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Aboriginal Youth At Risk: The Role of Education, Mobility, Housing, Employment, and Language as Protective Factors for Problem and Criminal Behaviours

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Introduction

One of the most critical policy concerns for Aboriginal and First Nations organizations in Canada is the disproportionate number of Aboriginal youth who are either at risk of becoming involved or are involved with criminal activities. Of particular concern to policy-makers and Aboriginal communities is the subset of these individuals who are sentenced to custody, become serious and violent young offenders, and continue their serious and violent offending into adulthood. As the overwhelming amount of serious youth crime generally occurs in urban/suburban contexts in Canada, regardless of the ethnicity of the offender, for urban-based, Aboriginal service organizations, such as the friendship centres, it is important to determine how best to utilize their resources to assist their members and the broader community of Aboriginal peoples in reducing the likelihood of Aboriginal children and youth becoming involved with anti-social, delinquent, or criminal activities.

While there have been considerable political debates and discussions about why the disproportionality for Aboriginal young offenders exists, there has been far less empirical research in Canada and elsewhere about the risk and protective factors identified in the extensive theorizing about youth crime. In effect, there is an abundance of political discussions and scholarly theories, but insufficient national data that can inform the development of specific, targeted programs to reduce the risk factors and increase the protective factors for Aboriginal youth in urban settings throughout Canada.

This chapter uses a number of key variables from the 2006 census from Statistics Canada to examine several important risk and protective factors for young offenders among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth in National Aboriginal Friendship Centre (NAFC) catchment areas. An analysis of this data and a review of the leading research literature will also form the basis for the policy/program recommendations found in this chapter.

In considering the data analysis presented in this chapter, there are several important data limitations. These are the absence of any self-report information on criminal or at-risk behaviour; the types of variables that were made available to the authors for analysis; and the inability to conduct any multivariate statistical relationships on the data between and among the risk and protective factors in the census data. Based on the available data, the variables used in this chapter are gender, household and family structure, housing, education, geographic mobility, language, and employment and income.

Notwithstanding the aforementioned limitations, it is possible to justify a univariate analysis of these risk and protective factors because there is substantial theoretical and research literature that establishes these factors as strongly correlated with young offending. It is also possible to argue that the policy themes raised above are so important that even a preliminary and partial data analysis of risk and protective factors is helpful to policy-makers, program developers, and Aboriginal communities and organizations.

Gender

There was early consensus in criminological theory and research that gender was among the strongest predictors of offending, involvement with the youth criminal justice system, custodial sentencing practices, and life-course criminality (Blumstein, Chen, and Vischer 1986; Loeber and Farrington 2001). Yet, for Aboriginal youth in Canada and Australia, there has been a disproportionate number of Aboriginal girls in custody (Cohen, Corrado, and McCormick 2008; Chen et al. 2005). In other words, while gender is generally a protective factor for girls, but a risk factor for boys, it is more complicated when attempting to explain Aboriginal girls and criminality. One explanation is that Aboriginal girls are more likely to experience a larger number of risk factors, such as family criminality, young/single mother, and abuse/foster care, and, conversely, fewer protective factors, such as strong verbal skills, a stable family, and initial school success, than non-Aboriginal girls. Yet, Aboriginal girls still experience fewer of these risk factors than Aboriginal boys, with the exception of sexual abuse, which is typical of the general gender profile of risk/protective factors (Corrado, Odgers, and Cohen 2002; Goodkind, Ng, and Sarri 2006; Herrera and McCloskey 2000).

In most of the presented analyses that include other risk/protective factors, gender and ethnicity will be considered control variables. However, the gender and age profiles for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth from the census data used in this chapter is presented in **Table 7.1** on the following page. This sample comprised 208,120 Aboriginal children and youth and 3,816,175 non-Aboriginal children and youth who were seventeen years old or younger at the time of the census and resided in NAFC catchment areas. The gender breakdown is approximately equal for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children and youth in the samples, and across the age groups under consideration in this chapter.

Table 7.1: Distribution of Sample by Age and Gender

		0 to 5 years old (%)	6 to 12 years old (%)	13 to 17 years old (%)
Aboriginal	Total	30.9	39.3	29.7
	Male	51.1	51.1	51.4
Non-Aboriginal	Total	30.2	38.8	31.0
	Male	51.1	51.3	51.4

In effect, approximately one-third of the sample was in each of the age groupings provided by Statistics Canada, and there was nearly a perfect distribution of males and females in the samples.

Family Structure

There is no criminological theory of young offending, especially serious and violent young offending, that does not include family as a central factor—as either a protective or a risk factor. The obvious reason is that the family, whether natural, adoptive, or foster, is where most of the critical factors affecting how children develop through the stages of life occur, even into adulthood. In a recent article in the *Criminologist* (2010), David Farrington, the most widely published and cited researcher in criminology, summarized his and other renowned research on the centrality of the family in explaining delinquency. The centrality of the family is also presented in the *Handbook of Crime Correlates* (Ellis and Wright 2009), which identified 35 family factors. Farrington (2010) asserts that six categories of family factors have been the focus of criminology research:

- (a) Criminal and antisocial parents and siblings
- (b) Large family size
- (c) Child-rearing methods (poor supervision, inconsistent discipline, parental coldness and rejection, low parental involvement with the child)
- (d) Abuse (physical or sexual)
- (e) Parental conflict and disrupted families
- (f) Other parental features (especially young parents, substance abuse, stress, or depression of parents)

According to Derzon (2010), the strongest predictors of serious and violent offending are low parental education and low child supervision, along with poor child-rearing skills, parental conflict, and large family size. In one of the most sophisticated and current cohort research projects on serious and violent young offending in the United States, the Pittsburgh Youth Study, three likely causal factors were identified, and they all involved family: poor parental supervision,

low parental reinforcement for pro-social behaviour, and low involvement of male children in family activities (Murray et al. 2002). Single parents, or related concepts such as broken homes and disrupted families (i.e., the loss of a biological father or mother), have also consistently been strong predictors of delinquency.

However, it is necessary to understand the reason for single parenthood in order to explain whether single parenthood is a risk factor or a protective factor. Single parenthood is a risk factor when it occurs because of family conflict leading to divorce, but it is far less of a risk factor if the cause is death or hospitalization, and it is a protective factor when the child is no longer exposed to an abusive, violent or criminal parent, typically the father (Murray et al. 2002).

In terms of the number of children, family size is often, but not always, a strong predictor of delinquency. In effect, there are specific conditions that affect whether family size is either a risk or protective factor. The risk factors within the family are often interdependent and include: the inability of parents to spend time with or nurture each successive child; an inability to monitor and provide consistent discipline; and overcrowding and inadequate privacy, nutrition, and leisure opportunities all causing frustration, anger, sibling conflict, and fighting. These risk factors are often related to financial or employment problems (poverty) and socially disorganized or high-crime neighbourhoods, especially those with a presence of youth and/or adult gangs. In addition, family and neighbourhood risk factors are typically associated with ethnicity or race. In the urban United States, this relationship is disproportionately African American and Hispanic. It is African Caribbean in the United Kingdom (Farrington and Loeber 1999).

As demonstrated in **Table 7.2** (below), the proportion of Aboriginal youth from the census data living in a one-family household (77.0%) was 10% less than the proportion of non-Aboriginal youth living in one-family households (86.1%). These proportions remained virtually the same when considering gender (see **Table 7.2**). While inferences from the census data are necessarily tentative because of the aforementioned sampling and statistical analysis limitations, the higher proportion of Aboriginal multiple-family households may contribute to an increased risk for a wide range of behavioural problems, assuming that multiple-family households are characterized by crowding and limited financial resources.

Table 7.2: One-Family Households for Sample 0 to 17 Years Old

		One-Family Households Only (%)
Aboriginal	Total	77.0
	Male	76.9
	Female	76.9
Non-Aboriginal	Total	86.1
	Male	86.0
	Female	86.2

In most urban contexts in Canada, especially in major cities such as Vancouver and Toronto, which have by far the highest-cost housing and rent, single households are considerably more expensive than multiple-family households. Typically, the latter are more likely to involve shared housing costs. In other words, it is very likely that Aboriginal families disproportionately live in multiple-family dwellings not only because of communal values, but also because of substantially lower family income or owning or rental affordability.

This general conclusion is supported by the data presented in **Table 7.3** (below), where the percentage of Aboriginal, single-parent households (29.3%) is nearly double the percentage of non-Aboriginal single-parent households (14.5%). Again, there are no gender differences. Audas and Willms (2001) have argued that single-parent families increase the risk of a number of problem behaviours among youth, including dropping out of school and engaging in deviant or criminal behaviour. This inference that single-parent families increase the level of risk for Aboriginal youth is based on several assumptions associated with single parenthood, including the higher likelihood of difficulties in monitoring children; lower overall family income; more social isolation for the parent and child or children; and lower social capital (i.e., the ability to resort to community friendships or acquaintances to help network in order to access critical assistance, such as finding employment, baby/child monitoring, neighbourhood social activities, and safety/crime prevention protection for children and parents) (Demuth and Brown 2004). For example, the NAFC is a source of social capital because not only can it link single parents to other families socially, but it also can assist a single parent to “bridge” to other community resources, such as housing and schools, and community groups, such as parents with children with special needs. Moreover, the NAFC can assist a single parent in obtaining resources through its ability to intercede and/or promote policies with all levels of government from the community, city, and province to the federal government.

A key familial risk factor is social isolation, which is substantially more pronounced for young, single parents, particularly those with substance-abuse problems, low educational attainment, involvement in the sex trade, and/or having experienced multiple abusive-partner relationships. In the urban context, the problem is further compounded because the only affordable rental housing

Table 7.3: Single-Parent Family Households for Sample 0 to 17 Years Old

		Single-Parent Households (%)
Aboriginal	Total	29.3
	Male	29.5
	Female	29.1
Non-Aboriginal	Total	14.5
	Male	14.5
	Female	14.5

for young, single mothers is typically in socially disorganized or high-crime communities, such as the Downtown Eastside in Vancouver and the Jane/Finch corridor in Toronto.

The relationship between the single-parent household and Aboriginal young offenders was evident in a large study of incarcerated youth in British Columbia, where the majority of Aboriginal incarcerated youth were living with their single, unemployed mothers (Corrado and Cohen 2002). An important related finding was that the average age that Aboriginal young offenders in this sample began leaving home was 13 years old, which was very similar to their non-Aboriginal counterparts (12 years old); however, the number of times that Aboriginal youth left their homes was much higher ($M = 39$ times versus $M = 19$ times), and Aboriginal youth stayed away from home much longer (30 days versus 19 days) (Corrado, Cohen, and McCormick 2008b). The authors concluded that “these findings are typically related to these youth being the children of single, young mothers who do not have the experience, resources, or skills to effectively raise children” (Corrado, Cohen, and McCormick 2008b: 4).

One of the themes that emerged from the authors’ research on the issue of single mothers was that Aboriginal young offenders were too often released from custody into urban communities where they did not return to reside with their mothers. For a variety of reasons, such as family abuse histories or the desire to be independent, Aboriginal young offenders, especially older adolescents, rarely returned to their parent for any length of time because they preferred to live on their own, primarily in large, urban contexts. However, without an urban Aboriginal housing resource, these young offenders often resort to further offending to survive “on the streets,” sometimes as part of informal groups of older adolescents and young adults. In effect, a stable Aboriginal housing resource with a strict anti-alcohol/drug, anti-gang membership, and strong Aboriginal/First Nations cultural values, and educational/job training triage capacities is necessary to increase protective factors and reduce the risk factors for recidivism (Hagan and McCarthy 1998).

Table 7.4: Single-Parent Family Households

		0 to 5 years old (%)	6 to 12 years old (%)	13 to 17 years old (%)
Aboriginal	Total	27.3	30.2	30.3
	Male	27.2	30.6	30.7
	Female	27.6	29.9	29.8
Non-Aboriginal	Total	9.1	15.3	18.7
	Male	9.1	15.3	18.7
	Female	9.1	15.3	18.7

Table 7.4 on page 158 provides a breakdown of the proportion of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth living in single-parent families. There was no variation by gender; however, there were some interesting findings when considering Statistics Canada age groups. For example, for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth, the proportion living in a single-parent family increased among the older age groups. For Aboriginal youth, the proportion increased from 27.3% for youth between the ages of 0 and 5 years old to 30.3% for those between the ages of 13 and 17 years old. While this general trend held for the non-Aboriginal youth in this sample as well, in that the proportion of youth living in single-parent families was greatest in the oldest age group, the distribution for the non-Aboriginal youth in the older age category (18.7%) was double the proportion of the youngest category (9.1%) (see **Table 7.4**). More critically, in all age categories, the proportion of Aboriginal youth living in single-parent families was much larger than among their non-Aboriginal counterparts. One possible explanation for this difference could be the disproportionate number of younger Aboriginal mothers and the high Aboriginal birth rate in Canada (Audas and Willms 2001).

There is a large and relatively recent trend in research literature that not only identifies new risk and protective factors, but also highly effective interventions. For example, the importance of a healthy pregnancy is universally acknowledged because multiple risk factors that increase potential damage to healthy and normal fetal development have been identified steadily over the last twenty years. Young, single mothers, typically those under 18 years of age, too often are unaware of their pregnancies during the first trimester, and even into the initial part of the second trimester, and, therefore, engage in risky behaviours that can have lifelong negative consequences for fetal development. These risks include alcohol consumption, especially binge drinking in the second trimester; drug use; malnutrition or poor nutrition; smoking one or more packs of cigarettes per day; and severe and persistent stress, often related to abusive and physically violent relationships. While all of these risks affect healthy fetal development, many of these risks are also associated with either low or high birth weights that both negatively affect neural development and, often, infant/child learning capacities. When a baby's birth weight is below 1,000 grams, 40% to 45% of those babies who survive have neuro-developmental impairments (Smith et al. 2007).

Beyond general health problems, children with major neurological problems, including irritability or limited affect, experience developmental delays that can affect how the mother bonds with the baby/infant. In effect, these children are at risk for a lifetime of cognitive, mental health, physical, and social problems. While learning deficits will be discussed in detail in the education section below, the concern here is that young, single mothers, who are socially isolated with little social capital, are more likely to engage in these risky behaviours while pregnant or when their babies are very young. Aboriginal mothers, particularly those under 18 years old, are disproportionately in this high-risk group. In addition, when considering the proportion of young Aboriginal mothers in Canada with the 2006

census data indicating a high proportion of Aboriginal infants, children, and youth growing up in single-parent families, policies and programs must be focused on single-parent families to reduce the risk factors that these children face.

Housing

As mentioned above, housing is important in assessing the presence of risk and protective factors for at-risk youth in general and, specifically, for Aboriginal at-risk youth because many of these factors are associated with housing. The first major difference between the Aboriginal people in NAFC catchment areas and non-Aboriginal people in Canada has to do with ownership of housing. Based on 2006 census data, of the 592,500 Aboriginal homes in the census, 47.2% were owned, 48.1% were rented, and 4.7% were band housing. By comparison, of the 18,009,765 non-Aboriginal homes, 71.4% were owned and 28.6% were rented. The gap in the proportion of homes owned by Aboriginal people compared to non-Aboriginal people must be addressed by Aboriginal leaders and politicians. Home ownership can contribute to more stable families and an increase in familial social capital. However, these protective factors are affected by the quality of the home and whether the home provides adequate space for residents.

As demonstrated in **Table 7.5** (below), there are enormous differences in the quality of housing between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal population samples in the data analyzed for this chapter. While approximately one-fifth (19.6%) of Aboriginal children and youth lived in housing that did not meet national standards, slightly more than one-tenth (11.9%) of non-Aboriginal children and youth in the sample were in a similar housing situation. A far more drastic disparity occurs for band housing since nearly one-half (42.1%) of the band housing in NAFC catchment areas was deemed substandard. For Aboriginal people in NAFC catchment areas who owned their homes, the rate of living in housing that was below national standards was 11.1%, more than that for non-Aboriginal children and youth (7.6%). The same general pattern was evident for rentals, even though the difference between Aboriginal youth and children and their non-Aboriginal counterparts was less (25.8% for Aboriginal children and youth compared to 22.7% for non-Aboriginal children and youth).

Table 7.5: Housing and National Occupancy Standards — Percentage Living in Housing that Does Not Meet National Occupancy Standards

	Aboriginal	Non-Aboriginal
Total	19.6	11.9
Owned	11.1	7.6
Rented	25.8	22.7
Band Housing	42.1	—

Table 7.6: Proportion of Homes in which Persons per Room Exceeded One (%)

	Aboriginal	Non-Aboriginal
Total	32.0	30.4
Owned	29.2	26.9
Rented	28.7	33.3
Band Housing	60.4	—

In addition to the quality of the home, as mentioned above, crowding within a home is another risk factor for children and youth. Using the Statistics Canada definition, crowding was defined as a home in which the number of persons per room exceeded one. When considering this factor, the proportion of Aboriginal children and youth who lived in homes that met this criterion (32.0%) was nearly equal to that of their non-Aboriginal counterparts (30.4%) (see **Table 7.6**, above). This relationship was also evident for Aboriginal children and youth who lived in homes that were owned, although it was somewhat less frequent (29.2%). Again, crowded home contexts appeared almost at a crisis level in band housing, with approximately two-thirds (60.4%) of Aboriginal children and youth living in NAFC catchment areas in this type of situation.

The crowding levels among the Aboriginal children and youth in this sample were large enough that it is possible to infer that the stress levels associated with the large-family risk factor likely applies to a substantial proportion of Aboriginal individuals and families. In effect, obtaining up-to-standard housing that is large enough for the family may be more difficult for Aboriginal people, particularly in an urban context. In most cities, available and affordable housing, whether for rent or ownership, is not only dependent on regular and minimum income, but also avoiding even subtle ethnic/racial discrimination, especially in stable neighbourhoods with limited low-income and government-assisted housing stocks (Cohen and Corrado 2004). In other words, for families relying on government assistance or low-wage employment, often the only housing available is in socially disorganized neighbourhoods with high housing turnover or transient renters. Again, this housing context is a high risk factor for Aboriginal youth, especially in areas where traditional youth/adult criminal organizations or gangs operate, such as in Winnipeg and Saskatoon. It is important not to underestimate that even in communities with a neighbourhood characterized by a high level of social disorganization, there are adjacent neighbourhoods that are more stable with at least moderate levels of social capital (Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls 1997).

The crowded-housing risk factor is compounded when major repairs are needed for the obvious reason that substandard housing can cause considerable strain within families. The major housing repair distribution between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children and youth in this sample is presented in **Table 7.7** on page 162. The sample data indicated that Aboriginal dwellings with children and youth were nearly three times (17.2%) more likely to be in need of major repair

Table 7.7: Proportion of Dwellings Needing Major Repairs by Ownership Status (%)

	Aboriginal (n = 592,500)	Non-Aboriginal (n = 18,009,765)
Total	17.2	6.7
Owned	13.2	5.2
Rented	17.7	10.3
Band Housing	53.3	—

compared to non-Aboriginal dwellings (6.7%). The same ratio was present for Aboriginal-owned dwellings versus non-Aboriginal-owned dwellings. However, the ratio decreased for rental dwellings. Also, the stark pattern that emerged in the above housing measures involving band housing was repeated here with slightly more than half (53.3%) requiring major repairs. In effect, a much larger proportion of Aboriginal people in this sample, compared to non-Aboriginal people live in rented dwellings in need of major repairs.

Taken together, all the housing measures lend support to the inference that housing is a significant risk factor for Aboriginal children and youth, whether through the family stress dynamic or for those Aboriginal youth who leave their families to live with friends or “on the streets.” Both patterns are intensified by the disproportionate levels of Aboriginal geographic mobility identified and explained by churn theory that contends that Aboriginal families and youth move frequently from rural, reserve housing to inter-city, non-reserve housing and back (Beavon, Wingert, and White 2009). Part of this theory is that this frequent movement can be explained through the search for better housing and access to other resources, including education, hospitals, and employment (Clatworthy and Norris 2007). The need for urban housing for Aboriginal people in Canada is based not only on the fundamental population shift, but also because of, as discussed above, the need to provide Aboriginal families, especially young, single mothers and individual adolescents, with the protective factors of stable housing in a stable neighbourhood with access to triaged resources, including education, hospitals, and employment.

Education

There is extensive research literature on the enormous importance of education attainment and high school graduation as strong protective factors. Beginning at the earliest points in preschool, kindergarten, and first grade, positive school experiences and learning achievements have lifelong protective effects against anti-social and criminal behaviours. Conversely, aggression, early school problems, and poor performance are strong risk factors (Trembley and LeMarquand 2001; Moffit 1993). There is also a large amount of education literature identifying the risk factors for later poor school performance and drop out. Again, a major theme is the presence of a distinctive developmental pathway consisting of early and

persistent learning and discipline problems beginning in kindergarten (e.g., below age/grade verbal, cognitive, and math levels, truancy, disruptive class behaviour, and continuing throughout primary and middle schools with the additional risk factor of involvement with anti-social peers) (Alexander, Entwisle, and Horsey 1997; Davison 2003; Mendelson 2006; White et al 2009). This pattern is highly predictive of both poor school performance and school drop out at all levels (Ensminger and Slusarcick 1992; Hains 2001; Haveman, Wolfe, and Spaulding 1991).

In terms of levels of education with the census data samples, for those between the ages of 15 and 19 years old, as demonstrated in **Table 7.8** (below), there are approximate parities between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, with the major exceptions of the two categories “no certificate, diploma, or degree” and “high school diploma or equivalent.” Although the non-Aboriginal youth (30.5%) had two times the proportion of people with a high school diploma or equivalent than their Aboriginal counterparts (16.1%), it is important to keep in mind that this analysis, as mentioned above, examined those aged 15 to 19 years. In other words, many Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth may have been in the process of completing their high school educations at the time of the census. As such, these proportions likely do not reflect the proportion of either Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal youth who successfully complete their high school educations.

To substantiate the claim above, an analysis was undertaken to determine how many students were attending school at the time of the census. This analysis revealed that there were substantial differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students regarding attending school during the key middle and high school grades in which dropping out most often occurs. While nearly three-quarters (73.3%) of Aboriginal youth between the ages of 15 and 19 were attending school, a slightly larger proportion of non-Aboriginal youth (81.2%) were attending school. There were no gender differences within each group. For many, this is a critical stage of development because it is strongly associated with vital turning points where stable relationships involving marriages, common-law partnerships, and gainful employment occur. Such stable relationships are a powerful protective factor against a life-course trajectory of offending and other problem behaviours. Graduating from high school and obtaining either a trade qualification, post-secondary diploma, or university degree all enhance long-term and

Table 7.8: Level of Education

	No certificate, diploma, or degree (%)	High school diploma or equivalent (%)	Trade certificate, apprenticeship, college, or university diploma or certificate (%)	Below bachelor level (%)	Bachelor's degree or higher (%)
Aboriginal	80.0	16.1	1.5	0.0	0.0
Non-Aboriginal	64.9	30.5	3.9	0.4	0.2

stable employment opportunities and stable intimate relationships (Sampson and Laub 1993). However, the relationship between dropping out and young offending is complex in that positive turning points can still occur for youth who drop out because of stable relationships and other protective factors linked to family and pro-social peer networks (Sweeten, Bushway, and Paternoster 2009).

One of the few in-depth empirical/quantitative studies of factors associated with Aboriginal student drop out was conducted by Corrado, Cohen, and McCormick (2008) in a suburban school district in British Columbia with a small sample of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. It was found that Aboriginal students were significantly more likely to drop out of school than non-Aboriginal students, and females slightly more likely than males. Several of the factors and pathways identified in the above general research literature were evident in this study. A major reason for female drop out was pregnancy, which was consistent with the above discussion about single, young adolescent mothers with very limited resources or social capital. Sex education in school and pregnancy/post-natal assistance are imperative to increase the key protective factors and reduce the numerous perinatal and infancy/early risk factors.

According to Corrado, Cohen, and McCormick (2008), Aboriginal students left school earlier than non-Aboriginal students, missed more days of school during Grades 5 and 7, and were late more often during Grades 3, 4, 5, and 7 than non-Aboriginal students. As predicted, Aboriginal students who dropped out had earlier onset school problems than Aboriginal students who did not drop out. These behaviour problems included skipping class, being easily annoyed or frustrated, being disrespectful, defiance, fighting, being argumentative, and the use of drugs. School mobility or non-normal changing of schools is also a predictor. Most importantly, Corrado, Cohen, and McCormick (2008a) confirmed the importance of the interactivity of many of the developmental risk factors that form a pattern characterized by the early onset of these factors and a cumulative series of new-school and family-related risk factors. Not surprisingly, many of the most effective programs to decrease risk factors and increase protective factors involve early school and family intervention strategies that focus on the basic verbal skills, reading, math, and discipline/focus experiences that are central to school success (Farrington and Welsh 2007).

Mobility

Another important potential risk factor is frequent residential and geographic mobility. Not only can mobility be disruptive in terms of changing schools, teachers, friends, and immediate family networks, but it also requires rebuilding these networks in new contexts. Alienation, frustration, and anger in family, school, and neighbourhood contexts are strain-related risk factors for general delinquency and also for more serious and violent offending. As demonstrated in **Table 7.9** on the following page, the geographic and short-term mobility, while greater than the

Table 7.9: Mobility in the Past 12 Months (%)

	Aboriginal (n = 581,385)	Non-Aboriginal (n = 17,815,325)
Movers	24.4	14.9
Non-Movers	75.6	85.1

non-Aboriginal population, was more moderate than some of the churn theorists would have predicted. Still, nearly one-quarter of the Aboriginal youth (24.4%) compared to approximately one-tenth of their non-Aboriginal counterparts (9.5%) had moved at least once in the past 12 months. However, more than half of the Aboriginal youth in the sample (57.7%), but a slight minority of non-Aboriginal youth (47.3%) between the ages of 5 and 24 years moved at least once during the past 5 years. Not surprisingly, the most active period was for the older—18 to 24 years—category for both Aboriginal (52.7%) and non-Aboriginal (48.6%) youth, while the least active period was the middle category—13 to 17 years—again for both Aboriginal (63.4%) and non-Aboriginal (51.6%) youth (see **Table 7.10**, below). Given the nature of the data, it was not possible to discern why respondents moved or how often. Still, it is important to recognize that mobility is not always a risk factor. It can be a protective factor for youth when it is intended to move young people away from negative family and/or peer relationships. In addition, it can reduce the drop-out risk by moving the youth away from specific and persistent stressful school contexts, such as bullies or gangs (Lee and Burkam 1992). Nonetheless, high levels of residential and school mobility are risk factors for serious and violent offenders (Cohen, Corrado, and McCormick 2008). Again, providing highly mobile youth with a safe-housing resource can reduce their exposure to obvious risk factors associated with the lack of a stable residence.

As demonstrated in **Table 7.10** (below), there were gender differences in mobility, particularly between Aboriginal females (68.4%) and males (57.8%) in the 18 to 24 years age category. There were also important differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal females in the 13 to 17 years and 18 to 24 years age categories as well (see **Table 7.10**). This suggests a potential greater vulnerability for both adolescent and young adult Aboriginal females to mobility risk

Table 7.10: Mobility in the Past Five Years

		5 to 12 years old (%)	13 to 17 years old (%)	18 to 24 years old (%)
Aboriginal	Total	58.2	50.2	63.4
	Male	58.5	49.2	57.8
	Female	58.0	51.1	68.4
Non-Aboriginal	Total	49.0	38.4	51.6
	Male	49.0	38.1	48.4
	Female	49.0	38.7	54.8

factors. As discussed above, finding housing that meets national standards and having the skill qualifications to obtain stable employment/income is difficult, especially in urban contexts and high-cost cities. Again, organizations, such as the NAFC, can be a focal, social-capital resource for this group of vulnerable youth in urban settings.

Employment and Income

For the parents of children, adolescents, and young adults who are the main family or self-supporting individual income earners, stable employment is an important protective factor against both delinquency and more serious offending (Bellair and Roscigno 2000; Jarjoura, Triplett, and Brinker 2002). However, despite the obvious general correlation between poverty and crime, there has been considerable debate about the direct causal relationship, though there is a consensus that it is a risk factor, as is persistent, unstable employment and related low income.

Of all the differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth from the various risk and protective factors described in the above discussions, the largest and most pervasive differences are found in **Table 7.11** (below). The total Aboriginal employment level (45%) is 21 percentage points lower than the non-Aboriginal level. This difference holds for both genders. The Aboriginal unemployment rate is nearly double (21%) that of the non-Aboriginal rate (11%).

The importance of educational attainment as a protective factor is supported by the finding that among employed Aboriginal youth between the ages of 15 and 19 years old ($n = 20,735$), nearly two-thirds (61.3%) had not completed a high school certificate, diploma, or degree compared to just under half (48.1%) of non-Aboriginal youth ($n = 505,275$). Moreover, among those who were unemployed, for Aboriginal youth, approximately three-quarters (76.2%) had not completed a high school certificate, diploma, or degree compared to a small majority (57.9%) of non-Aboriginal youth. In considering these findings, it is possible that they reflect the overall higher family-related financial resources available to non-Aboriginal respondents that may affect the decision to seek employment as opposed to pursuing postgraduate degrees and other opportunities, such as travel. Still, it seems clear that education is an important avenue for Aboriginal youth

Table 7.11: Employment Rate — Ages 16 to 24 Years

		Aboriginal (%)	Non-Aboriginal (%)
Employment Rate	Total	45	66
	Male	44	66
	Female	43	64
Unemployment Rate	Total	21	11
	Male	22	11
	Female	18	11

Table 7.12: Proportion of Sample 15 to 19 Years Old with Low Income After Taxes

		Low Income After Taxes (%)
Aboriginal	Total	22.1
	Male	20.4
	Female	23.9
Non-Aboriginal	Total	14.6
	Male	14.1
	Female	15.1

obtaining employment, as employment rates increased with higher levels of education to a greater degree than for their non-Aboriginal counterparts. Given this, and the findings related to education presented above, school programs that are effective in helping Aboriginal youth complete their high school educations and pursue university degrees are needed.

There were some slight gender differences between employed Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth. Specifically, nearly three-quarters of employed Aboriginal male youth (64.8%) compared to approximately half (50.4%) of non-Aboriginal male youth had not completed a high school certificate, diploma, or degree. For females, a majority of Aboriginal females (58.0%) compared to a minority of their non-Aboriginal counterparts (45.8%) had not completed a high school certificate, diploma, or degree.

While keeping in mind the age range of the sample under consideration, in terms of income, as demonstrated in **Table 7.12** (above), nearly one-quarter (22.1%) of Aboriginal youth aged 15 to 19 were low-income earners after taxes. This proportion was nearly double that of their non-Aboriginal counterparts (14.6%). Given this finding, it is possible that higher education contributes to a better opportunity for employment among Aboriginal youth, but not necessarily access to well-paying jobs. In fact, Aboriginal females in this sample had the highest proportion (23.9%) of low income, though this proportion was only slightly higher than that of Aboriginal males (20.4%). Again, the proportion among Aboriginal males was higher than that of non-Aboriginal males (14.1%) (see **Table 7.12**). As has been stated several times above, financial assistance to promote protective factors, in particular for Aboriginal females who may have a number of other risk factors, is critical.

Language

There is extensive literature on the protective factor of positive and pro-social self-identities for children and adolescents (Morretti, Odgers, and Jackson 2004). For Aboriginal youth, a major identity concern is the negative stereotyping derived from the colonial history of Canada and its effect on Aboriginal peoples generally, and within the Canadian education system specifically. Very importantly, education policies historically, most egregiously the residential

school system, have focused on assimilation or the culturally homogenous school curricula, whether based on francophone culture in Quebec or anglophone culture in most of the other provinces and territories of Canada. One result has been the diminishment of most of the Aboriginal cultural history, values, and languages that form the numerous distinctive First Nation, Métis, and Inuit self-identities.

Language is one of the distinguishing characteristics of self-identity for any ethnic group and is, therefore, central to the intergenerational transmission of identity. Until recently, the teaching of Aboriginal culture and language in formal education has been uncommon, and it is still sporadic today (Greenwood, de Leeuw, and Ngaroimata 2007; Neegan 2005). Arguably, it can be assumed that speaking (or at least understanding) one's Aboriginal language can assist in developing a positive self-identity that is protective throughout the life course. Another assumption is that urban contexts and schools are more difficult environments to maintain a distinctive Aboriginal self-identity and language proficiency because of the overwhelming pervasiveness of the dominant majority culture.

Only a very small proportion of the sample of Aboriginal youth under the age of 24 (7.6%) had any Aboriginal language knowledge. As is evident in **Table 7.13** (below), there was little variation to this finding by age. This finding is extremely important because it suggests a diminishing potential for the intergenerational transmission of language and its survival as an important source of identity.

Not surprisingly given the results presented above, only a very small proportion of the sample of Aboriginal youth twenty-four years old or younger (3.2%) spoke an Aboriginal language most often at home, while the overwhelming majority (92.4%) spoke mainly English in the home. Again, there were no substantial variations by gender. Moreover, as demonstrated in **Table 7.14** (below), only a very small proportion of the Aboriginal youth sample (5.0%) identified an Aboriginal language as their mother tongue.

Table 7.13: Proportion of Sample that has Knowledge of an Aboriginal Language

Age Group	Aboriginal (%) (n = 280,595)
0 to 5 Years Old	7.1
6 to 12 Years Old	7.1
13 to 17 Years Old	7.7
18 to 24 Years Old	8.5

Table 7.14: Proportion of Sample in which the Mother Tongue is an Aboriginal Language

Age Group	Aboriginal (%) (n = 280,595)
0 to 5 Years Old	5.2
6 to 12 Years Old	4.4
13 to 17 Years Old	5.1
18 to 24 Years Old	5.4

Table 7.15: Proportion of Sample that Can Conduct a Conversation in an Aboriginal Language

	0 to 12 Years Old	13 to 24 Years Old
Total	91.1	89.2
Male	91.1	89.2
Female	90.2	89.5

An encouraging language/self-identity indicator from the data was that nearly all Aboriginal youth who had knowledge of an Aboriginal language could converse in their Aboriginal language, independent of age and gender (see **Table 7.15**, above). The reported 91.1% who could hold a conversation in an Aboriginal language who were younger than 13 years old is important for the viability and survival of a fundamental identity dimension, although, as demonstrated in **Table 7.13**, the proportion of children and youth with knowledge of an Aboriginal language was very low. This further suggests the need to provide structured opportunities away from home to hear and speak Aboriginal languages.

Conclusion

Despite the limits of the survey data used in this chapter, arguably there are several important policy inferences that emerge for Aboriginal organizations, such as the NAFC, non-government organizations, government ministries/agencies, and policy researchers concerned with policies and programs to reduce the number of Aboriginal youth at risk for a range of problems, such as dropping out of school, unemployment, and criminality. While these policy inferences are mentioned throughout this chapter, the main themes focus on the confirmation of the disproportionate prevalence of at-risk factors for Aboriginal youth, and the encouraging presence of some protective factors as well. Most importantly, policies that provide young, single Aboriginal mothers with educational information and health assistance, such as home nurse visits to ensure a healthy pregnancy, and then subsequent income, housing, education, and employment assistance and opportunities, are vital. Especially in urban contexts, it is imperative to avoid the social isolation of young, single mothers by providing structured opportunities to develop the social capital necessary to network into stable personal and employment relationships.

The centrality of family protective factors carries into school protective factors primarily because parents are vital for early and sustained positive school experiences. Several early school/home educational programs can contribute to a positive school trajectory. Within schools, resources are integral for Aboriginal students who lack the family/home protective education factors, and are at risk for negative peer associations and early school drop out, specifically, and non-completion in later stages. Programs that facilitate Aboriginal high school

graduation and the continuation to trade and post-secondary education are strong protective factors. Finally, stable employment/income and housing in late adolescence and early adulthood can be augmented by urban-based organizations, such as the NAFC, which can provide specific triage services and informal social networking.

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