

## Self-reported delinquency of immigrant youth, Toronto 2006

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- <sup>P</sup> preliminary
- <sup>r</sup> revised
- X suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the *Statistics Act*
- <sup>E</sup> use with caution
- F too unreliable to be published
- \* significantly different from reference category ( $p < 0.05$ )

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According to the 2006 Census, almost half of Toronto's population was born outside of Canada. Further, almost one in five children in Toronto aged 5 to 19 had immigrated to Canada within the previous 5 years.<sup>1</sup> With a large and growing proportion of youth in Toronto who are either immigrants themselves or born in Canada to immigrant parents, the need for a better understanding of processes that lead to successful outcomes for these youth become increasingly pertinent.

Immigrant youth (or youth whose parents are themselves recent immigrants) face unique challenges in their development. They face a new environment in which their parents may not be able to guide them and in which they often do not speak the majority language. Previous research has found that integration of youth, or the lack thereof, is influenced by the amount of time they have lived in their new country, whether or not they were born in the host country<sup>2</sup> and the socioeconomic advantages or disadvantages their parents bring with them.<sup>3</sup>

Previous work on immigrant youth outcomes in Canada has focused on educational outcomes, finding, for example, that immigrant youth have higher educational aspirations than native-born youth.<sup>4</sup> While there has been little research on delinquency outcomes for immigrant youth, these two outcomes - education and delinquency - are linked,<sup>5</sup> since the goals and rewards associated with them, while contradictory, are nevertheless key to understanding pertinent risk factors for successful integration into society. If it has already been discovered that immigrant youth tend to have higher educational aspirations than their native-born counterparts, then is it also true that foreign-born youth have lower levels of delinquency and can these higher educational aspirations account for this? Also, given theories on the effect of length of time in the country and immigrant status, can we expect that these factors may also play a role in shaping patterns of delinquent behaviour?

This article explores the prevalence of, and factors related to, delinquency as reported by a sample of youth in grades 7, 8 and 9 living in Toronto in 2006. Previous work has found that demographic characteristics, school commitment, experiences of victimization and relationships with peers and families are all related to delinquent behaviour among youth.<sup>6</sup> This article investigates these factors in order to determine the extent to which they can help explain the delinquency experiences of immigrant youth, in particular.

### Box 1: The International Youth Survey, 2006

The International Youth Survey (IYS) was conducted for the first time in Canada in 2006. This is the Canadian version of the International Self-Reported Delinquency Study conducted in over 30 countries in that same year. The target population for this survey was students in the Toronto Public School Board who were in grades 7, 8 and 9, when the majority of them were between the ages of 13 and 15. Table A1 shows the age breakdown of the sample, by generational status. Youth who were not born in Canada had a slightly older age distribution, which may reflect, in part, placement at lower grade levels for some of these youth upon arrival in Canada.

Respondents provided information about their involvement in delinquent behaviour, as well as on a range of individual, family, peer and school characteristics. The property delinquency variable was derived from the following seven questions: In the past 12 months have you: damaged something on purpose, such as a bus shelter, window, car or seat on a bus or train? Stolen something from a store? Broken into a building with the purpose of stealing something? Stolen a bicycle? Stolen a motorbike or car? Stolen something out of or from a car? Set fire on purpose to a mailbox, garbage can, building or car (not your own property)?

Violent delinquency was measured using five questions: In the past 12 months: have you, snatched a purse, bag or something else from a person? Carried a weapon, such as a stick, chain or knife (not a pocket knife)? Threatened somebody with a weapon or threatened to beat them up to get money or other things from them? Participated in a group fight on a school playground, a football stadium, in a street, or in any other public place? Intentionally beaten up someone, or hurt them with a stick or knife, so badly that they had to see a doctor?

It should be noted that the International Youth Survey is a self-reported delinquency survey. The use of self-reported delinquency data has some advantages and some disadvantages. First, self-reported delinquency rates tend to be higher than police-reported data as it includes incidents not reported to police. Similarly, cases reported to police but deemed to be unfounded after investigation are also excluded from official crime data. However, relying on self-reported delinquency presumes that respondents will accurately describe incidents.

Second, youth at high risk for delinquency may be underrepresented if, for example, they are away from school on the day of the survey or have dropped out of school. In fact, school absenteeism data suggest that the level of absenteeism was higher among delinquent youth on the day of the survey.

## Immigrant youth report lower rates of delinquency

As part of the **2006 International Youth Survey**, youth were asked to report any delinquent acts they had committed in the year previous to the survey. Delinquency related to property is analyzed separately from violent delinquency, since previous research has found that the risk factors for these two categories of delinquency differ.

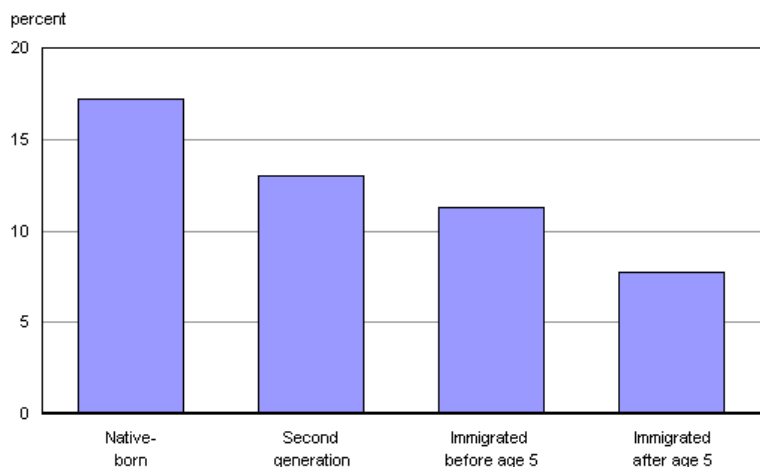
Rates of both property and violent delinquency vary by generational status. Native-born youth reported the highest rates of property-related delinquency, while youth who had immigrated to Canada after the age of 5 reported the lowest rates (Chart 1). In the case of violent delinquency, rates were highest for second-generation youth, while both youth who had immigrated after the age of 5 and native-born youth reported the lowest rates (Chart 2).

**Box 2:  
Generational Status**

Generational status is a concept that combines both the immigrant status of youth and the amount of time they have spent in Canada. In this study, youth were divided into four groups:

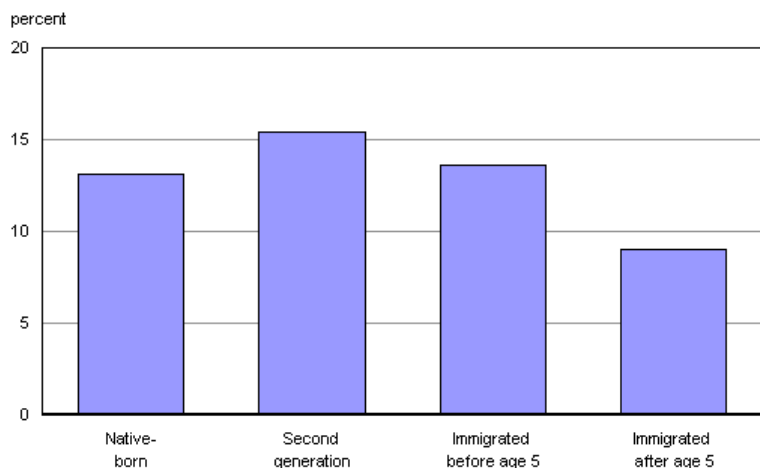
- Native-born youth: Both youth and their parents were born in Canada;
- Second-generation youth: Youth born in Canada, with at least one parent who was born outside of Canada;
- Youth who immigrated before the age of 5: Youth born outside of Canada and immigrated before age 5; and
- Youth who immigrated after the age of 5: Youth born outside of Canada and immigrated after age 5.

**Chart 1  
Self-reported property-related delinquency rates by generational status, Toronto 2006**



**Source:** Statistics Canada, **International Youth Survey, 2006**.

**Chart 2  
Self-reported violent delinquency rates by generational status, Toronto 2006**



**Source:** Statistics Canada, **International Youth Survey, 2006**.

Smaller differences are apparent across the generational-status groups once other factors such as sex, age and family composition are taken into account. Nevertheless, even after taking these factors into account, youth who had immigrated after the age of 5 were 60% less likely to have reported property-related delinquency than their native-born counterparts. In the case of violent delinquency, there were no differences across the generational groups, once other demographic factors were taken into account.

## School-related factors account for some, but not all, of the lower rates of property delinquency among immigrant youth

Previous research has found that immigrant youth are more likely than native-born youth to aspire to a university education.<sup>9</sup> Similar results were found using data from the International Youth Survey (IYS). Youth who had immigrated after the age of 5 were more likely than the other generational groups to have university aspirations (77%, compared to between 66% and 70% of youth who had immigrated before age 5, second-generation youth and native-born youth).

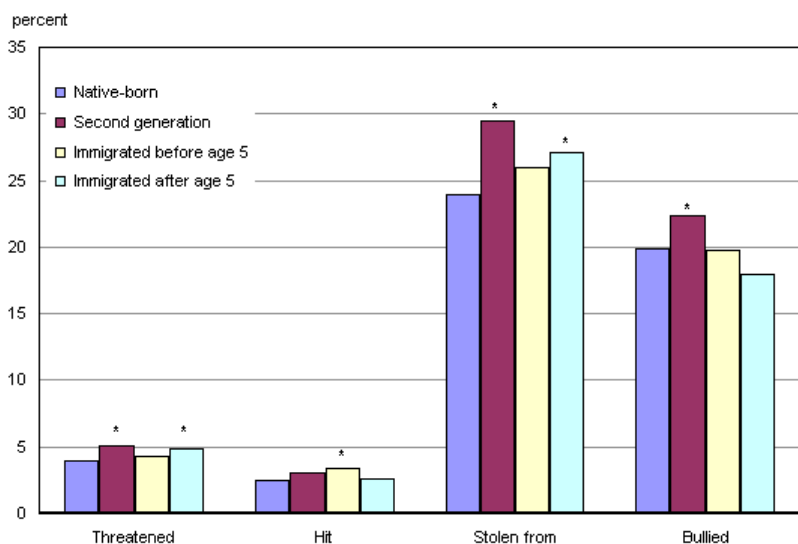
Moreover, the analysis shows that youth with university aspirations were less likely to report property delinquency. In fact, youth who aspired to university were about 40% less likely to report property-related delinquency in 2006 than youth who did not aspire to a university education.

However, school-related factors such as university aspirations, attitudes towards school, perceptions of school safety and a youth's school attendance account for only part of the difference in rates of property-related delinquency observed between native-born youth and youth who had immigrated after age 5. Independent of school-related factors, Canadian-born youth were twice as likely to report property-related delinquency as their counterparts who had immigrated after the age of 5.

## Second-generation youth more likely to report having been bullied or stolen from

Previous research has shown that being a victim is associated with a higher probability of committing either property-related or violent delinquency.<sup>10</sup> For some types of victimization, second-generation youth, youth who immigrated to Canada before age 5 and youth who immigrated after age 5 reported higher rates of victimization than did native-born youth (Chart 3). For example, both youth who had immigrated after age 5 and second-generation youth were more likely than native-born youth to report being stolen from or threatened. As well, second-generation youth were slightly more likely to report being bullied - 22% of second-generation youth reported having been bullied compared to 20% of native-born youth.

**Chart 3**  
Self-reported victimization rates, by generational status, Toronto, 2006



\* indicates that the difference is statistically significant between this group and native-born youth

Source: Statistics Canada, **International Youth Survey, 2006**.

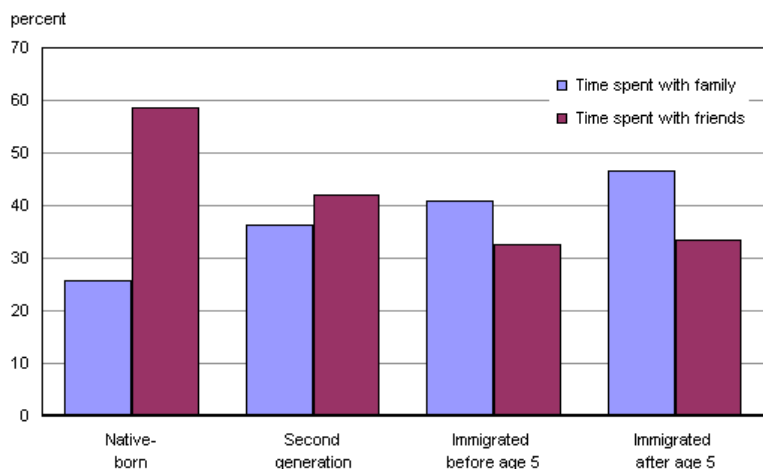
As mentioned previously, higher rates of victimization tend to be associated with higher rates of delinquency. Therefore, the higher rates of victimization observed among youth who immigrated after age 5 cannot explain why they would report lower rates of property-delinquency. If anything, one would expect these victimization experiences to be reflected in a higher likelihood of violent delinquency; however, this proved not to be the case.

After victimization experiences have been taken into account, youth who immigrated after age 5 become even less likely than their native-born counterparts to report property-related delinquency. Second-generation youth also become less likely than native-born youth to report property-related delinquency, a relationship that was not observed when victimization was not accounted for. A new relationship also emerged between violent delinquency and generational status once victimization experiences were accounted for: Given similar levels of victimization experiences, youth who immigrated after age 5 were half as likely to report committing violent delinquency as their native-born counterparts.

## Immigrant youth's relationships with family help account for lower rate of property delinquency

Immigrant youth differ from their native-born counterparts in other ways, for example, in the amount of time they spend with friends and family. All respondents were asked to report with whom they spent the majority of their free time. Youth could respond that they spent the majority of their time alone, with family or with friends. Compared to their native-born counterparts, second-generation youth, youth who immigrated before age 5 and, especially, youth who immigrated after age 5 were more likely to report spending the majority of his or her free time with family and less likely to report spending the majority of his or her free time with friends (Chart 4).

**Chart 4**  
**Proportion of youth who reported spending the majority of their time with family or friends, by generational status, Toronto 2006**



**Source:** Statistics Canada, **International Youth Survey, 2006.**

Youth who immigrated after the age of 5 were also less likely to report that they went out at night unaccompanied by parents – 89% of native-born youth reported going out at night, compared to 73% of youth who had immigrated after age 5. Finally, a smaller proportion (10%) of youth who immigrated after the age of 5 reported having delinquent peers, that is, peers who find illegal acts acceptable, compared to native-born youth (23%). Notably, native-born youth were significantly more likely to report having delinquent peers than any of the immigrant groups.

Youth in the International Youth Survey also reported on the quality of their relationships with their mother and father. While there were no significant differences among the generational status groups in youth reporting that they got along well with their mothers, second-generation youth were less likely than all of the other generational status groups to report getting along well with their fathers.

Once peer and family factors are taken into account, second-generation youth, youth who immigrated before age 5 and youth who immigrated after age 5 become no more or less likely to report property delinquency. This suggests that it is the difference in their relations with family and friends which help account for the decreased rate of property delinquency observed among youth who had immigrated after the age of 5.

However, once peer and family relationships were taken into account, second-generation youth were more likely to report violent delinquency than their native-born counterparts.

### Key factors associated with delinquency

In the final analysis, it is factors other than generational status that account for differences across generational groups in rates of property-related and violent delinquency. Having delinquent peers has the strongest effect on all youth in terms of explaining rates of self-reported delinquency. The odds of reporting property delinquency were more than three and a half times higher for youth who had delinquent peers than for those who did not. Youth who reported having delinquent peers were almost three times more likely to report violent delinquency as those without delinquent peers.

Relationships with family also play an important role. In particular, youth who spent the majority of their time alone or with friends had higher odds of reporting property delinquency. Youth who spent the majority of their time with friends were also more likely to report violent delinquency. As well, youth who reported a good relationship with their mother were less likely to report violent delinquency.

Victimization experiences also emerge as an important factor. Youth who themselves had been stolen from were more likely to report property-related delinquency. Youth who had been stolen from or hit were more likely to report violent delinquency.

Finally, school-related variables play a role as well. Youth who aspire to university were less likely to report either type of delinquency while youth who skipped school were more likely to do so. Youth who felt that their school was 'unsafe' were also more likely to report having committed acts of violent delinquency.

### Conclusion

Overall, this analysis shows that there are some key characteristics of youth that act as protective factors with respect to delinquent behaviour. Rates of self-reported delinquency were lower for youth who aspired to a university education, who spent most of their time with their families and who, in the case of violent delinquency, reported having a close relationship with their mothers. Immigrant youth who had arrived in Canada after the age of 5 were more likely to exhibit these characteristics and, as a result of these protective factors, were less likely than other generational status groups to report committing property delinquency.

While the findings were similar with respect to violent delinquency, there is one exception to note: Given similar relationships with families and friends, second-generation youth remain at higher risk of reporting violent delinquency than their native-born counterparts.

**Table A1**  
**Age distribution, by generational status, International Youth Survey, Toronto, 2006**

	Age				
	12	13	14	15	16
<b>Generational Status</b>					
Native-born	17.5	32.5	37.9	11.3	0.9
Second generation	22.9	35.6	32.0	9.0	0.4
Immigrated before age 5	20.2	35.2	26.8	16.7	1.1
Immigrated after age 5	17.8	30.6	30.6	19.0	2.1
Total	20.4	33.8	32.5	12.4	0.9

**Source:** Statistics Canada, **International Youth Survey, 2006.**

## Notes

1. Statistics Canada. 2007. **Immigration in Canada: A Portrait of the Foreign-born Population, 2006 Census: Findings.** Statistics Canada Catalogue Number 97-557-X2006001. Statistics Canada. 2007.
2. Kao, G. and M. Tienda. 1995. "Optimism and achievement: The educational performance of immigrant youth." *Social Science Quarterly*. Volume 76. pp. 1 to 19.
3. Zhou, M. 1997. "Growing up American: The challenge confronting immigrant children and children of immigrants." *Annual Review of Sociology*. Volume 23. pp. 63 to 95.
4. Taylor, Alison and Harvey Krahn. 2005. "**Aiming high: Educational Aspirations of Visible Minority Immigrant Youth.**" Canadian Social Trends. Statistics Canada Catalogue Number 11-008-X. Ottawa. Winter 2005.
5. See Sprott, Jane B., J. M. Jenkins and A.N. Doob. 2005. "The Importance of school: Protecting At-Risk Youth from Early Offending". *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*. Volume 3(1): 59-77 and Crosnoe, Robert. 2006. "The Connection Between Academic Failure and Adolescent Drinking in Secondary School." *Sociology of Education*. Volume 79: 44-60.
6. See Fitzgerald, R. 2003. "**An examination of sex differences in delinquency.**" Crime and Justice Research Paper Series. Statistics Canada Catalogue number 85-561-M — No. 001: Sprott, J.B., J.M. Jenkins and A.N. Doob. 2000. Early Offending: Understanding the Risk and Protective Factors of Delinquency. HRDC Catalogue No. W-01-1-9E. Applied Research Branch, Strategic Policy: Human Resources Development Canada; and Zeman, K. and A. Bressan 2008. "**Factors Associated with Youth Delinquency and Victimization in Toronto, 2006.**" Crime and Justice Research Paper Series. Statistics Canada Catalogue number 85-561-M – No. 014.
7. Sprott, J.B., J.M. Jenkins and A.N. Doob. 2000. Early Offending: Understanding the Risk and Protective Factors of Delinquency. HRDC Catalogue No. W-01-1-9E. Applied Research Branch, Strategic Policy: Human Resources Development Canada.
8. A combination of descriptive statistics and logistic regression were used in this study. When an outcome variable for a regression model is dichotomous (e.g., committing a delinquent act versus not committing a delinquent act), researchers are interested in determining the probability of the occurrence of that event under a particular set of circumstances (e.g., having low income, being female, or living in a single-parent family). In this case, logistic regression is the most appropriate technique to use.  
  
An odds ratio is a statistic generated by a logistic regression and, in this study, was used to assess whether, other things being equal, youth with specific characteristics are more or less likely to engage in delinquent behaviour than those in another (reference) group.
9. Taylor, Alison and Harvey Krahn. 2005. "**Aiming high: Educational Aspirations of Visible Minority Immigrant Youth.**" Canadian Social Trends. Statistics Canada Catalogue Number 11-008-X. Winter 2005.
10. Fitzgerald, R. 2003. "**An examination of sex differences in delinquency.**" Crime and Justice Research Paper Series. Statistics Canada Catalogue number 85-561-M — No. 001.
11. Differences in proportions are all statistically significant except for the percentages of youth who immigrated before age 5 and youth who immigrated after age 5 reporting that they spent the majority of their time with friends.