Unconventional Lives with Conventional Dreams: An Examination of the Formal and Informal Work Intersect Among Homeless Ottawa Youth

By

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Abstract

The goal of this research is to understand how work (both formal and informal) is situated within the lives of homeless youth and how this intersect is affected by peer networks and relationships developed on the streets. This research aims to increase understanding on whether homelessness and formal work are compatible through highlighting the everyday challenges that affect homeless youth in their struggles to successfully transition off the streets and into adulthood. Through 30 semi-structured in-depth interviews with a sample of homeless youth recruited from Ottawa, Ontario, this research investigates how peer networks affect a street youth’s ability towards taking conventional or alternative pathways to money-making pathways. Further, it examines why some homeless youth choose the types of informal money-making strategies they are engaged in and why they stray away from conventional working aspirations.

Results reveal that despite maintaining conventional goals and aspirations regarding rejoining conventional streams of society, youths turned to informal work due to their lack of viable options in the formal economy. Engagement in the informal economy was cited as necessary in order to satisfy addictions and generate a quick income to alleviate economic instability. Informal working involvements were met with numerous impeding risks and barriers including being subject to victimization, harsh weather conditions, mental and physical health issues and demographic barriers. Cumulative disadvantages were seen to impede youths’ abilities to successfully navigate their informal behaviours on the streets as well as maintain an attachment to family, friends, and school. Further, in most cases youth tended to lack significant formal employment experiences. Even when attaining formal employment, youths turned to illegal activities to supplement their incomes. Severe barriers challenged youths’ abilities to maintain employment as well as balance an attachment to family, friends, and school. These included challenges inherent to living without stable shelter, a lack of viable transportation and struggles with addiction. The results also suggest how social networks influenced youths’ navigations on the streets in respect to employment (both formal and informal) by facilitating criminal engagement through direct and indirect exposures and being embedded in criminal networks. Formal employment facilitation was nearly non-existent through means of peer network influences and youths’ motives and attitudes regarding conventional lifestyle aspirations did not reflect that of their peer networks. The findings in this research are discussed in light of Agnew’s (2006) General Strain Theory and McCarthy et al.’s (2002) Social Capital Theory. Suggestions are offered for future research directions and implications for policy.
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Dedication

To my grandmother Magdalena Stolowicz:

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The struggle homeless youth face to obtain employment in the formal economy stems from complex barriers that restrict choice and influence subsequent pathways of survival on the streets. Being faced with tough barriers that pose difficulties in finding and maintaining formal paid employment does not suggest that homeless youth do not work or want to work (Gaetz & O’Grady 2002:434). Rather, their money generating activities may be restricted to take on a variety of less conventional forms of work. In some instances, these behaviours may be criminal (Gaetz & O’Grady 2002:434). These activities can often be understood in the context of a basic survival strategy used for generating money (Hagan & McCarthy 1997).

Common public perception of homeless youth veers towards their lack of aspiration coupled with lazy attitudes towards finding formal employment. Gaetz (2004:429) argues that being without stable shelter creates limitations that impact one’s ability to exert greater control over aspects of day-to-day life. In turn, developing a lifestyle that allows one to eat, sleep and maintain formal employment comes with greater difficulties and risks. Gaetz and O’Grady (2002) suggest that most homeless youth are not avoiding work. In fact, the vast majority desire jobs but are faced with significant barriers that prevent them from succeeding. Gaetz and O’Grady (2002:430) further clarify, “as a result of their exclusion from the formal economy, many homeless people are forced to engage in risky money-making strategies, some of them illegal or quasi-legal, including the sex trade, panhandling, squeegeeing, and criminal acts such as theft and drug dealing.”

While much work has focused on the illegal money-making strategies on the streets, there has been little scholarship on the intersect of the formal and informal economies (Karabanow et
al. 2010:40). Further, little attention has been paid to the challenges associated with this intersect in relation to the influence of peer networks. In the face of adversity, homeless youth engage in criminal opportunities as a more direct way of satisfying immediate and pressing needs. In this context, offending can be understood as important for homeless youth because it is often the only available source of income on the streets (Hagan & McCarthy 1997:84). The transition from having stable shelter to living on the streets in abandoned buildings, parks, or shelters is undoubtedly a testing time for homeless youth that affects their abilities to re-join conventional streams of society.

The cause of homelessness in many lives of street youth is external. This population is vulnerable due to their lack of stable and loving family support (Guirguis-Younger et al. 2014:18). This population is less likely to have experienced a sense of belonging or care during their upbringing. Their lack of past experiences involving belonging or care lead to increased susceptibility to opening up to various street cultures and relationships (Guirguis-Younger et al. 2014:18).

Baron (2001) argues that the struggles of living on the streets and earning money places homeless youth in situations where they are likely to meet a wide variety of people. In some instances, social relationships are formed that influence the personal dimensions of how street youth manage their lives. Working alongside others within street settings opens one up for shared experiences of struggle and marginalization. Youth are placed in vulnerable positions where they become increasingly susceptible to peer influence and are more likely to experience hardship in their daily lives (Baron 2001; Gaetz 2004; Gaetz & O’Grady 2002; Hagan & McCarthy 1997). Within this context social learning dynamics are explored alongside implications for youth in the formal and informal economies.
Current Study

Through 30 semi-structured interviews with homeless street youth in Ottawa, this study seeks to explore the relationship between homeless youth and their involvement within formal and informal economic sectors. More specifically, the research objective is to understand how work (formal and informal) is situated within the lives of homeless youth and how this intersect is affected by peer networks and relationships. The research problem maintains that harsh realities plague youths’ pathways towards conventional work aspirations and prevent youth from attaining the types of employment opportunities that would help them get off the streets. This study questions how peer networks might affect a street youth’s participation in conventional or alternative money-making pathways. It explores why some homeless youth choose the types of informal money-making strategies they engage in and why they stray away from conventional working aspirations. This study aims to increase our understanding on whether homelessness and formal work are compatible by highlighting some of the challenges that affect homeless youth in their everyday struggles and realities.

Chapter Two of this thesis will provide a theoretical review of Agnew’s (2006) general strain theory (GST), and McCarthy et al.’s (2002) social capital theory. Social capital theory will first be introduced via Sutherland’s (1947) differential association perspective towards understanding peer learning processes more broadly. These theories serve to contextualize the findings of this research.

In order to place this research within the overall literature, Chapter Three offers a review of the current empirical research on homeless youth. The review will examine the characteristics and the changing profile of homeless youth, the complex diversity of this population, homeless youths’ occupational and educational backgrounds, and their employment within informal and
formal economies paying attention to the socially patterned nature of their working experiences and the role of their social networks. Finally, this chapter will provide a review of the empirical status of GST, social capital theory and differential association theory as applied to this population. In particular, the role of work and the strains and challenges that street youth are faced with.

Chapter Four offers a discussion of the methodological procedures used in this research. This chapter will discuss in detail the location of the research, how I gained access, the target population and sampling methods, the recruitment strategy, the data collection, and the analysis procedures used in this research.

Chapter Five presents an analysis of the data. The analysis is focused on presenting the broad themes: (1) informal working experiences; (2) aspirations; (3) informal peer influences; (4) formal working experiences; (5) formal peer influences, as well as the sub-themes that emerged. To conclude, Chapter Six summarizes the findings and provides a discussion of the various considerations of this research including the strengths and limitations. Following, I offer potential avenues for future research and policy suggestions.
CHAPTER TWO

Theoretical Frameworks

The peer network influence within the formal and informal work intersect facing homeless youth can be contextualized through the theoretical applications of Agnew’s (2006) general strain theory (GST), and McCarthy et al.’s (2002) social capital theory. Social capital theory will first be introduced via Sutherland’s (1947) differential association perspective which provides an understanding of peer learning processes more broadly. These theories address not only the social peer learning process that this study seeks to explore in relation to work, but also provide insight into the strains and challenges that street youth are faced with. Through the exploration of specific strains (e.g., lack of shelter, hunger, monetary income), the work presented will reveal whether these strains are more likely to result in criminogenic work survival strategies (e.g., drug dealing) or more conventional work strategies (e.g., formal employment) while dealing with adversity. These will be examined alongside the role of peers and focus on how certain strategies are learned from others and how social relationships can facilitate individual experiences on the streets.

General Strain Theory

GST emphasizes individuals’ engagement in criminal behaviour as a result of experienced strains or stressors. For instance, an individual may be in desperate need of money or when they may not be treated the way they want to be treated. These experiences lead to a range of negative emotions such as anger, depression or frustration. In efforts to cope with their strains and negative emotions, the individual turns to a crime to accumulate the money they desperately need. Essentially, GST argues that criminal behaviour is a way of alleviating the
negative emotions that result from strain (Agnew 1992). However, this relationship is often more complex than merely strain directly leading to a specific crime. Rather, the perspective places emphasis on a number of moderating factors including self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-control, social control, deviant peers, deviant values and attributions. According to Agnew, these factors work to moderate the strain-crime relationship. Agnew explains how the prospect of criminal outcomes resulting from strain is dependent upon, or moderated by these factors.

Mechanisms of internal control and moral constraints and beliefs prove important in the GST, conditioning the probability of delinquent responses to strain. The moderating factors serve to influence interpretations of strain and the emotional response levels that ensue in response to strains. Important for the current research, factors such as deviant peers and deviant values may influence interpretations of strain and in turn influence the types of attributions that people make (e.g., blaming the cause of one’s strain on others). The link between strain and deviant peers and values suggests that when one experiences strain given an increased presence of deviant peers and values, the future responses to strain are more likely illegal (Agnew 1992). The theory maintains that deviant peers and values may serve to enhance one’s disposition toward deviance.

Prior exposure to crime, one’s moral constraints against deviance and being exposed to deviant peers and values all affect the probability that a deviant response will occur when individuals experience strain. Peer groups have been found to control or encourage criminal behaviour depending on the deviant values and characteristics and an individual’s relationship within that particular group (Capowich et al. 2001). According to Agnew (2006), deviant peers strengthen the relationship between strain and criminal coping by providing opportunities for decreasing negative situations. Agnew sets forth the importance of the role of deviant peers and values as fundamental to GST because these networks serve to represent the social environment
in which individuals adapt to the stressful life events and forms of strain outlined in the theory. In sum, the GST framework outlines how conditioning factors serve to either buffer an individual from strain or increase their disposition towards crime (Agnew 1992; Baron 2008).

Agnew identifies three major sources of strain or negative relationships with others. Specifically, “strain occurs when others (1) prevent or threaten to prevent you from achieving positively valued goals, (2) remove or threaten to remove positively valued stimuli that you possess, or (3) present or threaten to present you with noxious or negatively valued stimuli” (Agnew & White 1992:476). Agnew further clarifies differences in strain by distinguishing between objective strains and subjective strains. Objective strains are defined as “events or conditions that are disliked by most members of a given group” whereas subjective are those “disliked by the people who are experiencing them” (Agnew 2001:320-1). For example, most individuals would dislike being deprived of shelter. Yet Agnew (2001:321) emphasizes the importance of considering differences in evaluations where some individuals differ in their subjective interpretation of the same events and conditions, even those classified as objective by magnitude. Agnew suggests this possible discrepancy exists because one’s subjective interpretation of objective strains is influenced by factors such as personality traits, goals, values and prior experiences.

GST emphasizes an individual’s personal experiences with strain suggesting these direct experiences should account as the most important factors towards explaining crime. However, GST outlines vicarious and anticipated forms of strain as important as well. Vicarious strains are seen as strains experienced by others in an individual’s social network such as family or friends. These forms of strains can lead to negative emotional responses followed by criminal coping. Anticipated strains however, are unique because they refer to an individual’s expectation that
their current strain will persist into the future or that new strains will be experienced. For example, a homeless youth in desperate need of money might anticipate battling their lack of income for the foreseeable future because of their lack of monetary success and inability to maintain employment.

In his classification of the types of strains most likely to cause crime, Agnew (2001) outlines the importance of strains seen as high in magnitude, viewed as unjust, and associated with low social control, that create incentives or pressure to engage in criminal coping. First, strains high in magnitude are further broken down by Agnew (2001) as severe depending on the degree or size of the strain (e.g. small versus large financial loss); whether they are frequent, recent, lengthy and expected to persist in the future; and whether they threaten an individual’s core goals or self-identity. Agnew specifically outlines homeless youth as a population susceptible to causing crime due to the intense strains they are faced with that challenge their “goals, needs, values, activities, and identities” (Agnew 2001:345). Baron (2004:59) suggests that the street youth population faces conflict, victimization, and poverty that create these challenges.

Second, strain seen as unjust is explained as a process of voluntary and intentional violations of common norms and rules. Therefore, these behaviours are viewed as violating relevant justice rules (Agnew 2001). In contrast, it is argued that an individual is less likely to view his or her strains as unjust if they are the result of their own behaviour or natural occurrences.

Third, strain associated with low social control is likely to cause crime. Social control can be explained by direct control, an individual’s emotional bond or attachment to conventional others, an individual’s investment in conventional institutions and an individual’s beliefs
regarding crime. Direct control refers to the extent to which set rules prohibit crime or monitor an individual’s behaviour while sanctioning an individual for rule violations. An individual’s emotional bond or attachment to conventional others can be understood through examples of healthy relationships with family members or teachers. An individual’s investment in conventional institutions can be exemplified with one’s attachment to school or work. When emotional bonds and investments are weak, the perception of having less to lose through crime arises. Engaging in crime is easier when an individual’s beliefs regarding crime suggest that they do not believe it is wrong. The strains that are associated with low social control are argued to result in crime since they lessen the costs of crime. To clarify, certain strains associated with low levels of social control, such as those involving unemployment or work in “dead end” jobs, for example, tend to be associated with a low investment in conventional institutions. In turn, the strains associated with low social control are more likely to result in crime due to the reduced costs of crime.

Fourth, Agnew outlines that a strain will lead to a crime when it creates incentives or pressure to engage in criminal coping. For instance, certain strains that involve a desperate need for money may be more easily resolved through crime such as drug dealing on the street than more conventional pathways to higher education and legitimate working opportunities. Agnew clarifies how certain strains associated with exposure to others who partake in crime or reinforce crime may teach beliefs favourable to criminal behaviour, or possibly pressure or lure an individual into crime.

GST also outlines how crime is more likely to occur when an individual experiences multiple strains close together in time. Agnew emphasizes how experiencing several strains simultaneously is likely to generate intense negative emotions and inhibit an individual’s ability
to cope in a legal manner. When strain results from negative relationships with others, including the three major types of negative relations outlined above (e.g., others preventing or threatening to prevent achievement of positively valued goals, the removal or threat of removing positively valued stimuli, or the presence or threat of presenting negatively valued stimuli) the likelihood that one will experience negative emotions such as anger and frustration increases. Experiencing negative emotions then creates pressure for corrective action, with crime outlined as one possible response. Agnew suggests that crime may be a method for alleviating strain, seeking out revenge or managing the experienced negative emotions. The GST model outlines how strains lead to crime through complex factors however, only certain strained individuals turn to crime in their reactions to experienced strain.

Of particular interest for this research on homeless youth are the major sources of economic strain that are argued to have a major impact on crime: unemployment, monetary dissatisfaction and relative deprivation (Agnew 2001; Agnew 2006; Baron 2008). Baron (2008:403) clarifies that being unemployed increases motivations to alleviate financial hardships through crime whereas living in poverty or “on the margins of society” can also lead to crime. Relative deprivation within this framework can be understood as a social process that provides understanding of one’s propensity for crime (Webber 2007). More specifically, Webber (2007:107) clarifies the social processes in which relative deprivation occurs as an end result where one’s subjective expectations and aspirations play significant roles in one’s perception of injustice. Homeless youth directly experience these three significant factors in their day-to-day struggles. A youth’s inability to obtain formal employment, or maintain a steady job, leaves them more likely to commit crime to overcome their economic difficulties. Being on the margins of
society places street youth at an increased risk of experiencing the strains of being deprived and monetarily dissatisfied, which could drive them into crime (Agnew 2006).

Agnew’s (2006) relative deprivation proposition is important in explaining street youth’s money making strategies and the associated feelings of frustration and subsequent employment motivation. Baron (2008:403) explains, “relative deprivation is important because strain is seen as a function of the achievements of others in one’s comparative reference group, as well as one’s own failure to achieve.” Therefore, choices to engage in certain conventional or non-conventional money-making avenues may be influenced by one’s evaluative comparison to others with higher socio-economic standing. Feelings of resentment, frustration and even hostility may lead to a series of emotional responses (e.g., anger) influencing one’s decisions and increasing the likelihood of coping criminally. One’s subjective interpretation of their conditions as understood in terms of monetary dissatisfaction and relative deprivation when unemployed and seeking to make money become important, specifically when seen through the context of influential peer groups (Baron 2008:405).

Past work drawing on economic deprivation explanations suggests that one’s chances of responding with aggression when faced with uneven distribution of resources and deprivation relative to others is intensified for those faced with chronic stress of poverty and low socioeconomic standing (Baron & Hartnagel 1998:169). In turn, those faced with daily economic hardships see a reduced ability to cope through conventional pathways, thus more likely to generate violent or angry behaviours (Baron & Hartnagel 1998; Bernard 1990).

In one’s decision to cope with their subjectively interpreted strains (e.g., inability to maintain conventional employment relative to others), certain influencing structural factors help explain the differences in coping behaviours. GST provides insight towards explaining the
differentiation for criminal coping versus non-criminal coping. As suggested by O’Grady and Gaetz (2004:399) it could be that one of the consequences of a street youth’s disadvantaged background and the strains they face in their day-to-day lives coupled with their “labour-market marginality is the lure that is provided by money-making activities outside of the formal economy” which has been clearly displayed in past research on homeless youth and crime (Hagan & McCarthy 1991; Carlen 1996; Baron & Hartnagel 1998; Greene et al. 1999; Stephens 2001). Agnew (2006:95) argues that individuals who have access to sustainable resources such as income, education and good jobs are more likely to cope through legal activities. Whereas those who are on the outside looking in, such as marginalized street youth, are often faced with strong economic pressure with few alternative legal courses of action available to them. Agnew (1999:123) summarizes these differences stating how “high levels of income or socioeconomic inequality lead some individuals to experience stress or frustration.”

Agnew’s newly revised theory suggests that people engage in criminal behaviour as a result of experienced strains or stressors. This theoretical framework applied to homeless youth money-making strategies will describe both avenues of coping (criminal and non-criminal). Given the struggles of homeless youth however, it is anticipated that they will resort to criminal coping as a more likely means of survival due to the theory’s emphasis on multiple strain experiences (Agnew 2001; 2006). This hypothesis falls in line with Baron’s (2004:459) summary of the homeless population and the intense strain they face. Drawing on Agnew’s GST, Baron (2004:461) suggests that, “homelessness challenges a broad range of identities, needs, values and goals and therefore is likely to be seen as a strain high in magnitude.” These needs, values and goals fall in line with the GST’s main outlines of strain. To reiterate, they include, “the loss of positive stimuli, the presentation of negative stimuli, as well as categories of goal blockage,
including the failure to achieve positively valued goals” (Baron 2004:458). The realities of the streets and hardships that homeless youth face neatly falls in line with the above mentioned components of GST.

After reviewing the general strain framework, it is clear that this theoretical approach is fitting towards understanding the dynamics associated with life on the streets and the struggles of generating an income, whether that be through formal or informal avenues. However, this research would bode well to incorporate a framework that seeks to understand how the dynamics of money-making work in relation to peer conditioned strain and the associations involved with homeless youth income generation. This is especially important to consider given the emphasis Agnew (2001;2006) places on deviant peers and deviant values within his theoretical approach. Past literature examining these important conditioning factors provide support for the theory wherein deviant peers and deviant values were found to condition the impact of relative deprivation on crime within a high-risk sample (Baron 2006). Within this context, the inclusion of social capital theory towards this analysis will help provide a more rounded context towards understanding the nuance and complexity involved with the formal and informal work intersect.

In order to move on to the following theoretical examination of differential association and social capital theory, it is important to revisit the meaning of peer conditioning effects to explain how peers are important in the contextualization of this research and how deviant peers condition values and beliefs on the probability of delinquent responses to strain. A key aspect of GST that Agnew is clear about is the recognition that conditioning variables influence the strain-crime relationship. Exposure to deviant peers plays an important role in the mechanisms involved in social learning processes where those individuals exposed to deviant peers are then more likely to model behavioural patterns, be exposed to the influence of other’s beliefs.
regarding crime, and to receive a level of support and reinforcement for crime (Agnew 1992; Mazerolle & Maahs 2000).

**Differential Association and Social Capital Theory**

The theoretical framework exploring the strains associated with attaining immediate monetary goals when living on the streets can be complimented with peer learning theories. Differential Association theory can be used to compliment this area of research by providing a more rounded approach that highlights the importance of deviant values and learning skills conducive to crime. Differential association (1947) states that criminal behaviour is learned through interactions with others, with a key focus on intimate others. More specifically:

> Through such interaction, we learn techniques of committing crime and ‘definitions’ (motives, drives, rationalizations, attitudes) favorable and unfavorable toward violation of the law. Individuals are most likely to engage in crime if they are exposed to definitions favorable to law violation (1) early in life, (2) on a relatively frequent basis, (3) over a long period of time, and (4) from sources they like and respect (Sutherland 1947).

While learning to commit crime can be the result of interactions with criminals or conventional people, the theory suggests that delinquent peers play a larger role influencing such learning (Sutherland 1947).

In the case of homeless youth, one can see how living on the streets would place a youth at an increased risk of being in a position favourable to law violation. This can be seen in the work of Hagan and McCarthy (1997:126) who argue that experiences homeless youth share with one another can promote criminal activity because they are required to learn skills and strategies for surviving on the streets. For example, if a newly homeless youth observes others close to them generating money through acts such as shop lifting, they would be more likely themselves
to learn and take part in that criminal behaviour. This example can be understood in the context of tutelage. According to Hagan and McCarthy (1997:136), associations based on tutelage emphasize learning from mentors who share their criminal skills with an individual they take under their wing (as cited by Sutherland 1947). However, Hagan and McCarthy (1997:137) specify that the context in learning criminal skills may vary from crime to crime. For example, a person with little training may be able to steal from a corner store quite easily. Yet they may lack the proficiency and skills needed to engage in more advanced money-making schemes such as drug dealing that would require increased training or learning.

McCarthy’s (1996) work on tutelage and Sutherland’s theory of differential association is useful for advancing this theoretical framework as it utilizes Sutherland’s interpretations to recognize the direct exposure of other criminal behaviours. McCarthy (1996:137) argues that, “Sutherland’s theory explicitly recognizes the direct exposure of others’ criminal behaviour and testifies to the centrality of this contact as a source for learning the skills required by certain offences.” McCarthy’s (1996) work is useful towards my research in that he explores two types of crimes that are common to my sample in line with informal income generation methods: theft and drug selling. McCarthy (1996:139) suggests that being faced with daily adversity in the form of hunger, shelter insecurities and unemployment often places street youth in a crisis situation wherein associations with criminals and exposure to possible tutelage relationships are more likely.

Sutherland (1947) first created the term ‘tutelage’ to emphasize the process of criminal socialization through mentoring or tutoring. His theoretical advancement of the criminal learning process via his perspective has served as a driving force in the advancement of literature in past decades pertaining to social relationships. McCarthy et al. (2002) use Sutherland’s line of
thinking to present the social capital perspective on crime and how this framework serves to explain the way associations on the street generate different levels of intangible resources of trust, commitment and reciprocity. Bourdieu (1985:248) defines social capital as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition - in other words, to have membership in a group.” In the case of homeless youth, this definition provides meaningful context towards understanding how peer relationships developed on the streets can facilitate social capital from one individual to the next in the form of shared resources. For example, mentoring a newly homeless youth by sharing money-making survival strategies in specific parts of town.

Through the facilitation of social capital, “street group relationships” or friendships in other words, present homeless youth with an array of outcomes (Lin 2001; Lin et al. 2001), some of which are argued to benefit homeless youth at the individual level (McCarthy et al. 2002) with certain outcomes facilitating criminal behaviour (Hagan & McCarthy 1997; Matsueda & Heimer 1997; McCarthy & Hagan 1995).

Previous work by McCarthy and Hagan (1995) drew on social capital and differential association perspectives to advance the theoretical agenda in this line of research by presenting the concept of “criminal capital”. McCarthy and Hagan (1995:66) explain criminal capital as comparable to the flow of information stemming from associations or ties in conventional lines of work that provide individuals with leads to jobs and useful work-related knowledge. They clarify that, “embeddedness in non-criminal networks, particularly those involving family members and educational personnel, provides exposure to more conventional types of non-criminal social capital” (McCarthy & Hagan 1995:67). Whereas ongoing criminal networks and
associations establish a foundation for another type of capital coined, criminal capital. Criminal capital is the process of developing knowledge and skills that can facilitate successful criminal activity. McCarthy and Hagan (1995:67) assert that embeddedness and criminal capital are fundamental to understanding the process of criminal behavioural patterns with regards to those who are homeless. They further argue that homelessness embodies Sutherland’s framework as contributing to the emergence of criminal behaviour.

The value of implementing a social capital framework towards understanding relationships developed on the streets and how they influence learning money-making strategies can be understood as an investment process (Lin 2001). This capital investment process is in line with a future flow of utility as explained by Fine and Green (2000) wherein capital is understood as both an entity and a process by which interactions within relationships lead to valued outcomes. McCarthy et al. (2002:833) build on this existing body of work and suggest that social capital is neither transferred nor exchanged easily within individuals who benefit from it because it is the result of particular relationships and its components. More specifically, McCarthy et al. (2002:833) define social capital as involving “two intertwined components: relationships and the intangible resources of trust, reciprocity, information, commitments, and solidarity that these provide.” However, they maintain that these relationships, although necessary for the production and accumulation of social capital, are not themselves capital.

The social capital theoretical perspective utilized by McCarthy et al. (2002) is useful to understanding my research, particularly when incorporating the previously mentioned general strain theory because this framework will explain how peer relationships facilitate opportunities. As Coleman (1990:304) explains, “social capital… is created when the relations among persons change in ways that facilitate action.” While it is important to mention that some relationships
do not provide resources and only produce costs, in the case of homeless youth who learn money-making strategies from others, the information and resources obtained may be the result of individuals actively or passively transforming associations into social capital (McCarthy et al. 2002:834). For example, a homeless youth might passively generate social capital if they begin a relationship without the intentions of building commitments. Or as Coleman (1994) suggests, when they partake in activities wherein social capital is an unintended consequence. Individuals may also intentionally choose actions in the hope of creating trust, commitments and other resources (Lin 2001).

The creation of social capital is also dependent on a number of influencing factors. The type of relationship developed, the level of intimacy and cohesion within these relationships, the durability, the status differences between those involved and the location of the relationship in the participants’ larger networks (McCarthy et al. 2002:834). The way that relationships deliver social capital resources is understood through several processes, “reinforcing participants’ identities and recognition as a member of a relationship, enhancing the flow of information between people, signaling to others one’s membership in a relationship and the social credentials that accompany it, and exerting influence on others outside of an association” (McCarthy et al. 2002:834).

Past work examining social capital theory perspectives for homeless youth populations reinforces many of the aforementioned processes. Hagan and McCarthy (1997) depict the familial type of connection developed within street relationships that resemble fictive families. They indicate that many of the youth shared common cultural interests or experiences that bounded their behaviours consistent with the roles in which they identified with. Street family relationships are argued to be the result of spontaneous origins supported through both internal
and external forces “involving personalities, relational and organizational dynamics, and external conflict” (McCarthy et al. 2002:837).

McCarthy (1996:135) outlines how the acquisition of symbolic elements (e.g. attitudes, motives, or drives) are key intervening factors between deviant associations and crime according to Sutherland’s theory. McCarthy (1996:138) goes on to explain how differential association affirms the significance for criminal contact as means for learning criminal behaviour. Whereas crimes such as professional theft may require professional training by those adept in the behaviour, so to do less highly specialized crimes such as street robbery, which still require specific skills.

In their analysis of criminal capital through embedded street relationships, Hagan and McCarthy (1997:142) provide ethnographic accounts of illegal money-making strategies. They suggest that the economically marginalized (homeless youth), have more extensive exposure to individuals involved in crime and often end up in precarious positions that stimulate tutelage in crime (Hagan & McCarthy 1997:142). They argue that an important element of criminal embeddedness and criminal capital is an individual’s definition of a situation suitable for offending. Certain settings become perceived as criminal opportunities when, “a person’s understanding of the social world translates them into potential sites of criminality” and in the case of street youth struggling with adverse circumstances, they could be encouraged to interpret situations as criminal opportunities, with other factors stimulating the process as well (Hagan & McCarthy 1997:135). Hagan and McCarthy’s (1997:156) findings were consistent with social conceptions of crime in that embeddedness in criminal networks and subsequent acquisitions of criminal capital were seen as important factors for street youth getting into certain types of crime.
Based on social capital theory, Barman-Adhikari and Rice (2014: 93) suggest that street youth with increased ‘bridging’ social capital will be more likely to engage and seek out conventional streams of employment. However, in the case of street youth who are seeking resources and help from other street youth who are themselves lacking resources (Stablein 2011), social capital sources may be of little help to make significant differences in opportunity for economic mobility and advantage (Irwin et al. 2008; Stablein 2011). Consequently, some researchers argue that social capital theory when applied to street youth may be more restrictive than positive (Lincoln 2000) and “bridging ties” may be required in the form of social workers or non-street peers and family who can provide important resources and services applicable to formal employment opportunities (Barman-Adhikari & Rice 2014: 93).

The peer learning interaction and process can also be understood in the form of establishing helpful peer networking and trusting friendships. Bender et al. (2007:35) explained that the development of street smart skills from others helped youth on the streets to avoid dangerous situations and aided their ability to locate valuable resources. These helpful processes potentially help youth navigate towards a more conventional work stream.

The facilitation of social capital via peer networks can provide protective factors which aid street youths’ involvement in more formal employment opportunities (Ferguson et al. 2015:48). A number of positive outcomes exist through instances of resource facilitation towards more formal and legal informal sources of income generation. Homeless youths’ successful involvement in formal employment is associated with positive outcomes that help satisfy immediate pressing needs such as stable housing and mental health treatment (Ferguson et al. 2012). Whereas employment is clearly important to a population faced with economic despair,
By addressing how work (formal and informal) is situated within the lives of homeless youth and how this intersect is influenced by peer networks and relationships, this study will move the research agenda further by addressing a relatively understudied gap in the literature with a never before examined sample involving Ottawa youth. In turn, the following research questions addressed will increase our understanding on whether homelessness and formal work are compatible by highlighting some of the challenges that affect homeless youth in their everyday struggles and realities in Ottawa, Canada:

1) What are some of the significant obstacles for homeless youth who want to participate in formal work? How do these compare to the obstacles that youth face in informal work?

2) What roles, if any, do peer networks play in managing these issues and obstacles?

3) Does being a part of a peer social network present one with social or criminal capital resources that might impede or enhance a street youth’s navigation towards conventional working opportunities?

4) How do the motives, drives, rationalizations and/or attitudes of peer networks influence one’s employment path through opportunities and subsequent motivational influences?

With the theoretical review of the theories used to contextualize this research complete, the following chapter will offer a review of the current empirical research on homeless youth in order to place this research within the overall literature.
CHAPTER THREE

A Review of the Literature

With the examination of contextualizing theories complete, Chapter Three serves to place this research within the overall literature on homeless youth. The review will first focus on examining the background characteristics of the population followed by the examination of youth employment experiences. The chapter then moves to provide a review of the empirical status of GST, social capital theory and differential association theory in relation to unemployment, as well as the unique strains and challenges that street youth face.

While much scholarship has focused on understanding criminal street activities in relation to income generation, work addressing other avenues of formal and informal economic behaviours remains relatively understudied. Karabanow et al. (2010:40) suggest recent movements towards neo-liberal market economies has left a growing number of individuals struggling to sustain their economic livelihoods in the face of political movements that encourage individualism. Canada is a prosperous country with a strong health care system and vast social programs to offer (Gaetz 2010:21). Yet why is it that within recent years we have seen a growth in the numbers of people living in extreme poverty without stable housing?

What was once considered a problem mainly affecting a small number of single males, the emergence of homelessness in Canada has seen an up rise affecting vast populations since the 1980s accelerating into the 1990s, which of course includes youth (Gaetz 2010:21). Described as a policy shifting from ‘rehousing’ to one of ‘dehousing’ (Hulchanski 2009), global and domestic changes in the Canadian economy have had a significant impact on the growth of poverty. These changes, alongside government social and housing policies, resulted in a growth of individuals
being forced to the streets or to emergency shelters due to a lack of accessible, safe and affordable housing (Gaetz 2010; Gavigan & Chunn 2004; Hulchanski 2009).

With their inability to maintain a political and economic sense of citizenship, homeless youth are a vulnerable population worth exploring within the linkage of their labour experiences and the regulated and unregulated economies (Karabanow 2010:40). To date, this area of research has received some attention by scholars who have explored homeless youth and work, specifically in regards to the struggles that youth face in their experiences obtaining and maintaining employment (Baron & Hartnagel 2002; Gaetz & O’Grady 2002; Karabanow et al. 2010; Keenan et al. 2006; O’Grady & Gaetz 2004; O’Grady et al. 1998; Robinson & Baron 2007). This literature review will provide a comprehensive examination of the relevant literature on homeless youth and employment with a focus on formal and informal money-making strategies, as well as the role that peer networks play on the streets in relation to these economic behaviours.

Who Is This Population?

Despite various attempts of enumerating Canadian homeless youth, as a result of definition ambiguities and troubles pinpointing youth that regularly use youth services across Canada, there has been no definitive numbers produced (Karabanow & Kidd 2014). According to the National Homelessness Initiative conducted in 2006, a widely accepted estimate for all homeless youth in Canada was about 150,000 individuals. Since then, the number of youth aged between 16 and 24 has been considered to be the fastest growing segment of the entire homeless population in Canada (Karabanow & Kidd 2014).
Definitions of ‘homeless youth’, or ‘street youth’, two terms that are seemingly used interchangeably, seem to hold common meaning and understanding across literature. Researchers commonly define homeless youth as young people between the ages of 12 and 24 that have run away, been kicked out of their homes and/or those young people who spend their time in different public locations such as squats (abandoned buildings), youth shelters or couch surfing with friends without a permanent dwelling (Baron 2004; Karabanow 2004a; Karabanow & Kidd 2014; Kidd & Scrimenti 2004). A more recent Canadian definition of youth homelessness derived by the Canadian Homelessness Research Network attempts to define the experience of homelessness more generally as opposed to characterized by specific sub-populations:

Homelessness describes the situation of an individual or family without stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it. It is the result of systemic or societal barriers, a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, the individual/household’s financial, mental, cognitive, behavioural or physical challenges, and/or racism and discrimination. Most people do not choose to be homeless, and the experience is generally negative, unpleasant, stressful and distressing (Canadian Homelessness Research Network 2012:1).

Others suggest that ‘street youth’ may refer to those young people who spend a significant amount of time and energy hanging out on the streets who may or may not have homes to return to at night (Whitbeck & Hoyt 1999). Many of these young people simply do not have the options of returning home to their parents, thus leaving them with no private and permanent homes and largely unsupervised (Baron 2004; Whitbeck 2009). These unsupervised living conditions are often alongside strangers, in run down rented rooms with others or in public spaces that are not meant for human habitation (Bailey et al. 1998; Wachter et al. 2015). As noted in this field of work, living in such unstable and often public places results in this population being more likely to engage in anti-social behaviours and resort to crime as a means of survival (Wachter et al. 2015). Criminology research on homeless young adults has also
shown how high levels of visibility in public spaces, coupled with tendencies to move between cities (influenced by unstable housing) often prohibits prosocial bonding and results in behaviours that are subject to various processes of police control, surveillance and troubling encounters (Gaetz & O’Grady 2002).

While the definitions across literature provide a common snapshot of homeless youth characteristics as a whole, they often do not differentiate definitions based on gender. Past work on homeless youth and gender has shown that differences do exist between males and females. Among the homeless youth population, males tend to be arrested more often for violent offenses, whereas females are more likely to engage in self-destructive behaviours (Broidy & Agnew 1997; Davis et al. 2007). Further, the experiences of being homeless and one’s criminal involvement vary by gender. Runaway female street youth turn to prostitution, theft, forgery and fraud as strategies for survival when faced with street life adversities (Kepf-Leonard & Johansson 2007). Research suggests that survival strategies for homeless youth tend to be gendered and often more problematic for girls. Hagan and McCarthy (1997) further highlight the gendered experiences in survival strategies among the homeless population finding that girls were more likely to be involved in prostitution. Research suggests that the realities of being a homeless female engaged in such survival strategies are that they are more likely to be sexually assaulted and taken advantage of (Janus et al. 1995; Rew et al. 2001).

Despite these important gender differences, risk of arrest for street youth remains a constant threat as a result of increased visibility and the likelihood of these young people engaging in criminal behaviours (Ferguson et al. 2012). Criminology research has also consistently found that among the homeless youth populations, criminal involvement increases
chances of long-term homelessness, social and economical exclusion and increases the risk of imprisonment (O’Grady & Gaetz 2004; Tyler & Johnson 2006).

A Changing Profile of Homeless Youth

As understood through the public eye, the typical profile of a homeless youth has seen a drastic shift in perception over the decades. These perceptions are largely influenced through popular questions that address issues such as “why are these young people living on the street?” (Karabanow & Kidd 2014:15). The answer to such questions has been met with a range of responses that have varied according to the functions and the cultural norms within the timeframes of which they were addressed in. For instance, early understanding of homeless youth in the 1950s and 1960s was largely influenced by perceptions based on psychological deviance wherein the population was believed to be mentally disturbed (Rivlin & Manzo 1988). The period of psychoanalysis eventually shifted from placing the blame on one’s mental capacities, towards a more supporting image of street youth being subject to various situational upbringing difficulties such as sexual or physical abuse (Karabanow & Kidd 2014). Past literature narrating the changing profile of this population emphasizes the importance of the 1970s onward which saw the deinstitutionalization movement as key towards the changing perception and image of street youth (Ruddick 1996).

Karabanow (2000) summarizes this transformation of the public perception of homeless youth as the product of the deinstitutionalization of runaway youth from the juvenile penal system, coupled with the growing public understanding of dysfunctional family upbringing and the lack of viable employment and shelter opportunities. All of these factors played a role in the shifting conceptualization of the young and homeless throughout the years. Today, public
perception builds on all of these elements together to acknowledge that this population is often homeless due to reasons beyond their own control (Karabanow & Kidd 2014). Past work in Canada on public perception of the root causes of youth homelessness also reinforces such views (Karabanow 2004b).

Understanding the pathways to youth homelessness is vital towards addressing more specific areas such as those involving money-making strategies and peer influences on the street because a lot of the negative experiences that emerge from such pathways intersect with and influence subsequent involvements. Thus, literature addressing more specific areas of exploration (e.g. money-making) must do so within the greater context of the pathways and numerous experiences that plague this troubled population.

This population comes from dysfunctional family backgrounds involving criminality and histories of drug and alcohol abuse (Hagan & McCarthy 1997). Research suggests that family maltreatment and abuse are often cited as the reasons youth leave home and take to the streets (Ferguson 2009; Kim et al. 2009; Thrane et al. 2006). These negative familial experiences tend to directly affect other domains such as school performance for example, but the literature also suggests that past negative home experiences result in youth being more likely to be at conflict with teachers and other authority figures more generally (Feitel et al. 1992; Hagan & McCarthy 1997). As such, these findings carry implications that hold significance beyond just these aspects. When taken together, we can see how such negative experiences and pathways to homelessness might spill over to a young person’s ability to navigate making-money on the streets, which will be reviewed in subsequent sections.
Important Connections Behind Understanding the Complex Diversity of This Population

As previous research has suggested, the reality of youth homelessness causes is much more complex than those perceptions that suggest these are merely just trouble-makers who have runaway from home or simply do not get along with their parents and do not abide by their rules (Gaetz et al. 1999). Since this population is often unable to depend on family support, they must take aspects of everyday survival into their own hands. This includes their need to make money. Gaetz et al. (1999) indicated that in order to properly assess needs and survival capacities of street youth with regards to employment, background characteristics need to be explored and understood first. Patterns of making money, employment expectations and capacity for transitioning into more conventional streams of income generation tend to hinder on individual and systemic barriers (Gaetz et al. 1999). To gain an in-depth understanding of the barriers facing homeless youth for making money, research examining the background characteristics of this population reflects the important connections and viable opportunities available to them.

A wide range of studies examining street youth in Canada and the causes of homelessness show how this population comes from a very diverse socio-economic background (Hagan & McCarthy 1997; Weber 1991). Over the years, the contributing literature on this complex topic has suggested that the causes and conditions affecting youth homelessness tends to vary according to each individual’s situation which is affected by a range of contributing factors. These include factors such as: individual relational factors such as challenging family situations and relationships (Gaetz & O’Grady 2002; Hagan & McCarthy 1997; Karabanow 2004a; Van de Bree et al. 2009; Whitbeck & Hoyt 1999), structural factors such as broader system, social and economic factors including instances of discrimination. These instances are apparent through the overrepresentation of sexual minorities among the street youth population (Cochran et al. 2002;
Lastly, institutional and system failures such as inadequate foster care or group home experiences often filled with exploitation and lack of support (Gaetz & O’Grady 2002; Gaetz et al. 2010; Karabanow 2004a).

When exploring gender and sexual orientation of the street youth population, previous studies have generally been consistent in their results indicating that when compared to the general non-homeless population, differences arise. These studies typically align with a 2:1 split with males making up the former, and females the latter (Gaetz et al. 1999; Hagan & McCarthy 1997). These demographic characteristics are also consistent with recent research on street youth using U.S. samples (Ferguson et al. 2011; Ferguson et al. 2016; Wachter et al. 2015). Not only does a considerable body of research exist that reinforces the gender differentiation of two males on the streets for every female (O’Grady & Gaetz 2004; O’Grady & Gaetz 2009), but these works have emphasized the importance of gender as a predictor towards pathways to the streets and the varied experiences that shape this population’s everyday realities.

Causes of homelessness are unique in a number of ways. Research in Canada suggests that homeless youth come from backgrounds of abuse and they also are more likely to face barriers in exiting street life (Gaetz & O’Grady 2002; Rew 2002; Whitbeck et al. 1999). Other literature in the field has also indicated how a significant percentage of these young people identify as being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered (Cochran et al. 2002; Gattis 2009) while other literature depicts the overrepresentation of ethno-racial populations including Aboriginal individuals (Baskin 2013) and young black individuals (Springer et al. 2006). This again highlights the diverse background and experiences that must be taken into account when looking to understand this population more closely and its associated characteristics, all of which are
important to take into consideration before looking to explain and understand specific activities on the streets.

*Homeless Youth Origins and Occupational and Educational Backgrounds*

When examining the origins of homeless youth, the literature on the transient nature of this population is mixed. In the case of Toronto homeless youth, the population is surprisingly and predominantly born and raised in the very same city that they are found to be homeless in, Toronto (Gaetz et al. 1999). It is clear however, that as a whole, this is not a homogeneous group as they come from many different backgrounds as explained through the literature in previous sections. It could be that in the case of large Canadian cities such as Toronto, a young person’s search for better opportunities (e.g. enhanced money-making opportunities) is perceived to be within the boundaries of the city itself. Thus, youth may be less likely to move across different cities or provinces in search of such occupational opportunities and might simply move within inter-city neighbourhoods. As such, movement within inter-city neighbourhoods still holds some merit to the common claims within the literature that classify this population as transient by nature due to their frequent movement in search of services, basic needs, adventure and overall quest for better survival opportunities (Karabanow 2004a).

Work exploring the occupational and educational backgrounds of Toronto street youth, found that these young people come from a variety of socio-economic classes (Gaetz et al. 1999). This finding is generally consistent with arguments across literature that reinforce the diverse socio-economic background of this population (Hagan & McCarthy 1997; Weber 1991) which goes against common public perceptions noted previously. The most common occupation of homeless youths’ parents in Gaetz et al.’s (1999:7) research revealed that nearly half of their
respondents’ fathers worked primary, processing, construction and transportation jobs and their mothers were largely grouped in clerical, sales and service work. Further, a substantial proportion of homeless youth reported their fathers working in managerial and professional occupations and their mothers taking on the homemaker role.

In terms of parental educational backgrounds of street youth, Gaetz et al.’s (1999:8) results revealed the contrasting and diverse nature of educational attainment levels. Both fathers and mothers of street involved youth did not complete high school at similar rates as those reporting that their parents finished university with undergraduate or graduate degrees. These types of findings again reinforce the complex backgrounds that these young people are faced with. Undoubtedly, these explored characteristics depicted across literature shed light on the complexities of one’s previous home life which influences how or why youth take to the streets and their subsequent experiences.

In terms of how these characteristics and backgrounds fit into the larger discussion and literature on money-making opportunities (formal and informal) of street-involved youth, it is important to recognize that the vast majority of the struggles to make ends meet is not about choice (Gaetz et al. 1999). Rather, the vast majority of this population take to the streets with unresolved issues from their previous home lives and they are faced with a sense of disconnectivity from their families and previous relationships (Gaetz et al. 1999) which influence their various risk-taking involvements and their opportunities on the streets (e.g. gaining employment). Taking on the already challenging task of going through adolescent development, all while being homeless with weak social and economic supports proves to be a very difficult task.
The following sections of this literature review will aim to provide an examination of the relevant work on how homeless youth situate their experiences of social disconnectedness from their past home lives and how their newly developed social networks fill such voids and influence their money-making opportunities. But first, this literature review will shift to an examination of employment and the informal and formal nuance that exists within the search for income generation on the streets.

*Homeless Youth and Employment*

To better understand homeless youth and their working opportunities, relevant literature depicting the realities and struggles of gaining access to employment is important. In that sense, understanding the chronic unemployment is important to consider. Work examining this population’s unemployment rates has shown a lot of consistency across the field. Some scholars have indicated how unemployment rates can be as high as 75% (Ferguson & Xie 2008; Ferguson et al. 2012; Whitebeck 2009), and this population is often faced with up to 8 months without work within an entire calendar year (Baron & Hartnagel 1997). When faced with unemployment, this population is more likely to see a reduced commitment to societal norms leading them to believe that breaking the law is acceptable (Baron 2008; Baron & Hartnagel 1997). The implications here suggest that unemployment is likely to increase one’s chances of criminal involvement (Baron 2001; Baron & Hartnagel 1997; Hagan & McCarthy 1997). This area of study has also been reinforced with findings which suggest that unemployment creates feelings of boredom and frustration for some youth, thus they turn to crime to alleviate those feelings (Baron 2001; 2008; Baron & Hartnagel 1997).
A population that faces a lack of legitimate employment skills alongside limited educational backgrounds, coupled with histories of mental illness, often results in recurrent homelessness and prolonged denial of legitimate work and school related opportunities (Cauce et al. 2000; Whitbeck 2009). Literature examining mental health factors affecting this high-risk population has shown that this population is faced with various obstacles that pose severe barriers to employment, in addition to various other challenges inherent to living without a stable home (e.g. hygiene issues, malnourishment, street-survival behaviours and limited education) (Cauce et al. 2000; Dachner & Tarasuk 2002; Gaetz & O’Grady 2002).

A key takeaway within this area of study is that working opportunities that exist in the street economy are often patterned or stratified based on one’s characteristics prior to becoming homeless (Gaetz & O’Grady 2002). To explain further, Lankeanu et al. (2005:11) clarify how “experiences preceding homelessness may relate to the specific ways that homeless youth earn money and engage in risk behaviour within the street economy.” Those street-involved youth who face social and economic exclusion from conventional society, which has been suggested to occur due to various cumulative effects of negative familial, societal and educational experiences prior to being homeless (Baron 2001; Gaetz & O’Grady 2002), are often forced to prioritize their time and opportunities available to them in nonconventional ways in terms of income generation. Here, the work suggests that street youth spend a majority of their time meeting their immediate survival needs (Dachner & Tarasuk 2002; Fast et al. 2009), which often leaves them with little time for job seeking. In addition, successful job seeking often requires access to things such as computers, phones and a proper clean look with a fixed address which this population struggles to access (Dachner & Tarasuk 2002; Gaetz & O’Grady 2002). Due to these socio-structural barriers to employment, these young people are funnelled towards alternative means of
generating income within the street economy, which often includes various illegal or quasi-illegal activities to meet their pressing needs (Gaetz 2004).

Informal and Formal Economies

The term ‘work’ more generally can fall into two specific types of categories, formal and informal. Formal economies being defined as documented and legal work that is subject to taxation where income is assessed and reported to tax bureaus (Revenue of Canada) within the government. Further, the majority of developed nations assess their Gross National Production based on the formal sector of the economy, which is comprised of all different private and public service jobs (Schneider 2002). The shift towards the ‘informal’ economy and its definitional understanding is a lot less conclusive. Informal economies often arise due to desperate situations facing individuals or groups that require an income, thus they create unconventional methods for generating money. These are often seen as underground economies that have emerged to satisfy the economic needs of individuals who are unable to secure employment in the formal economy suggesting that the majority of those involved engage in informal labour not by choice, rather by circumstance (Losby et al. 2002; Vogel 2006).

Patterns of work and income generation within the informal economy are often characterized by instability and diversity within the framework of a survival strategy for life on the streets (Gaetz & O’Grady 2002:437). The result of high unemployment rates in the formal sector of work leaves many street youth relying on informal sources of income. These include both legal (e.g., collecting and selling recyclable materials) and illegal (e.g., dealing drugs) sources of income generation which often serve as complementary to, or as a replacement to income from formal work (Ferguson 2013; Gaetz & O’Grady 2002; Kipke et al. 1997; Whitbeck
Informal work is often the only way for street youth to survive due to their low educational attainment and lack of permanent housing (Karabanow 2010). Consequently, they tend to be involved in both the illegal side (e.g., drug dealing, prostitution, theft) and the unregulated side of this economy (Baron 2004; Dachner & Tarasuk 2002; Gaetz & O’Grady 2002).

Previous literature demonstrates a consistency in regards to the understanding of what types of activities fall under the quasi-legal and illegal behaviours in Canada. These include risky activities such as sex work, salvaging or recycling, squeegeeing, panhandling, drug dealing, theft and robbery among the most common (Baron 2001; Cheng et al. 2016; Ferguson et al. 2012). To put these figures into perspective, previous work has found that that 34% of street youth panhandle, 21% sell drugs and 16% steal to generate an income (Ferguson et al. 2012). Of these activities, drug dealing, theft, robbing and stealing are considered to be criminal offences under Canadian law, wherein offenders are subject to punishment by the legal system (Cheng et al. 2016). Whereas salvaging recyclables, begging for money, squeegeeing and sex work are deemed quasi-legal activities because they are not criminal offences that fall under the Canadian criminal code. Instead, provincial legislation (Safe Streets Act of 2004) sets a number of restrictions on behaviours that include solicitation for money in public spaces. Within the quasi-legal parameters, sex work falls within this similar category as described by Cheng et al. (2016) due to the recent efforts that have been placed towards decreasing victimization of sex workers (Payton 2015).

The literature suggests that the implications behind the above mentioned policies and regulations affect street youth in a number of ways. Those involved in the informal economy who engage in the aforementioned illegal or quasi-legal income generating activities are more
likely to interact with police and end up caught up in the criminal justice system (Gaetz 2004). The increased risk of labour exclusion has severe consequences on this population as indicated by researchers in this line of work (Ferguson 2013:475). This is because employment, even within the informal economy, can promote the growth of entrepreneurial skills, which can be used to satisfy means legally (e.g., securing full and part-time employment in the formal economy) and illegally (e.g., dealing drugs in the informal economy). Further, employment plays an important role in the socialization of youth to the workforce as it contributes to identity formation, links them to conventional institution and provides self-sufficiency in regards to economic need (Baron & Hartnagel 1997; Gaetz & O’Grady 2002).

Unfortunately, street youth engage in informal economies, as opposed to formal economies as a result of their situational experiences and survival needs. Research has also shown how the vast majority of young people on the streets are not in favourable positions that would allow them to pick and choose the type of work opportunities to take part in due to a lack of conventional and achievable alternatives (Hagan & McCarthy 1997). As such, certain street-involved youth may resort to criminal activities such as drug dealing, or they may take on more quasi-legal activities such as panhandling.

Many reports have pointed out that the majority of work for street youth occurs in the informal and unregulated sectors of society. The literature has suggested that those on the brinks of labour-market marginality are often caught in the lure provided by money-making opportunities outside of the formal economy (Baron & Hartnagel 1998; Greene et al. 1999; Hagan & McCarthy 1991; Stephens 2001). Research on street youth and crime has suggested that within the unregulated economic spheres of society, strategies such as begging, squeegeeing, and other criminal activities have become commonplace as a means of survival (Gaetz &
O’Grady 2002). Yet despite taking on these activities as a means of survival, it could be that a youth’s engagement in such money-generating activities within the informal economy is a decision made stemming from the benefits of this economy.

Benefits to these types of money-making strategies are that they often offer an immediate payout and satisfy immediate needs such as for food and shelter (O’Grady & Gaetz 2004:399). The immediate needs that become a priority for those on the streets are often the reasons as to why street youth turn to these opportunities of earning money within the informal market, whether that be legal, quasi-legal or illegal. Further, the literature has shown how the subculture on the streets creates a context in which many unconventional activities and opportunities for earning money (e.g. drug dealing or prostitution) are clearly undertaken by youth who do not have stable living arrangements and reliable food sources. Thus, they are open to engaging in deviant social networks as seen through the subculture produced on the streets (Stephens 2001).

When youth do secure conventional work in the formal economy, is it often unstable and low-paying work in the service sector, predominantly part-time and considered as ‘dead-end’ jobs (Robinson & Baron 2007). Therefore, formal work may not provide youth with enough income to turn their lives around nor enhance their aspirations or motivations to continue along the formal economic path. This could lead to the decision of choosing work in the informal economy due to perceived benefits that outweigh work in the formal economy, which is contrary to previous arguments suggesting that informal work engagement is the result of restricted choice (Gaetz & O’Grady 2002; Hagan & McCarthy 1997). Yet on the contrary, other researchers point out that a certain element of humiliation exists when working in many informal jobs and street youth often deem the nature of their money-making strategy as demeaning. Research suggests that these groups would align with more conventional aspirations in regards to
employment and obtaining careers that provide economic self-sufficiency within the formal sector (Gwadz et al. 2009).

The realities of homeless youth and their involvement in the informal and formal economies is thus an important area of exploration that provides context between a number of inter-related aspects such as the extent of their criminal involvement and the meanings and work-related identities attached to their money making experiences.

**Socially Patterned Nature of Work**

As outlined prior, important gender differences exist in homeless youths’ experiences on the streets and characteristics. Literature examining employment and subsistence strategies is also similar in that the research has shown the importance of gender when it comes to work-related differentiation. Earlier studies have typically examined issues including earning ratios and occupational segregation while using samples derived from formal labour market participants (Davies et al. 1996; Hughes & Lowe 1993; Kaufman 2002). Realizing that the parameters of homeless youth working opportunities are restrictive within using such samples, scholars have taken notice and looked to explore beyond the parameters of the formal labour market (O’Grady & Gaetz 2004). Work has shown how gender continues to shape the experiences of street youth and the dynamics of how street youth make money, specifically when applied to Canadian samples in Toronto (O’Grady & Gaetz 2004).

The context behind demand and supply explanations in regards to employment segregation and earning distribution on the streets has largely been grouped into four factors that explain such discrepancies: skill deficits, worker preferences, economic and organizational structure and gender stereotyping (Kaufman 2002). Past literature examining formal labour
market participation has clearly demonstrated that street youth report a level of involvement within this sector (Baron 2001; Gaetz et al. 1999). Thus, with the added contribution of such studies towards overall understanding of the difficulties of obtaining and maintaining, “what are mostly low-skilled, poorly paying, service sector jobs on the margins of a labour market that is rife with competition from youth and adults with more settled backgrounds”, there is a clear display of research that highlights the importance of supply and demand side factors for overall understanding of gendered employment differences in the formal economy (O’Grady & Gaetz 2004:399). However, this approach may not entirely show the bigger picture behind explaining subsistence strategies of this vulnerable population.

What has been generally consistent across literature is the acknowledgment of gender differences within informal economy work patterns. Research suggests that females are more likely to work in the sex trade industry than males, whereas males are more likely to take on working opportunities involving increased public exposure such as squeegeeing, robbery, theft or selling drugs (Carter et al. 2007; Gaetz 2004; Hagan & McCarthy 1997). One commonality found within these types of money-making strategies lies in the social characteristics of these types of opportunities, and the direct impact they hold over those who engage in various money-making activities. Researchers suggest that those who come from severely troubled backgrounds are less likely to take on conventional jobs. Instead, their reliance on illegal and quasi-legal forms of income generation is much more likely (Gaetz & O’Grady 2013).

The highly flexible nature of many informal money-making strategies available to street youth prove to be key factors towards economic survival and explanations behind the socially patterned opportunities presented in this area of study (Gaetz & O’Grady 2013). However, a missing component exists that warrants consideration when seeking to understand the
complexities involved with the socially patterned nature of money-making activities more closely, which is the social influence factor and the role it plays in street youths’ money-making experiences. More specifically, the concept of one’s support system and the value that developed street relations and resources bring towards one’s life outcomes and income opportunities (Gaetz et al. 1999:34).

The Role of Social Networks

Work documenting the various social influences that help youth navigate through their experiences on the streets in regards to income-generation is relatively mixed. One substantial area of research that highlights the peer support role is the work done on street families. Peer support among street-involved youth can take on the role of advancing and encouraging engagement in survival strategies, including those necessary for generating money (Ferguson et al. 2011:402). These social support roles often exude a strong influence that help navigate a youth’s path toward both conventional and non-conventional streams of survival. Since leaving their previous home lives, youth are often no longer able to rely on past family and peer relationships for emotional and social support. In order to fill these voids, street youth often form fictive street families which help fill the many existing voids in their lives in addition to their ability to provide protection, emotional support and access to material aids (Bao et al. 2000; Unger et al. 1998). The strong bonds developed through these networks have been shown to influence money-making activities. In some instances, a strong sense of loyalty results in peers securing resources and generating money for their peers (McCarthy et al. 2002).

Prior research on the role of these networks also highlights the importance of learning within groups. A mentorship element often exists which allows street-involved youth to learn and implement various survival skills in regards to specific money-making strategies (Auerswald
& Eyre 2002; McCarthy et al. 2002). These types of learning opportunities may be geared towards more criminally inclined activities, which suggests that the influence may be troublesome. However, when faced with extreme poverty and hunger, the perceived guidance and support received on the streets from others could be enough to sway one’s course of action towards informal pathways and criminal money-making activities even with the understanding of associated legal consequences.

Baron (2004) documents how street youth that are involved in peer groups who engage in drug-related criminal activity have an increased risk of dealing and trafficking drugs themselves. Such results are comparable and hold across other samples, including those derived from U.S. cities. In their study of street survival behaviours in homeless youth in four U.S. metropolitan areas, Ferguson et al. (2011:407) found that peer support was identified as a factor associated with youth involvement in survival behaviours. More specifically, results indicated that street youth who relied more on their peers on the streets (versus parents or other family members), were more likely to engage in money-making survival behaviours such as prostitution, selling blood or plasma, dealing drugs, stealing and panhandling. This level of peer connectedness is also consistent with previous research which indicates that youth who are embedded in a street culture with similarly situated peers are likely to engage in similar activities where involvement in a heavily delinquent and criminal street economy is common (Piliavin et al. 1996).

Life on the streets proves difficult for youth to become self-sufficient through means of formal employment specifically at such a vulnerable age. What paves the way for young people to seek out street relationships is often the result of circumstance, “in the absence of connections to and resources from supportive adults and institutions that are common during the transition to
adulthood, homeless young adults often must rely on survival behaviors” (Ferguson et al. 2011:407).

Some researchers have found that when compared to street families, those homeless youth who aren’t immersed in peer networks are at times less criminal than those in street families (Hagan & McCarthy 1997). This type of research suggests that street youth involvement in peer networks often plays a negative influential role in their lives, which could permeate into other avenues of their lives and inhibit one’s chances of upward mobility through formal employment. However, not all research is in line with the negative influential role that peer networks play in their influence and lure to informal economical involvement. Bender et al. (2007:35) suggests that peer networks can also be understood in the form of establishing helpful opportunities through trusting friendships. Derived from qualitative data from focus groups, Bender et al. (2007:35) explained that the development of street smart skills from others helped youth on the streets to avoid dangerous situations and aided their ability to locate valuable resources. Locating valuable resources, even if only through informal economic activity, is important towards the socialization of youth to the workforce as it contributes to one’s identity formation and provides self-sufficiency in regards to economic need, factors which may be important towards pathways to formal work (Baron & Hartnagel 1997; Gaetz & O’Grady 2002).

Scholars note the importance of social supports during the transitioning time to adulthood. These supports are said to include a wide range of relationships including the support from family, friends, neighbours, school teachers and counselors (Gaetz et al. 1999:34). In addition to the important support gained from these networks in the form of love, guidance, encouragement and modeling of proper adult behaviour, these broad ranges of support often contribute to the development of skills required for day-to-day living, which include various job
related skills. In their analysis of social support systems, Gaetz et al. (1999:35) found that the range of social supports available to street youth is weak. Life on the streets was shown to diminish the various networks that were available to youth prior to homelessness, and eventually diminished to merely street youth friends who in themselves lacked other important social support systems and networks. To explain further, it was suggested that “their key supports are each other, and because of this they will often choose to stay together at all costs (and avoid shelters, for instance) rather than risk their fragile system of social supports” and the nature of these peer networks are said to be “not too helpful as stepping stones toward formal employment” (Gaetz et al. 1999:35). The role that these street peer support networks play is detrimental towards preparation for job searches and job networking. This is because they serve as a more immediate resource towards satisfying pressing needs and keeping each other protected and safe in the short term.

The socialization process that occurs during one’s time on the street is geared towards various means of survival (Karabanow 2006). As such, the various networks and peer connections developed while on the streets serve as important for learning the associated strategies behind making money (Gaetz & O’Grady 2002; Hagan & McCarthy 1997; Karabanow 2006). If a young person wishes to pursue conventional employment in the formal sector, the process that they go through is much like any non-street person’s process where they must formally apply and fill out applications and drop off resumes to employers.

The process for finding formal employment also includes the element of using informal networks to find opportunities via friends and family (Baron 2001). Therefore, in the case of street-involved youth, the limited informal networks of similarly situated peers who themselves have limited support may serve as a hindering factor towards successful job attainment. As
previous literature has shown, a vicious circle arises where street youth are then more likely to participate in various informal and illegal work as a result of negative formal work experiences and associated feelings of exclusion from conventional society (Baron 2001; Baron & Hartanagel 2002; Karabnow 2006). Such associated feelings of exclusion from society are met with feelings of unfairness in terms of the formal labour market opportunities which heighten the risk of engaging in crime to satisfy economic needs (Baron 2001). Therefore, when relying on what are often very loyal and tightknit peer groups who have themselves often experienced very negative employment experiences, the pathway towards upward mobility and conventional aspirations becomes further obscured as a result of the commonly perceived negative experiences and lacking support available.

The following subsection shifts to build on the previously contextualized frameworks by providing a review of the empirical status of both GST and Social Capital Theory and their application in research on street youth.

*Review of Empirical Research on General Strain Theory and Street Youth*

The GST model outlines how strains lead to crime through complex factors wherein certain strained individuals turn to crime in their reactions to experienced strain. Ferguson et al. (2016: 102) draw on an example of homeless youth to clarify this theoretical understanding. Multiple strains such as street victimization, prolonged homelessness and parental abuse can lead to negative reactions (e.g. anger) and the development of maladaptive coping responses (e.g. deviant peer associations, substance abuse and criminal activity), which may subsequently lead to illegal economic behaviours. Further various conditioning factors (e.g., deviant peers) can influence whether street youth react to strain with crime or not.
In their study of street youth and criminal violence, Baron and Hartnagel (1998) examined the roles of various subcultural (time on street, criminal peers, peer pressure, alcohol use, drug use), economic (income, length unemployed, strain, anger) and victimization factors (robbed, aggravated assault, common assault, family abuse) in violent behaviour of 200 homeless male street youth. Their findings indicated that minimal economic resources and perceptions of blocked opportunity structures resulted in youth being more at risk for violent behaviours. In relation to economic deprivation specifically, poverty was an important predictor. Regression models revealed how youth lacking financial resources in the form of income were more likely to have higher involvement in robbery. It was argued that economic deprivation experienced by homeless youth is the product of one’s length of time on the street.

Baron & Hartnagel (1998: 181) justify that street youth who believed they did not receive a fair chance in conventional labour market participation used violence and other unconventional means to secure monetary resources. These findings lend support to strain perspectives, emphasizing the importance of labour market strains and crime when applied to a high-risk sample of homeless street youth. In addition, findings have been fairly consistent across literature as seen with more recent work by Baron and Hartnagel (2002) who found significant interaction effects between labour market strain and criminal norms predicting property, violent and total crime. The research clarified labour market strain as the outcome of discrepancies between one’s length of unemployment and what one perceived as fair or just outcomes.

Findings by Baron (2006) further lent support for strain measures such as monetary dissatisfaction and relative deprivation as significant predictors of crime when examining a sample of homeless youth. In the examined interactions, Baron’s (2006) work revealed support for more traditional strain perspectives (Cloward & Ohlin 1960) with evidence indicating that
youth who perceived relative deprivation and who interacted with an increased number of deviant peers were more likely to partake in crime as well as individuals who were monetarily dissatisfied and blamed other people for their situations. Results revealed how deviant peers conditioned strain measures by moderating the impact of relative deprivation on measures of violent crime. The more deviant peers that homeless youth had, the larger the effect of relative deprivation on violent offending (Baron 2006 :217).

In a similar line of work, empirical research examining street youths’ reactions to unemployment and interpretations of labour market experiences further revealed that criminal behaviour is influenced by factors such as homelessness, drug and alcohol use and deviant peers who partake in illegal activities (Baron & Hartnagel 1997). In examining street youths’ reactions to unemployment, Baron and Hartnagel (1997) further revealed how criminal behaviour is influenced by a lack of income, job experiences and perceptions of a blocked opportunity structure. While labour market conditions and youths’ reactions to those conditions did have an effect on crime, other important findings were also found suggesting that lengthy unemployment, job experiences and a lack of income work alongside experiencing feelings of anger and external attributions to increase street youths’ criminal involvements.

Other work examining employment-related barriers for homeless youth populations have shown support for specific income-generating activities as influenced by demographic, environmental and geographic contexts (Ferguson et al. 2012b). More specifically, U.S. street youth that experienced intense strains such as the length of time living on the streets in addition to being currently homeless and drug addicts were shown to be more likely to be formally unemployed (Ferguson et al. 2012b). Implications surrounding these findings further revealed important employment-related barriers including homelessness, geographic transience, past
criminal activity, mental illness and addiction. Whereas most common income-generating strategies revealed were panhandling, followed by dealing drugs, theft, selling blood and prostitution. Strains such as homelessness and unemployment were related to these behaviours as the longer youth were immersed in such lifestyles, the more likely they would be to normalize the income-generating behaviours (Ferguson et al. 2012b:400).

Ferguson et al. (2012c:12) also examined mental health and situational strains and responses to such strains with arrest history among 144 street youth in four U.S. cities. The study identified factors related to youth arrest history including length of time homeless, level of transience, victimization, post-traumatic stress disorder, substance dependence and the use of survival strategies (e.g., panhandling, theft, prostitution, selling drugs, selling blood) (Ferguson et al. 2012c:10). Results indicated that street youths’ length of time homeless, substance dependence and use of survival strategies explained 17% of the variance in arrest history. Findings revealed an intervening effect occurring from transience to arrest history through victimization, post-traumatic stress disorder, survival strategies and substance dependence. The researchers clarified their findings suggesting how highly transient street youths may be presented with increased negative stimuli as they travel between cities, which as a result can lead to criminal activity. Given the transient nature of the youths in their study, the respondents were more susceptible to experiencing instances of victimization on the streets because they were unfamiliar with potential safe haven locations when they repeatedly moved to new cities. In turn, it was suggested that youths may develop various mental health illnesses such as PTSD which influenced their decisions to cope with trauma through substance dependence as a means to escape from the negative emotions (Ferguson et al. 2012c:13).
Ferguson et al.’s (2015b) work on risk and resilience factors associated with formal and informal income generation utilizing a sample of 601 homeless youth from three U.S. cities provides important evidence that highlights chronic strains associated with youth homelessness. Formal income generation from full-time employment, part-time employment, and paid temporary employment (e.g., seasonal work) was associated with characteristics such as being male, having an increased number of problem behaviours (e.g., arrest history, substance use, antisocial personality) and reporting higher levels of resilience (Ferguson et al. 2015b:19). Whereas informal income generation (e.g., selling self-made items, selling bottles/cans, selling blood/plasma, panhandling, dealing drugs, trading sexual favours, gambling and stealing) was associated with being younger, transient and also reporting an increased number of problem behaviours.

In his study of homeless youths’ labour market experiences and interpretations of unemployment, Baron (2001) found that labour market strains result in youth being more likely to commit criminal activities to maintain their subsistence on the street. Utilizing a sample of 200 male street youth, Baron’s (2001:196) results suggested that financial state support was often insufficient. Out of the 200 respondents, 59 respondents reported being on state support with the majority complaining about the income level. Further, self-report data revealed that the sample was heavily involved in criminal activities. The data reported upwards of 1,600 offences within the prior year. Drug dealing made up the majority of these offences (1,200), followed by property offences (348) and robberies (48) (Baron 2001:197).

Using general strain theory, Baron’s (2008) more recent work investigating the factors between unemployment and crime provided similar support for the theory with a more complete exploration of the internal and external attributions of unemployment. Baron’s (2008) work
revealed how these attributions of unemployment predicted situational anger within a sample of 400 homeless street youth. Further, results revealed how such situational anger over unemployment predicted violent crime and drug crime. These tended to be viable sources of income generation for homeless youth engaged in unconventional streams of money-making within the homeless economy (Gaetz & O’Grady 2002; O’Grady & Gaetz 2004). Results of Baron’s (2008) study further indicated how internal attributions of unemployment were seen as a strong predictor over one’s anger regarding unemployment, with this anger in turn being positively related to violent crime and drug dealing.

Gaetz & O’Grady’s (2002:444) study of 360 homeless youth in Toronto highlights the failure of achieving positively valued stimuli in the context of legitimate working opportunities. Results indicated that 18% of youth turned to crime, 17% engaged in squeegeeing, 12% panhandled and 10% worked in the sex trade. The remaining legitimate money making activities were from paid employment at 15%, social assistance at 15% and ‘other’ activities such as receiving money from friends or family at 12% (Gaetz & O’Grady 2002:439). This statistical breakdown is further supported by qualitative evidence suggesting that, “many homeless youth in [the] total sample state that they have stolen goods- if not to convert to cash, at least to meet immediate needs, for instance for food or clothing” (Gaetz & O’Grady 2002:442). The study affirmed that homeless youth were more likely to engage in criminal and quasi-legal activities to generate money. Turning to alternative strategies was a result of significant barriers to maintaining employment, among other things. According to Gaetz and O’Grady (2002:437), the results further revealed that the informal economy was socially patterned and youth income generation was also depended on past background and experiences living on the street as
measured through situational variables (e.g., hunger, shelter and drug use) along with background variables (e.g., sexual orientation, ethnicity, and level of education).

The review of empirical research on GST provided insight into the strains and challenges that street youth are faced with in their navigations through the streets. These studies revealed how youths’ engagement in criminal behaviours tends to be the result of experienced strains and stressors, many of which were seen as high in magnitude and severe. Homeless youth are a population susceptible to causing crime due to the intense strains they are faced with that challenge their goals, values, needs, identities and everyday activities (Agnew 2001:345). The following subsection shifts to build on the previously contextualized framework by providing a review of the empirical status of Social Capital Theory and its application in research on street youth.

Review of Empirical Research on Social Capital Theory and Street Youth

The social capital perspective on crime sheds light on how associations on the street generate different levels of intangible resources of trust, commitment and reciprocity. McCarthy et al.’s (1998) work exploring cooperation in criminal endeavours among a two-wave panel of street youth in Toronto and Vancouver provides valuable insight in clarifying this theoretical understanding. Testing motivations to co-offend using cross-sectional and longitudinal models of general and group theft, McCarthy et al. (1998:172) found that street youth who are open to criminally cooperative orientations are much more likely to take part in various types of thefts compared to those who adopt a more individualistic approach to criminal decision making. They found that a ‘collaboration’ approach was most important in the facilitation of crime. In line with previously examined evidence, this study supports the perspective that adversity on the streets
and social networks influence one’s willingness to engage in criminal behaviour, and in this case, to co-offend.

Extending the work on social capital, McCarthy and Hagan (2001) argue that numerous aspects of conventional capital such as a willingness to cooperate, a desire for wealth, propensity for risk-taking and competence also play vital roles in legal and illegal prosperity in their study on capital, competence and criminal success. Utilizing a three wave panel study of street youth in Toronto and Vancouver, McCarthy and Hagan (2001:1043) used their conceptual model to explore systematically the importance of capital with respect to drug selling income. McCarthy and Hagan (2001:1053) demonstrated that factors which contribute to income generation in conventional streams also influence illegal streams. Specifically, specialization (an attribute of human capital), one’s willingness to collaborate and a desire for wealth (attributes of personal capital) increased criminal success. Results revealed how competence increases illegal earnings through interacting with specialization and collaboration as well as through interacting with a disposition for risk-taking, which is defined as a personal capital attribute usually found in the conventional success of individuals such as entrepreneurs (McCarthy and Hagan 2001:1054). These findings showed that competence itself does not lead to crime. Instead, for competent street youth that favour risk taking, specialization or collaboration may allow them to become successful offenders in particular adverse conditions on the streets.

In a more recent line of work, Ferguson and colleagues (2015) examined gender differences among homeless youths’ coping strategies and homelessness stressors highlighting the utility of the social capital framework. Ferguson et al. (2015:48) indicate how networks of like-minded peers influence and endorse common illicit behaviours such as substance use and illegal income generating activities. In certain cases, the exerted influence of the associations
results in the increased exposure of street youth to dangerous others (e.g., adults or peers) creating an increased risk of exploitation (e.g., financial exploitation by peers), distress and victimization with regards to income generation (Ferguson et al. 2011; O’Grady and Gaetz 2004). These increased risks of exploitation by dangerous others are suggested to occur due to the often unsupervised and unsafe locations of the illegal activities that youth are exposed to. Results revealed how street youth who relied on fewer social coping strategies such as turning to peer groups for social support, indicated a greater variety of illegal money-making sources than their peers who relied on others for social support (Ferguson et al. 2015).

When the sample was assessed separately by gender, females who reported fewer social coping strategies reported earning income from greater varieties of illegal sources than their peers who relied on more coping strategies. Second, males who relied on fewer social coping strategies reported a greater variety of illegal income sources than those who relied more heavily on such strategies (Ferguson et al. 2015:50). Gender differences in coping strategies revealed how problem-focused coping (e.g., concentrating on what to do and how to solve a specific problem) was associated with legal and illegal income generation in females with no association found in males. Further, gender differences were found within transience (e.g., total number of cities to which youth moved since leaving home) impacts on economic activity with greater transience being associated with more diverse involvement in legal activities in females, whereas transience was associated with more diverse illegal activities in males (Ferguson et al. 2015:54).

As outlined in past literature, the longer youth are homeless, the more susceptible they are to social estrangement and isolation (Baron, 2004). Therefore, Ferguson et al. (2015:53) suggest that the association between social isolation and illegal income activity may be the result of a “disconnection from supportive adults and institutions [that] might preclude these young
people from access to formal employment opportunities and settings.” In efforts of coping with their formal employment exclusions, street youth may turn to other social networks in peers for emotional support (Barman-Adhikari & Rice 2014). As seen in the case of the Ferguson et al. (2015) study, the lack of a conventional social capital influence within the lives of street youth in three large American cities (Los Angeles, Denver, and Austin) proved to direct income generating strategies towards more criminal avenues.

After reviewing the current state of empirical research on homeless youth, employment, the role of social networks, GST and Social Capital Theory, this research will address and contextualize how work (formal and informal) is situated within the lives of homeless youth and how this intersect is influenced by peer networks and relationships. This study will move the research agenda further by addressing a relatively understudied gap through applying a GST and Social Capital Theory lens. The following chapter offers a discussion of the methodological procedures and considerations used in this research. It will discuss in detail the location of the research, how access was gained, the target population and sampling methods, the data collection, the recruitment strategy and the analysis procedures used in this research.
CHAPTER FOUR

Methods

This chapter summarizes the methodology used to collect data on homeless Ottawa youth. I outline the location of the research, how access was gained, the target population, the data collection strategy, the techniques of data analysis, as well as other research considerations.

The goals of this research are to better understand the relationship between homeless Ottawa youth and their involvement within formal and informal economic sectors. More specifically, the research objective is to understand how work (formal and informal) is situated within the lives of homeless youth and how this intersect is affected by peer networks and relationships. This research aims to increase understanding on whether homelessness and formal work are compatible by highlighting some of the challenges that affect homeless youth in their everyday struggles and realities.

A number of guiding research questions were addressed in this study with the purpose of exploring homeless youths’ perceptions and lived experiences of formal and informal work. These questions were in line with the main research objectives of this study. The research objectives were best met through the use of a qualitative approach. Qualitative methods provide a rare learning opportunity that allows for rich and complex understanding of a problem. With the goal of understanding the social meaning individuals have behind various life processes and outcomes, qualitative research can provide a voice when discussing issues with participants in their natural setting (Creswell 2013). In addition, the interviews served as an opportunity for participants to hold meaningful dialogue not often available to them on the streets. After the majority of the interviews were complete, participants voiced their sincerest gratitude for the chance to open up, speak and make their voices heard.
Location

Ottawa, Ontario was chosen for the location of this research due to the lack of empirical exploration focusing on homeless youth and income generation in this location. As outlined in the literature review chapter, Canadian studies exploring homeless youths’ employment opportunities and survival strategies tended to focus on samples drawn from other large metropolitan cities such as Toronto (see McCarthy & Hagan 1995; 2001; O’Grady & Gaetz 2004; 2009).

Ottawa is the fourth largest city in Canada with a population nearing one million people. As the nation’s capital, Ottawa is a vibrant and growing metropolitan area with a diverse population. The marginalized youth in Ottawa reflect the growing diversity of the city in many ways proving to be a city worthy of empirical exploration (Klodawsky et al. 2006). Data collection for this research took place during a four-week period from mid September to mid October of 2016.

Gaining Access

This research was made possible through the help of an employment, education, and support centre for homeless and at-risk youth aged 16 to 24 located in Ottawa. Their hours of operation are Monday through Friday 8 am to 4 pm and they help upwards of 50 youth on any given day on a drop-in basis.

In order to gain access to participants for this study, I first secured access to the support centre as the site for my recruitment and data collection. The support centre takes a very informal approach for providing research access and does not implement their own research screening process. Access to this site was granted for the purpose of respondent recruitment and for
utilizing the site to conduct interviews. Approval was granted after initial contact over the phone where I was referred to speak with a staff member that could provide more information. Emails were then exchanged where I briefly introduced myself and I set up an informal meeting to discuss my research topic, objectives and interview questions in person with a support centre staff member. I received verbal approval and was met with a receptive response to carry out my research at their location pending clearance by the Queen’s University General Research Ethics Board in compliance with the Canadian ethics guidelines.

After taking the necessary steps to securing the aforementioned approval (see Appendix A), I set up another meeting at the support centre to familiarize myself with the facility and staff and to finalize the details of my study. I was taken on a tour of the centre where I was introduced to the various staff members. My initial person of contact at the support centre had informed the remaining staff members ahead of time of my research goals and forthcoming plans to carry out interviews with respondents at their centre in the upcoming weeks. Each staff member that I spoke with was well aware of my research plans and they all kindly volunteered their willingness to help throughout the duration of my fieldwork if needed. During the tour of the centre, I was provided the opportunity to pick and choose the specific location that I would deem suitable for carrying out interviews. Lastly, as the principal researcher, I was asked to sign a waiver form to ensure I did my best to protect the well-being and anonymity of the respondents I would be conducting my research with.

Target Population and Sampling Methods

Thirty respondents were interviewed (22 male, 8 female) based on the following two sampling criteria: (1) individuals were between the ages of 16 and 24; (2) individuals have spent
at least two weeks away from home without a fixed address or living in a shelter prior to the interview. The rationale for these criteria were to cover the age range of those allowed to utilize the support centre services and to ensure that the sample was in fact composed of “serious at risk youth” (Baron 2006:214). The target population was consistent with common Canadian definitions of homeless youth that define this population as young people within similar age ranges that have run away, been kicked out of their homes and/or those young people who spent their time in different public locations such as squats (abandoned buildings), youth shelters or couch surfing with friends without a permanent dwelling (Baron 2004; Karabanow 2004a; Karabanow & Kidd 2014; Kidd & Scrimenti 2004).

Potential respondents were alerted of the volunteer study by both the drop-in staff that were working on duty and by myself. The sampling criteria meant that purposive sampling was used in this research. A purposive sampling strategy allows researchers to select respondents that best fit the characteristics of the research objectives (Bryman 2001:406). Initial screening occurred during casual conversations held with potential respondents at the support centre ensuring that the sampling criteria were met. In addition to the sampling criteria, I had to also take steps to ensure that participants were mentally fit to take part in the study. After verbally screening for eligibility, I had to use my best judgment to assess whether individuals appeared intoxicated or mentally unfit, in which case they were screened out. To determine if an individual was mentally unfit, attention was paid to clear signs that indicated an individual could have serious problems in their ability to work with me. For example, if an individual was experiencing severe nervousness, mood changes, or unusual behaviour.

Those who were determined as eligible were provided additional information and were invited to take part in the study. Participants were provided a clear letter of information in which
the complete research plan was outlined (see Appendix B). The letter of information was read slowly to the respondents to ensure full comprehension. Participants were informed of the purpose of the project, the benefits, the types of questions that they would be interviewed about, as well as the potential risks that were involved with participating (e.g., disclosing engagement in criminal behaviours or discussing sensitive topics) and the steps taken to minimize these risks. Participants were also asked to be audio-recorded and reminded that the audio-recorder could be shut off and erased at any time during the interview. Participants were also notified of the steps available to them should they decide to withdraw from the study after the interview was completed. Participants received a $5 Subway Restaurant gift card regardless of their decision to withdraw at any point in time. Participants were notified that they were able to withdraw up until the time that the final thesis project has been completed and submitted to Queen’s University.

Verbal consent was provided off tape by participants stating they were aware and understood everything involved in the process prior to beginning the interview. Confidentiality was explained where participants were reminded that they are protected throughout the entire research process and no personal information would be made public.

Data Collection

Thirty one-on-one semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect the data. The interviews were audio-recorded with lengths ranging between 30 to 60 minutes each. The interview schedule utilized four main sections to tap into the research objectives: (1) informal work; (2) peer network influences on informal work; (3) formal work; and (4) peer network influences on formal work (see Appendix C). The sequential design behind the interview schedule was to first explore themes pertaining to informal working involvement while
homeless, followed by more sensitive and subjective experiences behind those involvements. Respondents were then asked about the role that their relationships and friendships had in their informal involvements. Next, a similar question sequence was used to tap into the formal working involvements as well as potential strains involved with such work, followed by inquiring again into the role of their peer networks on formal involvements.

The question content was structured with open ended question formatting to encourage rich and complex responses. The sequential order was strategically structured so that a rapport could be created throughout the interview between the researcher and the respondent allowing personal and sensitive topics to be explored more freely. In an effort to create an interview schedule that was most suitable for interviewing a young vulnerable poorly educated population, certain measures were taken to assist in their abilities to fully participate in the research. The interview schedule was created using less formal language. The documents were run through an online tool to ensure that the language use was appropriate for the comprehension level of the sample. Clarification was also offered during instances when uncertainty emerged. In turn, these mitigating measures enhanced the researcher’s ability to establish and maintain a trusting, friendly and respectful relationship throughout the course of the interviews.

Recruitment Strategy

Interviews were conducted in an open concept empty office cubicle. This location was chosen because it allowed for privacy where respondents could feel safe to discuss sensitive matters without worrying about being heard by others, but also because it provided a safe location wherein I could be heard by other staff members in case of emergencies. This specific location was also recommended to me by the support centre staff as it was within eye sight of
other office spaces. I was able to comfortably interview respondents in this space without distractions as well as write down any rough ideas and notes I had immediately following each interview.

It was important that I take the necessary steps to assist in gaining the trust of respondents that would allow for sincere and honest data collection to take place. After discussions with my supervisor and initial observations of the staff dress and informal atmosphere at the support centre, I decided to dress in a way that would not draw attention and make me stand out as a researcher. Casual t-shirts and jeans were worn so that I could avoid initial judgments by potential respondents who may have found me to be an ‘outsider’ if dressed more formally.

During my four-week fieldwork period I decided to immerse myself into the daily drop-in setting of the centre so that I could familiarize myself with the youth. By being an active drop-in support staff member, I became a familiar face that would allow potential respondents to recognize and become familiar with me. While I did help out with typical volunteer duties such as cleaning (e.g., dish washing and sweeping) and occasionally food preparation, I also made an effort to socially engage with as many youth as I could. At times this was difficult to do given that certain youth were noticeably upset or in distress due to personal issues experienced outside of drop-in hours (e.g., drug related issues or difficulties experienced on the streets), or other youth were noticeably intoxicated. Nonetheless, I was also able to develop a series of friendly relationships with others through informal discussions and playing around. I did my best to lighten the mood around others by presenting a non-judgmental demeanour and making an effort to actively listen when engaging with others. One strategy that I developed over the course of drop-in hours which enabled me to actively screen potential respondents for eligibility and recruit them for my study was through playing games. More specifically, through a series of
foosball challenges. This became a big hit during the drop-in hours as I spent a significant amount of time engaging with potential respondents over friendly yet competitive matches of foosball. This strategy allowed me to gain their trust, and recruit respondents to take part in my research after our games. Through carrying over that friendly atmosphere from our foosball games, I created a very approachable and receptive connection right away that allowed me to maintain rapport during interviews and receive rich testimonies.

Lastly, during my time spent in Ottawa I decided to join the outreach volunteer team at the support centre. The decision to join the support centre outreach volunteer program was made for both personal and research related reasons. As a member of the outreach volunteer team, I spent my Friday evenings working in teams of two or three volunteers from the support centre by walking around the downtown core of Ottawa for a number of hours delivering food, clothing and health supplies to homeless individuals. We worked to deliver reliable and discrete support through outreach initiatives aimed to help disadvantaged youth in the community. The goal was to deliver goods but also to encourage youth to come to the support centre to seek the help they needed. This experience was valuable to me in that it allowed me to truly gauge what life on the street is for some of these individuals that I would be interviewing. I spent a significant amount of time listening to youth on the streets and encouraging them to seek help through the support centre services. I was able to learn first hand about the very same things I have studied in the literature which proved to be very important to my development and understanding as a researcher. This experience provided clarity and a deeper meaning to my interviews in terms of understanding some of the adversities that I was inquiring about through a different lens. As a researcher, I felt more connectivity with my research project due to the things I was exposed to on the street. Outreach volunteering also proved valuable because I was able to establish an
initial trusting connection with four youth who I subsequently went on to interview in the following weeks. Finally, outreach volunteering provided me the opportunity to meet the individuals that I volunteered alongside, some of which were staff members at the support centre. They were very encouraging towards my research plans and they played a key role in motivating me to overcome the challenges that come with working with at-risk populations.

Analysis

All audio-recorded semi-structured interviews were transcribed verbatim. The transcribed data was first read and then categorized into separate files for each question used in the interview. Once the data was grouped into separate files chronologically in accordance to interview questions asked, open coding was implemented to make sense of the data. The process of open coding took on a grounded theoretical approach where the analysis occurred in a more naturally occurring manner allowing concepts to emerge from the data within each file analyzed (Charmaz 2014:180). The naturally occurring sequence of coding data within each file into conceptually-specific themes and categories is more conducive in a research design focusing on homeless youth within an exploratory qualitative framework. Grounded theory approaches facilitate analysis with the process of identifying varying themes while building conceptual narratives from the collected data. In turn, this process allowed for specific coding and analysis reflective of the intended research direction (Strauss and Corbin 1990). The main themes that emerged throughout the analysis stage will be discussed in the following chapter of this thesis.
CHAPTER FIVE

Analysis

Chapter Five presents an analysis of the gathered data. There are five broad themes that will be discussed including: (1) informal working experiences; (2) aspirations; (3) informal peer influences; (4) formal working experiences and (5) formal peer influences. This chapter will also examine several sub-themes that emerged within each of these broad themes.

Sample Characteristics

This study utilized a sample of 30 participants, the majority of which were male. Twenty-two respondents were male, and the remaining 8 were female. The age range of the sample was 16 to 24 years old with the average respondent being 21 years old. The average education level was partially completed high school. In terms of respondent living situations, the majority of the sample either stayed in a shelter, couch surfed, or engaged in squatting/rough sleeping outdoors (e.g., in an alleyway or park). Half of the sample was originally from Ottawa, with the remainder of the sample being predominantly from other cities within Ontario.

Informal Working Experiences

The first theme to emerge from the participants involves the reported informal work experiences. In line with past research, informal work was explained to participants as activities that take place to make ends meet. It was explained that these include illegal activities, but also non-criminal forms of working activities or unregulated activities such as working under the table. Past research suggests that informal economies often arise due to desperate situations facing individuals that require an income, forcing a reliance on unconventional methods for
generating money. These include legal (e.g., collecting and selling recyclable materials), illegal (e.g., dealing drugs) and quasi-legal (e.g., begging for money or squeegeeing) sources of income generation (Ferguson 2013; Gaetz & O’Grady 2002; Kipke et al. 1997; Whitbeck 2009).

Respondents in this research were simply asked about their involvement in any informal work and what made them start engaging in these behaviours. All thirty respondents voiced their involvement in informal work with criminal, quasi-legal and unregulated ‘under the table’ jobs emerging as common activities. A few examples of common criminal activities that the youths engaged in are illustrated below:

Well before here, before here I used to sell different drugs here and there so that’s how I made my money. I don’t know, I grew up in a rough neighbourhood so that was my way (Male, 22).

Absolutely, I am currently selling speed umm because I’m a single mom and I need extra things that I cannot afford and to get a job at the present moment is difficult because of daycare and it’s just an easy stay at home type of job (Female, 19).

I used to be involved. I used to be on [main] street. I was homeless from fourteen up until now but when I turned eighteen I smartened up and knew that I could get a record so I stopped doing that. I used to sell weed on [blank] street (Male, 24).

While drug dealing emerged as the most common illegal means for generating money among this sample, a number of other less common yet important criminal behaviours were also voiced. These behaviours are important because they highlight the extreme lengths that certain youths are willing to undergo in order to generate income. They often include more severe risks such as being self-exposed to physical harm and serious legal consequences. These behaviours are illustrated in the examples below:

Ya, I was a collector. A collector means that it’s a person that gets calls from other people and he goes up to the person and basically tortures him. That’s a blunt way of saying it, I basically tortured him until he pays the money, like extort him. If he owes anything, a collector could be anything. It could be as
little as owing drugs or it could be that you robbed my mother and I’m going to send a collector after you. It could be anything. So a collector goes and extorts them until they pay the money if they don’t, they get badly hurt and then they have a week to pay up (Male, 23).

I’ve done a lot of credit card fraud. Stealing cards from people we would just run into houses or cars or whatever and take their bags, find their credit cards and use their credit cards. Pretty much it’s the easiest thing to steal and use (Female, 22).

I escorted before for years. It was like pretty scary. You never know who you’re meeting they can hurt you but luckily I never got hurt. I did it for about five years I was my own boss and I did everything online (Female, 19).

Another behaviour that emerged within the realm of informal working activities was pan-handling, a common quasi-legal activity that youths engaged in as part of their everyday routines on the streets. The results of this study are in line with research which has consistently shown that panhandling is among the most common means for generating an income when faced with dire situations on the streets (Ferguson et al. 2012). Whereas the above mentioned activities (e.g, drug dealing) are deemed criminal offences under Canadian law wherein offenders are subject to punishment by the legal system, quasi-legal activities such as panhandling are not criminal offences that fall under the Canadian criminal code. Instead, provincial legislation under the Safe Streets Act of 2004 sets a number of restrictions on behaviours that include solicitation for money in public spaces (Cheng et al. 2016). Fourteen respondents in this research voiced their involvements in panhandling. A few examples are illustrated below:

_Umm almost everyday I go panhandling because I don’t have a job. I have certain mental health issues where I have anxiety and I have trouble working at a workplace. I can be social sometimes so it’s an iffy thing but I wouldn’t think about finding a job until I get housed so I panhandle to get money (Female, 22)._

_I panhandle every now and then, I don’t like to umm, but there are some days where you’ll make like say fifty bucks in an hour and there’s other days where you’ll make like nothin’ but twenty-five cents in four hours (Male, 23)._
Whereas the above examples highlight a common informal behaviour in panhandling as a means to generate an income, other respondents voiced their involvement in less common informal money generating behaviours:

Yeah, I return beer cans and stuff like that just to try and make money and stuff, be able to afford things (Male, 17).

I’ve never had to panhandle I just sell my own Jewelry (Female, 19).

A number of respondents voiced their involvements in unregulated cash ‘under the table’ jobs. Four respondents indicated generating an income primarily through these types of unregulated activities:

Yeah, I’ve definitely been involved in some informal work. There’s been volunteers like the last pride that was here, there are a lot of people who are paid to work on barricades, it pays under the table. That’s just some of the work informal that I’ve done (Male, 17).

Capital pride is one and I’ve done other random jobs where I’d get paid money or a cheque and then I wouldn’t really have to provide it to my ODSP worker because they never gave me a letter along with it stating this is how much you made and there wouldn’t even be a pay stub so if it’s cash under the table there’s no way I can really report it (Male, 24).

While participants were asked about their most commonly used informal money-making activity, many youths also voiced their involvements in multiple informal activities as part of their day-to-day survival strategy and as a means to supplement their earnings. Multiple informal activities included a combination of any illegal, quasi-legal or unregulated work, or relying on informal work to supplement monthly income received from either Ontario Works (OW), or the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), which both serve to offer income support each month to help with costs of basic needs like food, clothing and shelter. One respondent voices his need to sell drugs as a means to supplement his insufficient OW income:

Working informally, I think is a more freelance area where you are not bound by the restrictions that the laws impose on you. So for instance, with OW
people especially, let’s say you go to school, and you can work part-time. The most he can make working part-time is probably gunna be like a thousand three-hundred and that’s still pretty tight. And if you get a thousand three-hundred they’re gunna cut your OW. So what you do basically is you work informally and you get OW plus that (Male, 18).

In the above example, it becomes clear that social assistance alone does not always provide adequate means for financial stability and advancement. According to the OW and ODSP program overviews, the support programs are intended to provide financial assistance and help one find and keep a job, while advancing a career. In the above example, the young male rationalized taking on the risks of an illegal career in drug dealing to maintain his day-to-day needs in hopes of socio-economic stability and mobility.

The results in this research also raised an interesting theme pertaining to the deterrence of involvement in informal work for reasons beyond those associated with legal consequences and dangers. In some cases, youth were aware of the dire consequences associated with their informal activities such as the legal consequences and potential dangers but still decided to engage in certain illicit behaviours despite the risks. Interestingly, this research shows how other factors associated with one’s self-worth emerged as more important deterrents to certain youth discouraging them from engaging in informal behaviours. Even within the desperation of the informal street economy, certain behaviours were still only considered to be a last resort:

*Umm I honestly try and sell like some of my personal things instead of panhandling but when it gets to a point where I don’t have anything to sell or nobody is interested in what I’m trying to sell and I really need the money to survive I will go panhandle that night (Male, 23).*

*Yeah I just sold drugs on [main street], I didn’t panhandle, I don’t like to panhandle. I don’t like to ask people for their hard earned money it kind of makes me feel very degraded. I was refusing to beg people for money. I didn’t want to degrade myself to beg people for money and I didn’t steal because I was taught not to steal and I have morals I don’t like to steal, not from the government and I don’t like to steal from people. I don’t steal from anybody.*
So the only thing I could think of that was kind of like a way to make money without having to do something like that was to sell drugs (Male, 24).

**Pathways to Informal Work**

The literature suggests that homeless youth who engage in the aforementioned informal income generating activities are more likely to interact with police and end up caught up in the criminal justice system (Gaetz 2004). Taking this into consideration, this research also explored why some homeless youth choose these informal money-making strategies and why they stray away from conventional working aspirations. When asked about what first made them engage in the various informal activities, the respondents in this research voiced a number of factors reflecting their unique situations. Ten respondents indicated they took on informal work to satisfy their own addictions and drug habits. A few examples are illustrated below:

**Addiction**

_Well I left my parents place, and I was extremely depressed. I started cutting myself, and I felt that I didn’t really want to harm myself in that way. So I started doing drugs, and I started selling them because I never really had money for drugs so I needed a way to get drugs without spending money on it. My only way to do that was by selling drugs (Male, 19)._

_Umm not making enough money on the streets. Then I started smoking weed, I started doing drugs, I started doing a lot of drugs and then I started wasting too much money and then the more money I wasted the more money I needed. So then I started to sell pot so I can make extra money (Male, 18)._  

In the examples above, the respondents demonstrate the vicious and consuming cycle that develops over time with addictions. The constant need for money to fuel one’s habits are seen to funnel youth towards criminal behaviours, proving that satisfying one’s addiction outweighs the risk involved with committing crime to attain the means necessary to pay for drugs.

Eight respondents explained their rationale behind engaging in informal money-making as stemming from the sheer convenience available given their circumstances on the streets and
needs for quick cash. A few examples illustrating youths’ involvements in drug dealing and credit card fraud within this context are exemplified below:

Convenience and Quick Cash

*I started selling [items and possessions] because I wanted money. And it's just that easy to do. You only need this much of that? Oh I can do that, you know? When you give them a bit of a deal. It's like whenever I need a little bit of cash, and I know someone is looking for something. You kinda have to hunt it down and I'm like yeah, I have this. Or most of the time that thing is in my possession so I don't have much attachment to it or like I have an abundance of it so like yeah, I can definitely toss you this much. Or like yeah I can make a loan to front this much of whatever I have* (Male, 17).

*Umm seeing some friends doing it and seeing how easy it was. I have friends who use as well so you know? It just kinda seemed like an easy marketing plan* (Female, 19).

*Yeah it was because panhandling takes too long and house robberies, you know you have to wait all day. House robberies are a very delicate thing to do you have to watch the house, see what times they are home and what times they're not so it's very risky. For credit card fraud after you steal a card we would pretty much use it at a store right away cus a lot of stores have cash back and you can actually get cash back on credit cards* (Female, 22).

The respondents above voice their distinct needs to generate an income quickly. When living homeless and surviving day-to-day, street youth in this research show signs of being unable to wait for extended periods of time to generate money because they are too focused on satisfying their immediate pressing needs. As such, they resort to the types of income generating behaviours illustrated above that best provide them the options suitable for daily survival. The below examples further elaborate on respondents’ pressing monetary needs including needing to support themselves financially as well as their families. Seven respondents indicated their involvement stemming from their own day-to-day survival needs including three respondents voicing their need to support their children:
Family and Self-Support

Umm I started too [sell drugs] because I had my child and I didn’t have any money plus my boyfriend got arrested so I had no money so I needed to figure out a way, so I used that way (Female, 19).

Well the lack of money and the need for it. Umm at one point this time around being homeless I wasn’t on basic needs for a long time so I needed some way to find money and I knew that panhandling was a: frowned upon and b: illegal so I tried to avoid that so I would sell things like this cell phone I didn’t have minutes for because I wasn’t about to buy minutes for it so I’d sell that. Or like I found a scooter and I’m trying to sell that one for like thirty bucks or I’d have uhh an extra pair of shoes that I’d be carrying around on me didn’t need them and they were still in good condition and someone else wants them or needs them I’d sell them for say like fifty bucks and have cash to get through the week (Male, 23).

While the above examples illustrate reasoning specific to each respondent’s own circumstances, the overall results align with previous research which suggests that underground economies often emerge to satisfy the economic needs of individuals who are unable to secure employment in the formal economy. The literature further suggests that the majority of those involved engage in informal labour not by choice, rather by circumstance (Losby et al. 2002; Vogel 2006), which became apparent through the analyzed examples above.

This research suggests that a number of barriers exist that face not only homeless youth seeking formal working opportunities, which will be examined in subsequent sections of this chapter, but also those who engage in informal work. A few subthemes emerged pertaining to the barriers facing homeless youth and informal working experiences relating to daily struggles that conventional streams of society are not accustomed too. These subthemes, along with the statements that illustrate these issues will be examined below. The first subtheme pertains to the daily risks and dangers associated with generating an income through informal behaviours while homeless:
Daily Risks and Dangers

Yeah lots of dangers. First one of the dangers was the police, because if they catch you you’re in jail. There’s people who like to rob people who are selling drugs. I’ve gotten robbed, beaten badly. I got set up and I got beat up very badly (Male, 19).

You don’t have a place to worry that it’s safe to do it you know what I mean? You’re on the streets twenty-four-seven you’re just walking the streets, you’re roaming the streets at night and you have the stuff on you so you have nowhere to put it so there’s a lot more chances that when you panhandle cops come sometimes to tell you that you gotta go, and sometimes they’ll ask you your name and search you. So it’s very hard to go around like with the drugs on you when you’re homeless. You gotta be very careful always gotta be watching your back, ya (Male, 18).

Other kids, cops, they were real dicks about it I don’t know why. If you’re alone it’s dangerous especially because if you’re alone and see that you have a cup full of change they’re gunna probably jump you or something (Male, 18).

In the above examples, the first two respondents voice the daily risks and dangers involved with dealing drugs. These respondents indicate how dealing drugs comes with a multitude of risks that are seemingly more severe for the homeless population. Aside from having to worry about specific drug dealing risks such as drug rivalries or being robbed and beaten up, being homeless while drug dealing means that youth are subjected to increased processes of police control and surveillance because they have nowhere to sleep (Gaetz & O’Grady 2002). As voiced by the second respondent, this creates added risks and dangers because the youths are often left without any safe areas where they can store their illegal products, which adds to the already dangerous nature of dealing drugs and severe stresses associated with homelessness.

The third respondent in the examples above illustrates similar concern over dangers and risks involved with panhandling. In this research respondents often voiced how they turned to panhandling versus criminal behaviours such as drug dealing because they perceived
panhandling to be a safer option. However, despite the lesser risks involved, the above respondent clearly explains how this behaviour may not necessarily always be a safe or worry free alternative.

*Weather Implications*

The respondents in this research also voiced their experiences with attempting to account for the various weather conditions while engaging in their informal behaviours:

*When it’s raining, like it was yesterday, it drops your chances by like seventy-five percent at least. First off, not many people are walking around in the rain second of all, you don’t wanna be walking around yourself in the rain so you lose a lot of opportunity to ask more people but depending on how much you want to sell that item you can still go out with an umbrella and ask. So it all depends on self-motivation really* (Male, 23).

*When it was winter I didn’t even own a winter jacket or anything like that, I had no winter boots or anything my shoes were all ripped, I had frost bites on my feet and everything it was kinda hard but then I had a couple people bring me boots and a jacket. I had a couple people bring me some stuff. I forced myself like I walked it off in a sense. If it didn’t kill me I’d still do it. I needed to eat. What would I rather do just sit there freezing and starving and not have money? Or be sitting there freezing starving and be making money?* (Male, 24)

*Oh when it’s cold out, the squeegee juices that get on you, like you use window cleaner and stuff like that and it would give you freezer frost bite and stuff like that it would be really cold and really harsh. Umm the conditions sometimes were just really rough. In the middle of the summer though it was really hot, lots of sweating you’re dehydrated because you don’t wanna leave your spot because there’s other squeegeeers that would take your spot and you don’t wanna lose your spot because it’s a busy spot right?* (Male, 23).

The city of Ottawa is known for having harsh winters. For homeless youth looking to not only survive through the tough Ottawa winters on the streets, but also earn an income, they are often forced to mentally and physically find a way to cope with the extreme conditions in order to survive. In the above examples, the second respondent explains how his motivation to deal drugs despite not having adequate clothing came from his dire need to eat. In the face of
starvation, the respondent realized that there are certain aspects he cannot control over his situation (e.g., harsh winter conditions) whereas he can always control his determination to generate an income. As such, he pushes through the weather barriers.

This research also illustrates how it is not just the winter season that affects one’s ability to generate an income through informal means. The first respondent in the example above notes how his ability to sell his own personal items on ‘the block’, a common hangout for street youths downtown Ottawa, is weather dependent. Rainy days result in an inability to maximize profits for the day, which ultimately influence subsequent life prospects such as having money to satisfy hunger needs. Finally, in the last example, the respondent explains how despite enduring severe heat and even facing dehydration in the middle of the summer, knowing that somebody is willing to take your place and your potential earnings proves enough of a driving force to continue squeegeeing in hopes of making money.

**School Balance**

As mentioned prior, the average education level of this sample was only partially completed high school. Below, a number of youths explain their experiences in balancing school and their informal work illuminating as to why this population struggles academically:

*I was at first but then I dropped out of school, I wasn’t able to focus on school. I was too more or less focused on the drugs. I wanted to do drugs, I wanted to sell them so that I could get more (Male, 19).*

*I mean I tried. I would go to school for like a month or a couple of weeks when I was doing good and then somethin’ happened or somethin’. It was too hard with everything going on and being homeless (Female, 24).*

*Well I’d go to school just to sell drugs. I wouldn’t go to school to go to school. Obviously yeah I had many friends. I’d go to school and I’d go to like three classes and when lunch time happened I would just leave school and everybody usually smoked their cigarettes in their smoking pits and stuff so I’d go there and be like, anybody need this? Yeah okay come for a walk here (Male, 22).*
Common in this research was the experience of using school as a catalyst for selling drugs. In the examples above, the last respondent explains how school can serve as an institution useful towards the facilitation of selling drugs and making money. The respondents in this research voiced their concerns over trying to meet their daily needs and worrying about how they will survive from one day to the next while on the streets. Due to their cumulative disadvantages, school became a distant priority that was not feasible to manage. Having no stable shelter, and a need to make money to survive or satisfy one’s addiction, as seen in the first example above, the respondents in this research focused their efforts on other aspects of their lives that did not include a conventional school experience.

**Demographic Barriers**

A number of demographic impediments were also explained to be barriers towards one’s ability to attain and maintain earnings from informal activities. A number of youths explained how their young age shaped their money-making experiences:

*Some people wouldn’t want my drugs because they thought I was young and dumb, you know? And I don’t know what I’m using or they just wouldn’t buy it from me because they didn’t trust me (Male, 19).*

*Well I was a lot younger than everyone I was like fifteen and everyone else was like twenty-two or twenty-three so they used to call us Twinkies back then. There was not much respect you know? I was a lot younger. Still I’m older now and still don’t feel like there’s the respect there so you know I just don’t think the respect is really there (Female, 24).*

*And I mean age was definitely a huge factor cus I was really young. Like when I was panhandling, I was really young when I started doing it so people wouldn’t necessarily give me money (Female, 22).*

Common to the above examples was the need to earn respect on the streets. Whether one was dealing drugs as in the first two examples above, or panhandling as in the last example, the need to earn respect within the street culture was seen as important behind developing the street
skills needed to thrive in the underground economy. Being younger, or new to the streets, served as an impeding factor common to all lines of informal work in this research. As seen in some of the examples below, gender also influenced one’s ability to generate an income informally:

*Well like people will go to buy from a guy before they go to a girl and I dunno why it’s just something I noticed. I definitely noticed that guys take precedents over girls so… you just gotta act a lot more on edge. On edge and then fearless (Female, 19).*

*And I feel like females are also a target for getting harmed on the streets. Last night I was with my friend [Jessica] and my boyfriend [Brad]. [Brad] went to go use the bathroom so it was just me and [Jessica panhandling] and two black guys came up to us and started harassing us immediately (Female, 22).*

Research suggests how survival strategies for homeless youth tend to be gendered and often more problematic for girls (Hagan & McCarthy 1997). In the above examples, the female drug dealer explains how she is at a disadvantage in the drug trade compared to her male-counterparts. This disadvantage not only leads to decreased potential earnings, but results in the need to establish a more tough persona in order to adjust to the role and successfully earn an income. The second respondent voices the daily realities of panhandling as a female. Without a male presence, being a female panhandler is described as a riskier endeavour where the respondent feels unsafe and subject to harm.

*Mental Health*

A number of mental health issues that served as barriers to informal money making were also voiced by the respondents in this research:

*It was really bad like I wasn’t able to [balance drug dealing and homelessness]. I had a very big depression. I was very big into self-harm, I was very suicidal I’ve been admitted multiple times into like the [hospital], the [Royal Ottawa], the general just because of the depression and the suicide attempts. Being homeless did have a major impact on my depression because now that I’m housed, even though it’s just transitional, my depression isn’t as bad. But I am manic depressed so I will have depression for my whole life but*
it’s not as bad because I’m not homeless anymore because now I have more to look forward to instead of being like what do I have here? Nothing. (Male, 24).

I was physically less active, emotionally I was very depressed, stressed, anxious, still am... I seen a lot of stuff I wish I hadn’t seen. Umm living on the streets you see things you wouldn’t see normally (Male, 18).

Past research has shown how many in this population come from dysfunctional family backgrounds with histories of criminality, drugs, alcohol and mental health issues (Hagan & McCarthy 1997). The mental health issues voiced in this research were seen to directly affect not only their informal income generating opportunities, but also other everyday aspects of their lives. Balancing drug dealing and homelessness while struggling with severe depression and anxiety surely inhibits one’s drive to continue to fight for survival. As such, the examples above provide a snapshot of the constant personal battles the respondents go through to get up everyday and continue to persevere.

Physical Health

A number of physical health barriers were explained as also influencing the respondents’ navigation towards informal income generation:

Well after a while I started getting hemorrhoids from panhandling and stuff so umm, it was getting harder for me to pan so I don’t really pan as much anymore (Male, 19).

I had pneumonia for a while and most of the time you just try to brush it off to the side however you feel emotionally or physically you just push it off to the side because it’s just getting in the way (Male, 18).

In the above examples, the first respondent indicated how physically he has been limited from continuing generating an income through panhandling due to a developed condition which stemmed from sitting on the cold ground for long periods of time. Interestingly, the attitude of each respondent in the examples above is reflective of the unique circumstances of homeless
youth in general where the second respondent, despite getting sick with a more severe condition than the first respondent, voiced how his mentality was to push through pneumonia and continue dealing drugs to make money. It could be that certain youth in this research are willing to take on greater risks and even endure sickness and pain in order to survive if their given situation is perceived as desperate enough.

**Aspirations**

Past research indicates how being placed in a situation without stable shelter creates limitations that impact one’s ability to exert greater control over aspects of day-to-day life (Gaetz 2004:429). Developing a conventional lifestyle that allows one to eat, sleep and pursue formal employment thus comes with greater difficulties and risks. Faced with greater barriers, homeless youth are often restricted to informal work. In this section, respondents discuss their subjective interpretations of informal work and explain the importance behind their informal involvements given their ongoing struggles to maintain conventional lives and exert greater control over aspects of day-to-day life.

Research suggests homeless youth do not wish to avoid conventional work. Rather, the vast majority desire jobs but are faced with significant barriers that prevent them from succeeding (Gaetz & O’Grady 2002). The importance of informal economies and subsequent aspirations given the respondents’ homeless situations, lack of viable employment opportunities and ongoing adversities are examined. Respondents were asked what their informal working involvements meant to them on a personal level, and what their future work aspirations would be despite their given situations. Youth were asked about their aspirations and personal testimonies
pertaining to informal work. A number accounts revealed the negative feelings and perceptions associated with their informal involvement:

*Regret, Shame and Negative Self-Perception*

*Makes me feel disgusting. Cus I never really thought I would sink that low. To sit on the ground with my hat out. I never thought I would. The fact that like, I see people I know, like friends, family, people from high school. And they see me doing that, I just feel like a piece of shit. Some people like it, but me, its just like, its hard its really hard (Male, 21).*

*It changed like the way I feel about myself and about sex like I’m young and I’m not interested in sex anymore. I’ve been paid pretty much to sexually please people and it’s just not the same anymore it just doesn’t feel the same. It feels like a job instead of natural you know? (Female, 19).*

*I regret it some ways umm in some ways I don’t. In the way I don’t yes, I was desperate for money, I was really needing it and in other ways maybe if I didn’t have that money maybe something else would have happened to me? Maybe I would have got sicker because I didn’t have food? Who knows. But I do regret it because it’s not an honest way to make money, you know? And I wanna make money in an honest way. I wanna make money with a real job and that’s also why I wanna join the military to give back to my country who has helped me out when I was on the streets and also I’ve always loved the military ever since I was a kid ummm I was in cadets for five years so it’s something I love (Male, 18).*

The above examples illustrate the deep impact that being immersed in an informal economy can have on a youth’s self-perception. The transition from having stable housing to living on the streets or shelters, coupled with this population’s experiences in informal work proves to be an undoubtedly testing time. It plays a role in their abilities to re-join conventional streams of society, but also shapes their sense of self as seen in the analyzed examples.

*Learning Experience: “I move forward, right?”*

Some of the respondents voiced their regret and shame with their informal experiences, other respondents reflected on their informal experiences in a more positive light. Despite sharing similar informal experiences and struggles, each respondent’s life experiences and
subjective interpretations are unique which could play a role in the varied results pertaining to their attitudes and reflections on informal work. The following examples draw on these positive reflections and highlight the testimonies of three male youths who were involved with panhandling, squeegeeing, and selling drugs:

*I don’t like the idea of panhandling at all. I like the idea of working for yourself for your own living obviously. It makes me who I am though. It was just a part of my life and a part of my experience of a phase of my life that I went through. I move forward right? (Male, 24).*

*I feel pretty positive I wouldn’t trade it [squeegeeing experience] for the world. I wouldn’t go back and do anything different because I took a lot of experiences from it, I’ve learned a lot of things and it’s made me who I am today and I’m a lot stronger because of it (Male, 23).*

*It was important to me now because that’s how I survived to get to where I am today and show me how to be more dependent on myself and not others, but at the same time I really didn’t wanna have to resort to having to do that. It’s like a life lesson that got me to where I am. I try to live life without any regrets because everything you do in life, every move you make, every choice, every decision, it always impacts the future and how your life plays out so everything happens for a reason (Male, 24).*

Research indicates that homeless youth are a population worth exploring within the linkage of their labour experiences given their inability to maintain a political and economic sense of citizenship (Karabnow 2010:40). Results within the analyzed *Learning Experience* subtheme are indicative of youth who are able to maintain a positive outlook on their future prospects despite their struggles to maintain such conventional citizenship. These are examples of youth who have not lost sight of the possibility of rejoining conventional streams of society despite often not having the options of returning home to their parents, and being largely left vulnerable and unsupervised on the streets (Baron 2004; Whitebeck 2009). It could be argued that having hope for a better future might increase one’s motivation to take the necessary steps to make meaningful changes.
Hopefulness: “It gives me hope to keep living”

This research will now shift to an important subtheme that explores the prospect of optimism within informal work in the lives of homeless youth. The accounts raised below signify the true meaning behind having at least some viable options for survival, even if the path chosen is not considered conventional:

“It means that next next meal. That meal for the next couple days. It means when I’m getting that money there’s not a doubt that it’s helping me (Male, 17).

Well it was a way to survive, there’s no other way to earn money. I wasn’t registered with the government so I didn’t have a birth certificate or a SIN number. My birth wasn’t registered, it’s not that I didn’t have a copy of my birth certificate it just never existed. So I was struggling dealing with that getting my ID. My mom moved to [a different province] and left me here so I had no choice. It was either that or prostitute and I wasn’t gunna be a prostitute (Female, 24).

It was just nice to be able to make cash under the table because being homeless I didn’t have a bank card and didn’t have a bank account or any of that paper work or anything so it was better at that time. Especially when you’re younger to make the money it’s just something that’s out there, it’s cheap, it’s easy to do, you know? You have a bike and a backpack you’re good to (Male, 17).

In the above examples, the first two respondents explain the deeper impacts that drug dealing plays in their struggles on the streets. Reassurance and hope for tomorrow are important factors that youth hold onto in a situation where they have very little other support. Drug dealing is not only a basic activity that is used to generate an income, but it is seen as an activity that helps one garner hope through attaining an income within a deeper context of being able to eat and survive that proves vital to life on the streets. Similarly, with the third example above, the respondent voices the benefits and reassurance behind relying on selling recyclables and earning a quick income. The formalities of a conventional employment path (e.g., needing a bank account to get paid) do not always align with the realities that homeless youths find themselves
in. These formal barriers hinder a youths’ abilities to rejoin conventional streams often causing them to fall back on more reassuring informal ways of generating an income such as in the example above with selling recyclables.

**Conventional Goals and Aspirations**

When asked about their hopes and dreams in terms of employment, this research generally found that most respondents sided with conventional goals and aspirations. These results align with past research which states that homeless youth do in fact aspire to contribute as conventional working members of society, instead they face barriers that restrict them from doing so (Gaetz & O’Grady 2002). The conventional goals and job aspirations are indicative of a hopeful future where youths see themselves as successfully transitioning into adulthood:

*I want to be either a social worker or mental health counselor so I can mainly help people in the LGBTQ society and stuff for people that are trans or gay or gender-queer. Not just them but I want to mainly focus on that because there’s not many people that can relate to that and be counselors that actually know and can relate to what that person is feeling as a person, you know? And I feel like I’d be really good because I love helping people and it makes me feel good (Male, 24).*

*It’s my dream to join the military so I have something to strive for. I’m still training right now, I go to the gym everyday umm do push ups, I train, I have to quit smoking cigarettes, too. So that’s two thing I have to quit [drugs]. It’ll be fun but hard (Male, 18).*

The youth in this research voiced examples of various conventional job aspirations. These ranged from more modest jobs such as construction workers or counselors, but also more ambitious jobs such as serving for the Canadian Military or becoming a medical doctor. Interestingly, most respondents in this research were able to convey a working aspiration that reflected a deeper level of previous thought and analysis. Despite struggling day-to-day to get by, and in some instances engaging in dangerous criminal behaviours, these results show how youth are able to maintain rationally thought out job aspirations that they envision themselves doing in
their lives after homelessness. Despite living circumstances being obscured by the harsh realities of the streets, the youth are able to brush aside their given situations, at least momentarily, and not lose hope by dreaming of more prosperous and conventional lives.

This research found that youth were often able to convey their understanding of the educational pathways required to obtain their goals (e.g. first finish high school then go to university) however, they often failed to address the need to improve their very present housing situation. Research shows that when faced with economic despair, youth exhibit a sense of disconnectivity from their families, relationships and realities of the engulfing streets (Gaetz et al. 1999). In turn, their sense of disconnectivity influences their various involvements and opportunities on the streets, and in this case, also obscures their ability to prioritize their housing situations for the purpose of facilitating a more promising future.

**Informal Peer Influences**

The third theme to emerge from the participants involves the reported influence of peers and respondents’ relationships on informal work. Respondents were asked about how their peer networks influenced their involvements with informal work. The analysis focused on measuring whether youth had relationships that helped them find or encouraged them to get involvement in informal work. This section explores the role peer networks play in reported informal working experiences. A number of subthemes emerged that documented the various social influences that help youth navigate through their informal experiences on the streets which will be examined below.

Twenty-two respondents indicated that they have had relationships or friendships that helped them find or get involved with informal work. Eight respondents indicated they
received no help from their social networks in getting involved. Research suggests that the subculture on the streets creates a context in which many unconventional activities and opportunities for earning money are undertaken by youth who are homeless. They are often open to engaging in deviant social networks facilitated through their friends and through the subculture produced on the streets (Stephens 2001). A few examples below highlight the intricacies involved and the extent of the help they received in finding informal work while homeless:

**Informal Facilitation**

Well uhh, I’ve had friends come up to me and tell me they need help moving, or you know, sell drugs or something. Stuff like that. (Male, 19).

Well I would meet a new person and be like look I have some drugs, and they try some and right away we become friends. We would do drugs together, hangout everyday, then they would tell me to start selling drugs together (Male, 19).

Just my mom. Especially when I lived with her. She would just keep trying to feed it to me so that I would go and do it [prostitution] and would help support her drug habit as well so I wasn’t just supporting mine I was supporting my mother’s and her boyfriend’s and if I didn’t give them anything they’d kick me out (Female, 23).

The respondents in this research that were introduced to informal work by others (friends or family), as in the examples above, tended to believe that choosing work in the informal economy outweighed the benefits of work in the formal economy. In the first two examples, the respondents maintained how their path to informal work, despite being facilitated by others, was perceived as beneficial to them because it served as an easy pathway to satisfy their developed drug habits on the streets.

In the third example above, the respondent explains how her informal involvement began prior to her life on the street. Her very own mother, a drug addict, facilitated and coerced her
daughter into prostitution to feed her drug addiction. Eventually the respondent’s drug addiction and strained familial relationship proved too severe to cope with resulting in her path to homelessness. The respondent maintained her informal working activity as a prostitute which was facilitated prior to her life on the streets.

Certain respondents explained how their friends facilitated their informal work indirectly through a process of observation. Being immersed in the street life means that these youths are exposed to informal behaviours, some of which tend to be criminal, more often than youth from more conventional walks of life. Through being immersed in the street culture and deviant networks, certain behaviours become second nature, resulting in one’s decision to take part in the informal economy themselves:

> Well like I said seeing my friends selling speed is really what gave me the idea and the fact that I know people who use like really seems like an easy thing to do. Definitely seeing it, seeing how easy it is and how you can just make money so easily. So that alone and just the fact that I know people who use its like even better because its like oh, there’s my client base right there (Female, 19).

> It was just like what they’re doing, I mean monkey see-monkey do. So I’m seeing the dollar signs and immediately it’s just sorry to say that, but it’s just great. I’m seeing the value in it and uhhh I’m overriding the risk in real time because I’m seeing it’s working for them and then I look at it and I’m mitigating it in real time saying well what I’m doing is not worse than what they’re doing and they’re not getting in trouble, so how am I gunna get in trouble? And so you’re chalking it up and you’re sizing it up any which way you can and then you come back with the decision that it’s not all that bad, you know? (Male, 23).

> Yeah, one of my good friends he was selling and he just wanted to be a dealer so I was just surrounded for a long time and he asked me to do things for him and eventually I just did (Male, 18).

The results in this research reveal how some respondents indicated their informal work began through a series of opportunities presented to them through their friends. Some of which involved participating alongside their friends in the very same informal activity they were was
asked to engage in as in the examples above. Some respondents took to informal work through being immersed in the street culture and underground economy for long periods of time wherein they eventually conceded to the same behaviours as those around them. Only one individual explained how his relationships helped him find opportunities within more conventional streams of work and alongside non-homeless peers:

> Basically social interactions and stuff like that. Opportunities would arise on the streets where you know, oh my friend he needs a couple people for him today to help move some things, or my friend needs a couple people to do some yard work or whatever, you know? Whenever the opportunity presented itself and I learned a lot of things and I’m very adaptable so if I see an opportunity I know I’m going to grab it (Male, 23).

As mentioned, the above example was the only cited example in this research which showed how one’s social networking on the streets resulted in more conventional opportunities alongside non-homeless peers. For the most part, the results from this study aligned more with other research which suggests that the range of conventional supports and services available to street youth is weak (Gaetz et al. 1999). Relying on opportunities from street youth friends who in themselves lacked other important social support systems and networks is deemed as not being a helpful stepping stone towards conventional employment (Gaetz et al. 1995:35). It could be that within this research, the social networks and relationships developed on the streets serve as a more immediate resource towards satisfying pressing needs and keeping each other protected and safe in the short term versus providing helpful resources in the form of job searches and job networking.

*Informal Working Encouragement*

When asked about the encouragement the respondents’ received from their peer networks to get involved with informal work, 14 respondents indicated that they were distinctly encouraged. Respondents voiced examples that illustrated various reasons for being encouraged
such as coercive pressure or because they were simply used by other street peers that wanted to get ahead themselves. Others however, indicated that they did not receive much encouragement at all if any. Below are three examples of street youth engaged in selling drugs who explain how they received encouragements from others:

Well they would be like look, I have this amount of speed and I need more, so if you help me sell these, then we can go and get more and we can do a lot together instead of just having a smaller amount (Male, 19).

Most of my friends and relationships always encouraged it or tried to peer pressure me into doing it and keep me doing it. They would just be like c’mon you need money for this. They would just manipulate me in a sense making me think that this is the only option instead of like I dunno, maybe going out and finding a job? Or making resumes somewhere, you know? Like no, [name] this is the only option you have, you have to do this. You need to eat. You need this, you need that, you need to do this (Male, 24).

Yup, he did [encourage to sell drugs]. He technically did it by bringing me down type of thing, by saying, oh your child is not gunna have anything, your child is gunna have the worst life, you won’t have this, you won’t have that and you won’t get anywhere in life if you don’t do this and it just brought me down a lot so I just kept doing it (Female, 19).

The results from this research show how the encouragement received to continue engaging in illegal and informal behaviours was often for underlying purposes. In the examples above, the encouragement the respondents’ received tended to be within the context of the street culture where individuals only received such encouragement because it was in the best interests of others and not themselves. Research suggests how street youth that are involved in peer groups who engage in drug-related criminal activity have an increased risk of engaging in selling drugs themselves (Baron 2004). It could be that in the above drug dealing examples, encouragement to continue or engage in selling drugs by others was seen as a survival strategy implemented by others who themselves wanted to either selfishly get more drugs, or reap the financial benefits that come with their ‘friend’ selling drugs.
**Relationship Implications**

Participants were asked a few questions regarding how they valued their peer relationships on the streets, and how their relationships were impacted through their specific informal working involvements. As noted earlier, some respondents indicated that they worked informally alongside their peers, whereas others merely received encouragement to get involved. Scholars have noted the importance of receiving social support during the transitioning time to adulthood. The support that street youth receive through family or friends is important as research suggests that the support gained from these networks in the form of guidance and encouragement tends to contribute to the development of skills needed for conventional day-to-day living in adulthood (Gaetz et al. 1999:34). Therefore, the context of their relationships was examined and how their friendships affected their ability to perform their informal work:

*It would affect the relationship panhandling. It wasn’t always a good thing like oh it sucks we have to do this. I guess it put strain on the relationship but then it ends up being alright after the money is made and everybody is happy (Male, 24).*

*There was never really any fights because we were pretty close and whenever something went wrong we would work it out right away because that’s the guy you’re gunna be sleeping with for the next week, you know? (Male, 18).*

*We got really close like as friends and business. Like we knew once business [drug dealing] interacted in our friendship we would sit down with each other and be like look, we’re getting our work mixed up with our personal life, we can’t let this do this and we can’t do that. We needed to set some boundaries and then we would just sit down and put up boundaries and stuff with proper rules and if one of us didn’t like it we would say something (Male, 22).*

The above examples are revealing of the realities that shape relationships on the streets. When one becomes invested in the informal behaviours they are engaged in as a means necessary for survival, their closest relationships, and those a part of their inner networks will be exposed to their informal behaviours, and in some cases even share the same behaviours. When
already faced with the severe hardships that come with living a homeless lifestyle, the respondents in the above examples explain how their relationship is something that they aim to control and positively manage to the best of their abilities given their circumstances.

It could be that making an effort to work on balancing a positive relationship when juggling informal work and street hardships stems from how much one value’s that specific relationship and the experiences they share common to the street lifestyle. Research suggests that the socialization processes and interactions that occur during one’s time on the street are geared towards various means of survival (Karabanow 2006). These means of survival might be met with shared interest that are common within social networks that help youth work together and understand each other’s focus for attaining these means through informal work.

A few examples pertaining to the theme of relationship influences on informal work highlight a grimmer reality that surfaced in this research. Being young and susceptible to outside influence during times of adversities while homeless often placed youth in vulnerable positions where they could be taken advantage of by those they thought were their friends, or where they needed to earn their respect to get by on the streets. A few examples of this dynamic are illustrated below:

*They got me into it [drug dealing] so they could basically use me so they could get whatever they wanted because those people now.... None of them are my friends. Ever since I’ve tried to get transitional housing, I don’t talk to any of them. They were taking my money, taking my drugs, they were taking everything I had worked for. They were eating my food and they wanted everything for themselves in a sense. I was only good to them when I had stuff. If I had nothing and had no food, no nothing, they wouldn’t even bother with me (Male, 24).*

*I always had a boyfriend and I always had to make money. Like there was always that mission to make money and if I wasn’t making money then I was gunna be dumped or they were gunna go make money another way. Well because having money downtown is like a rank thing and if you’re broke then no one wants to hangout with you and they’ll see some other girl that’s*
making money and they’ll say ok, see ya later. You’re not really dating anybody because you like them you’re dating somebody because of what they can do for you so if you can’t do anything for them then leave me alone. When you’re fifteen and downtown alone, that’s not safe and it becomes important (Female, 24).

The above examples illustrate the context behind valuing peer relationships that develop on the streets and how destructive they can be. Receiving encouragement to take part in informal work can come with repercussions that stem from coercive underlying reasons as opposed to a shared best interest common to conventional relationships. The examples illustrate how value in a relationship on the streets is associated with what one can do for somebody, which eventually becomes the focal point of the interactions that take place, and how invested one becomes in that relationship.

Peer Network Goals with Informal Work

Respondents were also asked about the types of informal work their peers engaged in. Nineteen respondents indicated that they shared the same informal working experiences as their peers. Research suggests that feelings of exclusion from society are often met with feelings of unfairness in terms of the formal labour market opportunities which heighten the risk of engaging in crime to satisfy economic needs (Baron 2001). Within this context, the respondents were also asked about their thoughts and attitudes towards their shared informal working experiences and about their peers’ goals with informal activities. Some of the reported attitudes and goals are exemplified as follows:

They wanted it for the same reason I did. Addiction. Something to do with their time because they were sad, lonely and depressed. If we had no money and needed drugs, we would go car hopping in the evenings. Go to steal from cars. Sometimes we would find drugs and then we would be like oh look lets do some drugs. Other times we would just find money or sun glasses and would go and sell them to people to make money for drugs. It makes me feel sad that I would let myself go like that. I lost a lot of friends and a lot of family because of it (Male, 19).
I wanted food, they wanted to get high. They did it to support their habit, I did it to feed myself and survive (Male, 24).

Well in the end they all think that they’re gunna get rich. And me? Well I don’t think I’m gunna get rich I just think about buying things for my family. For me it’s a way to maintain but for most people, and my friends, it’s a way to advance and they think they’re gunna be like a millionaire (Female, 19).

Consistent with past research, results in this study reveal how respondents’ shared feelings of exclusion from society and feelings of unfairness in terms of formal labour market opportunities. However, peer groups who shared these feelings and as a result engaged in crime to satisfy economic needs (see examples of drug dealers above), tended to have differing views and goals associated with their informal working end goals than the respondents who were interviewed in this study. As seen above, some attitudes differed in terms of engaging in crime to satisfy basic needs such as hunger. Whereas other peer groups of certain respondents were overwhelmingly concerned with satisfying their addictions which drove their willingness to engage in crime and shaped their attitudes regarding their involvements.

The following example provides an interesting take on living through daily struggles on the streets. When generating an income, the respondents in this research revealed how often their peers would use the money on illicit substances or alcohol. The following respondent, despite having different goals and attitudes with making money through squeegeeing than his peers, demonstrates a level of compassion towards those sharing his struggles and informal behaviours:

I understood I mean the thing about being on the street too is it’s hard not to be sober on the street because you deal with so much bullshit in the day so you kind of got to be fucked up to put up with the bullshit and you know, kind of laugh at the pain and make people see what you’re doing it looks like it’s fun and stuff like that. I guess numbing the emotional pain and stuff just by being intoxicated, you know? It made a lot of things easier to deal with like if you’re on the side of the street and homeless it’s easier to be drunk and homeless than be sober and homeless because if you’re drunk and homeless you’re drunk. You don’t really give a fuck because you’re drunk. But if you’re
sober and sitting there you’re thinking this is what my life could have been this is what this could have been and you’re thinking about all the roads you didn’t take and stuff like that. You’re thinking about your future but when you’re under the influence it’s almost like ok, I’m under the influence, I feel good physically because I’m high or I’m drunk and you don’t think about that you just live in the moment. Which is also a bad thing because you get stuck being in the moment everyday (Male, 23).

The above example provides a powerful testimony behind what often helps youth numb the daily strains of homelessness and subsequently motivates their decision to make money informally. This perspective is important in this research as it explores the grim reality behind what many youths relate to in their reasoning for turning to illicit substances. What is further revealing yet troubling behind the above respondent’s account is that the respondent sheds light on the consuming nature and vicious cycle that also comes with numbing the pain through drugs. That is, the respondent mentions how one can easily get stuck in living in the moment, which ultimately hinders one’s chances of rejoining conventional streams of society, especially when dealing with addiction.

*Investigating Attitudes*

The results in the following accounts reveal the perspectives, attitudes and interpretations of respondents when asked about their peer informal working experiences. In above sections, respondents voiced the goals their peers had with their shared informal behaviours. Through investigating the attitudes and interpretations of the respondents when asked about their peer’s informal work experiences, the results aim to reveal how the attitudes over these experiences shape subsequent motivational influences on part of the youth in this research. A few examples within this context are examined below:

*I wouldn’t say we shared similar attitudes or feelings because there was a few of my friends who really liked doing it. Personally, I didn’t necessarily like doing it, I just needed to do it. But they actually did it because they could*
and they actually enjoyed it. I wasn’t like ya let’s go rob a house today, you know? (Female, 22)

I don’t feel bad about it, I don’t feel remorse. I don’t see it as bad necessarily because it’s money. It’s the same as if I was a postman and just delivering mail to people but instead its just me and them delivering something else (Male, 17).

Well it’s the same like if you run out of money or you run out of weed your whole life sucks and you just don’t want to do anything. It’s like the worst thing ever like the world is gunna end so making money is an important part. I mean, we’re all down there for a reason and mental health is usually a part of it and that’s self medication (Female, 24).

Research suggests that the various networks and peer connections developed while on the streets serve as very important towards the ability to make money and learn the associated strategies for making money (Gaetz & O’Grady 2002; Hagan & McCarthy 1997; Karabanow 2006). In the examples above, it becomes clear that the peer connections developed shape the attitudes of the respondents in this research in terms of their ability to side with or understand the behaviours they and their peers take part in to generate an income. Even in the first example above, the twenty-two-year-old female may not share the same exact attitudes towards robbing houses as her street peers, she is still understanding of the behaviour itself and the purpose it serves, which ultimately influences her motivation to also take part in the same behaviour.

The last two examples above also highlight how the specific attitudes regarding drug dealing on the streets could play a role in subsequent motivations to engage in the same behaviours. Results show how similarly situated peers are more understanding of taking to informal behaviours to satisfy pressing needs and thus themselves are more likely to be motivated through their inner circles. The next section will shift the analysis to the formal working experiences found in this research.
Formal Working Experiences

The fourth theme explored in this research supports informal working experiences. In line with past research, formal work was explained to participants as regulated working activities that generate a legal source of income. The research explores formal working experiences given the unique circumstances that many homeless youths are faced with. Research suggests that those street-involved youth who face social and economic exclusion from conventional society, which has been suggested to occur due to various cumulative effects of negative familiar, societal and educational experiences prior to being homeless (Baron 2001; Gaetz & O’Grady 2002), are often forced to prioritize their time and opportunities available to them in nonconventional ways in terms of income generation. In addition, successful formal job seeking often requires access to things such as computers, phones and a proper clean look with a fixed address which this population struggles to access (Dachner & Tarasuk 2002; Gaetz & O’Grady 2002). It is within this context that the formal working barriers and experiences are explored in this research.

Respondents in this research were asked about their involvement in formal work and their motivations in regards to getting involved. Four respondents indicated that they were currently working and an additional fourteen respondents indicated that they had formal working experience in the past while homeless. The employment tended to be low-wage precarious service sector work or general labouring jobs. When asked about how they managed to find their formal employment opportunities despite being homeless, a number of interesting accounts arose. The following respondents voice how they were able to secure employment through the aid of social service programming offered to them through various shelters or drop-in support centres. The examples of youth utilizing social programming services to find formal employment are examined as follows:
Social Programming

It’s a job program here. Basically it’s three weeks and it’s all paid and it’s all job prep umm, I don’t really know how to explain it. You get all your certifications and they teach you how to make resumes, cover letters and whatever and then three weeks from now it’s gunna be the ten-week portion of it when we are actually in a job placement which we actually find. So it’s something we wanna do so we apply to jobs that we want and then once they follow up with them, explain the program, they do like a subsidy for pay so they pay like $8.25 of what the employer pays us. So it’s pretty cool. Then at the end the goal is so that we stay working with that company (Female, 22).

I’m connected with the boys and girls club because I’ve been going there since like seven years old and I did volunteering and stuff and then they had mentioned that there was a camp job opening and when I was younger for a while I did actually want to become a camp counselor so that’s what I initially applied for but there was no space left, so they called me back two weeks later saying there was an opening at the camp and they were like yea, it’s not camp counselor but it’s kitchen hand and I was like I’ll take it because then at that time I was thinking how it’s off the streets, a job, money and food (Female, 16).

I did an employment program here and yeah they knew one of my, one of the helpers that help run the employment program. She knew the boss of the restaurant so me and her went in and sat down with him and got to talk to him and he was like if you want a shot, I can give you some hours here and there and I was like ok (Male, 22).

As mentioned prior, research suggests the importance of social supports during the transitioning time to adulthood (Gaetz et al. 1999). These supports are not limited to family and friends and as seen in the examples above, they often come from social services. The respondents indicated how they received access to formal employment opportunities through a series of helpful networks facilitated by counselors and job programming tailored for helping at-risk populations. These instances of support and guidance through social services however, were not common to the entire sample that had formal working experience.
Improbable Measures and Connections

Certain youths voiced their entry to formal work through more improbable measures. Below are the accounts of youth who managed to secure formal employment through a series of less conventional pathways where they happened to be in the right place at the right time. These examples demonstrate the possible outcomes of being young, homeless, and panhandling on the streets:

Well, I was panhandling one day, and some man came up to me and said do you need a job? And I said yes I do and he said well I work here at this labour company, come in on Monday or Tuesday and we will set you up on orientation and we will get you into work (Male, 19).

I was panhandling and some guy came up to me and talked to me about uh getting a job at a dispensary which is pretty kind of cool. And then he’s like how old are you? I’m like eighteen and he’s like perfect we’re looking for new workers and he’s sending me an email address to send him my resume so hopefully I start the job soon (Male, 18).

I found it when I was on the street. The owner came and offered it to me. I was panhandling at the time and he was like, hey do you want to work? And I was like ya I do want to work. Whenever someone asks me if I want to work I tell them yes because it’s an opportunity, right? (Male, 23).

In the examples above, it could be that being young and homeless on the streets is sometimes met with a level of compassion to certain passers-by. Results indicate how seeing a homeless youth panhandling on the side of the streets is not always met with negativity in the eyes of the public. As demonstrated above, the youth were simply going through their everyday routines trying to generate an income through panhandling when they were approached by compassionate adults looking to help make a difference in a young person’s life. As noted by some of the respondents, these opportunities were perceived to be unique to their age group as homeless adults panhandling were explained as not likely to receive similar formal job opportunities from strangers.
Formal Application Process

Three other respondents noted how they went through the same formal application process required for conventional job postings. A series of formal steps such as handing out resumes, responding to job advertisements online, filling out applications and interviewing for specific jobs resulted in these youths successfully landing formal employment:

*Before I became homeless I lived closer to the area around that store and I saw it and I’m like, well I love Halloween. Like I love Halloween, so I ran in and I’m like, hey can I have a job? I know all about this stuff. They asked me a couple interview questions, I answered them and they’re like ok you can come in at this time and I went in and loved it (Male, 17).*

*I just decided that I was tired of using so I went and handed out a bunch of resumes and I just got lucky. I made sure I had a cell phone and that was my number to call and somebody called and I went for an interview and the next thing I knew I had a job which lasted five months (Female, 19).*

*I applied through Kijiji but it was a temp agency so it was only like a temporary job. Like two months? Or three months or somethin’ (Male, 24).*

These types of formal application processes open to the public exemplified above are noteworthy because they suggest how the youths were able to secure employment despite competing in a job process against other non-homeless individuals. As seen in previous sections, this sample on average lacked a high school education and they often came from negative familial backgrounds and struggled with addiction. Given their already disadvantageous situations, the results reveal how these homeless youths were able to overcome certain obstacles that may not exist for others, even something as simple as having the means to print off resumes, and they still proved successful in their formal job search.

Motivation to Work Formally

In previous informal working sections of this chapter, respondents indicated that their motivations to generate an income through informal work predominantly stemmed from pressing
needs and often to satisfy addictions. Now shifting the research towards the motivations associated with seeking income through formal employment, respondents illustrated a number of more ethically and morally sound justifications. Below are three examples of respondents who voiced their motivations to work formally as stemming from personal reasons and being fed up with their ongoing struggles:

**Personal**

*That was basically because I didn’t wanna be doing anything bad because I was with my ex-girlfriend at the time and I didn’t want her to worry about me at all times, you know? So I was more motivated into working legit at the time* (Male, 23).

*Well when I heard that [baby girl] was on the way to be born I decided to get off my ass and get on my feet so I took initiative to find myself a job and that’s what the motivation was. To provide for my family* (Male, 23).

*My motivation was my child. To get a job and do something normal and proper instead of giving my child drug money which is kind of very bad. I wanted to be able to give my child normal money with her to be able to walk around without a cop pulling her over and saying ya, that’s not appropriate money* (Female, 19).

When faced with added responsibility and the realities of being a parent, the above two respondents had a shift in perception in what was most important to them. They realized that in order to provide for those closest to them, their motivation and current lifestyles in the informal economies would no longer be the most moral way to make ends meet. The first respondent, similar to the other two, felt an added sense of responsibility to somebody important in his life. The importance of others closest to them, and caring about the well-being of these individuals proved to alter the life trajectory of these respondents supporting the importance behind developing positive and meaningful bonds in their lives.
Shelter

Other respondents in this research voiced their motivation to work formally stemming from their need to get housed and address one of the most debilitating barriers in their lives, being without stable shelter. Tired of living the lifestyle they were living, the following respondents illustrate their motivation to get off the streets through formal work:

*I was trying to get housed at the time and I was trying to just get money and get out of the scene of selling drugs* (Male, 24).

*Well, when I was panning all the time, it wasn’t because I didn’t want to work or anything, I did want to work at that time, its just I was going through so many different problems that I uhh, you know couldn’t. Like whether it was me having a stable bed or whatever, or not being able to eat. But uhh, yeah I wanted to change that* (Male, 19).

*Well my plan actually was to save up money and to get my own place by like hopefully a year or two. But unless Ottawa housing helped me out, if I got into Ottawa housing my rent would have been cheaper and I would have been able to get a one or two bedroom, you know?* (Male, 22).

Whereas the above examples illustrate respondents who are looking to begin a journey towards a better future for themselves through conventional means, one respondent in this research indicated he lacked the motivation to seek out a better opportunity for himself due to the overwhelming adversities that the street life brings. His testimony is revealed below:

*I’ve never been motivated to look for a formal job because being homeless, it’s always just about surviving* (Male, 24).

In the face of extreme adversity, the above respondent indicates how trying to survive on a daily basis is simply overwhelming and subsequently obscures one’s long-term formal working goals and motivations. The need for satisfying immediate needs for a person to live such as hunger, is at the forefront of daily concerns which prevents the youth from envisioning a more conventional reality equipped with formal work.
Finding Meaning Behind Formal Work

Two other respondents in this research indicated that despite struggling with homelessness and similar adversities that affect the entire sample, such as one’s lack of food and income, the prevailing factor in seeking out a more conventional path came from the passion towards the specific job at hand:

*What motivated me for that was mainly the fact that I loved the camp so much because I was a camper for six years, or seven years? And from the third or fourth year I always planned how I wanted to become a camp counselor and do what they were doing for us and then when this job came up, I was like it may not be camp counselor but I was at least being at camp, still being able to interact with kids so yeah (Female, 16).*

*Just finding something that I was good at and something that I enjoyed (Male, 24).*

When the above respondents were asked about their motivations towards formal work, they interestingly looked past some of the other sub-themes raised by other respondents such as finding proper shelter, or improving their personal lifestyles as seen in previous accounts above. Instead, the above respondents, a panhandler and drug dealer who were both homeless, held onto more conventional aspirations that come with finding formal work. For example, finding a meaningful job that one enjoys doing and is passionate about. Instead of settling for any formal opportunity they could get, these respondents indicated a higher personal standard for what would constitute as motivation for them to continue to seek out formal work.

Physical Barriers To Formal Work

Respondents in this research were asked about their day-to-day struggles and barriers that stood in the way of maintaining formal employment while balancing homelessness. Research suggests that when youth do secure conventional employment in the formal economy, the work tends to be unstable and low-paying in the service sector, predominantly part-time and considered as ‘dead-end’ jobs (Robinson & Baron 2007). Within this context, various barriers to
formal work were examined including physical barriers unique to being homeless, as well as mental health barriers that prevent youth from succeeding in conventional streams of work. As previously mentioned, formal work may not provide youth with enough income to turn their lives around nor enhance their aspirations or motivations to continue along the formal economy. A number of eye-opening accounts in this research reveal the various mental and physical barriers. Below are a few prominent accounts that highlight the physical barriers experienced by the youth in this study:

*Actually once I did have a job before I had a house. Which was kinda tricky because I was sleeping in a tent and I had to charge my cell phone to make sure I had an alarm clock for everyday to get into work. I would charge it at work and if I couldn’t charge it at work I would charge it outside of the area at [district X]. If I needed to shower and stuff I had to go to the [community centre X] in Hull which was like open luckily until 9 o’clock at night and most of the time because I worked in a government place, but in [the retail job], we had awesome hours Monday to Friday between eight to five-thirty was the latest you’d work. So showering was not an issue but where I did have an issue was getting to meals because you know, I didn’t have a fridge and obviously its money but it’s not enough money to eat everyday fast food all day so eating was a little tricky umm I couldn’t afford a place. I needed subsidized housing. Then when work was over I’d go and shower and then I’d go for a snack at a shelter and then I’d go to my tent. I didn’t stay at the shelter because there’s too many bed bugs and that scares me (Female, 19).*

*I’d walk so I’d have to leave at like six AM to get there for nine. Then after my boss would just drive me back into Ottawa drop me off downtown. I’d say I’m going to catch a bus to go back home but then I’d just go out behind [main street] and sell drugs. But the thing is, I couldn’t tell them I was homeless I think it would have had an effect I don’t think I would have got the job if they knew I was homeless and didn’t have a steady place to live or anything like that. Cus I’ve had previous jobs that turned me down because of being homeless so it’s just like... I’m not gunna be like hey by the way did you know I was homeless? But don’t worry Ill still come to work, I’m still a good worker. Most people would look at them and be like okay you’re homeless, how are you gunna be able to get here on time? How are you gunna be able to work? (Male, 24).*

*It was very hit and miss, it was whatever I could. Just through other services and using bathrooms and public restaurants and stuff like that to clean and shave in public bathrooms and brush my teeth. When the workday was over*
I’d normally end up getting drunk or something just to deal with all the stress and all the bullshit. In the mornings it was very early I was very tired, groggy. I was doing a lot of maintenance stuff for him so it was more or less I wasn’t the face of the business I guess you could say but at the end of the day I was tired, groggy, had to wake up the next morning and didn’t get a proper sleep (Male, 23).

In the examples above, the respondents reveal barriers that are in line with previous research suggesting that homeless youth struggle with challenges inherent to living without a stable home such as hygiene issues and malnourishment (Cauce et al. 2000; Dachner & Tarasuk 2002; Gaetz & O’Grady 2002). In addition to these challenges, the respondents in this research voiced how their lack of viable transportation options and sheer distance to their workplaces played a large role in their (in)abilities to maintain formal work. Despite Ottawa being known for having reliable public transportation as the nation’s capital, having to spend the very limited money these youths have to get to and from work proved to be too costly on a daily basis in some cases which resulted in the decision for some youths to quit formal work and earn an income informally through drug dealing. Another challenge raised in the above accounts was one’s lack of proper sleep. Living on the streets, the youths in this research voiced how their physical sleeping arrangement changed day-to-day which undoubtedly had an impact on the amount of rest they accumulated prior to a workday, in turn affected their work performance.

Other Barriers to Formal Work

The respondents in this research voiced their experiences struggling with their battles to maintain formal work when faced with extenuating circumstances that come with the reality of living on the streets. Despite these struggles, certain respondents were able to maintain their temporary motivation to continue in their pursuits of rejoining conventional streams of society, at least until the strains proved too difficult to overcome. Others however, were unable to generate enough income to improve their housing situation or maintain control over their own personal
battles with addiction. Despite earning a full-time wage, they ended up being unable to save up financially to move from transitional housing units, shelters or the streets:

I had really cheap rent and I had access to food banks which really helped me out with food. But then I spent all my money on illicit drugs because, well, I had money and I’m very bad at saving (Male, 22).

Yeah, yeah, that was the thing, like I still wasn’t able to get enough money to make sure that I was able to pay and get my own place (Male, 19).

Without proper guidance and support systems in their lives, even when youths were able to secure a formal job as in the examples above, they were unable to get ahead. The respondents that battled with addiction and were only able to secure low-wage jobs were ultimately in the same predicaments as their non-working street youth counterparts. That is, stuck in the vicious cycle of poverty unable to acquire meaningful and life changing opportunities. Instead the respondents in this research that did obtain formal work lacked the support needed to maintain their formal employment and often were funnelled towards alternative means of generating an income within the street economy.

*School Balance*

Respondents were also asked about how they managed to balance going to school and maintaining formal employment while homeless. Thirteen respondents did not go to school or dropped out while working formally. Whereas three respondents were able to maintain formal work and school balance. When asked about what their lives looked like after school and work was done, the following respondents reveal certain aspects that made going to school while working formally more feasible to them:

Well I found it very easy because school was actually right next to it. It was a lot easier it was like a bike ride away. So it wasn’t heart trenching, blood sweat and tears it was more like ok, I’m here now time for work (Male, 17).
Because I had a part-time so my school that I was going to, I go to school right up here, and I would only go from eight-thirty in the morning to three in the afternoon and then I would go to work until twelve at night and then I would come home. So it was pretty busy all through the days I’m always running around and all that stuff (Female, 19).

The above examples demonstrate that finding the balance between school, formal work and homelessness is in fact something that can be managed pending certain favourable factors such as geographic proximity and lessened school work loads. As previously mentioned, a significant number of participants gave up on school entirely and were unable to maintain the balance needed to succeed. The following accounts illustrate the ongoing struggle voiced by the respondents to balance school and formal work:

*It was not very good. It was hard. I dropped out and went back in and re-enrolled multiple times. It was very hard to balance. Just because you know, you didn’t have that stability at the end of the day to go home to and do your routine and stuff like that, you know? And get a proper night’s sleep and stuff like that* (Male, 23).

*Uh no I wasn’t doing very much schooling cus I was more focused on work and trying to find a place* (Male, 19).

Research suggests that at-risk youth who face social and economic exclusion from conventional society tend to face various cumulative effects of negative familial, societal and educational experiences prior to being homeless (Baron 2001; Gaetz & O’Grady 2002). It could be that this population is often forced to prioritize their time and opportunities available to them in nonconventional ways in terms of generating an income to survive wherein the examples above, school was clearly not seen as a priority and aspect necessary for surviving day-to-day and meeting one’s needs.

*Self-Esteem and Formal Work Importance*

Finally, respondents were also asked about the importance of formal work to them, despite their experiences struggling to balance and maintain a conventional lifestyle. Research
suggests that this population is often unable to maintain formal work even when they do secure employment. When faced with unemployment, street youth are more likely to see a reduced commitment to societal norms leading them to believe that breaking the law is acceptable to survive (Baron 2008; Baron & Hartnagel 1997). It is within this context that formal work is analyzed given that unemployment in this population is likely to increase one’s chances of criminal involvement (Baron 2001; Baron & Hartnagel 1997; Hagan & McCarthy 1997). Understanding how formal work affects the self-esteem of these individuals, and their hope for the future could play a role in their willingness to overcome personal obstacles to maintain their employment despite ongoing struggles. Below are the results voiced by these youths when asked about the personal importance of formal employment:

*It feels good. I like it, for me not to go out and panhandle or break into cars or anything like that, steal other people’s hard working money, makes me feel a lot better about myself. Brings my self-esteem up. So like when I come back from work, I’m leaving satisfied* (Male, 21).

*It makes me feel better about myself because I’m doing something that’s honest instead of going behind police and running around selling people something that’s going to kill them eventually* (Male, 19).

*It makes me actually feel happy and good because I’m not running around doing something that’s bad and I’m not putting myself at risk of being arrested. I’m doing something good and I’m going out and getting an actual job and trying to succeed in life and do stuff good for my daughter so she can have more than I do* (Female, 19).

The examples above are telling and indicate how these youths, despite being down on their luck, still maintain level headed towards their future prospects. Being able to overcome the vast obstacles they face and hold onto a sense of positive self-worth through the idea of being included in conventional streams of society and working formally shapes one’s attitude towards the future. But also, the hopefulness helps one continue overcoming present day obstacles in efforts of striving towards a better tomorrow.
Other respondents in this research, despite not having any formal work experience, were also asked about their thoughts on what a possible conventional stream of work could mean to them. This research suggests that subjective formal work aspirations means that respondents believe they could have a potential avenue to exit the street life and improve their immediate unstable situations:

*It would be important for me because it would mean a lot, having some money and being able to buy my own food, place, clothes and do other things too (Male, 18).*

*It means, you know, going everyday waking up, doing what you’re supposed to do, taking your breaks, making money to pay bills, making enough income and just all of it (Male, 17).*

*That would make me feel fulfilled because I really hated being on disability since I got on it. I hate it, I don’t like it and it makes me feel like I’m mooching off the system but I know that as much as that sounds nice and all, I do have a mental disorder and working full-time would never really be a good idea for me because I already have sleep apnea and I have mental disorders and I have so many different things wrong with me it’s like I can’t and I couldn’t function for a full eight hours a day. A part-time job, maybe part-time working at a public school with kids, that seems a little more feasible. Four hours? Sounds a little bit like I could do something like that (Male, 24).*

In line with the already presented results of the youth who had formal working experience while homeless, the above examples indicate the importance of having something to strive for. Taking on the already challenging task of going through adolescent development, all while being homeless with weak social and economic supports proves to be a very difficult task for this population. The results above indicate how developing a positive future outlook on employment, despite ongoing struggles, is associated with positive feelings of self-fulfillment and helps maintain the drive needed to seek out formal employment opportunities in hopes of a better future.
Despite conventional aspirations and dreams that were analyzed in this section, envisioning a better future may be a distant goal and hope to carry on when odds seem to be stacked against someone. But as exemplified by the accounts in this research, it seems as though the pathways and realities of attaining conventional lives for those that are most desperate to do so are not always attainable despite their conventional aspirations and hopes. The following section offers the results gathered in this research on the influence of peer networks on formal work.

**Formal Peer Influences**

The final theme explored is the influence of peers and relationships on formal work. Respondents were asked about how their peer networks influenced and helped them navigate their own paths towards conventional streams of employment. This included an exploration of whether their relationships helped to facilitate opportunities and how they may have done so. This section explores the role peer networks play in reported formal working experiences, but also examines the attitudes and goals of peer networks and how these shape subsequent opportunities and motivations.

The reported accounts of peer influence on formal work are important as research suggests that locating valuable resources (e.g., work opportunities), are important towards the socialization of youth to the workforce as it contributes to one’s identify formation and provides self-sufficiency in regards to economic need, factors which prove important towards finding and maintaining formal work (Baron & Hartnagel 1997; Gaetz & O’Grady 2002). Research further suggests that the importance of social supports from relationships including those of family and friends is critical during the transitioning time to adulthood in terms of modeling proper adult
behaviour. However, research has found that the range of such social supports available to street youth is often weak (Gaetz et al. 1999).

Of the 18 youths who have been involved with formal work while homeless, four respondents in this research indicated that they had relationships or friendships that helped them find or get involved with formal work while homeless. Fourteen respondents indicated that they received no help from their social networks in finding work. Others, while not having received direct help finding formal work, were still encouraged to do so by their peer networks through a series of meek attempts of verbal encouragement. A few examples of how the respondents received help or encouragement are listed below. These include three youth who received guidance or help through their friends and family which resulted in the successful facilitation of formal working opportunities:

Formal Facilitation

That was actually pretty awesome because one of my friends introduced me to his girlfriend and she worked at like a fast food restaurant and she was like hey we are looking for people and you don’t have a job, do you want to come talk to the manger and all that? And I was like sure, and she’s like here give me your resume and you can come in with your resume and tell them that I told you to come and you can talk to the manager automatically and I actually did get that job (Female, 16).

My mom and my girlfriend helped me. My girlfriend would help me with my resume and my mom would help me with like printing out those resumes and driving me around to places to apply to. They definitely didn’t want me like, the idea of selling drugs or anything back then, but I knew that my mom is an old school lady and she definitely would frown upon that and I had a kid on the way at that time so everyone was expecting me to get a job (Male, 23).

Mhm I have a couple friends right now that are in the army. Well I was in the cadets for like five years like I said, and my friends from the cadets joined the military not too long ago and then they sent me a picture saying, man you should come with us and then I was like, you know what? Maybe I should (Male, 18).
The above examples show the important role that encouragement serves in the lives of certain youth that are down on their luck. The above respondent, a homeless drug dealer, maintains a positive outlook and holds onto a glimmer of hope towards rejoining conventional streams of society in part due to the encouragement effect he received from friends in his life that are already conventional members of society. Others received more direct help in their job search as seen in the first two examples where the youths were able to rely on their family and friends to directly facilitate their job search through a series of networking opportunities and by helping physically print out and deliver resumes. These results are important within the context of the research because scholars have noted that successful job seeking often requires access to things such as computers to print resumes, phones and a proper clean look which this population struggles to access (Dachner & Tarasuk 2002; Gaetz & O’Grady 2002).

**Reality of The Social Networks On the Streets**

Of the 18 respondents in this sample that have indicated they have held a job while homeless, 12 explained that they received no aid from their friends or relationships in securing jobs. The respondents below voiced a common subtheme concerning the primary reason street youth do not receive the type of support and encouragement from their peer networks that would lead to successful formal employment which is that within the street culture, the peer networks themselves often lack supports and are unable to offer any positive steps towards future opportunities if they themselves do not aspire to do so. The reality of the social network on the streets is exemplified in the accounts below:

*No, not really I mean nobody I know on the streets really worked that much, like even people I dated or hungout with that had jobs would lose them pretty quickly (Female, 24).*

*Not even from my family man. They’re like ok, you’re getting by that’s your choice to do that because nobody here [on the streets] is really looking for a*
job unless they’re down in the shit hole and they wanna get their shit together as fast as they can and they need structure or schedule to their lives and that’s the only time someone really has a chance at getting a job around here (Male, 17).

The implications here suggest that the various social influences that help youth navigate through their experiences on the streets are often limited by the adverse circumstances facing this population. Researchers suggest how street youth often must rely on survival behaviours due to the absence of viable connections and resources from supportive social networks (Ferguson et al. 2011:407). When immersed in peer networks which also lack conventional structure, the support and motivation towards finding formal working opportunities is less likely as demonstrated above.

One respondent, despite being offered formal opportunities to work from his peers, maintains his unwilling attitude to take part in formal work due to the type of employment opportunities that come his way. This same respondent admittedly maintains his informal drug dealing activities to survive on the streets until he can find his way to a suitable career path that aligns with his interests and passion:

*They always try to get me to go with their dad to do landscaping or dry walling or construction type of work but I’m not into that. They just tell me like all the money they make and like oh this is this, this is that, you do this, you do that, and you get this much money. They try to make it sound like it’s worth it and I’m like ya bro, that’s perfect for your line of work. That’s not my type of work. That’s not the type of work that I wanna do. I wanna do something that involves kitchen (Male, 22).*

Respondents were also asked whether their friends have similar past working formal experiences as them and whether they share similar attitudes towards some of the formal work they have been involved with. The results were mixed as a number of respondents suggested that they were unsure of the attitudes held by those closest to them as they were merely focused on
their own situations despite being a part of the same social networks as these individuals. A number of examples regarding their uncertainty are shown below:

Their work it doesn’t bother me. Like ok you’re doing your thing? Ok, I’m gunna go do my thing. It’s not something that comes up in conversation a lot like ok I have my life here where I get stuff for people and sell and then there’s my life where I have to act like a human being who is supposed to buckle down and work (Male, 17).

No. My friends don’t really care they’d rather just smoke weed all day. Like I smoke weed, I have my license for it I smoke at night. But some of my friends would just smoke weed all day outside and its like really? How do you function? I need to be able to motivate myself in the morning and if you smoke that in the morning you’re just gunna sit there and do nothing you know what I mean? (Female, 23).

Well they’re not trying to set up for a life they’re just trying to get through the week. So they don’t really care about working so they will just work somewhere, screw it up, find a new job and they can do that. I have so many mental health problems that like, just going to interviews is too much to me. So if I’m getting that job I keep that job, it’s not doing that again, I have to recuperate (Female, 24).

The examples above illustrate that street youth involvement in peer networks often do not serve as a positive influential role in their lives. The lack of positive influence here could permeate into other avenues of their lives and inhibit one’s chances of upward mobility through formal employment. As suggested by the above results, it becomes important then that these youths are able to distinguish between the types of networks and attitudes of their peers that could impede their abilities to rejoin conventional streams of society, or diminish their motivations to do so. This becomes especially important to consider given that only seven of the respondents that were involved in formal work voiced that their peers shared similar past formal working experiences as them. Therefore, the developed peer networks are more often situated towards facilitating alternative working opportunities which consequently means they are more likely to lure these individuals to crime within the informal economy.
This chapter presented an analysis of the data. The analysis was focused on presenting the broad themes including informal working experiences, aspirations, informal peer influences, formal working experiences, and formal peer influences. The following chapter will summarize the findings and provide a discussion of the various considerations of this research including the strengths and limitations. Potential avenues for future research and policy suggestions will also be offered.
CHAPTER SIX

Discussion

By addressing how work (both formal and informal) is situated within the lives of homeless youth and how this intersect is influenced by peer networks and relationship, this research set out to better understand a relatively understudied gap in the literature using Ottawa youth. The results aim to increase understanding on whether homelessness and formal work are compatible by highlighting some of the challenges that affect homeless youth in their everyday lives. Through 30 one-on-one semi-structured interviews with homeless Ottawa youth, this research set out to better understand the following questions:

1) What are some of the significant obstacles for homeless youth who want to participate in formal work? How do these compare to the obstacles that youth face in informal work?

2) What roles, if any, do peer networks play in managing these issues and obstacles?

3) How do the motives, drives, rationalizations and/or attitudes of peer networks influence one’s employment path through opportunities and subsequent motivational influences?

4) Does being a part of a peer social network present one with social or criminal capital resources that might impede or enhance a street youth’s navigation towards conventional working opportunities?

The research findings are contextualized using Agnew’s (2006) general strain theory (GST), and McCarthy et al.’s (2002) social capital theory. These theories address not only the peer learning process that this study explored in relation to work, but they also provide insight into the strains and challenges that street youth are faced with. These guiding theories also serve to contextualize the strains experienced by the respondents revealing how the youths in this research were more likely to turn to criminogenic work survival strategies (e.g., drug dealing) versus more conventional work strategies (e.g., formal employment) when dealing with adversity.
GST emphasizes an individual’s engagement in criminal behaviour as a result of experienced strains or stressors. These experiences lead to a range of negative emotions such as anger, depression or frustration. Criminal behaviour is a way of alleviating the negative emotions that result from strain. In his classification of the types of strains most likely to cause crime, Agnew (2001) outlines the importance of strains seen as high in magnitude, viewed as unjust, and associated with low social control, that create incentives or pressure to engage in criminal coping. Strains high in magnitude are further broken down by Agnew (2001) as severe depending on the degree of the strain (e.g. homeless and sleeping outside or homeless and couch surfing with friends); whether it is frequent, recent, lengthy and expected to persist in the future; and whether it threatens an individual’s core goals or self-identity. Agnew specifically outlines homeless youth as a population susceptible to crime due to the intense strains they are faced with that challenge their “goals, needs, values, activities, and identities” (Agnew 2001:345).

McCarthy et al. (2002) utilize the social capital perspective on crime to explain how associations on the street generate different levels of intangible resources of trust, commitment and reciprocity. Bourdieu (1985:248) defines social capital as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition- in other words, to have membership in a group.” In the case of homeless youth, this definition provides meaningful context towards understanding how peer relationships developed on the streets can facilitate social capital from one individual to the next in the form of shared resources. Through the facilitation of social capital, “street group relationships” or friendships, present homeless youth with an array of outcomes (Lin 2001; Lin et al., 2001), some of which are argued to benefit homeless youth at the individual level (McCarthy et al. 2002) with certain outcomes facilitating
criminal behaviour (Hagan & McCarthy 1997; Matsueda & Heimer 1997; McCarthy & Hagan 1995).

*Informal Work Experiences and Obstacles*

Consistent with past research, the youths in this study turned to informal work as a means for satisfying their addictions, generating a source of quick income and to give themselves a better chance of surviving day-to-day while faced with the adversities of being homeless (Gaetz & O’Grady 2002; Wachter et al. 2015). The youths in this sample voiced how their informal working involvements stemmed from their distinct and unique situations on the streets. They were unable to wait for extended periods of time to generate money due to their immediate pressing needs. Drug dealing and panhandling were therefore cited as the best options suitable for daily survival. Consistent with past research, the respondents in this sample also indicated how their informal activities, such as drug dealing, were complementary to, if not a replacement for formal work (Ferguson 2013; Gaetz & O’Grady 2002; Kipke et al. 1997; Whitbeck 2009).

Despite engaging in the informal economy in an effort to alleviate their economic instability, the youths in this study still revealed feelings of regret, shame and undesirable self-perceptions when asked about their informal working experiences. The transition from having stable housing to living on the streets or shelters proved to be a testing time in these youths’ lives. As a result, they voiced they had no other choices but to work informally, yet they still regretted these choices despite not having other options. Their negative feelings were also met with a form of hope and reassurance where they cited their informal choices as only temporary with hopes of rejoining conventional streams of society once they are able to get back on their feet.
Consistent with the GST perspective, the youths in this research indicated feelings of frustration and perceived unfair blocked opportunities resulting from their interpretations of ongoing and anticipated strains associated with homelessness. GST suggests that the types of strains most likely to cause crime are those seen as high in magnitude, viewed as unjust, and associated with low social control, that create incentives or pressure to engage in criminal coping. In this sample, the youths voiced their experiences in the informal economy as stemming from intense adversities such as the lack of stable shelter, a lack of food, and an immediate need for income.

The youths in this research cited conventional goals and aspirations regarding future employment prospects. Despite being heavily involved in the informal economies of Ottawa, this research found that most respondents aspired to be working formally. These results align with past research which also shows that homeless youth aspire to contribute as conventional members of society, but face barriers that restrict them from doing so. Engagement in informal labour was thus seen as not by choice, but rather, by circumstance (Gaetz & O’Grady 2002; Losby et al. 2002; Vogel 2006). GST suggests that a strain will lead to criminal behaviour when it creates incentives or pressure to engage in criminal coping. In the case of these youths, their experienced barriers and strains that involved desperate needs for money were seen to be more easily resolved through crimes such as drug dealing rather than legitimate working opportunities.

While living and working on the streets, the youths are faced with a number of daily risks and barriers that stand in the way of their informal involvements. This research found that most youths involved with informal behaviours reported being subjected to increased processes of police control and surveillance which was consistent with past research (Gaetz & O’Grady 2002). These dangers and risks were found in both criminal behaviours (e.g., drug dealing) and
quasi-legal behaviours (e.g., panhandling). Turf-wars and claims over territory were also reported as risks involved with both criminal and quasi-legal behaviours.

The majority of those reporting being involved with informal work also cited the difficulties associated with Ottawa’s harsh winter conditions that often impeded youths’ abilities to generate an income and worsened their physical health. In addition, this research found how a number of mental health barriers played a role in youths’ abilities to successfully navigate their way on the streets and generate an income through informal behaviours. Balancing commonly cited mental health issues such as depression and anxiety was seen to inhibit one’s drive to continue engaging in informal work. These results were in line with past research which has shown how many in this population come from dysfunctional family backgrounds, some with a history of mental health issues (Hagan & McCarthy 1997). In some cases, the mental health barriers prevented youth from generating an income informally and nearly pushed the respondents to the brink of starvation where they would be left without income for nourishment for multiple days.

This research also found that certain demographic barriers impeded one’s abilities to generate an income informally. Being younger and being labeled a twinkie to the streets, meaning a newcomer to homelessness, were commonly cited as representing impeding factors to informal income generation. These respondents reported needing to earn a respect within the street culture in order to develop the connections and skills needed to thrive as drug dealers.

This research found that female drug dealers reported facing more difficulties in the drug trade compared to their male-counterparts. These difficulties included gaining the trust of others, and earning the same respect. Female drug dealers reported needing to establish a more tough persona in order to successfully navigate their occupational roles as drug dealers on the streets.
Past research suggests how survival strategies for homeless youth tend to be gendered and often more problematic for females (Hagan & McCarthy 1997).

Both men and women in this sample reported feeling pressured to act tough as part of their informal activities in order to survive on the streets despite privately supporting a non-violent sense of self. These experiences suggest that life on the street perpetuates and constructs violent masculinity as subcultural norms wherein one’s status and earned respect is associated with survival on the streets.

Consistent with past research, the youths in this study also cited academic difficulties and majority were simply unable to maintain a commitment to school while dealing with the strains associated with homelessness and the need to make money. Past research suggests that the vast majority of this population takes to the streets with unresolved issues from their previous home lives and they are faced with a sense of disconnectivity from their families and previous relationships (Gaetz et al. 1999) which influence their various informal risk-taking involvements and affect their abilities to consistently maintain an attachment to school. In some cases, the youths that were able to stay in school did so for alternative reasons. These youths commonly listed using school as a catalyst for selling drugs. Due to their cumulative disadvantages, school became a distant priority that was used as a means to generate an income and sell drugs to other students as opposed to attending school to attain a formal education.

**Formal Work Experiences and Obstacles**

Consistent with arguments in GST, this research found that youths’ feelings of anger over unemployment was linked to their negative interpretations of their financial situations and a continued attachment and desire for participation in the formal labour market despite lacking
viable opportunities (Baron 2008). As a result of their social exclusion and limited available choices, the youth in this sample tended to lack significant formal working experiences. This finding is consistent with past work (Gaetz & O’Grady 2002).

GST claims that when individuals have aspirations and expectations for achievement that cannot be attained, they experience strains. GST outlines how the discrepancies between one’s expectations and actual achievements is especially important when the goals are reinforced by societal or cultural norms, such as attaining conventional employment. When the youths tended to be able to secure their unstable and low-paying work, their day-to-day struggles to continue was a result of their predominantly part-time and ‘dead-end’ jobs (Robinson & Baron 2007). In many cases, the youths were frustrated and cited being unsatisfied with their menial type of formal work.

The youths in this sample cited a number of obstacles. The youth in this research were met with a lack of formal employment choices as a result of their exclusion from conventional society, their low educational levels and their limited employment skills (Whitbeck 2009). Those youths that did work formally were often unable to maintain their jobs. Their inability to maintain formal work could stem from their ongoing mental health barriers and adversities that come with being homeless. But also, their inabilities to maintain work could be the result of their street victimization experiences wherein street youth internalize negative feelings of anger, shame and guilt, all of which are suggested to compromise one’s ability to function in a formal work setting (Ferguson et al. 2016). The findings in this research revealed severe barriers that challenged youths’ abilities to maintain employment including the lack of stable shelter, viable transportation and ongoing struggles with addiction. Even when working formally, the youths in
this research predominantly worked low-wage jobs that did not allow for successful socio-economic mobility and left them struggling on the streets.

These results suggest that the future outlook for employment in this sample will likely continue along the bleak reality highlighted in past work. Unemployment rates among this population have been shown to be as high as 75% (Ferguson & Xie 2008; Ferguson et al. 2012; Whitebeck 2009), and this population is often faced with up to 8 months without work within an entire calendar year (Baron & Hartnagel 1997). When faced with unemployment, this population is more likely to see a reduced commitment to societal norms leading them to believe that breaking the law is acceptable (Baron 2008; Baron & Hartnagel 1997). Within this context, the reduced commitment to societal norms was apparent in this research as youths voiced in some cases how despite having formal work, they still turned to illegal activities such as drug dealing to supplement their incomes.

Past work has shown that this population is faced with various obstacles that pose severe barriers to employment. These include the challenges inherent to living without a stable home that make formal work difficult to maintain (e.g., hygiene issues, malnourishment, street-survival behaviours and limited education) (Cauce et al. 2000; Dachner & Tarasuk 2002; Gaetz & O’Grady 2002). In addition, research also found that physical barriers, including a lack of viable transportation, and sheer distance to one’s workplace, can play a large role in one’s (in)ability to maintain formal work.

Besides struggling with accessing a viable way to get to and from work, youths in this research also cited how a lack of proper sleep, in part to their unstable sleeping arrangement, challenged their abilities to get to work on time, and to perform their work duties adequately. A number of respondents also cited the challenges inherent to balancing drug addictions and
attempting to live a clean and conventional life through formal employment opportunities. These were also the struggles associated with school balance and informal work. This research found how extenuating circumstances proved too difficult to overcome and hindered youths’ abilities to balance school successfully in addition to homelessness and formal employment.

Peer Networks: What Role Do They Play?

The street youth in this research voiced a variety of relationships with people they met on the streets. Some of these relationships and networks helped facilitate different levels of intangible resources of trust, commitment, and opportunities that influenced employment (both formal and informal) navigation while on the streets. These peer network influences were perceived in a number of ways by the youths in this research, but ultimately, they served to shape one’s survival prospects while homeless through navigating employment opportunities.

Agnew’s (1992) GST outlines that people are more likely to react to strains with illegal behaviour when they associate with deviant peers and hold attitudes and values supportive of criminal behaviour. In line with this argument, this research found how those with deviant peer networks tended to strengthen the link between strain and crime by providing support for modeling criminal behaviour. Youths in this sample conveyed how their deviant peers worked to define certain deviant activities as appropriate responses to strain, in particular, drug dealing.

GST further suggests how deviant peers influence others to react to strain with illegal behaviours by serving as instigators to crime (Agnew 1992; Baron 2004). The youths in this research indicated that their involvement in crime was often the result of external pressure to engage in the activity from their peers on the streets. In some instances, when youths were faced with strains unique to their situations (e.g., homelessness, hunger, monetary dissatisfaction) they
cited engaging in crime and other quasi-legal behaviours. These experiences were predominately the result of their desperate need for money and pressure from their inner circles to engage in such behaviours. Research utilizing GST components suggests how moral values against crime tends to lessen the effect of strain on crime while deviant attitudes that support criminal coping, as in the cases of many youths in this research, may serve to increase the effects of strain on crime (Baron 2004). These results are important for future considerations as past research notes the importance of social supports from positive relationships, including those of family and friends, as critical during the transitioning time to adulthood in terms of modeling proper adult behaviour (Gaetz et al. 1999). In the case of these youths, the range of conventional social supports available to them on the streets was often weak rather social support tended to encourage criminal behaviour.

The types of relationships developed and maintained on the streets were found to be predominately other homeless youth in similar situations sharing similar experiences. This suggests that the various social influences that help youth navigate through their employment experiences on the streets are often social opportunities limited by the adverse circumstances facing this population. In line with past research that suggests how street youth often must rely on certain survival strategies due to the absence of viable connections and resources from conventional social networks, this work found how these youths do not receive the type of support and encouragement from their peers that would lead to successful formal employment (Ferguson et al. 2011:407). This suggests that the influential roles that peer networks play for many of these youths tends to limit the positive steps needed toward future conventional paths. Many youths indicated how their peers did not look towards the future but rather were
preoccupied with earning income to satisfy immediate needs and addictions, or they simply did not discuss future plans for a life after homelessness.

Given the dynamics of these described relationships, when it comes to managing issues associated with barriers to employment, this research found that the lack of positive peer influences permeates to other avenues of youths’ lives and inhibits one’s chances of gaining formal work. Research has found how those on the brinks of labour-market marginality are often caught in the lure provided by money-making opportunities outside of the formal economy (Baron & Hartnagel 1998; Greene et al. 1999; Hagan & McCarthy 1991; Stephens 2001). In the case of this research, this lure comes from those closest to them on the streets that they spend the majority of their time with their peer networks. As opposed to channeling efforts towards conventional paths, youth predominately indicated that they failed to receive the needed support from their peer networks to help them overcome the barriers they faced to formal work. This is problematic given that unemployment is likely to reduce commitment to societal norms leading youths to believe that breaking the law is acceptable and increases one’s chances of criminal involvement (Baron 2001; Baron 2004; Baron & Hartnagel 1997; Hagan & McCarthy 1997).

Criminal and Social Capital

Consistent with the social capital framework, the street youth in this research tended to have limited contact with their parents while living on the streets which influenced their willingness to develop and establish street relationships with other homeless youth (McCarthy et al. 2002). Research suggests that being faced with daily adversity in the form of hunger, shelter insecurities and unemployment often places street youth in a crisis situation wherein associations with criminals and exposure to possible tutelage relationships are more likely. As cited in this
research, many youths suggested that going through the same struggles and being faced with the same strains as those around them shaped their associations on the street through opening up to others and becoming vulnerable to the development of varied intangible resources such as trust, commitment and reciprocity.

These described resources align with the facilitation of social capital, as seen with Bourdieu’s (1985:248) explanation of how social capital functions where “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition- in other words, to have membership in a group.” In the case of this research, the facilitation of social capital through group membership or individual friendships was seen to present homeless youth with an array of outcomes (Lin 2001; Lin et al., 2001). Some of these outcomes benefited these youths in a more conventional manner (McCarthy et al. 2002), and some of which facilitated criminal behaviour (Hagan & McCarthy 1997; Matsueda and Heimer 1997; McCarthy & Hagan 1995). This section will now discuss the informal facilitation and encouragement effects towards employment, followed by the formal facilitation effects towards conventional working opportunities.

Past work examining street populations utilizing a social capital framework suggests how through embedded street relationships, criminal capital facilitates illegal money-making strategies (Hagan & McCarthy 1997: 142). Being economically marginalized and homeless presents extensive exposure to individuals involved in crime and often exposes individuals to precarious positions that stimulate tutelage in crime (Hagan & McCarthy 1997: 142). Respondents in this research cited how they were introduced to informal work mainly through friendships established on the streets. These networks were seen to facilitate their informal working involvements through a series of avenues including direct and indirect exposures.
Informal work was encouraged and justified by peers who explained how informal work (e.g., drug dealing) was beneficial and served as an easy path to satisfy drug habits and earn quick cash to get by on the streets. Others explained a more indirect process of facilitation that involved a method of observation. Through being immersed in certain deviant networks for long periods of time, youths in this research explained how the street culture and certain deviant behaviours become second nature, resulting in opportunities arising wherein youths eventually conceded to the same activities as those within their networks.

From a social capital perspective, engaging in illegal and informal behaviours can be explained by an important element of criminal embeddedness and criminal capital where an individual’s decision to engage in informal work stems from a situation they deem as suitable for offending (Hagan & McCarthy 1997). In the case of this research, the situations that youths deemed suitable for offending are those situations that arise with a homeless lifestyle filled with adversities and survival needs. Thus, the social networks and relationships developed on the streets serve as a more immediate resource towards satisfying pressing needs and keeping one another protected and safe in the short term versus providing helpful resources in the form of job searches and job networking. Past research indicates how networks of like-minded peers influence and endorse common illicit behaviours such as substance use and illegal income generating activities (Ferguson et al. 2015). This research revealed that informal facilitation and encouragement endorsed by peers is important as past research suggests that the exerted influence of associations results in the increased exposure of street youth to dangerous others which creates an increased risk of exploitation, distress and victimization with regards to income generation (Ferguson et al. 2011; O’Grady & Gaetz 2004).
Based on social capital theory, past work indicates that street youth with increased ‘bridging’ social capital will be more likely to engage and seek out conventional streams of employment (Barman-Adhikari & Rice 2014: 93). However, in the case of this research, street youth who are seeking resources and help from other street youth who are themselves lacking resources (Stablein 2011), social capital sources were seen to be of little help to make significant differences in opportunity for economic mobility and advantage (Irwin et al. 2008; Stablein 2011). Consequently, “bridging ties” may be required in the form of social workers or non-street peers and family who can provide important resources and services applicable to formal employment opportunities (Barman-Adhikari & Rice 2014: 93). The few street youth in this research that were successful in attainting formal employment often attributed their involvements as stemming from social services.

This research found how formal employment facilitation was almost non-existent with just a few cases indicating the relationships or friendships developed on the streets helped them find or get involved with formal work while homeless. The majority of the respondents indicated that they received no help from their peer networks in finding formal employment. Others, while not having received direct help finding formal employment, were encouraged to find employment by their peer networks only through a series of meek attempts of verbal encouragement. These results are revealing within the context of the social capital perspectives as applied to street youth. Research suggests that locating valuable resources in the form of job networking and job opportunities is important towards the socialization of youth to the workforce. They contribute to one’s identify formation and provide self-sufficiency in regards to economic need, factors which prove important towards finding and successfully maintaining formal employment (Baron & Hartnagel 1997; Gaetz & O’Grady 2002). Within this research,
receiving no significant or direct help within located like-minded peer networks in finding conventional employment hindered not only one’s navigation towards conventional streams of society, but was seen to influence one’s motivation outlook. The negative attitudes and drives of social networks seemed to dampen one’s ambition and effort. These attitudes and motives will be discussed in the following subsection.

Peer Network Drives, Motives and Attitudes: What Are the Subsequent Motivational Influences?

It has been documented in past research that the longer youth are homeless, the more susceptible they are to social estrangement and isolation (Baron 2004). In turn, the association between social exclusion from conventional societies and illegal income behaviours may be the result of a “disconnection from supportive adults and institutions [that] might preclude these young people from access to formal employment opportunities and settings” (Ferguson et al. 2015:53). This research found that being disconnected from supportive adults and institutions meant that youth turned to other homeless peers for support. It is within this context that the youths in this research revealed how their peers’ motivations and attitudes in regards to employment and homelessness helped shape their own navigations through the streets via opportunities and subsequent motivational influences.

McCarthy (1996:135) outlines how acquisition of symbolic elements (e.g., attitudes, motives or drives) are the key mediating factors between deviant associations and crime. This research found youth were motivated to change their way of thinking and rationalizations regarding illegal behaviours. Those immersed in the homeless street culture, tended to make such changes after being frustrated with their current struggles and life paths. These realizations regarding illegal activities became more clear for youths when they compared their own motives and attitudes to their peers’ motives and attitudes. They often did not align their goals and
aspirations with those closest to them on the streets. Being immersed in deviant networks that were largely described as having a negative impact on the lives of these youths, pushed certain individuals to make positive changes in their own lives. It could be that such positive changes in attitude found in this research are unique to this sample given that these respondents were not recruited directly off the streets, but rather, from a support centre.

Respondents cited how those closest to them on the streets tended to hold negative attitudes and lacked the drive needed to make meaningful changes in their lives that would result in deviating away from illegal behaviours and pursue rejoining conventional streams of society. Youths’ interpretations and understanding of the consequences with such street-involved lifestyles was seen to aid their abilities to make a change in their own lives and often helped them desist from their illegal working involvements. Even in certain cases where youths were still involved with illegal and informal activities, they were able to convey their willingness to work towards making positive changes in their lives and planned to desist from crime and attempt to overcome their battles with addiction.

Developing one’s own motivations towards future prospects was important because these motives were often developed through the indirect influence of other peers who were content or accepting with their discouraging street lifestyles. What remains unclear however, is how significant this motivational link to seeking out better opportunities is in comparison to the other motivations explored in this research such as personal self-driven motivations, desire for improving one’s living situation and to find self-fulfillment and meaning through formal employment. The implications found behind developing positive motivational influences to pursue more conventional lifestyles are important as past research suggests that feelings of exclusion from society are often met with feelings of unfairness in terms of the formal labour
market opportunities which heighten the risk of engaging in crime to satisfy economic needs (Baron 2001). Therefore, despite citing feelings of frustration and unfairness regarding formal labour opportunities, the youths in this research were able to overcome these feelings explained in part through realizing that their inner-circles share the same circumstances as them and they will continue to remain on the brinks of society if they do not make changes to their aspirations and motivations that address important aspects of their lives such as addressing employment and shelter.

**Contributions**

This work set out to contribute to existing scholarship by exploring some issues that have been relatively understudied in the past. First, this research revealed empirical accounts of Ottawa street youths and their formal and informal working experiences and daily adversities. While research outlining street youths’ criminal involvement is vast, little work exists that explores the intricacies involving the obstacles that homeless youth face in their formal working experiences in addition to informal working experiences. This study is the first to report empirical results examining these obstacles while utilizing a sample of youths from Ottawa. Second, this work was able to incorporate the added element of peer networks. Specifically, in regards to how work (both formal and informal) is situated within the lives of homeless youth and how this intersect is affected by peer networks and relationships. Third, this research adds to the scarce literature on how social network dynamics shape one’s navigation on the streets through exploring various attitudes and motives that shape youths’ subsequent motivational influences. These dynamics are explored alongside social and criminal capital resources that
impeded and enhanced street youths’ navigations towards conventional employment opportunities.

**Limitations and Future Research Suggestions**

As with all research, this study is subject to limitations that need to be taken into account when interpreting the results. First, this research utilized a qualitative approach for the data collection which means that the causal process of both GST and social capital theory cannot be fully explored. This research relied on these theories in order to contextualize the work and provide meaning behind how youth make sense of their lives and experiences. As a result of the chosen method, the results cannot be extended to wider populations of street youth. This means that the links made between strain, crime and deviant peers and attitudes are only suggestive. Future research would bode well to incorporate a mixed-methodological approach that would allow for a more complete test of the theories alongside rich qualitative accounts that could supplement the theoretical claims.

Second, utilizing a qualitative approach to conduct this research may have impacted the validity of the inferences drawn from the data due to issues of reflexivity and reactivity. In research of this nature, it is not possible to eliminate the influence of the researcher on the social system. Attempting to observe and understand through the lens of a researcher conducting this research may have played an influential role over subject responses and situational outcomes. The researcher’s gender, social class, ethnicity, appearance, and social identity potentially shaped the social interactions with participants and subsequently may have influenced subject responses. This might have included misreporting experiences to either hide histories, or alternatively to provide responses thought to satisfy the researcher’s expectations. As the
researcher, certain steps were taken to establish strong relationships with the respondents in order to address these types of issues. For example, volunteering at the support centre during drop-in hours to establish the type of relationship that would lead to rapport with the respondents and utilizing a carefully thought out sequence of questions in the interview schedule to elicit reliable and valid responses were some of the tactics utilized. Despite such steps, the social interactive component of the respondent-researcher relationship still may have resulted in biases whereby a level of unintended influence may have distorted the subject responses and outcomes during one-on-one interviews. In addition, volunteering at the support centre creates a potential loss of objectivity in the way the data were coded and interpreted because of the relationships formed. Further, my personal history, gender, social class, ethnicity and social identity may also have shaped the way the responses were coded and interpreted. These factors all need to be considered and taken into account when interpreting the results.

Third, the data collected in this research relied strictly on a sample drawn from Ottawa that was recruited from one youth support centre. Working with an institution allowed me to gain access to participants. However, this presented a number of challenges that influenced the results and prevents this work from being generalizable to wider populations. Youths were not recruited directly from the streets, which may have potentially restricted the type of street youth interviewed and limited the results. This could explain why many youths voiced positive attitudes towards their futures because they were already subject to a positive environment that fostered meaningful change in the form of their commitment to the support centre. Future research should incorporate a comparative sample that draws on testimonies from youths who have not, or do not, access such support centres. Comparative samples would shed new insight on the experiences of those street youths who lack positive role models or supports in their lives.
Fourth, as in most existing research on homeless youth, this sample was made up of predominantly males. Although this is representative of the homeless youth population, future work would do well to explore gender differences more in depth. Comparative samples would reveal new insights on the experiences of this population and how different genders may navigate their lives and experiences differently.

Finally, conducting research on a vulnerable population through an institution held certain challenges that may have influenced youths’ willingness to fully open up about sensitive topics and gain researcher trust. Working as a volunteer with the support centre during drop-in hours and outreach hours may have strengthened my relationship with the street youth I met. However, given the sensitive nature of some of the topics discussed in the interviews and the potential pre-existing apprehension to trust others, youths may have felt uneasy about sharing certain information. Despite taking steps to promote the respondent-researcher relationship dynamic and assuring respondents that all information would be kept private, building a solid foundation of rapport was not possible with all respondents. In some instances, respondents indicated apprehension and asked whether the information would be shared with the police or if they really were expected to truthfully open up about their criminal involvements. Future research endeavours would bode well to devoting more time in the field getting to know respondents on a deeper level over a longer period of time. Given the time constraints of this research, immersing myself in the field as a researcher for an extended period of time was not feasible.
Policy Implications

If meaningful changes are expected to be made that address youth homelessness, then preventive policy initiatives need to be implemented that take into consideration the relationship between homelessness and unemployment specific to the experiences of this vulnerable population. Results from this research showed key experiences linked to understanding youths’ criminal behaviours. They shed insights behind lives that are more likely to lead to pathways of arrest as opposed to returning to conventional society. Key is understanding how social networks fit into this complex struggle. These provide specific insights that should be taken into consideration at the policy level. As opposed to developing legitimate skills and qualifications such as gaining conventional job experience or acquiring an education, homeless youth are trapped in a vicious cycle of poverty that often leaves them worse off in conventional society due to their lack of legitimate experiences and personal development (Baron 2001:211).

The results of this study bode well for policy implications as the findings point to not only the day-to-day experiences involving struggles to maintain employment, but also the recognition that overtime, these struggles could contribute to the growing challenges of public health that already face this population. Understanding the cited difficulties facing this population as explored in this research helps unveil the cumulative burdens facing this population. Policy makers and community leaders need to begin to address their efforts aimed at improving the current state of youth homelessness given the documented barriers facing viable employment opportunities voiced in this research.

Policy initiatives would do well to focus on structural factors that recognize the unique challenges of employment that face youth. Gaetz and O’Grady (2002:453) argue that developing ‘hard’ skills (e.g. learning wood-working skills) and ‘soft’ skills (e.g. learning how to prepare for
job interviews) may not be sufficient to obtaining and maintaining employment. Addressing long-term solutions through social supports such as housing, counselling and health care may prove to have more positive long-term results for homeless youth (Gaetz & O’Grady 2002:453). Long-term policy strategies that address youth homelessness solutions need to adopt a more widespread strategy. A comprehensive policy strategy is therefore recommended to include the collaboration of various levels of government in partnership with researchers, practitioners, youth agency organizations and homeless youth themselves in order to implement evidence-based preventive interventions that address the cumulative disadvantages facing this population.

Developing a long-term plan using preventive interventions should address multiple interrelated disadvantages, and subsequent responses to strains prominent in the lives of street youth (Ferguson et al. 2016). Incorporating a preventive approach to eradicating homelessness is among Canada’s latest national strategy to end youth homelessness in accordance to the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association. Turning a long-term strategy and policy into action therefore starts with identifying youth at-risk through the education system. The education system plays a key role as at-risk youths can be identified easier at earlier stages. School systems should work alongside practitioners to evaluate and understand the experiences of childhood abuse. Scholars note the importance of addressing experiences of childhood abuse in attempts to prevent high-risk trajectories that accompany difficult past familial experiences (Ferguson et al. 2016).

Second, preventive measures should address harm-reduction principles and concentrate on addressing problem areas associated with substance use. As cited in this research, addiction was often related to youths’ informal income generation strategies. Past work raises the importance of implementing evidence-based harm-reduction approaches in future planning in
order to minimize the risks associated with substance use (Ferguson et al. 2016). This research found that involvement in deviant peer networks was related to informal income generation strategies that were often dangerous and expose youths to illicit substances. As such, a comprehensive strategy should incorporate educational sessions that build youths’ self-management skills and help them connect to prosocial peers while informing on substance use, health and risk-reduction strategies (Poland et al. 2002). Connecting youths with prosocial peers that are non-substance using and conventional members of society creates added support and mentorship opportunities.

Scholars note how long-term homelessness and transience complicate efforts to keep youth safe while homeless and turning to illicit substances becomes more likely. Harm-reduction strategies become complicated given the unique experiences of this population. It is important to interrupt these high-risk trajectories through addressing stable housing opportunities through providing youths with affordable and supportive housing options, such as transitional housing (Ferguson et al. 2016). In addition, supportive housing should incorporate access to services that focus on employment development, educational programming, mental health services, and case-management tailored to youths’ employment goals (Padgett et al. 2006).

This research revealed how at such a young age, this population has already faced immense adversities and struggles that are unique to each individual’s circumstance. Addressing long-term solutions through a preventive approach and incorporating the education system, supportive housing models, counselling, and health care should be at the forefront of Canada’s national priority. Incorporating a strategy equipped with treatment that takes youths’ unique experiences that are compounded by other situational issues is important if we wish to turn policy into meaningful action that prevents youth homelessness.
Conclusion: Advice to Future Youth

What was once considered a problem mainly affecting a small number of single males, the emergence of homelessness in Canada has seen an up rise affecting vast populations (Gaetz 2010:21). As a result, homeless youth have become common place across cities such as Ottawa. This is a population that struggles with maintaining a political and economic sense of citizenship. Struggles that homeless youth face in their experiences obtaining and maintaining employment are important as these are individuals who are young, vulnerable, and have fallen off course from conventional life trajectories.

Despite ongoing struggles, these young adults have the potential to contribute as meaningful members of society as they grow into adulthood. They often however, do need some extra support to help them get back on track towards conventional paths. With no fixed address, no access to regular meals, clean clothes and hygiene, these young adults struggle balancing school and finding and maintaining employment. These issues are important to acknowledge and address given than the number of youth aged between 16 and 24 has been considered to be the fastest growing segment of the entire homeless population in Canada (Karabanow & Kidd 2014).

Researchers and practitioners need to collaborate in developing preventative measures that address the various and multiple interrelated strains explored in the lives of these youths documented in this research, and in others (Ferguson et al. 2016). It is important that we do not lose sight of the potential homeless youth have. As scholars, practitioners, and everyday members of society, we must aim to fill the missing gaps facing this population and work to provide opportunity and hope.

In this conclusion I included a section titled Advice to Future Youth. This section was included as part of the conclusion because some respondents asked me to include their final
thoughts as part of my final interview question. During the end of my interviews, respondents were given the chance to provide any final advice or thoughts they would like to share to somebody that may be struggling with homelessness themselves in a similar situation. I selected certain quotes that I felt best represented the overall themes being discussed as well as responses that resonate with youths’ conventional aspirations found in this research:

I’d say don’t be afraid to ask for help. The shelters I’m sorry, but the staff always seem intimidating. I’m an adult now and I went to an adult shelter but I’m pretty sure it’s just as intimidating being a youth and going to a youth shelter or whatever, you know? It’s just as difficult but you know, if you never ask for what you need then you’re never really gonna get what you need. So be brave and don’t be afraid to ask for help if you need it and you’re down on luck (Male, 24).

Don’t go into doing illegal stuff. Try to focus on your mental health first, then go back to school get your education then umm, to live in a shelter but don’t let people convince you to do illegal stuff. Always think of the good, be a goodie two shoes and do good things cus then it will help you in the end and you won’t get a criminal record so it opens your doors if you just go back to school, finish your school like don’t let drugs or drinking or any of that get to you. Don’t let people peer pressure you into doing stuff (Female, 19).

Everyone’s life teaches them a different lesson. I would say not to be stubborn and to always consider possibilities because the worst thing is when your life is trying to send you a message like let’s say you keep on selling drugs, and your life is trying to send you a message saying that’s not right but because you’re so stubborn, because you’re so comfortable in your comfort zone, you don’t think of possibilities of ever doing something else. Even if it won’t stop you from doing whatever you wanna do right now. So I would say always consider everything, don’t be stubborn and think about what life is trying to tell you right now (Male, 18).

This research has increased understanding on whether homelessness and formal work are compatible by highlighting some of the challenges that affect homeless youth in their everyday struggles and realities. New empirical insights have been revealed on the problem of youth homelessness in Ottawa and this research has offered avenues for future research considerations and policy suggestions that could help homeless youth from becoming homeless adults.
REFERENCES


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APPENDIX A: General Research Ethics Board Approval

August 29, 2016

Mr. Dominic Kucharski
Master’s Student
Department of Sociology
Queen’s University
99 University Avenue
Kingston, ON, K7L 3N6

GREN Ref #: GSOC-137-16; Rome # 6018908
Title: "GSOC-137-16 Unconventional Lives with Conventional Dreams: An Examination of the Formal and Informal Work Intersect Among Homeless Ottawa Youth"

Dear Mr. Kucharski:

The General Research Ethics Board (GREB), by means of a delegated board review, has cleared your proposal entitled "GSOC-137-16 Unconventional Lives with Conventional Dreams: An Examination of the Formal and Informal Work Intersect Among Homeless Ottawa Youth" for ethical compliance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (TCPS 2 (2014)) and Queen's ethics policies. In accordance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (Article 6.14) and Standard Operating Procedures (405.001), your project has been cleared for one year. You are reminded of your obligation to submit an annual renewal form prior to the annual renewal due date (access this form at http://www.queensu.ca/trasg/signon.html; click on "Events"; under "Create New Event" click on "General Research Ethics Board Annual Renewal/Closure Form for Cleared Studies"). Please note that when your research project is completed, you need to submit an Annual Renewal/Closure Form in Romeo/traq indicating that the project is 'completed' so that the file can be closed. This should be submitted at the time of completion; there is no need to wait until the annual renewal due date.

You are reminded of your obligation to advise the GREB of any adverse event(s) that occur during this one year period (access this form at http://www.queensu.ca/trasg/signon.html; click on "Events"; under "Create New Event" click on "General Research Ethics Board Adverse Event Form"). An adverse event includes, but is not limited to, a complaint, a change or unexpected event that alters the level of risk for the researcher or participants or situation that requires a substantial change in approach to a participant(s). You are also advised that all adverse events must be reported to the GREB within 48 hours.

You are also reminded that all changes that might affect human participants must be cleared by the GREB. For example, you must report changes to the level of risk, applicant characteristics, and implementation of new procedures. To submit an amendment form, access the application by at http://www.queensu.ca/trasg/signon.html; click on "Events"; under "Create New Event" click on "General Research Ethics Board Request for the Amendment of Approved Studies". Once submitted, these changes will automatically be sent to the Ethics Coordinator, Ms. Gail Irving, at the Office of Research Services for further review and clearance by the GREB or GREB Chair.

On behalf of the General Research Ethics Board, I wish you continued success in your research.

Sincerely,

John Freeman, Ph.D.
Chair
General Research Ethics Board

c: Dr. Stephen Baron, Supervisor
Dr. David Murakami Wood, Chair, Unit REB
Ms. Michelle Underhill, Dept. Admin.
APPENDIX B: Letter of Information and Consent Form

Letter of Information

June 2016

Student Principal Investigator:
Dominic Kucharski, Sociology, Queen’s University, Master’s Thesis Project
Email: 15dak1@queensu.ca
Phone: (613) 533-6000 x 74718

Faculty Supervisor:
Stephen Baron, Professor, Sociology, Queen’s University
Email: barons@queensu.ca,
Phone: (613) 533-2170

Unconventional Lives with Conventional Dreams: An Examination of the Formal and Informal Work Intersect Among Homeless Ottawa Youth

Dear Participant,

This is a letter of invitation to participate in a master’s thesis research study about homeless youth experiences in formal and informal economies. This study is being conducted in Ottawa, Ontario with the help of Operation Come Home. This study is being conducted through Queen’s University. This study has been granted clearance by Queen’s University General Research Ethics Board in compliance with the Canadian ethics guidelines.

The purpose of this research is to explore homeless youth experiences with formal and informal work and the influence of friendships on work. Your participation is helpful because this study seeks to understand the activities that homeless youth take part in to make ends meet and how homeless youth learn to take part in these activities. This study is also interested in exploring how friendship networks influence working opportunities and attitudes within formal and informal work.

This study will use interviews to gather information on your experiences in formal and informal work. Informal work can be understood as illegal activities that take place, but also non-criminal forms of work such as panhandling or other unregulated activities including working under the table. Formal work can be understood as regulated working activities that generate a legal source of income.

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked for a one-on-one interview session that will be audio-recorded. The duration is expected to be approximately 60 minutes. All information disclosed will be confidential. In agreeing to take part in this study, you will be given a $5 Subway Restaurant gift card after we have finished our time together. Throughout the course of the interview, you can choose to not answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable. Please know that you may also withdraw from this study at any point. Should
you choose to withdraw, all data collected up to the point of your withdrawal will be destroyed. You may withdraw from the study up until the final completion date of the written project.

If you wish you withdraw from the study after our interview is finished, you will be able to do so up until the time that the final thesis project has been completed and submitted to Queen’s University. You will be able to inform your decision to withdraw from the study by email or telephone contact. This information will be made available to you through the cue card that you will be given after the interview that will have the contact information for the Queen’s University Ethics Review Board and Dominic Kucharski (principal investigator).

Possible benefits of participation include a greater understanding of the barriers facing maintaining employment and being homeless. During the in-depth interview process however, some questions may lead you to become uncomfortable or upset. If you take part in this study, please be aware that legal risks exist. This means if you report illegal activities or admit to crimes then there is the potential that the police would like to arrest you should they find out about the activities. You are reminded you do not need to answer these questions. Further, if you wish I will terminate our interview and arrange contact with the Operation Come Home trained professional support workers on the premises.

After the final written project has been submitted to Queen’s University, your research will be included in the study. Your name will not be connected to the information about your experience. The data will be held on a disc drive that only Dominic Kucharski (principal investigator) has access to. No personal information or names will be collected for this study and you will be asked to provide verbal consent off tape stating that you are aware and understand everything involved before beginning the interview. Your confidentiality will be protected throughout the research process. No personal information will be made public.

All data will be given to Queen’s University so that it can be archived. This includes the typed transcripts, notes and all write-ups. Interview audio recordings will be destroyed 3 months after the interviews are conducted. The uses of the data collected for this project will be to satisfy the program requirements of the thesis based Master’s of Arts in Sociology at Queen’s University. The data will also be subject to conference presentations and possible journal article publications.

Should you have any additional questions about this study or require further information, please do not hesitate to contact Dominic Kucharski using the contact information presented below or the supervisor of this project Professor Stephen Baron at barons@queensu.ca, or the General Research Ethics Board at 613-533-6081, or chair.GREB@queensu.ca.

Thank you,

Dominic Kucharski
Graduate Student,
Sociology, Queen’s University
15dak1@queensu.ca
(613) 533-6000 x 74718
APPENDIX C: Interview Structure

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

This interview will take approximately 60 minutes and will be conducted by Dominic Kucharski, the principal researcher investigator. If you agree, I would like to audio-record the conversation.

Interview Overview:
Thank you for taking time out of your day to speak with me about your experiences with formal and informal work and your friendships while living on the streets. I am interested in learning about the activities that you are involved in to make ends meet and how you learned to take part in these activities. The questions are shaped around the way your friendship networks influence your working opportunities and attitudes. The questions are focused around the idea of informal and formal work. Informal work can be understood as illegal activities that take place, but also the non-criminal forms of work such as panhandling or other unregulated activities including working under the table. While formal work can be understood as regulated working activities that generate a legal source of income. To begin we will talk about your informal work experiences and how your friendships influence those activities. After, we will talk about your formal work experiences and how your friendships influence those work activities.

Do you have any questions for me before we begin? If you are ready to start our interview, I will turn on the audio-recorder and start by discussing your experiences with informal work on the street.

(A) INFORMAL WORK

1 Are you currently or have you ever been involved in any ‘informal’ work? (If no go to question 6).
   o Which of these do/(did) you do most?
   o What made you start__________?

2 What is/(was) your normal day of work like? Tell me more about the routine of your workday:
   o Does/(did) the amount of money you make influence your decision to do__________?
     ▪ Do/(did) you make enough money to get by doing this?
o Are there any dangers with __________?

o Do/(did) you go to school at this/(that) time? **(If no, skip to weather question)**
  - How do/(did) you balance both school and ________?

o How does/(did) the weather affect ________?

o How does/(did) your current living arrangement affect your ability to do________?

3 **How does/(did) ________ fit within your day-to-day struggles?**

   o What do/(did) you do with your pay?

   o Do you think gender age or race makes a difference with the type of work you do/(did)? How?

   o Does/(did) your health (physical or emotional) affect your ability to ________?

4 **What does being able to work informally mean to you- how is it important to you now?**

   o What makes it hard to work (e.g., tickets, police presence, rude passers-by, etc.)?

5 **What would be your dream job- what do you hope to do?**

   o What would need to happen for you to realize this goal?

__________________________________________
(B) PEER NETWORK INFLUENCES ON INFORMAL WORK

6 **Have your relationships/friendships helped you find informal work?**

   o How did/(do) they help you find this work?

   o How did/(do) your relationship(s) affect your work?
• Did/(do) your relationships encourage you to do informal work? How/Why not?

7 Do/(did) your friends have similar past informal working experiences as you?
  o Do/(did) you share similar attitudes or feelings about the work you are/(were) doing as your friends?
  o What are some of the goals your friend(s) have/(had) towards making money and informal work?
    • What would need to happen for them to realize this goal?
      • How does/(did) this make you feel about the work you are doing?

(C) FORMAL WORK

8 (Provide reminder for what formal work means): Are you working right now? (If yes, skip the next question).
  o Have you ever had formal work while homeless?
    • Talking about your most recent job, how did you find this job?
    • How long did you keep this job? OR how long have you had this job?
  o What motivated you to take a formal job- Was there a plan- a short-term/long term goal?

9 What is/was a typical day of work? Tell me more about the routine of your workday:
  o What happens/(ed) for you when the workday is/(was) over?
  o How are/(were) you treated by your coworkers/boss?
o Does/(did) your work know about your homeless situation?

o Do/(did) you make enough money to get by?

o Do/(did) you go to school at this/(that) time? (If no, skip to living arrangement question)
   - How do/(did) you balance both school and formal work?

o How does/(did) your living arrangement (i.e. shelter, street, squat, friends etc.) affect your work?

10 What does working mean to you- How does it make you feel to go to a regular job- a daily job?
   o What makes/(made) it hard or easy to work?

(D) PEER NETWORK INFLUENCES ON FORMAL WORK

11 Have your relationships/friendships helped you find formal work?
   o How do/(did) they help you find this work?
   o Do/(did) your relationships encourage you to do formal work? How/Why not?

12 Do/(did) your friends have similar past formal working experiences as you?
   o Do/(did) you share similar attitudes or feelings about the work you are doing?
   o What are some of the goals your friend(s) have/(had) towards making money and formal work?
      - What would need to happen for them to realize this goal?
        - How does this make you feel about the work you are doing?
Post-Interview Commentary:
Thank you once again for sharing your experiences with me. At this point, you can take some time to reflect on our discussion and whether you feel comfortable with us using your answers as direct quotations for the purpose of my study. Any quotations used will be kept confidential. If you happen to feel uncomfortable with anything we talked about, please let me know so that we can ensure your preference. Thank you for your time.