'd

be more in a healthy environment so they could actually do schooling and get a job,

improve, and not only improve in the economy, but…themselves as well… I feel like

people who live in traumatic…surroundings, they seem to let go [of] most of what they

want to do because they're not really let to do that, I guess. But everyone's different, like,

there's so many different signs of abuse…And the aftereffects [of abuse]…I feel like

should be…looked into more.

One young person wished the police officer who responded when they were experiencing

a mental health crisis would have begun by asking them questions:

Like, 'do you need to go to the hospital? Do you need to talk to someone? Do you have a

therapist? Do you have a psychiatrist?'

Like the other youth who reported that police failed to investigate the abuse they were

experiencing at home, this youth stated:

> *Investigation, asked me questions, [tried] to figure out what really went down. Like they*
>
> *literally just took me and I was gone…there was no…they didn't even ask what*
>
> *happened…If…any kind of child in care says they're being abused, it should be*
>
> *investigated. No matter what, no matter their past or anything.*

Similar to the other youth who stated that the need for police reform goes beyond the individual

police officers, one young person added:

> *It would come from the government training these people how to do, how to work, like –*
>
> *mental health has been around for years... forever actually. And I fear for some people*
>
> *that have mental health worse than…me, that they're going to get, like, shot up and shit…*
>
> *And also, part of the problem is we don't do background checks on police officers,*
>
> *like…deep background checks…mental health checks. We just take anyone we can get*
>
> *pretty much. Like, like we get people from the army that have PTSD [posttraumatic stress*
>
> *disorder] becoming police officers that didn't get help for the PTSD. We don't need that*
>
> *in our cities... our polices… I think…they need to get help themselves if they're going to...*
>
> *act out…I just think we should be careful who we...hire. You may be a war veteran, but*
>
> *then…did you deal with that stuff that happened in the war? Or happened at other*
>
> *places? Because that's also trauma you're putting on other people.*

The young person who noted that she had occasionally become aggressive with police

officers in response to their aggressive behaviour stated that she believed the solution to

improving youth-police interactions to be fairly simple, starting with a conversation:

> *A conversation. I'm SO willing to talk things out. I'm so willing to, like…tell me what I did wrong. I'm one of those people. Tell me what I did wrong. Tell me why I'm getting arrested. Tell me, just please tell me…why you're doing this to me. He had no reason to body slam me. Yeah, I might have gotten into his face and gotten emotional, but he was a fully grown man. I was a 14 year old girl; I was a baby. I was a child…I wouldn't have gotten so mad, so violent. I saw him there and it…made me really mad, but him talking [to]me [and explaining] that the protest is getting violent and he needed people to move instead of just saying 'pack your shit and go'… would have been better.*

She also discussed that what she wished would have been different went beyond the individual officers she interacted with:

> *Because they've been trained in this system for, like, God knows how long and the system's a little flawed. But, you know, if somewhere in their training was like 'treat people like people too'. Not all criminals are the most nastiest people you've ever met…doesn't seem too hard to treat a person like a person, but God…Didn't know it was that hard. Like come on guys.*

She added:

> *It's only very few cops that ruin the representation of everybody. It just sucks…I wish more…cops were…like the guy who picked me up when I was a missing person, he was really nice. He treated me like a person. He understood that I had struggles, he did too. They weren't the same, but they were struggles. And he understood. It's just nice to be treated like a person, and since it's just, you know…a lot of cops have these huge egos that I don't like.*

Focus Group

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After developing the broad framework to categorize critical incidents and wish-list items described during individual interviews (presented above), the two youth co-researchers created subcategories within each critical incident type to describe and present the focus group findings in even more descriptive detail. Due to the future-focused nature of the focus group guide, as outlined in Objective 3, much of the findings are clustered within the *wish-list* item category, with many of the descriptive subcategories falling within the *police–hindering/perpetuating* category, as youth reflected on actions police had taken that they would like to change going forward. Although the youth initially intended to include both the *youth–helpful* and *police–helpful* categories, they did not end up coding any of the focus group data within these categories and the categories are thus not included in the findings shared below. In addition to the initial critical incident categories based on the ECIT, the youth co-researchers added a category called "evidentiary statements" in which they identified, "statements related to how the police system needs to change overall and related factors that may impact such change."

Therefore, focus group findings are presented in Table 5 below according to four categories, consisting of *youth–hindering/not helpful* (orange text), *police hindering/perpetuating* (red text)*, wish-list items* (pink text)*,* and *evidentiary statements* (purple text)*.* The youth co-researchers noted that quotes categorized as *youth–hindering/not helpful* were often related to beliefs youth held following police actions that were hindering/perpetuating; therefore, some quotes contain both red and orange text to demonstrate this association. All subcategories are in the words of the two youth co-researchers, with solid bullet points representing the primary subcategories and empty bullet points representing more specific themes within each subcategory. All descriptive quotes are from youth who participated in the focus group and are

colour-coded according to the youth co-researchers' framework. Quotes that are single-spaced

and alternate between standard text and italics indicate a back-and-forth dialogue between youth.

Table 5. Focus group findings, presented in the words of youth co-researchers and focus group

participants.

Critical Incident Categories	Subcategories	Descriptive quotes
Youth – hindering/not helpful	• Distrust/mistrust (also connected to police not being trustworthy) (also connected to beliefs youth hold about police)	[Any other thoughts on what you want police to know about you?] "The minimal possible amount of information…The more police know about you the more they're able to fuck you over." "Being a minority myself, I do feel like the law's not on my side and the police aren't people that are on my side… I felt even more, as a Black woman, like a double edged sword. Being a woman, being Black, I just feel…like it's, like we could do better honestly. We have the money, we have the resources, we're just not…We [as society] SHOULD be doing better" "We couldn't call an ambulance for a girl who got pepper sprayed by random gang activity once because they were going - and she was like, 16 mind you - and they, because they were going to send the cops and they didn't want to get fucking interrogated all night. She would rather go blind - which she was at the moment, I don't know if her vision returned - than deal with the cops." "As a youth, one of the most traumatic things in learning the world around us, and the police being included in that, is having been raised to constantly give our hopes up that they're out there to protect us."

Police – hindering/ perpetuating	• Police ignorance ○ Lack of training	"I want them to know that I'm a person too" "I don't know why their training teaches them that anyone they interact with isn't deserving of the same degree of respect.. The minute that they think they're committing a crime, but even people who are in the depths of psychosis, even people who are in their absolute worst place, are still people. They're still deserving of compassion. They're still deserving of respect."
	• Abuse of power ○ Using access to information to cause harm (i.e., health or criminal records) ○ Lack of police oversight ○ Prioritizing private interests over public safety (i.e., not serving the public the way it's supposed to) ○ Dealing with things that should not be within police purview ○ Systemic stagnation (i.e., having money and resources and not allocating it to improve the current system)	"I have a file on Children's Services and the police officers have access to our files. So they looked up my file, my diagnosis… *"Yo, same!"* "And they treat you like you're unhuman when they know you have like a diagnosis…you're just an animal pretty much" "Who's there to police the police when we need it." "They don't.. Money talks, that's the thing. And then we find out that the police officers that shot [friend's name], his name's [friend's name] his dad is high up in the police force. And he's trying to cover it up." "Here's the only other alternative. You are wealthy enough. And come from wealthy enough family, that they are actually there to protect you." "People use the police as like, their own like personal like security system. And I'm like, well, that's not what the police are for and this is just adding to the problem of why police are assholes." "They protect power, privilege, property, and not people."

	• Dehumanizing behaviour ○ Racism ○ Prioritizing positions of power over the abused (i.e., listening to adults over children; perpetrators over victims; men over women) ○ Sexism/misandry/misogyny ○ Homophobia ○ Classism ○ Mental health stigma ○ Invading individual privacy	"I pretty much think, like, Native people…they get discriminated [against] all the time." "I agree that…Indigenous populations particularly get treated incredibly poorly by Canadian police." "Because some cops, they get away with like, beating up native people" *"And Black people!"* "What they need to know about youth is that…we youth, young folk - we don't know as much as we think we do. But we know more than *they* think we do." "A lot of the time that leads into like, like cops trusting like abusive parents more just because they like, can give a good speech or something, you know, or because they're older." "This is why I can't go to my mom's place is because she literally charged me even though she has a pervert ass boyfriend, like at her place. And they don't believe me. But I just keep trying to tell them." "That is a situation that comes up a lot that they do deal with, right? Like dealing with abusive parents and then, talking to them and being like, 'Oh, well, we think they're good, they had a good chat with us.'" "They just don't believe anything anyone younger says. Ever." "I think it applies to both ends, but the way it's perceived is really different. If it's like…an AFAB [assigned female at birth] person, or someone who presents more fem, and they're

being emotional, they're like, 'Oh, it's just the estrogen or whatever', right?...Whereas if it's a masc person, they're like, 'Oh, you're mentally ill and weird', because men aren't... stereotypically men aren't allowed to be emotional. And if you're doing that, there must be something wrong with you."

"The cops treat minority communities like a punching bag…"
"That's because that's what they're designed to do…"
"But the issue comes when those minority communities are literally the people who are reaching out for help."

"I feel like this applies to everyone but youth [especially] in terms of appearing emotional or more emotional...mental illness and emotion do not equal stupidity. I've seen people in very emotional and fragile states be talked down to [by police officers] like they are a child, simply because they have gone through something traumatizing and are processing it."
"They don't respond to us…"
"No, not us poor people."

"You'll have like an extremely rich kid who will graffiti a bunch of stuff or whatever, like the same sort of stuff you'd get arrested for as a poor person…"
"Like just gets away with it."
"Their mom will show up and say, 'Oh, well, you can't be bringing my kid in for that. I'll just give them a good scolding' or whatever."

"Don't check my waistband if I tell you I don't have underwear on."

	• Excessive violence	"I had a friend…He literally got his head kicked in by a police officer. And now he has…a big ass bump on his head." "I have this... one of my dear friends…He looks Native…He's not Native, he's Vietnamese...He got shot in the back three times by this officer [and killed]. And this officer got promoted literally two weeks ago to be a chief investigator." "They literally attacked the smallest girl and they literally, and it was snowing out and it was like really like fucking like slippery and then they literally attacked her and like threw her on the ground."
	• Bias and Negligence - Picking and choosing when and where to respond based on biases, and practicing incomprehensive triage.	"So one of the issues is…police showing up to things that they're not supposed to deal with. And not showing up to things that are actual crimes that have been committed." "I believe it's because they triage which cases they're going to respond to, not by severity of crime, but by location. They're going to respond to rich neighborhoods because those are the people they're protecting and they're going to respond to domestic abuse and native and poor regions because those are the people they want to go in and fuck up." "They'll come sooner to like, some homeless person…that's taking a little too long in a public bathroom… Than they'll come to like an actual murder…Especially if that murder is happening in a poor neighborhood."
Wish-List Items	• Defunding the police and bolstering alternative responses ○ Separate structure to deal with youth	"Police should not be interacting with non-violent crime." "We should spend all the money that we're paying [the police] to beat up poor people and just give it to poor people."

	involved in non-violent crime ○ Expand social support integration with policing services (i.e., include more therapists and social workers)	"I don't think that the police should be dealing with like, family stuff to begin with, but if they're going to be they should, like, I don't know…" *"Bring a therapist!"* "Have a social worker on staff!" "If I saw all those cops were doing all of those shit, start doing completely different things, going into the poor neighborhoods, no weapons, nothing on them, just being human beings, genuinely trying to help people, offering services, doing basically the exact opposite of everything they do. I would trust them. I would respect them." "If they were walking around in like downtown with Naloxone kits, no weapons on them." *"And like baskets of food and water."*
	● Modifying police training ○ Also training of 911 operators (respond more promptly and appropriately in crisis situations) ○ Pro-Serve type training (how to deal with intoxicated people appropriately); addiction training ○ Naloxone training ○ De-escalation training (i.e., focus on de-escalation and social supports rather than conflict-oriented police	"They should have different structures and different strictures." "[911] operators need better training." "And then they spend five minutes taking all of your goddamn information and then you have to tell it to three more fucking people afterwards…They don't just pass it along. It doesn't go on a computer. What are they asking for it for?" "There should be no involvement with the police for having…a mental breakdown, there should be no involvement with the police." "Homeless people shouldn't be getting picked up by the police. Do you know what should be happening to homeless people? With like, outside organizations that are not state funded? Those people should be approached by outreach services, and like social workers who go out into the public to find people and try to help them, rather than…having social workers who sit in offices in the fucking Alberta Works building, doing nothing, twiddling their thumbs, and going home with a full fucking paycheck, when they've turned

		training; less violence)	down seven people for support, just because they don't have a permanent fucking address."

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Law degrees (better knowledge of laws they are enforcing)
How to deal with people experiencing abuse
How to deal with mental health
Not being trained to dehumanize people
De-stigmatization and de-stereotyping training

</td><td>

"And having better training for those other jobs."

"More resources makes people better able to respond. More resources in the right locations, makes people better able to... work, makes the system work better."

"The Hope Mission van? Those things are awesome. If we had that but all everywhere and way more trained, and way more funded, that would be great."

"Fucking law degrees. And this isn't just for youth, this is working with anyone. A police officer should have a law degree. Period."
"They should actually know what they are supposed to be enforcing."
"Because sometimes they enforce too much."
"Or they don't enforce the right things!"

"Anger management, impulse control, and empathy."

"They should be mandated [to attend] therapy."

"They should have really in-depth training on how to de-escalate a situation before anything else."

"Another piece of training that is absolutely vitally necessary for police – and this goes back to the, like, mandated therapy – they have to have some kind of, like, specifically addiction therapy or addiction treatment training. Not only when interacting with the public but also for when interacting with other police officers."

"Why are they not trained to use Naloxone kits? Why are not every single one of them carrying around a Naloxone kit?"

"Again, this goes back to like learning how to deescalate and stuff, learning how to just talk to
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		someone who's intoxicated in a way that will like settle them down." *"On that point, bartenders are better trained to deal with intoxicated people."* "Just being a native person, like personally, like I just feel like judged. Like all the time, like, 'oh native people are so fucking like, whatever'. Like on drugs or something, but I'm not…So I would like to change that [police stereotyping Native people]" *"Yeah, and poor people."* "I would have less issues with the police if they treated rich people the same way that they treated poor people."
	• Police reform (system level) ○ Having police systems be less controlled by businesses (actually serve public interest vs private interest) ○ Mandatory police therapy (so they can deal with their own issues and not take them out on the public) ○ Get rid of SROs (i.e., many reports show SROs increase criminalization of youth, particularly those with mental health issues)	"I wish they would stand up. I wish we would have police that weren't owned by the oligarchy." "I wish they wouldn't discriminate." "They need to belong to the people for the people." "There isn't a way to fix the current police system that exists…There really isn't because the entire structure in which it's designed is just inherently flawed. You would have to completely tear it down and then build up a new system like that… That actually focuses on violent crime, people getting attacked…" "The only applicable answer when you're asking 'how do we make our police system better?', is, look outside of the current box that it's within and start acting there because the system is not designed to act there." "Another thing to give you a more direct answer is to focus on your topic of youth. Get them [police officers] out of schools, so they have no reason to be there. They're making everything worse…"

	○ Fair and equal treatment regardless of circumstance	*"Specifically in schools, SROs have absolutely no purpose being in schools."* "Yeah, literally no reason." *"If there is a crime that needs a police response in a school, then there should be a priority response."* "But having SROs in schools makes police deal with things that aren't police problems." "First time I saw an SRO in school, I was terrified, didn't know why the cops were here. They shouldn't be." "Honestly, the best suggestion I have is get the police out of dealing with youth and have a youth service." "With the exception of violent crime, police should not be interacting with youth."
	● When looking for problems, look at problems that are actually important.	"If they were looking for solutions and not problems." "And if they were looking for the right problems."
Evidentiary Statements	● Acknowledging systemic change requires change of other systems too? And being realistic in that we can't scrap the whole police system as it exists, but can work to improve it?	"I think one of the issues is that you can't actually talk about correcting a system or giving constructive feedback to a system when that system is so heavily tethered into so many other things…Like it's all well and good to suggest that police don't... they exclusively deal with violent crime... But in order for them to be able to do that, you have to have structures in place that deal with non-violent crime. Or deal with loitering or deal with other things that are against the law… We can't talk about the system without talking about the structure around the system."

Critical Incidents

Although both *youth–helpful and police–helpful* were included within the youths'

categorization framework, they did not code any focus group data within these categories.

Therefore, the results from the remaining critical incident categories (i.e., *youth–hindering/not helpful, police–hindering/perpetuating), wish-list items*, and the youth-added category of *evidentiary statements* are summarized below.

Youth–Hindering/Not Helpful. Within this category, the youth co-researchers identified actions youth took or beliefs youth held that may have made their interactions with police more difficult. The only subcategory they identified here was "distrust/mistrust" and they added that the information coded within this subcategory was a result of police actions in which police themselves were "not trustworthy." They included beliefs such as youth being skeptical of police or hesitant to seek police help, and added that this hesitancy was rooted in previous negative encounters with police. Therefore, included in this category were explanations youth provided for their lack of trust in police, such as having previous experiences with police that led them to believe police would use information against them, and thus only wanting police to have access to minimal information.

Police–Hindering/Perpetuating. Within this category, youth identified a range of actions police had taken (both directly and indirectly) that they believed to have hindered or perpetuated negative interactions with youth. Because the focus group did not begin with a contextual question (i.e., having the youth think of a specific encounter) like in the individual interviews, the information they shared during the focus group was not only connected to interactions they had experienced. Rather, youth also discussed their general perceptions of police (often based on their own experiences), as well as police interactions they had witnessed, or those that impacted their family and/or friends. They identified "police ignorance" as a general subcategory, which included their belief that police often did not treat individuals with

whom they interacted with the respect they deserve. They felt that this lack of respect was due to a lack of sufficient training.

Relevant to a lack of training, the youth identified other areas in which police lack of training could impact how individual officers enacted their roles. Namely, they felt that "abuse of power" was a significant issue, and identified numerous relevant subcategories, including using information such as health or criminal records to cause harm by judging youth from their records before interacting with them meaningfully face-to-face. This subcategory was also discussed in the individual interviews, in which youth expressed concern that police officers had made judgments about them based on their Children's Services involvement or criminal records rather than responding to them appropriately in the context of the interaction at the time. Within the abuse of power subcategory, youth also identified the lack of police oversight as a significant issue, and noted that police officers and police systems more broadly often seemed to prioritize private over public interests, respond to calls that were outside of their purview (e.g., mental health), and improperly allocate funds, which they argued led to "systemic stagnation" and a lack of necessary change.

Many police actions that were directly connected to youths' experiences were categorized under "dehumanizing behaviour." Such behaviours included racism, "prioritizing positions of power over the abused," (e.g., listening to abusive parents over youth; this was also identified in individual interviews), sexism/misandry/misogyny, homophobia, classism, mental health stigma, and invading personal privacy. They identified numerous encounters in which police officers had demonstrated these harmful attitudes, which resulted in them engaging in harmful and "dehumanizing behaviour." This was a common topic in both individual interviews and the focus group, as youth shared many stories relevant to feeling discriminated against by police due to a

range of factors including their mental health, racial background, sexual orientation and gender identity, age, perceived social status and living circumstances, financial circumstances, substance use, and so forth.

In discussing the dehumanizing experiences they had had with police, youth also identified instances in which police officers had used "excessive violence." Although the youth initially placed this subcategory under dehumanizing behaviours, they then decided it should have its own subcategory to emphasize the significance of the issue. Within this subcategory, they discussed several instances in which either themselves or their friends had encountered significant police violence, including one incident in which a youth participant noted that her friend had been shot and killed by police. She did not discuss any details of a subsequent investigation, but reported that the officer was still working following the officer-involved shooting and had recently been promoted. In both individual interviews and the focus group, youth described situations in which they had directly and indirectly experienced excessive violence at the hands of police, and that they felt the police were not held accountable for their actions and instead often continued working or were even promoted, as was the case in the story this youth shared.

In the context of discussing police discrimination, several of the youth discussed an incident that had recently happened at CHEW, which staff reported as well. They explained that a number of individuals were harassing young people trying to access services at CHEW and were lingering near the building entrance, making youth feel unsafe. They explained that CHEW primarily serves sexual and gender minority youth facing barriers, and that they have pride flags and other affirming and inclusive decor in the windows, but that, on several occasions, their windows had been smashed in or the entrance had been otherwise vandalized. They noted that,

on this occasion in which individuals were physically present and harassing them, they called the police and asked for help and the police were "dismissive" and never showed up. They even said that the 911 operator told them to "act more scared" if they were to call back to increase the likelihood of their calling being prioritized. Outside of the focus group, staff members also shared this story, and noted that, although they thought a police vehicle may have driven by, no one attended the scene. In the focus group, they described the incident as a hate crime and many of the youth reported feeling frustrated, disappointed, and scared that police were unwilling to respond to their report. One youth concluded by saying, "the unfortunate thing is, even if we hadn't been in a minority…" and another youth finished their sentence with, "...they still wouldn't have done anything," expressing their overall lack of faith in the police.

The final subcategory under *police–hindering/perpetuating* was labeled as "bias and negligence." Here, youth identified incidents in which they felt police had selectively responded to calls, leading to over-policing in some areas, and under-policing in others. They reported that police often had a heavier presence in "poor" neighbourhoods and those with larger racialized populations than they did in wealthier and more white neighbourhoods. This made the youth feel that police were ready to respond and criminalize otherwise non-criminal behaviours in the context of unstable housing and other social determinants of health (e.g., mental health, substance use, etc.), while also taking much longer to respond to calls for help in those areas.

Wish-List Items. Youth discussed factors they would like to change both about individual interactions with police officers, as well as police systems more broadly. In doing so, they acknowledged that because "there isn't a way to fix the current police system that exists," such changes would likely take time. They added that proposing such big changes from the outset might make it less likely for smaller progress to be made in the meantime and noted "a

system cannot be built from nothing…destroying something without having something else in place to replace it...will not be of benefit to anyone." They added, "and before they start taking anything away from the police, because yes, the police still provide a vital service to our society… As much as they…don't actually do their jobs, they do provide a vital service. That system is designed to do things and occasionally it does." Although another youth initially disagreed and argued, "What do they do? That's good for us?" The youth then agreed that "destroying it outright is a bad idea…because destroying anything outright leaves nothing in its place." Another youth then added, "you should just…not completely destroy the police force, but like, you should change a lot of shit." And with that, a discussion began about what they would like to change.

Regarding what changes the youth would like to make, they noted that the potential changes fall into a few different subcategories. Namely, "defunding the police and bolstering alternative responses," which could include expanding social support and better integrating such supports within policing services (e.g., involving more therapists and social workers, especially for mental health and family-related incidents), creating more clearly distinct structures to deal with youth involved in violent vs non-violent crime, and having police not carry weapons.

They also discussed ideas relevant to "modifying police training" both for frontline officers and teams, but also for 911 operators and other police-adjacent services to ensure appropriate response times and approaches. They noted that "bartenders have better training" than many police officers when it comes to interacting with people who use substances, and thus, police should receive better training, both relevant to harm reduction and trauma-informed policing approaches. Similarly, they emphasized the importance of police engaging in more de-escalation training, especially relevant to conflict-oriented police training; they explained that

they felt many policing models were conflict-oriented and reactive rather than de-escalation-oriented and centred around providing social support. Similarly, they emphasized the importance of recognizing and responding appropriately to abuse (e.g., abusive parents or caregivers toward youth in their care; intimate partner violence), engaging in training around "de-stigmatization and de-stereotyping" and "not being trained to dehumanize people." Some youth felt that, to meet these goals, police officers should have both theoretical and practical training, noting that some officers do not seem to have a solid enough grasp on the laws they are "supposed to be enforcing."

Beyond defunding the police and modifying police training, they also noted that more "system-level police reform" needed to occur. In particular, they felt that police systems were often too influenced by politics and private interests, rather than serving the public as intended. Some youth shared that issues with frontline officers started from poor hiring and management practices, and suggested that police officers be mandated to attend therapy "so they can deal with their own issues and not take them out on the public." Many youth also expressed their perspective that police presence in schools often criminalizes youth unnecessarily, noting "having SROs [school resource officers] in schools makes police deal with things that aren't police problems." They noted that violent crimes that require a police response in schools should receive "a priority response" and that otherwise, officers are best left out of the education system. One youth even described feeling "terrified" from seeing police officers in her school. Another youth added, "honestly, the best suggestion I have is get the police out of dealing with youth and have a youth service." They then discussed some of the social supports mentioned earlier, and noted that a youth-specific social service to meet those needs would be preferred to

having a police response, or even a youth-specific police response. Many of the youth agreed and

stated "with the exception of violent crime, police should not be interacting with youth."

Finally, youth stated that they felt police systems would be better overall "if they were

looking for solutions and not problems…and if they were looking for the right problems. They

concluded with an evidentiary statement,

> *I think one of the issues is that you can't actually talk about correcting a system or giving*
>
> *constructive feedback to a system when that system is so heavily tethered into so many*
>
> *other things…Like it's all well and good to suggest that police don't... they exclusively*
>
> *deal with violent crime... But in order for them to be able to do that, you have to have*
>
> *structures in place that deal with non-violent crime. Or deal with loitering or deal with*
>
> *other things that are against the law… We can't talk about the system without talking*
>
> *about the structure around the system.*

Chapter 5: Discussion

The results from this study demonstrate the extensive benefits of engaging youth in research. Throughout this study, youth identified significant encounters they had with police, how these encounters impacted their overall wellbeing and their current level of involvement with the criminal-legal system, and what they wished would be different, both in how police respond to youth, but also how police respond to people more generally. In their statement to justify the extension of general human rights to children and youth, the UNCRC (1989) stated:

> everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth therein, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

The youth who participated in the current study perfectly explicated these principles of the UNCRC in the following dialogue about how police should treat people:

> I am a human being too.
>
> All of us!
>
> Treat everyone like people.
>
> We're all human beings.

The youth participants and co-researchers of this study recognized the importance of their human rights and those of others, and contextualized these rights relevant to policing practices. Although the principles of the UNCRC (1989) were not directly included in the current study in any way, the findings naturally indicate how many of these rights are not being addressed in current Canadian policing practices. As summarized by UNICEF (n.d.-a, para. 5), the following four areas are emphasized in the UNCRC (1989).

- Protection (e.g., from abuse, exploitation and harmful substances)

- Provision (e.g., for education, health care and an adequate standard of living)

- Participation (e.g., listening to children's views and respecting their evolving capacities)

- Specific protections and provisions for vulnerable populations such as Indigenous children and children with disabilities.

Regarding *protection*, youth participants indicated that although police are meant to protect the public, they often felt that their role in doing so was selective. Specifically, they reported that police often seemed to over-police certain areas while under-policing others, especially relevant to racial discrimination and wealth disparities. This issue is well-documented in the literature, especially in the context of Indigenous and other racialized communities in Canada (McKay, 2021). In addition to not feeling they could rely on police to respond when needed, youth also expressed concern that police did not enact their role of protecting children and youth from abuse, specifically from parental and caregiver abuse. This finding could be relevant in considering the broader literature, in which it is well-documented that youth are often hesitant to disclose abuse to police or other professionals (Ungar et al., 2009). Ensuring that youth feel heard and supported is essential in getting them the support they need (Iwasaki, 2015).

Relevant to ensuring youth have proper support is the next principle, *provision*. Although police are not directly responsible for providing youth with access to education, healthcare, and adequate standards of living (UNICEF, n.d.-a), they do play a large role in what that care might look like. For example, youth reported concerns with the presence of police in schools, as they felt that this could criminalize students unnecessarily. This is another well-documented concern in the existing literature, as some scholars and advocates have noted that having police in schools can contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline (Weaver, 2022). Relevant to the issue of over- and under-policing mentioned above, there is also well-documented evidence that such policing

practices can exacerbate existing health inequities and further limit health and other resources in communities already facing marginalization (Kapadia & Borrell, 2023).

Participation encompasses the motivation behind conducting this study in the first place; namely, that children and youth are often excluded from both formal and informal conversations relevant to policies that directly impact them. By continuing to exclude youth from youth-policing decisions, police systems continue to jeopardize this human right under the UNCRC (1989). Equipping police with sufficient knowledge to better interact with and respond to youth from a developmental perspective is also necessary in ensuring that meaningful participation is possible (Suleiman et al., 2021).

Finally, specific *protections* and *provisions* relevant to "vulnerable populations" or those who have experienced structural marginalization, should be implemented in all policing practices. As identified by the youth in the current study, this ensures that all professionals interacting with youth have sufficient knowledge and training to address factors beyond developmental considerations, including mental health and substance use, to promote developmentally-appropriate, culturally- and trauma-informed, and harm-reduction approaches to best support youth needs.

In addition to the four core principles summarized above, the BIC principle of the UNCRC is also relevant to include when reviewing youth policing practices. Within the BIC principle, the primary focus is fostering children's holistic development, which includes "all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies" (UNCRC, 1989, p. 3). As evidenced by youths' responses in the current study, discussed above, the intersection of, and interaction between numerous systems (e.g., criminal-legal, child welfare, healthcare, etc.)

contribute to a young person's holistic development. In sharing their experiences interacting with police, many young people noted that these interactions occurred within the context of child welfare involvement and/or mental health and substance use concerns. As such, youth policing practices must be considered within the broader context in which such policing occurs in order to best support children and youth holistically.

Proposed Improvements to Policing

Although youth have had limited involvement in police policy development to date, a variety of proposed improvements and alternatives to police involvement, especially relevant to racialized individuals and those with mental health concerns, have been brought forth in recent years (McKay, 2021; Riccardi et al., 2021; Silvester, 2022). Some researchers and advocates suggest a full removal of police from crisis response (e.g., CAMH, 2020), others have provided recommendations to directly address systemic racism and related concerns (e.g., McKay, 2021), and some individuals who work within criminal-legal systems have proposed increased training or shifts in police training, with a greater focus on trauma-informed and compassionate policing approaches (e.g., Jones, 2020; 2021b; Williams & Jones, 2020). Although these proposed improvements are not always specific to youth, they may be a good starting point to serve youth more effectively.

Trauma-Informed and Compassionate Policing

The notion that there is significant overlap in the number of individuals who are in contact with the criminal-legal system as both victims and offenders, often referred to as the victim-offender overlap, is well-researched and documented (Jones, 2021b). Despite the existing literature on this overlap, there is often a lack of acknowledgement of it within the criminal-legal system and associated policies and practices (Jones, 2021b). According to Jones (2021b),

changing how criminal-legal system professionals are trained by introducing more trauma-informed and compassionate practice could positively impact how individuals progress through the system. Jones (2021b) argues that trauma is a health issue and should be treated as such in all criminal-legal encounters. Therefore, he proposes that policing should shift towards utilizing a public health lens (Bucerius et al., 2021; Jones, 2021b; Williams & Jones, 2020). Williams and Jones (2020) note that although mental health is often relevant in police calls, mental health teams are not deployed unless the caller specifically identifies a mental health concern. As a result, police remain the primary first contact in mental health crises but continue to lack the appropriate training to respond compassionately and appropriately. Williams and Jones (2020) provide the example of a reckless behaviour call in which an individual is throwing objects at cars in traffic. Perhaps this gets called in as a safety concern requiring a law enforcement response, yet the underlying behaviour contributing to this individual's actions is not considered. Therefore, this situation is responded to strictly as a law enforcement matter rather than being de-escalated and referring the individual to appropriate mental health supports to prevent further occurrences, both with the criminal-legal system and the healthcare system.

In response to such concerns, Williams and Jones (2020) proposed the Compass Police Response (CPR) Model, which acknowledges a spectrum of responses, requiring officers to follow a "compass" moving from west (wellness check) to east (law enforcement) and north (no disposition) to south (services in community and health systems) when responding to calls. The authors note that the first step in any police encounter should involve an attempt to de-escalate the situation and remain on the west end of the compass. Next, an appropriate disposition should be determined by the police officer to focus on preventive or rehabilitative approaches to the issue. Finally, following the encounter, the police officer should take time to reflect on how they

handled the situation (Williams & Jones, 2020). To improve policing policy and practice, and consequently address many of the predominant concerns within police encounters, Jones (2021a) argues that police officers should be trained to practice from a more compassionate, strengths-based, and trauma-informed lens.

The Edmonton Context

Relevant to youth policing practices, The Edmonton Police Service (EPS) has developed a Young People Support Branch, which contains The Youth Integrated Services Section and includes School Resources Officers and Community Assertive Services Team (CAST) who work in partnership with Alberta Health Services, as well as the DIVERSIONfirst Unit. The EPS released a Young People Strategy to reflect its goals in working with youth over a four-year period (2021-2024; EPS, 2021). In their development of the Young People Strategy, EPS emphasized the importance of the YCJA, as well as the other statutes, regulations, and bylaws that address youth in Alberta, including the: Alberta Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act; Children First Act; Family Law Act; Education Act; Missing Persons Act; Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act; and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The EPS (2021) identifies its goal as: "balancing enforcement and support in developmentally appropriate ways to: hold young people accountable, refer and navigate young people to programs or agencies, and treat young people fairly" (p. 19). To do so, they aim to promote developmentally informed policing by collaborating with young people, families, and partner agencies. Although the EPS consulted with many partner agencies in developing this strategy, they still did not involve youth. Additionally, any progress reports or indications of these programs' effectiveness have yet to be released.

Youth-Specific Policing Approaches

Across the numerous ways in which police can initiate contact with youth, ranging from recidivism prevention initiatives and the processing of young offenders, to police-initiated diversion programs, few of these approaches are supported by evidence-based policies that guide police training and practice. The Canadian Society of Evidence-Based Policing (CanSEBP) reports on the evidence base for widely used policing programs in Canada (2020). Some of the police initiatives included in CanSEBP's Square 1 assessment program include recommendations youth proposed in the context of the current study. For example, Co-Response Teams are comprised of police officers and mental health practitioners, and the Training and Education about Mental Health for Police Organizations (TEMPO) program consists of training modules for frontline police officers to better serve individuals living with mental illness (CanSEBP, 2020). Notably, few of the listed programs are relevant to youth and none of the programs meet the Society's recommended standards of evidence. Further, it is noted within many of the program descriptions that their implementation varies widely between jurisdictions with no consistent standards being applied. Finally, many of the programs were not developed and/or tested in Canada.

In reviewing the existing youth-police literature, it appears that universally-delivered prevention and crime-reduction programs, outcomes of police-youth contact, youth and police perceptions of one another, or criminal legal proceedings that occur past the point of initial police contact, are all more well-researched than the actual policies, programs, and procedures intended to guide police-youth interactions. This suggests that researchers are focused more on what might happen before or after youth come into contact with police rather than what police systems and officers are actually doing when such contact does occur.

Next Steps

Contributing to existing dialogues regarding police reform requires a comprehensive, evidence-based approach. Although significant research has been conducted to amplify the need for reform or to suggest how such reform could be enacted, these existing studies tend to be somewhat siloed. Specifically, they each provide significant and meaningful contributions to the literature, but the research contributions seem to be primarily separate from those relevant to practice and actionable recommendations. Few studies have bridged the critical gap between research and practice by implementing a multi-phase approach in which numerous interested parties (e.g., youth, community agencies, police) are directly consulted and involved in providing both their perspectives and experiences, and using that invaluable knowledge to develop evidence-based change. As such, the current study, and the broader study of which it is a part, present a unique contribution to both existing research and practice. By combining these elements through a youth participatory lens, we hope that some of the existing gaps can begin to be addressed and we can move beyond acknowledging that police systems need to change by actually taking steps to do so.

Limitations and Lessons Learned

Although the current study generated important findings, it is important to acknowledge some of the relevant limitations. The young people who participated in the study did not report involvement with the youth criminal justice system beyond the police interactions they spoke of. Rather, they were primarily involved with child welfare and/or mental health and substance-use related services. Although this raises the important question of why police were involved with these youth to begin with, it may be beneficial to include youth in future research who have experienced more extensive criminal-legal involvement (i.e., police or crown cautions, extrajudicial sanctions, custody sentences).

Having participants commit to attending an interview, focus group, and being engaged throughout the research project, was anticipated to be a potential challenge. Many of the youth faced numerous barriers that may have made it difficult for them to participate in the research at all, let alone in multiple phases of the research. However, in keeping with the theoretical framework of the study, it was important to ensure that any barriers potential participants faced would not lead to them being excluded from the research process; this would silence the voices of individuals who were already often excluded from important policy and practice decisions involving them (Foster-Fishman et al., 2010). As such, it was necessary to allow participants to engage in as much or as little of the project as was feasible for them. Although this was integrated into the initial plan for the study, this was a novel research approach, and it was not clear how being flexible with youths' level of participation would actually work in its implementation.

First, youth were not involved in the actual development of the study and its objectives. Rather, staff from the community partner organization identified that many of the youth accessing services there were burnt out from engaging in research, and they suspected that youth would be less likely to be involved if it was participatory from the outset. They also noted that, because of the anticipated challenges with having the same youth involved throughout the project, it may be difficult for them to be involved in such an extensive way. However, staff noted that the study's objectives already seemed to align with much of what had been raised naturally in conversations with youth. Therefore, they felt that, although youth did not develop the objectives themselves, they could still be involved in participatory ways at different stages throughout the study's implementation. In sharing the project with potential youth participants, this turned out to be the case, as many youth expressed wanting to participate in a project

discussing their experiences with police, and to have a say on potential youth-focused police reform. Although this ended up working out well in the current study, it was a risk that may not be appropriate in other studies. In keeping with the critical theory paradigm and the principles behind YPAR, it is essential that youth have the power and the voice at any and every stage of the research process. By collaborating with a community partner whose aim was to best support the youth they served, I feel that I was able to uphold these critical theory and YPAR principles throughout the study by ensuring it was accessible to youth in ways that felt feasible for them. That being said, it is important, especially in the present and forthcoming knowledge translation stage, that I am transparent in identifying where the research objectives originated.

Next, in keeping with having youth participate in ways that were meaningful and feasible to them, five of the six youth who participated in an individual interview did not return for the focus group. Again, although this was anticipated as a potential challenge, it is important to consider the limitations inherent in having different youth participate at each stage. Namely, the youth who participated in an individual interview did not develop the focus group questions, nor did they reflect and add to their original transcripts. This was addressed by having informal conversations with staff and other youth who were accessing services at CHEW to see what kinds of questions they might ask if they were to address police reform. This way, the process was still youth-informed and participatory, even though it did not include the original participants themselves. Additionally, wish-list items and those relevant to police reform more broadly were incorporated into the individual interview questions to ensure youth had an opportunity to reflect on these questions as well. Unfortunately, there was no true alternative to replace youth reviewing their own transcripts; but it is important to note that they had the opportunity and autonomy to determine whether they wanted to and whether it was feasible for

them to do so at that time. Therefore, although this may have reduced some of the credibility on the ECIT side of the methodology, it upheld the principles of the YPAR side.

Third, because different youth participated in the focus group and thus chose to become involved in the data analysis process at a later stage, the coding framework they developed was not fully applied to the individual interviews. Although this resulted in the individual interviews being coded by me rather than by the youth, the ECIT methodology worked well to address this limitation. Namely, the individual interview guide was structured to align closely with the research objectives, and in doing so, with the critical incidents (e.g., youth and police helpful and hindering actions and wish-list items). Therefore, there was limited subjectivity and bias I could insert into the data analysis process at this stage, as youth had specifically answered questions such as "what did police do that you found helpful in that encounter?" Any information that youth shared outside of such direct questions was not included unless they identified or associated it with a critical incident in some way. Although this may appear to contribute to missing or excluded data, in reality, the individual interview participants generally stayed close to the interview questions in their responses and therefore minimal, if any, information was excluded. In this way, the combination of YPAR and the ECIT was again beneficial, in that the structure of the ECIT-guided interview questions allowed for more flexibility in the YPAR approach. I was unsure how this would work at the outset of the study, so although this was somewhat of a limitation, it also allowed me to better prepare for future research, should I continue to use these methodologies.

Conclusion

Taken together, these limitations speak to the potential risks in implementing a novel research approach. However, rather than consider them to be limitations, I prefer to see them as

lessons learned. I knew from the outset that there would be potential challenges and setbacks, and I also knew that my main goal in completing this research was to engage youth and hear their thoughts on systems that directly impact them. Even when challenges arose, youth— including participants, co-researchers, and youth who were accessing services outside of the study—along with staff, demonstrated the true value of engaging in participatory research. They came together, brainstormed, problem-solved, and adapted, and the end result was a process that allowed us both to connect and share stories to be used as meaningful evidence supporting the calls for police system reform. The findings from this study add to the calls for police reform that many youth advocates and activists have been sharing for decades. In speaking with youth directly, it is clear that the issue does not lie with these concerns not being shared; rather, it is that the concerns are not being *heard*.

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Appendix A: CHEW Project Letter of Support

Letter of Support

Title of Study: Actioning Youth Perspectives on Police System Evolution

Principal Investigator: Dr. Melissa Tremblay, University of Alberta

Name of Community Partner: Community Health Empowerment Wellness (CHEW) Project

As a representative of the CHEW Project, I ████████████████, express my support of the above-named research study. I acknowledge that the study is community-based in nature. CHEW will support the research team with participant recruitment, data collection, data interpretation, and knowledge mobilization as needed. CHEW will also continue to provide support to individuals who access CHEW's services and who participate in the study.

Name: ████████ _____

Role: Executive Director _____

Date: 10/11/2022 _____

Signature: ████████ _____

Appendix B: Participant Information Letter

Title of Study: Actioning Youth Perspectives on Police System Evolution

Principal Investigator: Dr. Melissa Tremblay, University of Alberta

What is this letter about? You are being asked to take part in this research study because we are trying to learn about youth perspectives on their interactions with police. We want to learn from you to be able to provide recommendations for police systems seeking to improve their services for youth. **You do not need to be in a research study if you don't want to be.**

If you join the study, what will you be asked to do?
- You will be asked to participate in an individual conversation with a member of the research team to talk about a significant encounter that you have had with police. These conversations will be conducted during regular drop-in programming at either the Community Health Empowerment and Wellness (CHEW) Project or iHuman Youth Society. No staff members from these organizations or police officers will be in the room with us and your participation in the research will not impact your involvement with CHEW, iHuman, or the police. Each conversation will take about 30 minutes to 1 hour. Our conversations will be audio recorded and transcribed.
- Following the individual conversations, you will be asked to take part in a group conversation with a member of the research team and other youth research participants. In this conversation, we will talk about police systems more broadly, including your ideas for what works and doesn't work with how police interact with youth. Each conversation will take 1-2 hours. Our conversations will be audio recorded and transcribed.
- You will have the opportunity to review the transcripts from your individual and group conversations. You will also have the opportunity to learn about the research process and work with the researcher to analyze the data if you are interested. This step is not required to participate.
- You are free to not answer any questions that you do not want to answer, and you can choose what information you want to share or not. In case any of the conversations are upsetting to you, you will be provided with a list of mental health resources, and staff from CHEW and iHuman will be available to support you.
- You can choose to stop participating at any time. However, after each group discussion starts, we will not be able to remove your comments from the project because the discussion will be audio recorded and it will be too difficult to separate your comments from others in the group. If you want to remove your individual conversation from the project, you will be able to do so until February 28, 2023.
- For each phase of the research that you participate in (individual conversation, group conversation, transcript review), you will receive a $25 gift card. The gift cards will be given out immediately after each session (you don't have to wait until the end of the study to receive the gift cards). If you participate in all three research phases, you will receive a total of $75 ($25 for each of the three phases). If you wish to leave the study during any of the three phases, you will still receive a gift card for each phase that you participate in.

What are the possible risks and discomforts? It is possible that sharing your experiences and thoughts may be upsetting or distressing to you. We will provide you with a list of mental health resources and you can connect with CHEW or iHuman staff for additional support if needed. Also, sharing information in a focus group means that others will hear your thoughts and ideas, so they cannot be kept anonymous or confidential during the groups. You can choose what information you want to share or not.

What are the benefits to me? Sharing your experiences will have the potential to improve police services for youth. It is also a unique opportunity to provide feedback on the police and justice systems without having to interact with them directly. Finally, you will also have the opportunity to learn about the research process by actively participating in it with the research team. Although these are potential benefits, it is also possible that there may be no direct benefit to you for participating in this research.

How will the information be shared? The information collected about you during this study will be kept safely locked up and nobody will have access to it except the people doing the research. Your name will be removed from your comments to make sure it is anonymous. Once this is done, the comments you and other youth participants shared will be shared with CHEW and iHuman staff, and with police services, to help them determine how to better support you and other youth.

Do you have to be in the study? You do not have to be in the study. It will not affect your involvement with CHEW, iHuman, or the police or legal system. You can change your mind and stop being part of the study at any time.

What if you have questions? If you have any questions, you can call Melissa Tremblay at (780) 492-3763 or contact Emily Pynoo at pynoo@ualberta.ca.

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615.

Appendix C: Participant Consent Form

Title of Study: Actioning Youth Perspectives on Police System Evolution

___ YES, I will be in this research study.	**____ NO, I don't want to do this.**

Participant Information

Name of Participant: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix D: Decision-Making Capacity Form for Participants Aged 15-17

Title of Study: Actioning Youth Perspectives on Police System Evolution

If you are 15, 16, or 17 years old, you must answer the following 6 questions after you have reviewed the information letter with a member of the research team. These questions are to make sure you understand the study and can consent on your own. If you are able to answer the following questions and agree to take part in this study, you can fill in the consent form. This will not impact your participation at CHEW or iHuman.

What do the researchers want to learn?

What good and bad things could happen in this study? (i.e., benefits and risks)

Who will know what you say during the study?

Do you have to be in this study? Why or why not?

Will being in this study impact your ability to come to (partner organization)?

If you have any questions about this study, who can you ask?

Appendix E: Recruitment Poster

Appendix F: Individual Interview Guide

Think of a significant encounter that you have had with police. The term "significant" just means an encounter that you feel had a big impact on you, and there is no right or wrong answer. It could have been your first encounter, your most recent, or anything in between. For the following questions, try to focus on the events, and your thoughts, feelings, and actions that went along with them.

1. Tell me about the encounter that you had with police, what happened?

   a. When did it happen?

   b. Where did it happen?

2. What makes this encounter significant to you?

3. What happened before this encounter – e.g., what were you doing earlier that day?

4. What happened after the encounter with police – e.g., what was the outcome?

5. What did the police officer(s) do in the encounter that you found to be *helpful*?

   a. How did that help/why was it helpful?

6. What did the police officer(s) do in the encounter that you found made it more *difficult*

   (or *hindered* the encounter)?

   a. How did that hinder it/why did that make it more difficult?

7. What did you do in the encounter that you feel helped the situation?

   a. How did that help/why was it helpful?

8. What did you do in the encounter that you feel made the situation more difficult?

   a. How did that hinder it/why did that make it more difficult?

9. How do you feel about the encounter overall?

10. How do you think that encounter impacted your life today?

11. We've talked about what things were helpful in the encounter and what things may have

    made it more difficult.

a. [If they've had more than one police encounter] – how does this encounter compare to other encounters that you have had with police?

    i. What makes this encounter stand out amongst others?

    ii. Is there anything you wish would have been done differently in this encounter? If so, what?

    iii. If so, how might that have changed the outcome of the encounter?

b. [If this is there only encounter to date] – If you could change something about this encounter (e.g., something you wish would have happened differently), what would you change?

    i. Why would you change that aspect of it?

    ii. How do you think that might have changed the outcome?

Appendix G: Focus Group Guide

So just a few things to go through before we get started today…

I've talked with each of you individually about interactions that you've had with police, and you've told me some really important information about how those interactions looked for each of you. So today I'm hoping to go through some of the topics that came up in each of our individual conversations. But the goal today is to talk about police more broadly – so instead of going through individual interactions that you've had, we'll talk more about what you think works that police do, what you think doesn't work, what you think police should know to work with youth, and so on. Does that make sense? Any questions so far?

Okay so before we get started, I just want to say that, just like in our individual conversations, I will be recording this to help me go back through the information later and make sure I capture everything. The difference now is that since there are a few of us talking together – I won't be able to remove your comments once we start talking because it will be too hard to separate in the recording. If you decide you don't want to participate any more, you can leave at any time. You're also free to answer questions you want to and skip any you don't want to. If any of the conversation is upsetting to you, you can touch base with me after to get a list of resources, and you can also talk to Corey or other CHEW staff for support – being part of this won't impact your participation at CHEW at all. Any questions from that?

Okay and then the last thing is just that you will get a $25 gift card for participating again today, which I will hand out at the end of our conversation. Are we okay to get started?

Questions

What do you want police to know about you? /what do you think is helpful for police to know about you? /what do you think is helpful for police to know about youth in general?

What needs do police help you meet/have they helped you meet? What needs do you wish they helped you meet?

What services do you think police should offer youth? /how do you think police should help/support youth? /what services do you wish police provided for youth?

What kinds of training/experience do you think police should have to work with youth?

What could police do to make you think more positively of them/trust them?

What could police do to make you feel safe?

If you could redesign the police system, what would you change? How would that change things? /what would that look like? "Dream world" scenario?