

# HOMELESS YOUTH RISK AND RESILIENCY SURVEY

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# San Jose

# AT-A-GLANCE

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RESEARCH REPORT | 2019



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Lens Co is a community-based research and implementation consulting enterprise, founded by Dr. Robin Petering. Lens Co currently oversees several research and evaluation contracts with agencies across the country that serve young people experiencing homelessness. Our approach to research and evaluation is to prioritize inclusiveness and equity for the individuals and agencies involved. This is done through an iterative a collaborative process throughout each project, guided by core values: accountability and transparency; ethically informed; community inclusive; contextually appropriate; creative dissemination; and data as voice. The current research report acknowledges teh hard work and colloboration of the following individuals and agencies: Laura Onasch-Vera, Nicole Thompson, Layan Kaileh, Bill Wilson Center Staff and Administration, and the REALYST Colloborators.

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# INTRODUCTION

Researchers interested in understanding the needs and strengths of young people experiencing homelessness typically rely, out of necessity, on rather small localized samples, limiting their ability to understand the full range of experiences of young people nationally. Further, very little is understood about the actual lives and experiences of these young people. To fully address youth homelessness, a comprehensive and up to date understanding of the behaviors, demographics, experiences, and sources of resiliency is necessary. To address this need, the Homeless Youth Risk and Resiliency Survey (HYRRS) was developed. The HYRRS is an assessment tool that provides in depth detail on experiences of young people that will provide insight into differences and similarities across cities and communities. The current report reflects the current landscape of youth homelessness in San Jose, CA.

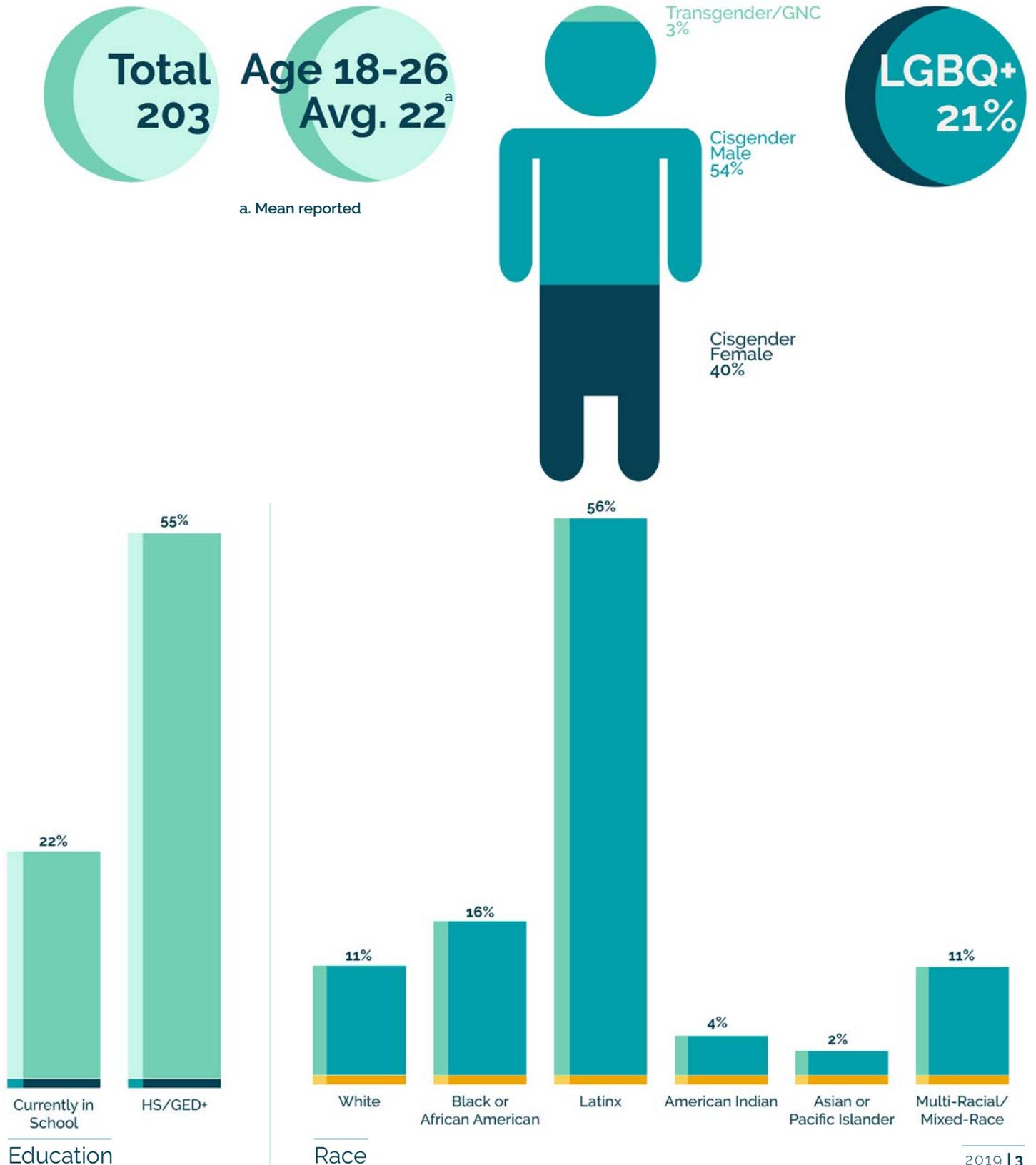
## METHODS

A sample of 203 unique homeless or unstably housed youth (aged 18-26) were recruited in the Spring of 2019 from service agencies in San Jose, CA. All youth accessing services during the data collection period were asked to participate and went through the informed consent process with a research assistant with the caveats that child abuse and suicidal and homicidal intentions would be reported.

For the San Jose data collection site, a research team based in Los Angeles was able to contract with the local service agency to collect an initial sample and train local staff to administer the remaining surveys. The study consisted of a comprehensive online self-administered survey. Research assistants and staff were available at all times while the young person was completing the survey to answer any questions as they came up or resolve any technical issues. The survey took an average of 45 minutes to complete. All participants were compensated \$20 cash after completing the survey.

# DEMOGRAPHICS

Table 1: Frequency Distributions for Demographic Characteristics

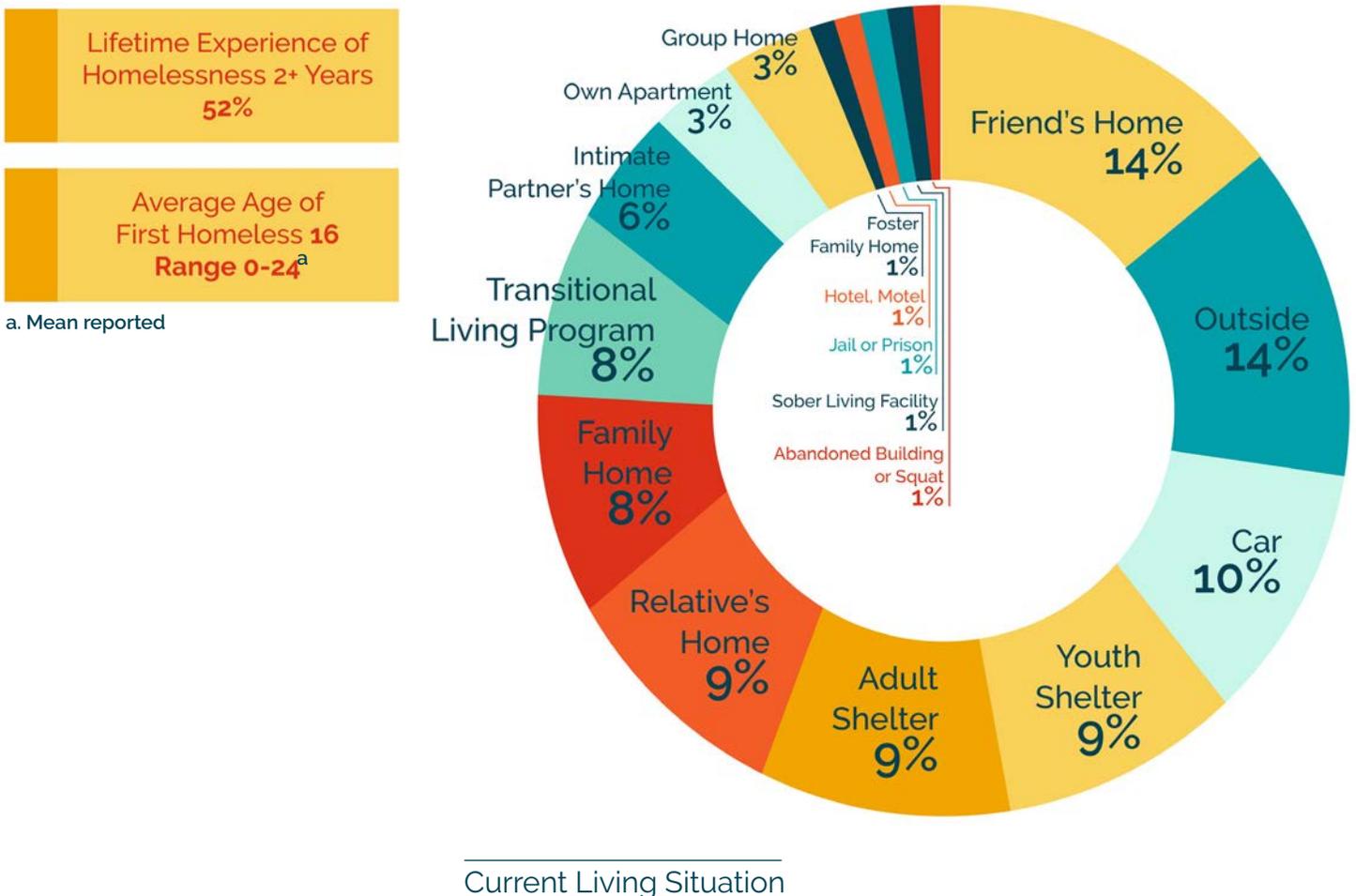


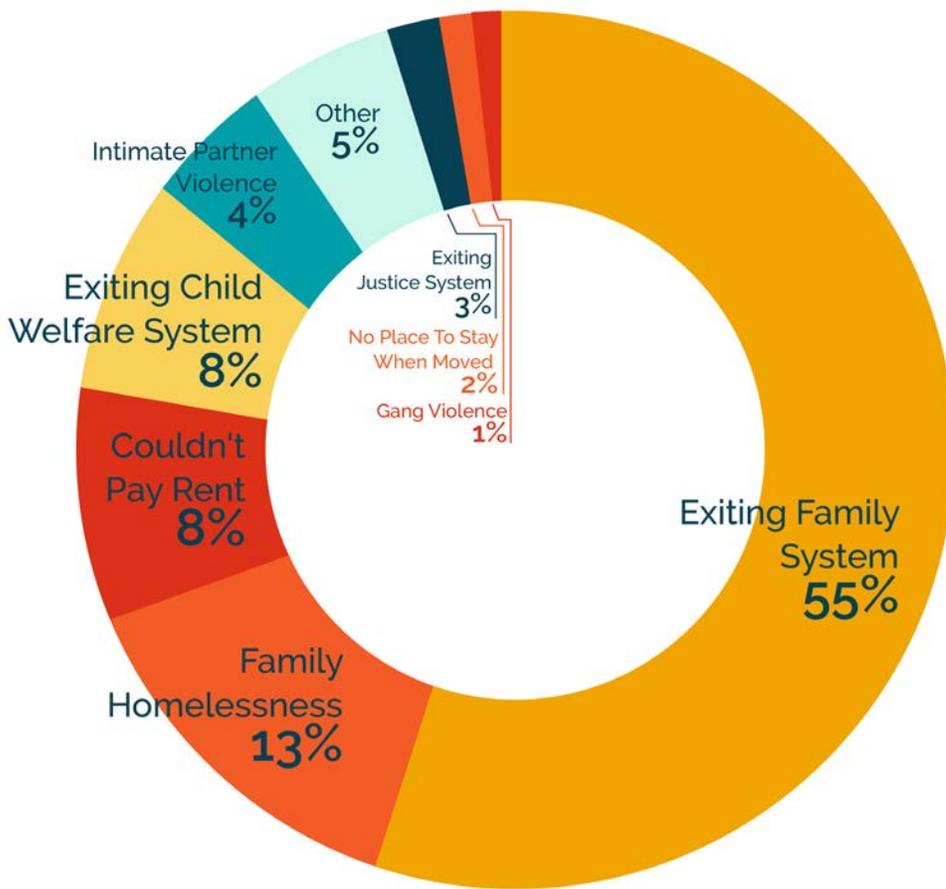
## Key Takeaways:

Among the 203 individuals who participated in the survey, the average age was 22 years old. Minors were ineligible to participate in HYRRS. Half of the population identified as cisgender male, and 40% identified as cisgender female. More than half the population have a high school diploma or GED and higher, while less than a quarter are currently enrolled in school. Most young people surveyed identified as Latinx (56%), followed by Black or African American (16%), White (11%), Multi-Racial or Mixed Race (9%), American Indian (4%), then Asian or Pacific Islander (2%). Eighty-three percent of persons surveyed spent most of their time growing up in San Jose or surrounding areas in Northern California.

# HOMELESSNESS EXPERIENCES

Table 2: Frequency Distributions For Homelessness Experiences





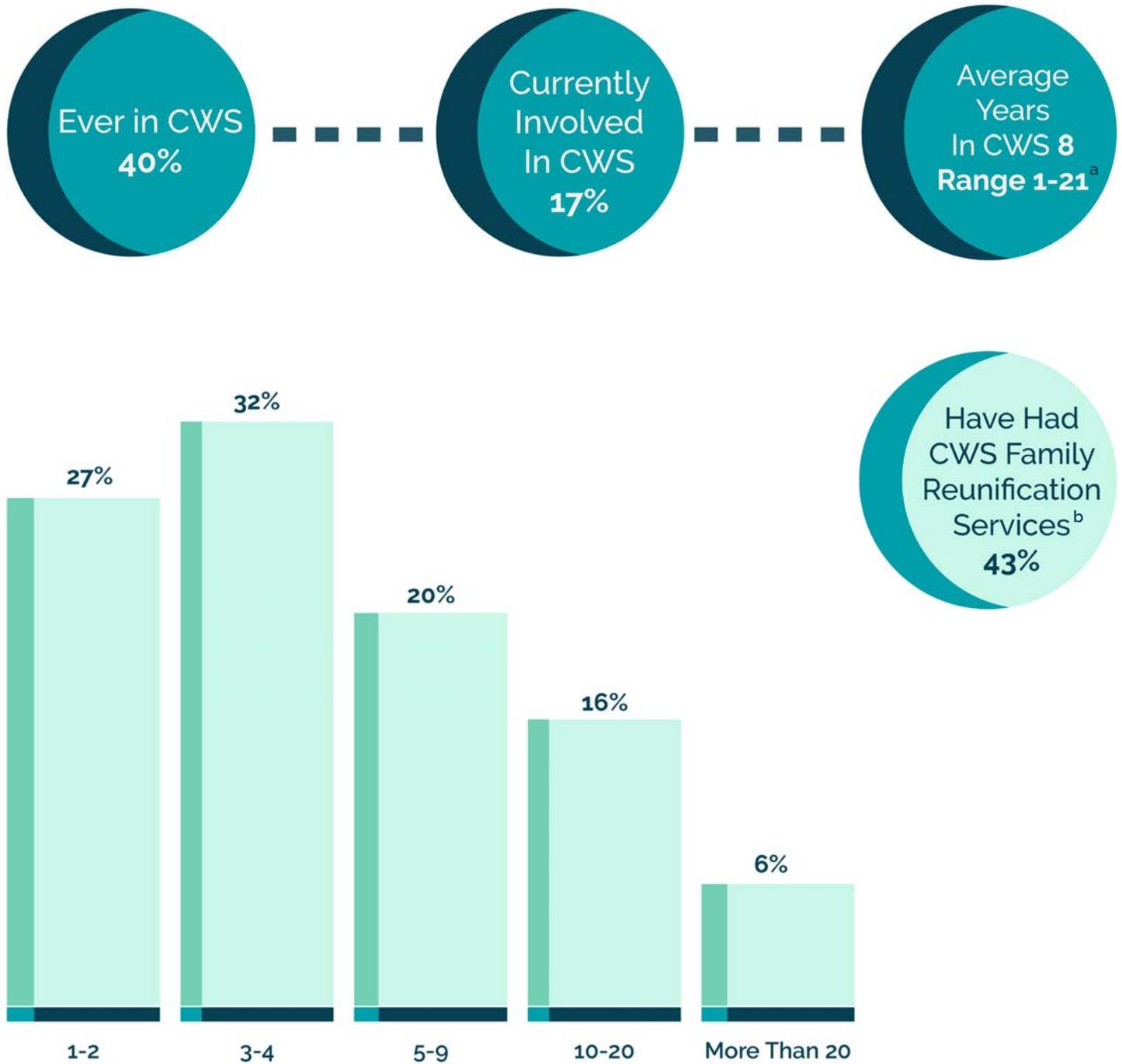
Reasons For Experience Of Homelessness

### Key Takeaways:

In the past two weeks, young people spent most of their nights in a variety of places. Commonly, young people reported staying at a friend's home. Many identified that they were couch surfing (37%), meaning that they were staying with a friend, family member or intimate partner. There were a significant number of young people that were unsheltered (25%), staying outside or somewhere not meant for human habitation such as a car or abandoned building. Many young people were staying in some sort of supportive program such as a shelter, transitional living program or their own apartment with a voucher or subsidized rent (11%). The most common reason for becoming homeless was leaving a family system. Fifty-three percent of young people reported being kicked out, asked to leave or running away from a family or relatives' home. Family homelessness was the second most common reason for becoming homeless. Some other reasons that young people reported becoming homeless was death of a parent, exiting a romantic relationship, losing a home in a fire, or being terminated from a housing program.

# CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM AND JUSTICE INVOLVEMENT

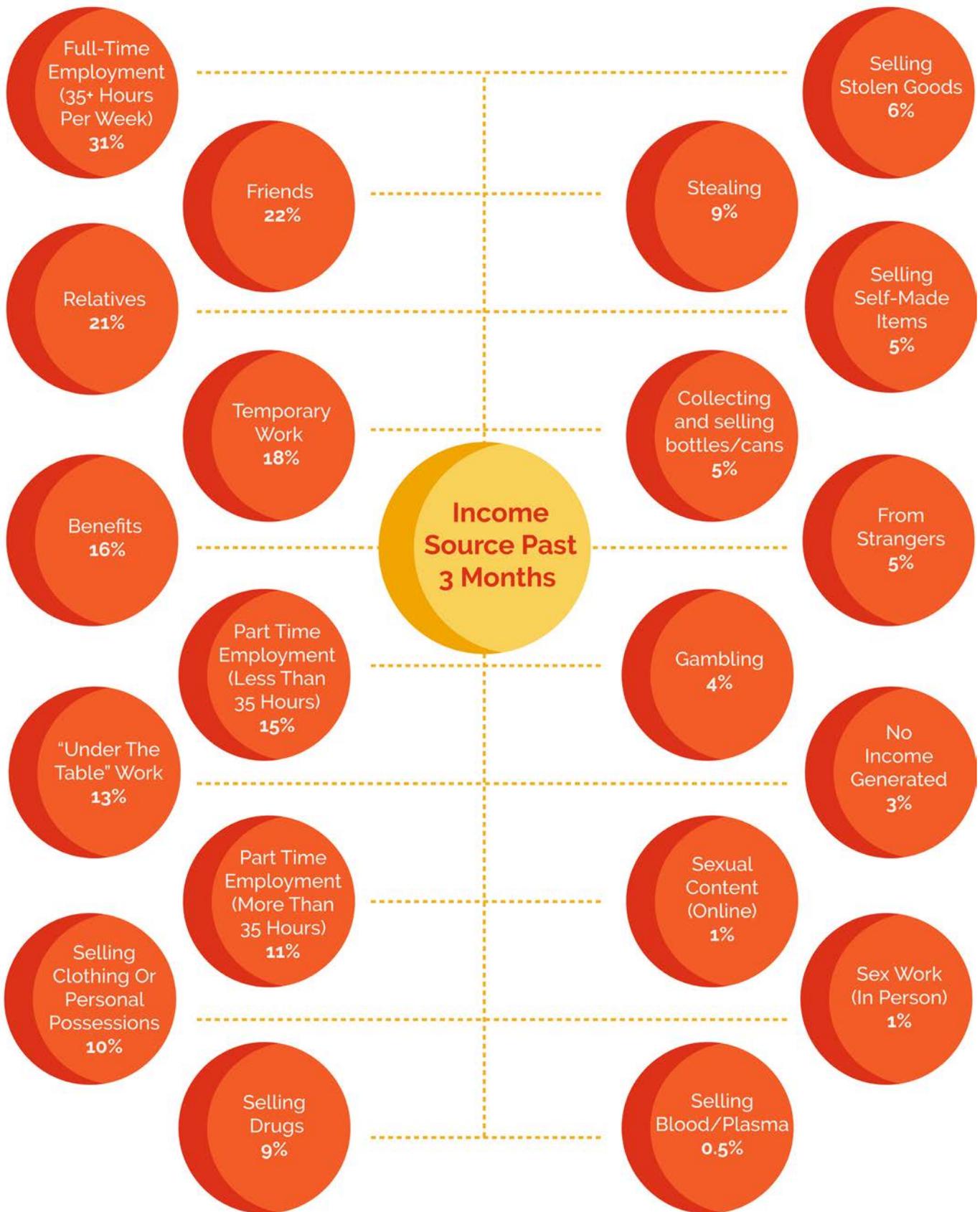
Table 3: Frequency Distributions For Child Welfare System (CWS) Experiences And Juvenile Justice System Involvement



Number of placements<sup>b</sup>

a. Mean reported  
 b. Percentages reflect of those ever involved in CWS (n=78)







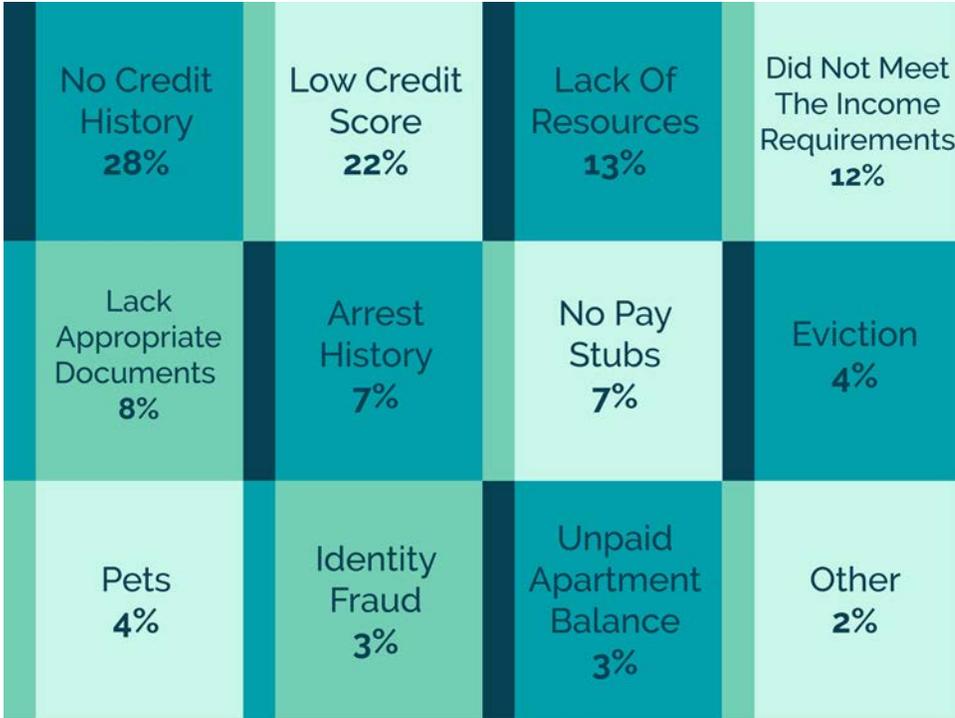
Has A Bank Account

#### Key Takeaways:

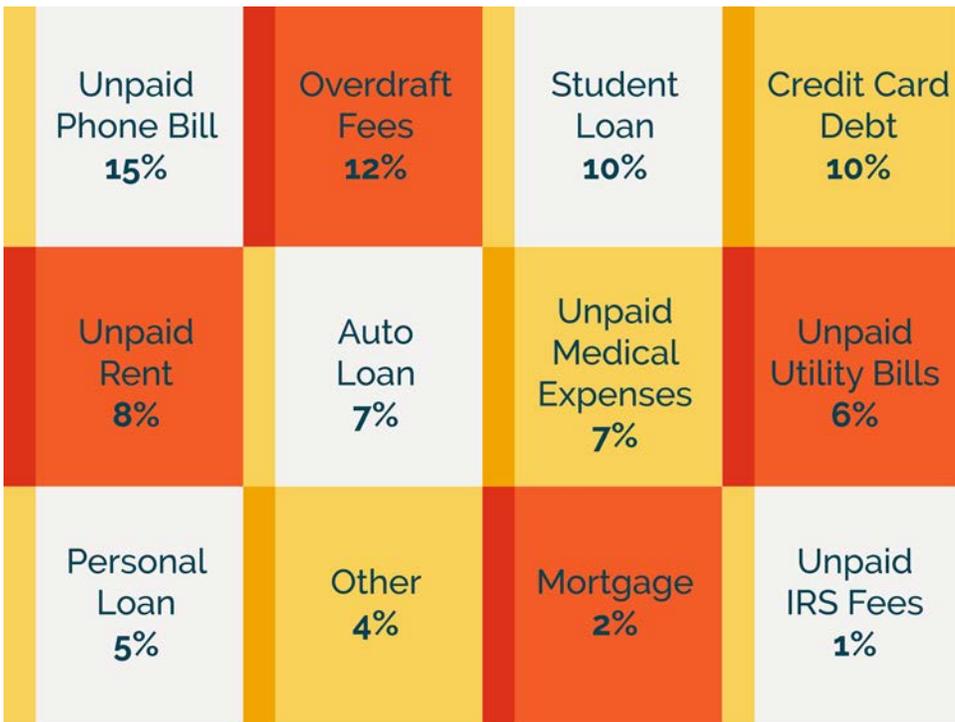
The majority of young people reported being employed (61%). However only 31% reported receiving any income from a full-time job in the past 3 months. Many young people report receiving income from friends or relatives. Temporary, "under the table" and part time employment is also common. A small percentage of young people report generating income from the underground economy. Only three percent of young people surveyed reported not generating any income in the past three months, however 51% do not have a bank account.

# DEBT AND BARRIERS TO ACCESS

Table 5: Frequency Distributions Of Debt And Barriers To Access



Has Ever Been Turned Down For Something That Was Needed Because Of



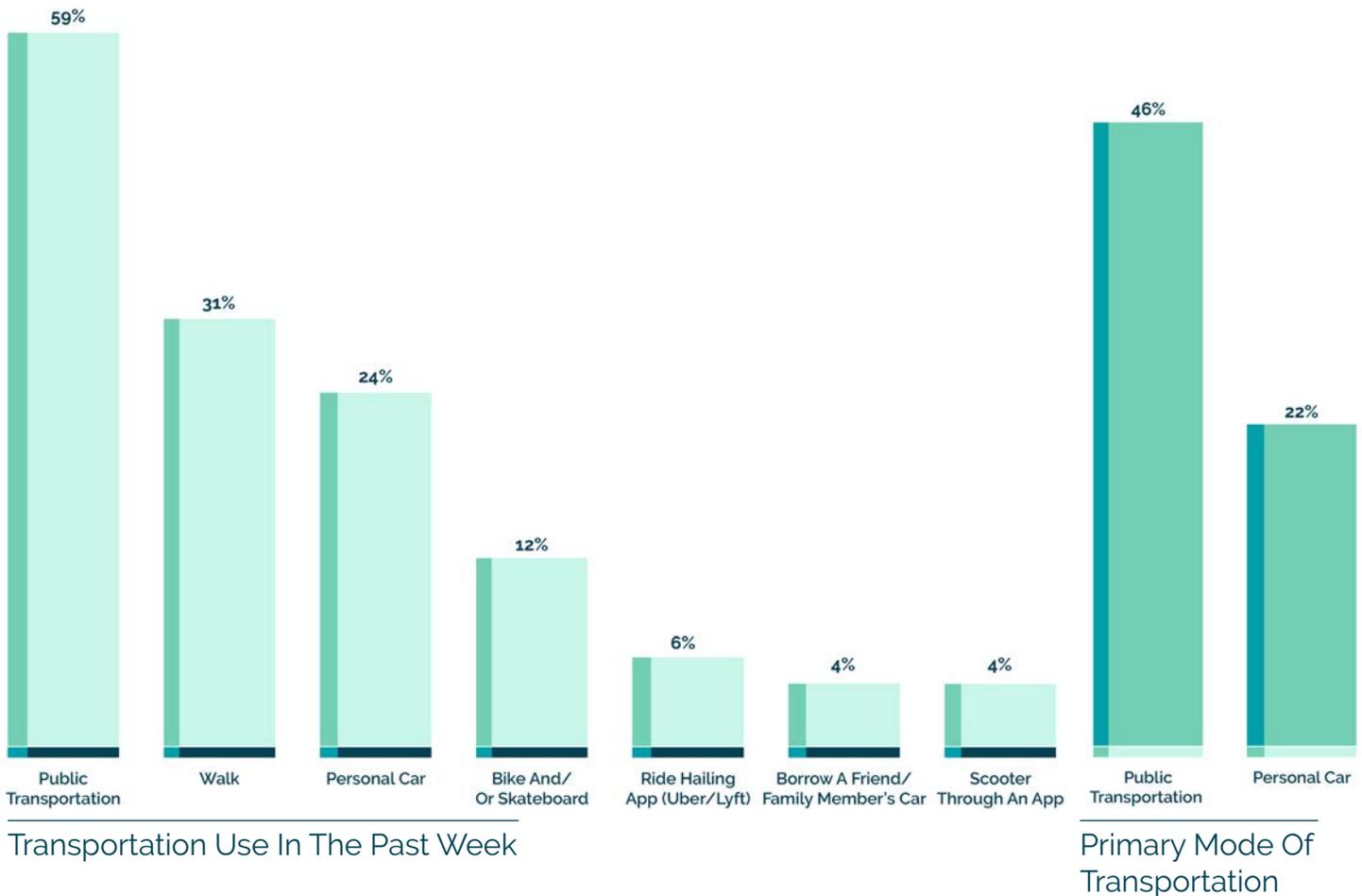
Type Of Debt

## Key Takeaways:

Generally, credit or income was a barrier for obtaining something that was needed. Between 22-28% of young people had been turned down for something that they needed because of no credit history or low credit score. A small percentage of young people surveyed reported pets, arrest history, eviction or identity fraud as a barrier. Other responses included immigration status, legal name status and gender transition status. 49% of young people reported having outstanding debt. The most common form of debt is unpaid phone bill and overdraft fee. Student loan debt is also common for young people in this sample. Other responses included owing friends or family, immigration costs, child support and court fees.

# TRANSPORTATION ACCESS

Table 6: Frequency Distributions Of Transportation Access

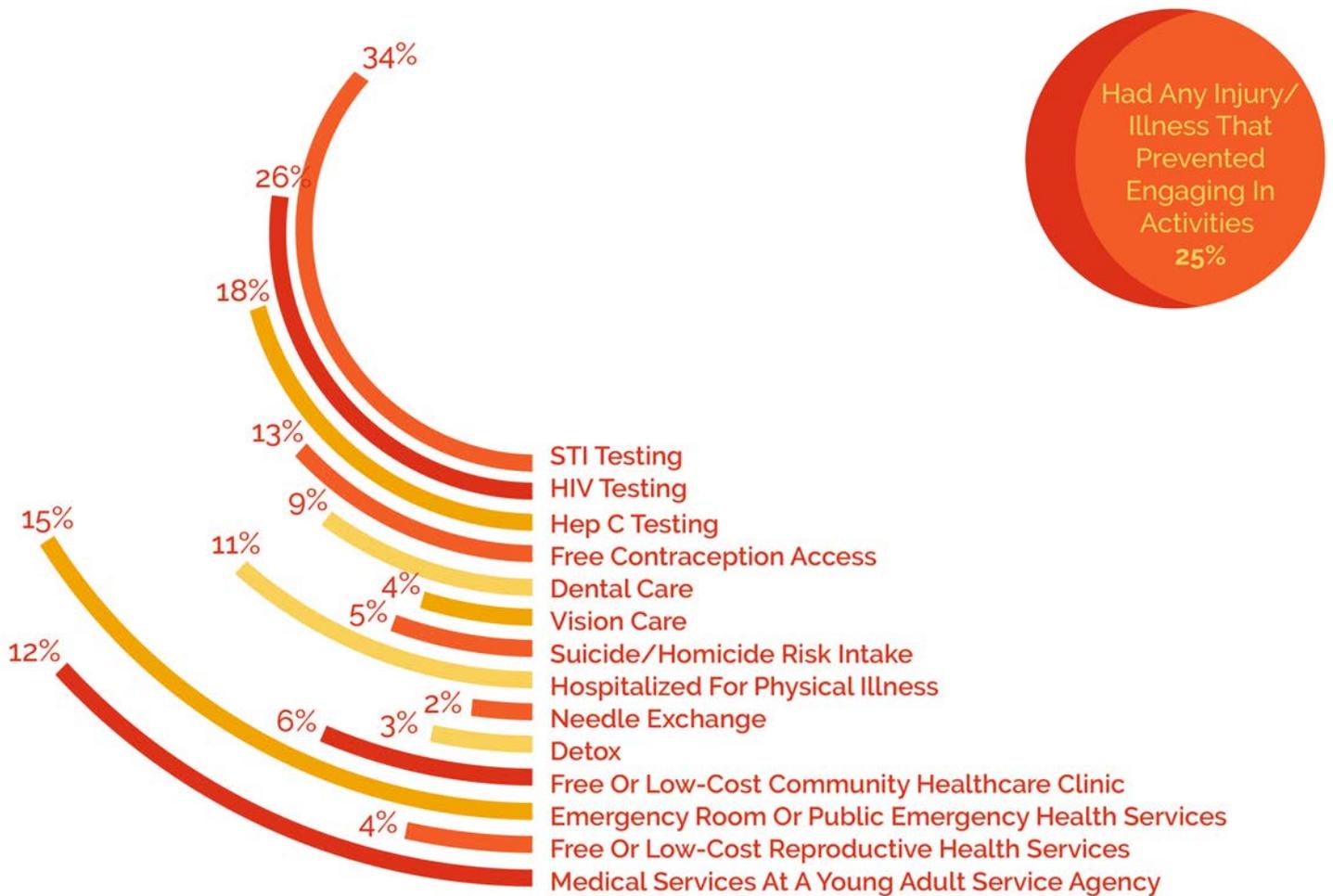


Key Takeaways:

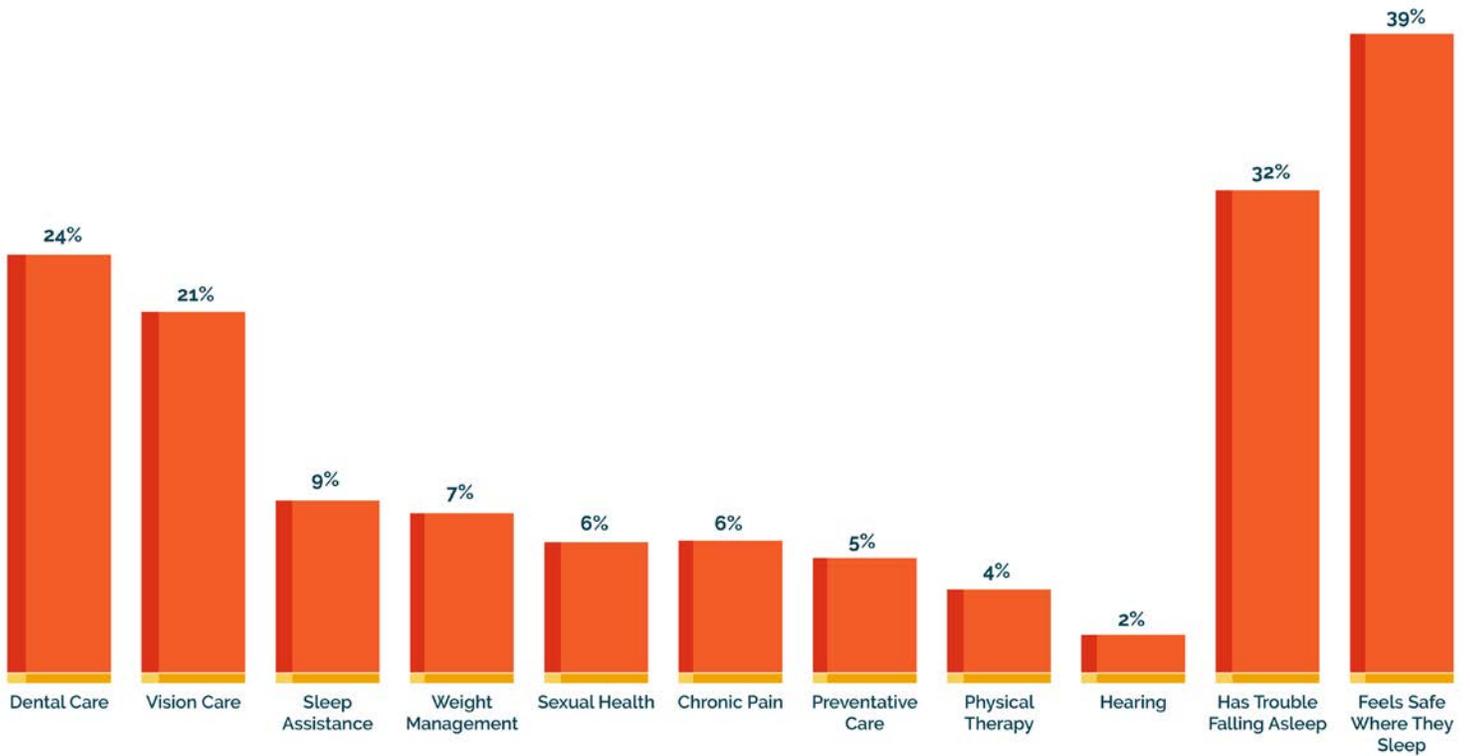
Sixty percent of young people surveyed used public transportation and this was the primary method of transportation. Many young people had access to a personal car. Walking, biking, and skateboarding were also common. Between 4-6% of young people used a ride hailing or other transportation modality through an app in the past week.

## HEALTHCARE ACCESS AND NEEDS

Table 7: Frequency Distributions Of Health Care Access And Needs



### Health Care Access In Past 3 Months



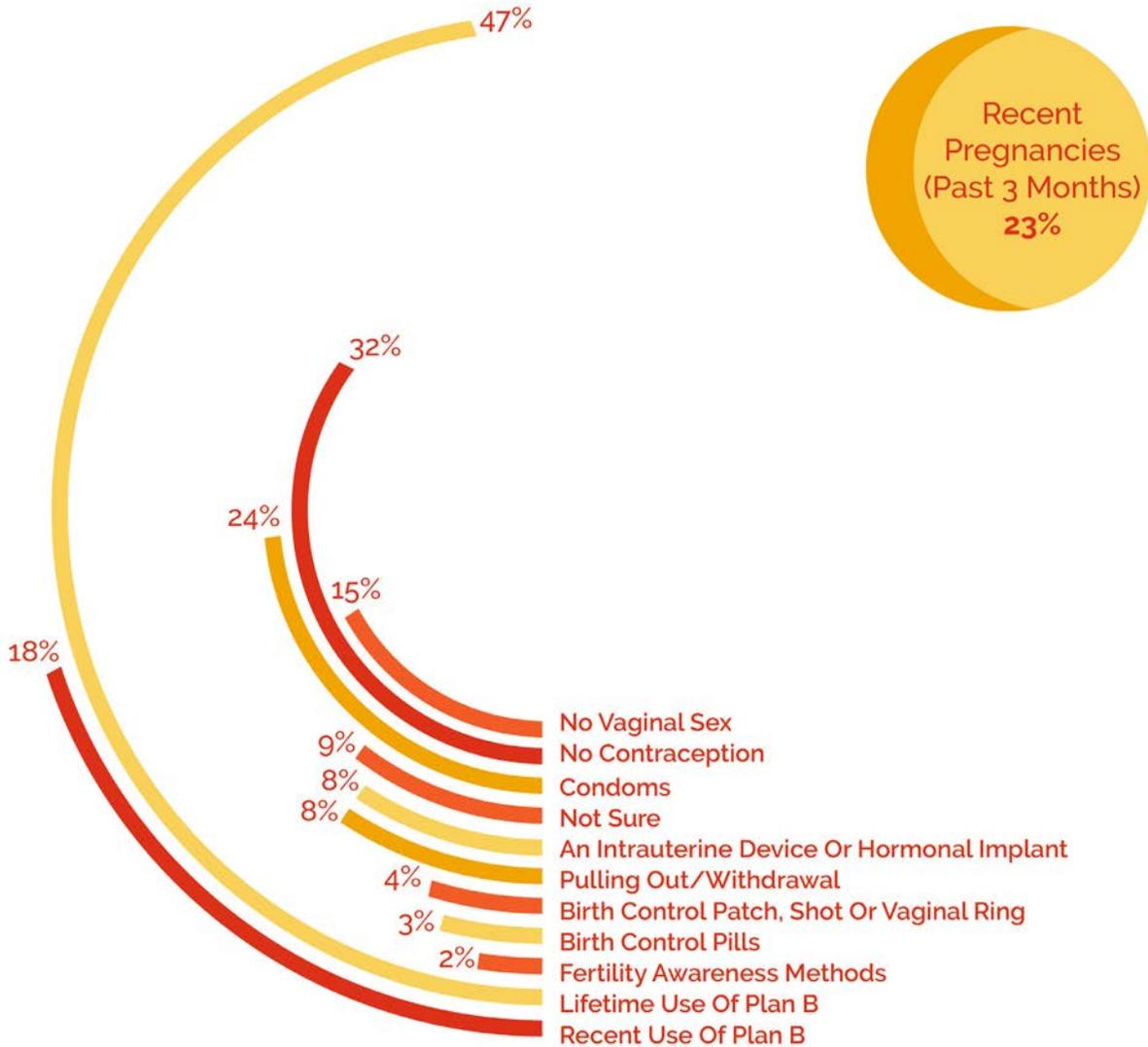
## Healthcare Needs

### Key Takeaways:

One-quarter of young people had an injury or illness in the past three months that prevented them from engaging in activities. However, there appears to be a gap in illness and injuries to healthcare access. Only 15% had been to the emergency room and 12% had accessed health services within a young adult service agency. Testing rates for sexual transmitted diseases, HIV and Hepatitis C were high ranging from 18-34%. Dental and vision care is consistently a high need for young people experiencing homelessness, followed by sleep assistance and weight management support. Although most young people reported feeling safe where they sleep, one-third of young people reported having difficulties in falling asleep.

# PREGNANCY AND CONTRACEPTION

Table 8: Frequency Distributions Of Pregnancy And Contraception



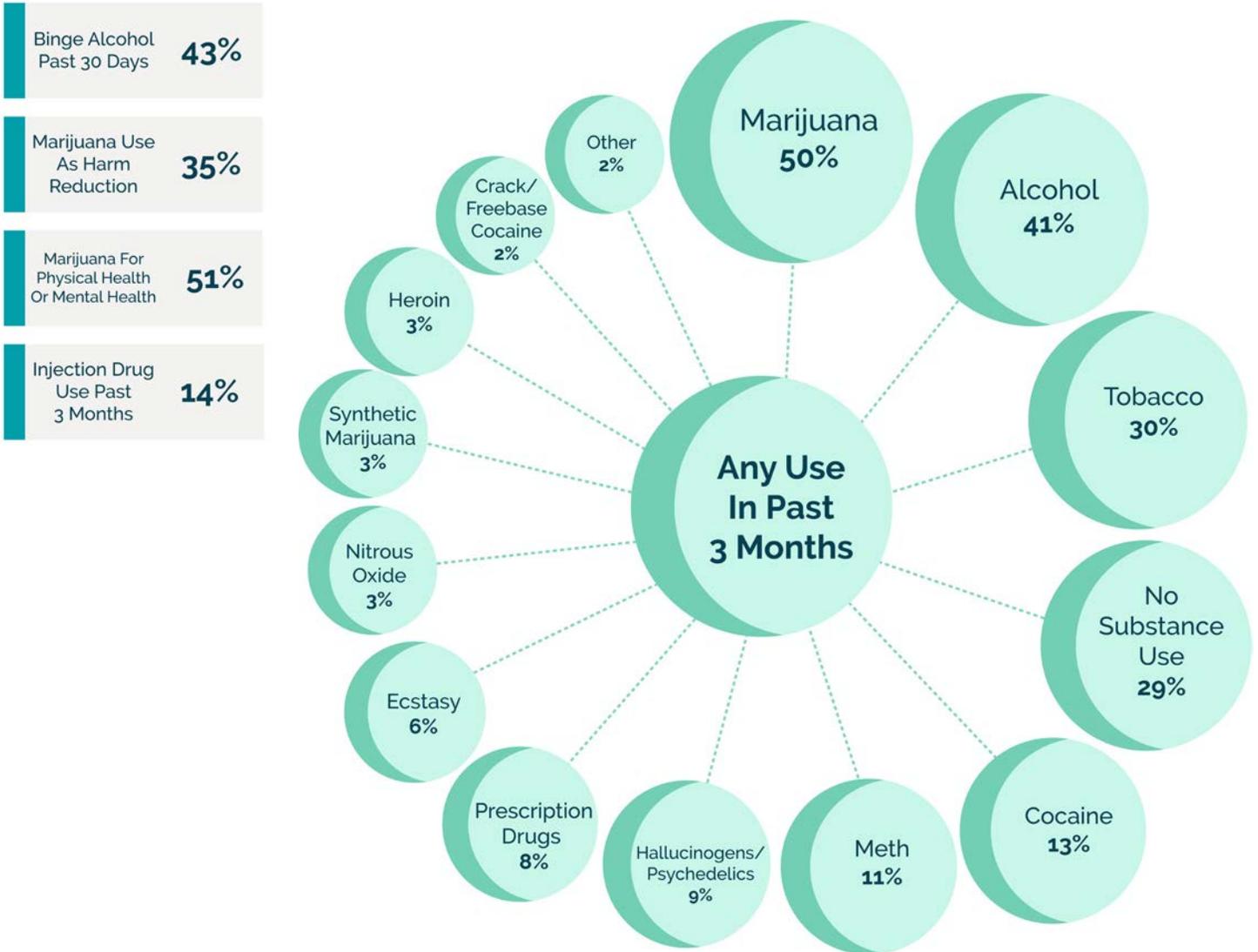
Primary Method Of Contraception Past 3 Months

## Key Takeaways:

One-quarter of young people had been pregnant or gotten someone pregnant in the past 3 months. In the past three months, 15% of young people had not had vaginal sex. Over 30% of young people did not use any form of contraception or were unsure if any was used. One-quarter reported using condoms.

# SUBSTANCE USE

Table 9: Frequency Distributions Of Substance Use

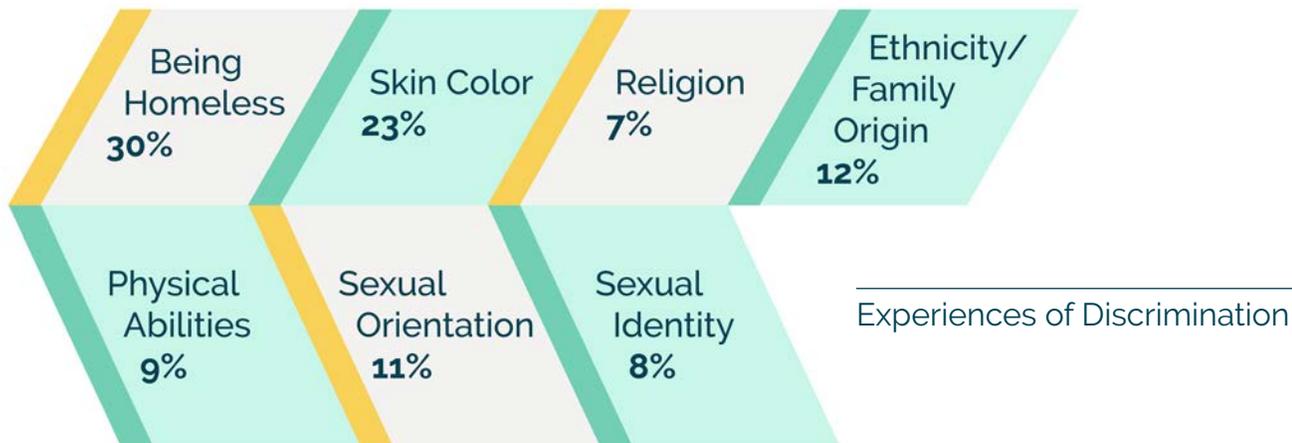


## Key Takeaways:

Alcohol, tobacco and marijuana are highest used substances for young people experiencing homelessness in San Jose. Over one-third of participants reported using marijuana as a harm reduction tool, i.e. in substitution of a potentially more dangerous substance. Over half reported using marijuana to aide in a health or mental health issue.

# DISCRIMINATION AND VIOLENCE EXPERIENCES

Table 10: Frequencies Of Discrimination And Violence Experiences

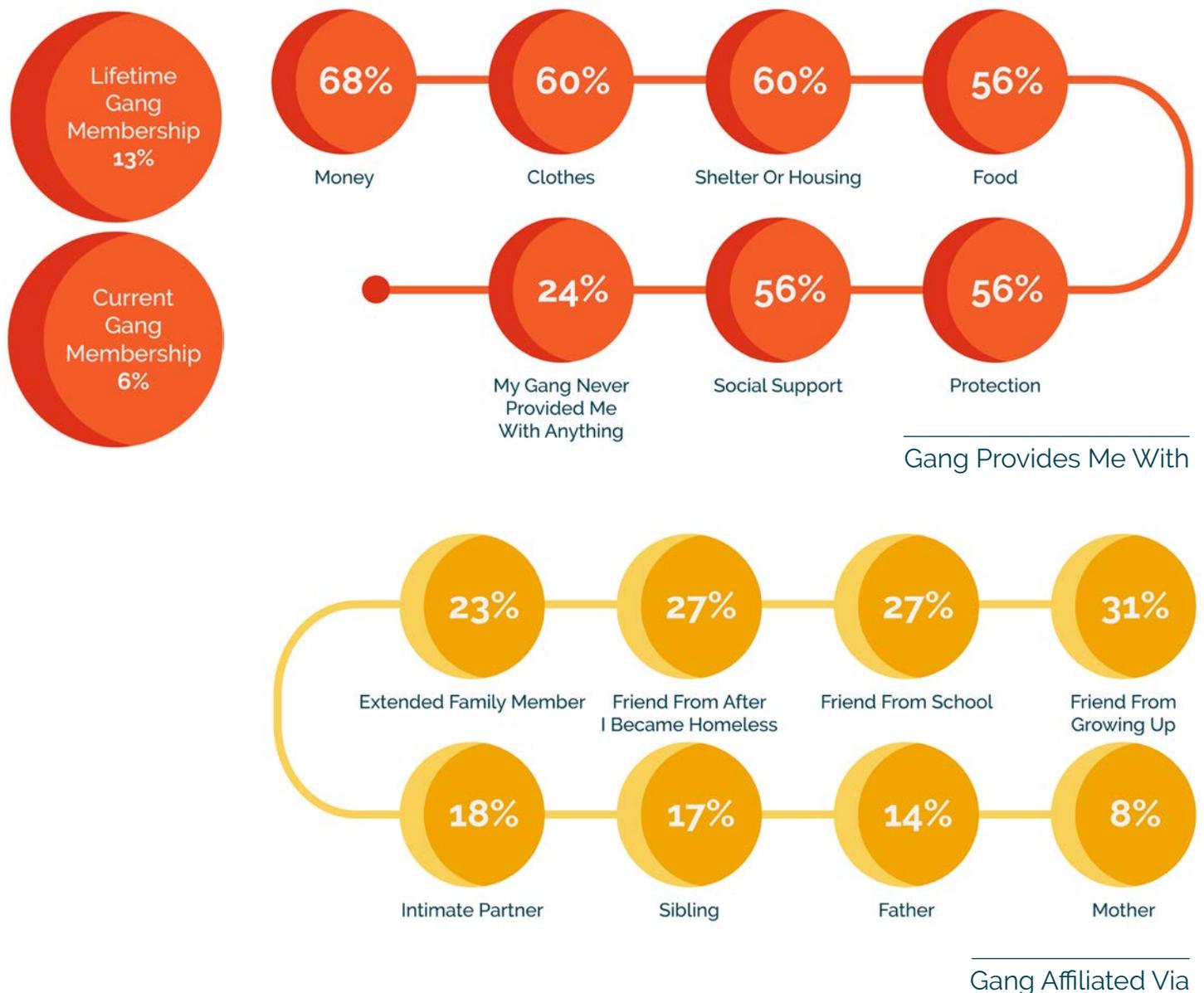


Key Takeaways:

Many young people reported feeling discriminated against because of their housing status. Witnessing community violence including gun violence was a common experience for young people, and 15% of young people said they had been a victim of gun violence since becoming homeless. One-fifth of the young people in the survey recently felt endanger related to gang violence. Almost half of the sample had interacted with law enforcement in the past three months. However, most people reported the interaction as neutral or positive.

## GANG INVOLVEMENT AND AFFILIATION

Table 11: Frequencies Of Gang Involvement And Affiliation

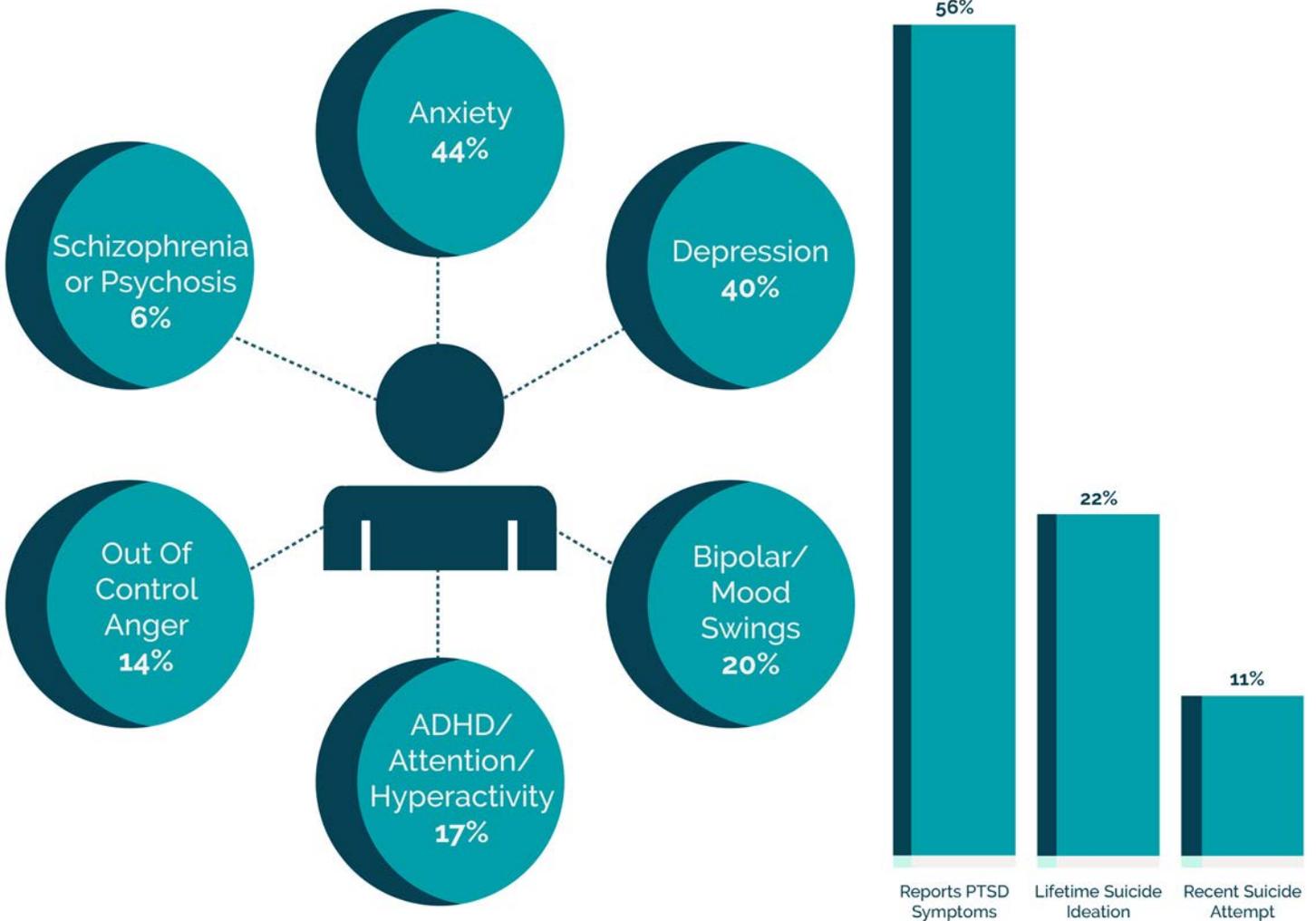


## Key Takeaways:

Thirteen percent of young people surveyed had ever been involved in a gang, and half of those people were currently in a gang. Current and former gang members reported that they received money, clothes, shelter, food, protection and social support from their gang (between 56-68%). Many nonmembers were affiliated to gangs as well. The most common type of affiliate was a friend or extended family member.

# MENTAL HEALTH

Table 12: Frequency Of Mental Health Experiences



## Current Mental Health Struggles

## Key Takeaways:

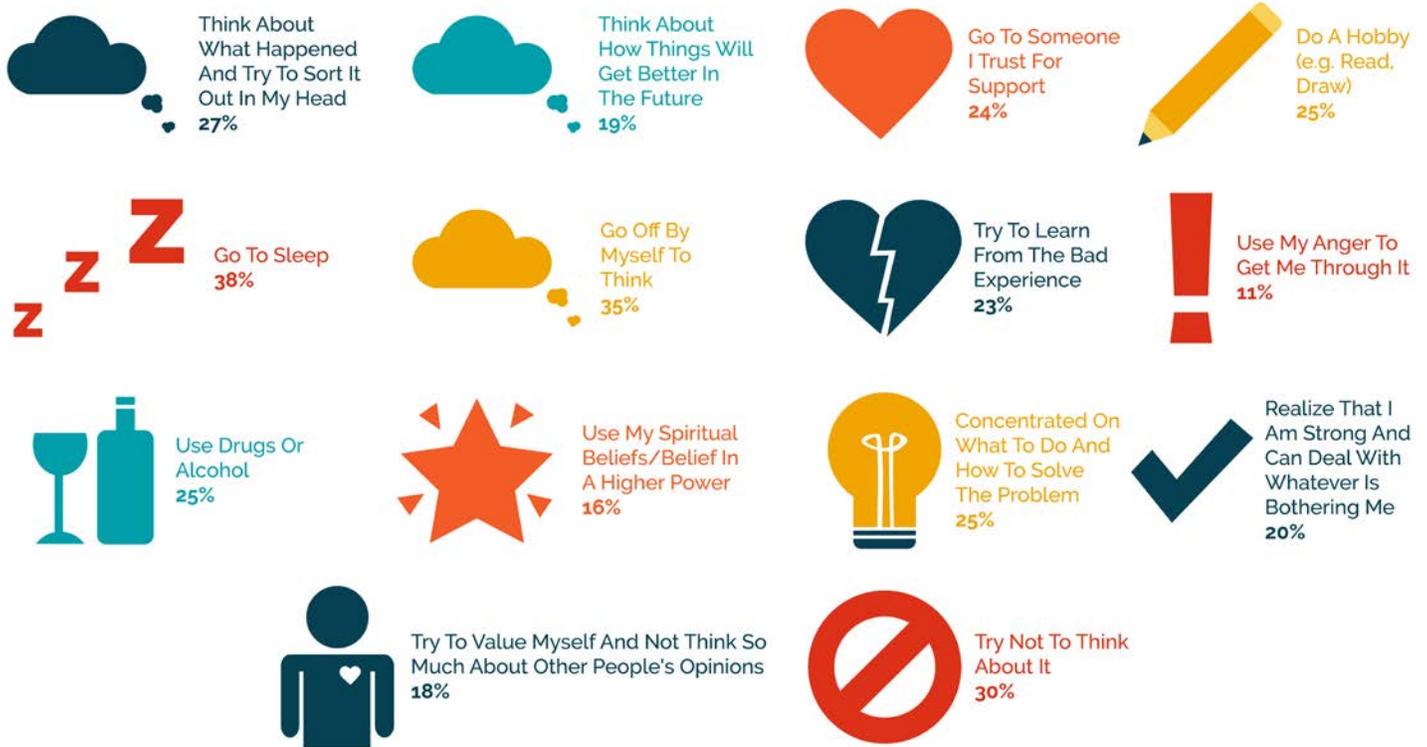
36% of youth reported not struggling with mental health. Of the 64% that are currently struggling with mental health issues, most people reported that they struggle with anxiety or depression. Rates of self-reported psychosis were low (6%). One-fifth of the sample had ever thought about dying by suicide. Eleven percent of the sample had attempted suicide in the last year.

# STRESS AND COPING

Table 13: Frequency Distributions Of Causes Of Stress In Past 3 Months



Table 14: Frequency Distributions Of Coping Mechanisms

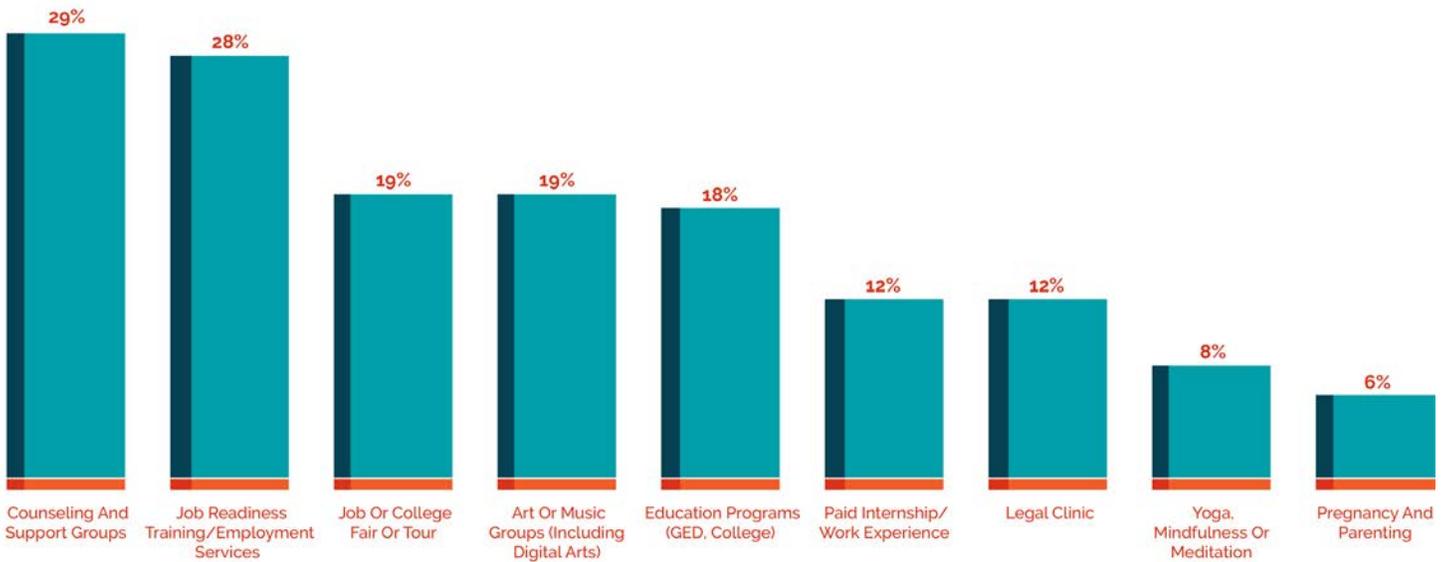


Key Takeaways:

The most prominent stressors were related to income, employment and meeting survival needs. Earning enough money caused stress in almost 40% of the sample. One-third of young people were stressed related to food security and finding a place to sleep. Other prominent stressors included those related to young adult developmental trajectories, i.e. having a purpose in life, getting along with friends and getting more education. Common methods for coping with stress or problems included social isolation or avoidance.. One quarter of young people reported using drugs and alcohol as a coping mechanism. Seeking social support was reported by 24% of the sample.

# PROGRAM UTILIZATION

Table 15: Frequency Distributions Of Program Utilization



Programs Accessed In Last 3 Months

## Key Takeaways:

Many young people use drop-in services at least once a week. Less than 15% reported only using services when they needed to.. The most accessed type of program was counseling and support groups, followed by employment related programs. The lowest accessed type of programming were yoga, mindfulness, or meditation and pregnancy/parenting programming.

# SERVICE EFFICACY AND RESPONSIVENESS

Table 16: Frequency Distributions Of Service Efficacy And Responsiveness

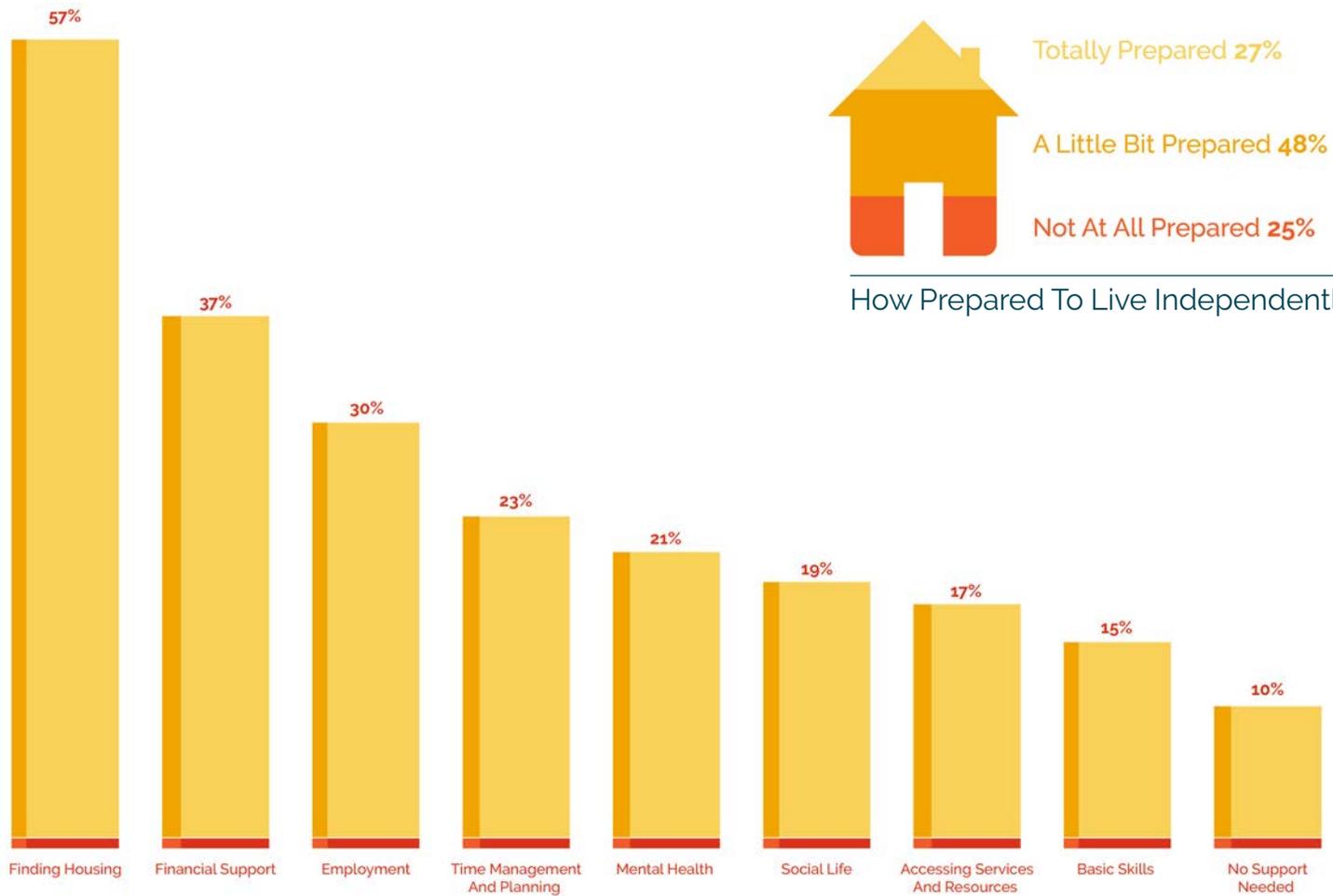


## Key Takeaways:

Most young people feel that services are easily accessible, that they are able to connect to a supportive staff member, and that they know who to talk to in order to get support.. Areas that young people were least efficacious in terms of services were connecting with a supportive adult who was not staff and knowing how to access shelters.

# INDEPENDENT LIVING PREPAREDNESS

Table 17: Independent Living Preparedness



Self-Identified Areas Where More Support Is Needed To Live Independently

## Key Takeaways:

Only one-quarter of young people surveyed felt prepared to live independently. The majority had mixed feelings and one-quarter felt totally unprepared. The areas where young people identified needing the most support were in housing attainment, financial support and employment.

# CONCLUSION

With any large-scale research project, comes challenges and opportunities to grow. An initial challenge was the survey instrument itself. From the beginning, investigators aimed to create a comprehensive instrument but also prioritized limiting the survey length. Limiting survey length was important for participant buy-in, understanding that young people have a variety of features that may make completing a computer-based survey difficult including lack of sleep, vision issues, and/or distrust of research. Reducing survey burden was a priority, however, as a result some items were not included such as extended mental health scales and military status. Although the investigators believe that the samples accurately reflect the larger population of homeless youth in each city based on research that states that a large proportion of homeless youth populations access drop-in centers, it is possible that certain sub populations may be underrepresented in the sample. Future directions with the HYRRS protocol would be to refine sampling methodology to look more closely like a random sampling methodology. Going forward, HYRRS seeks to expand the number of cities and services environments included in order to expand the HYRRS collective. Efforts will be made to continue to refine the HYRRS instrument.

## LENS CO

Lens Co is a research and implementation consulting enterprise that combines scientific rigor with realworld experience. Founded by Robin Petering, MSW, PhD, the Lens Co mission is to empower change for creating an equitable and just society through the strategic and appropriate use of data.

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**LENS CO**

## REALYST

REALYST is a national collaborative of academic and community partners that uses research to inform innovative policies, programs and services aimed at ending homelessness and housing instability among young people. We believe that understanding youth homelessness helps communities create effective solutions for preventing it.



**REALYST**

RESEARCH, EDUCATION AND ADVOCACY  
CO-LAB FOR YOUTH STABILITY AND THRIVING

## BWC

Bill Wilson Center is committed to working with the community to ensure that every youth has access to the range of services needed to grow to be healthy and self-sufficient adults. Bill Wilson Center has been providing services to runaway and homeless youth since 1973.



**BWC**  
Bill Wilson Center