
Street Poll #5 Post-COVID Ticketing in Inner-City Toronto



Community Harm Reduction Response Team (CHRRRT) Project

August 2020

What is the CHRRT Project?

The **Community Harm Reduction Response Teams (CHRRT) project** is a 3-year initiative (April 2018 to March 2021) designed to promote low-threshold, harm reduction services in Toronto neighbourhoods in response to the growing opioid crisis.

Funded by the **Substance Use and Addictions Program (SUAP) of Health Canada**, the project has been designed to mobilize people with lived experience to play leadership roles in community-based harm reduction work.

Ten agencies are partnering to train and employ 20 people with lived experience to become Harm Reduction Support Workers in their communities.

A major component of the project is the mobilization of the community's knowledge about this new model for promoting and resourcing effective community responses to the crisis.



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Introduction

- COVID 19 and social distancing enforcement have had a negative impact on the homeless and under-housed people in the downtown core of Toronto.
- This ten question / five minute survey was designed to take a 'snapshot' of COVID-19 related ticketing and the increase of police intervention with homeless and street involved people during the pandemic.
- A final question explored the impact of COVID-19 on access to services
- Data collection occurred over a two week period between July 20th and August 10th, 2020
- An outreach approach secured 105 surveys from seven locations in the inner-city neighbourhoods surrounding Street Health in Toronto.



Methodology

- The survey was designed and tested by the CHRRT team.
- The survey was administered in an informal interview format by Street Health HR staff in person using a paper based survey instrument and “social distancing” protocols (mask, 2 meter distances).
- Participants received \$10 cash for participating in the anonymous survey.
- 105 people completed the survey.

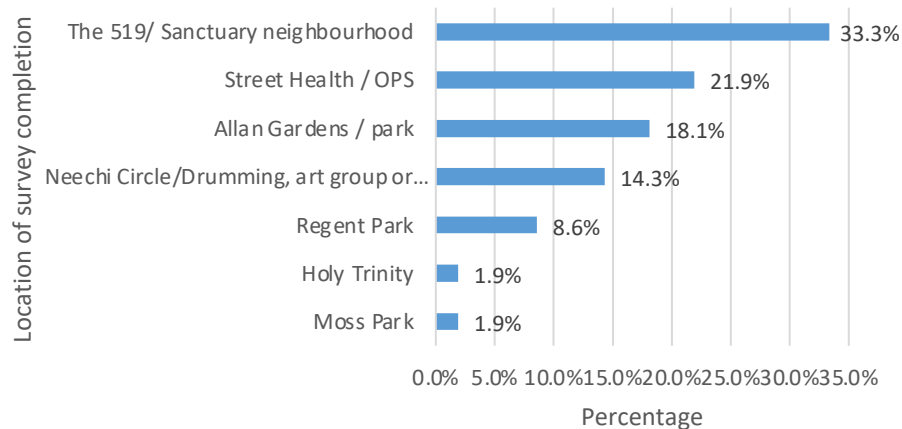


Survey Outreach

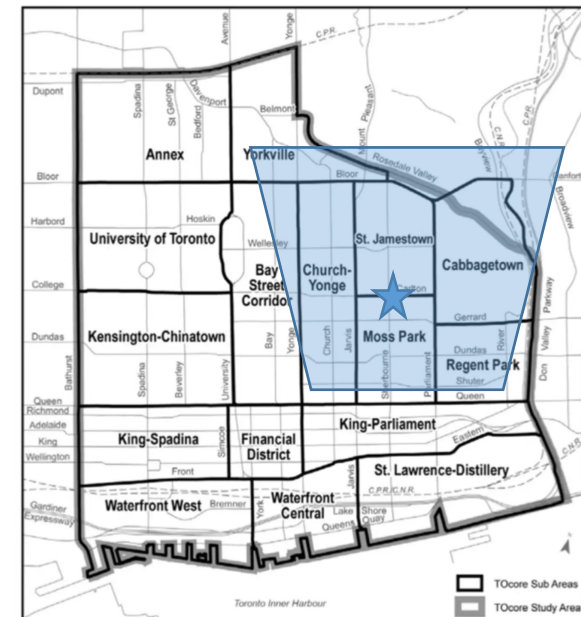
Respondents were approached in person in seven different locations in the downtown east side of Toronto



Location of Survey Completion (N=105)



Map 1: Map of Downtown Neighbourhoods

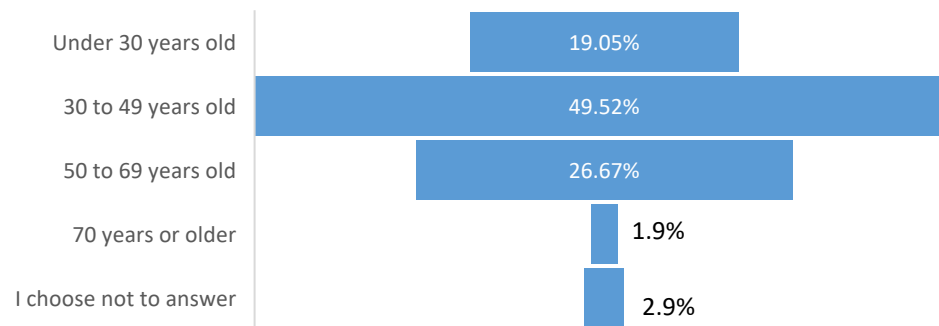


Who participated in the survey?

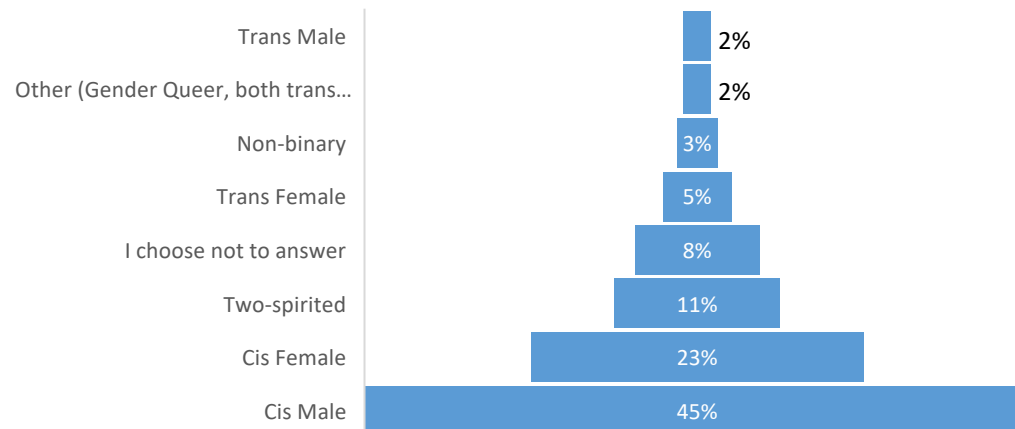


46 (43.81%) of respondents self-identified as a status or non-status Indigenous person

How old are you? (N=105)



What is Your Gender? (N=105)



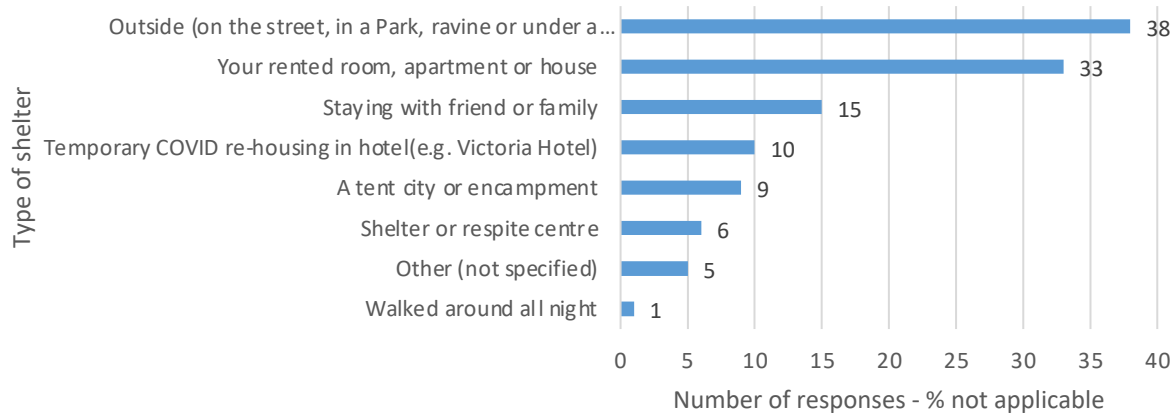
Housing

The survey was completed by homeless and street-involved people living in a wide range of circumstances



Q10. Where did you stay last night? (N=105)

Note: 12 (11%) respondents specified 2 locations



Findings



Prevalence of Ticketing



Ticketing has increased during the pandemic

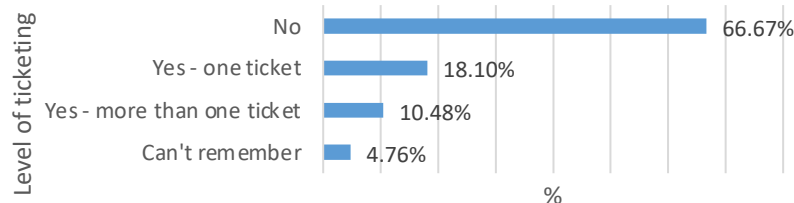
30 respondents (28.5%) had been ticketed since the pandemic started.

Over half of those people were ticketed more than once.

Q3. Have the police issued you any tickets since COVID hit in Mid-March this year?

(N=105)

Note: 30 (28% of respondents) had been given at least one ticket since COVID began

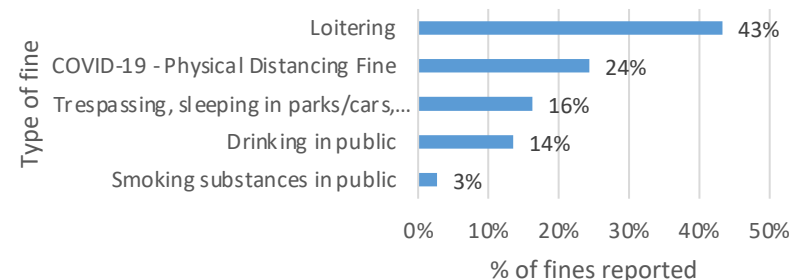


3 reported being warned by police

1 reported seeing two others fined for \$1000

Q4. What was the ticket for? (N=30)

Note: 30 respondents, all of those reporting being ticketed, report 37 tickets by type of fine



Note: The median size of fine reported was \$100

Two people had received \$1000 fines

"I don't know how much the fine was for. I didn't even look, I just threw it in the garbage." (respondent)

Consequences of Ticketing

“I have thousands in unpaid tickets I will never pay.” (respondent)

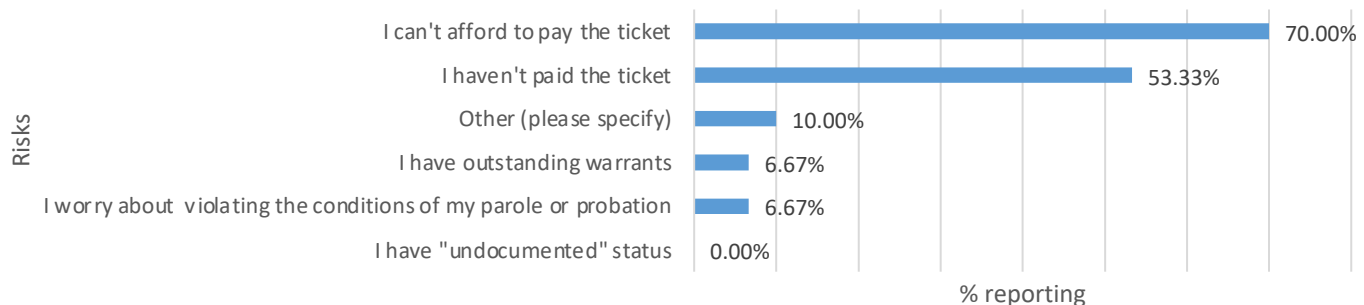
“It's stupid - the people they ticket don't have money, or options to socially distance. They're letting everyone out of jail - so what then?

People don't pay and that's it.” (respondent)



Tell us how ticketing and/or increased contact with the police may have put you at risk (N=30)

Note: respondents could check more than one risk



Emerging themes

From Qualitative Analysis of Comments

The following are all respondent quotes

Increased Police Presence since COVID

(10 people commented)

- *“There’s more police presence and questioning in the park.”*
- *“I’ve noticed more police observing people for COVID.”*
- *“I thank goodness have not been accosted but a lot of my friends have had many problems with being ticketed/targeted.”*
- *“Police were extremely rude and threatened to ‘lock me up’ when I asked for an explanation. This isn’t unusual but has gotten worse since COVID hit.”*

Targeting homeless people

(16 commented)

- *“They’re targeting homeless people.”*
- *“My homeless friends are being bullied in the parks and benches.”*
- *“Instead of providing assistance the police target the homeless.”*
- *“Indigenous people are always targeted.”*
- *“Its basically carding again!”*



Emerging themes (2)

Feeling of harassment and aggressive treatment by police (16 commented)

- *“It feels harassing.”*
- *“I’m feeling targeted and vulnerable.”*
- *“It’s harassment and targeting! Information constantly changes – By-laws too.”*
- *“I’ve been warned [by the police] about social distancing. There is an aggressive police presence. They’re doing illegal name checks.”*
- *“There’s a lot more police activity and intimidation.”*
- *“Allowing tents was a good thing on the part of the City to keep us from catching COVID, but in a way it also allowed police to single us out and surveil us.”*

People are scared and upset (6 commented)

- *“People are scared.”*
- *“Things are crazy. I’m feeling very paranoid - always looking over my shoulder, wondering if police are going to beat me up.”*
- *“I’m way more wary.”*
- *“The police have been stopping me more often which affects my anxiety and paranoia.”*



Implications

Ticking and harassment erode community and trust

Respondent quotes:

- *“It has made people less convinced that the police are here to help.”*
- *“We feel crowded and we are losing our space.”*
- *“The ticketing hurts friendship and affects people’s mental health.”*

Curtailed income generating activities

- People are losing income (e.g. pan handling and sex work) due to harassment and COVID



“COVID Sucks!”

We also asked people about how the pandemic has affected their access to supports and services...

Respondents commonly noted:

- The negative impact of general closures/cancellations of programs and services in the community (15) - additional 6 noting the loss of drop-ins in particular
- Difficulty of accessing the services that they normally use (14)
- No supports – not being able to talk to community workers (14)
- Social isolation (10)
- Difficulty of maintaining personal hygiene (7) (particularly lack of toilets)
- Loss of food security (4)
- Loss of access to medical services (4)
- Loss of mental health supports (4)
- Need access to housing
- Longer wait times for services and treatment (4)
- Difficult to get things done (3)

Respondent quotes –

- *“It's shut down so much - it's weird. If you actually get to see a worker - you see the mask, or the glass they're behind.”*
- *“So many of my supports have shut down. It's really hard. I feel sad and lonely.”*



COVID

Some people are getting housed

Respondent quote:

- *“It made my life 100% better, I was finally housed.”*

Other respondent quotes:

- *“Can't do laundry, shower or get anything to eat”*
- *“COVID is getting to my mental health and I cannot obtain treatment or attend ceremonies.”*
- *“I am homeless not helpless and I just need support to get housing. It's impossible to self isolate. Homophobia is everywhere!”*
- *“No access to visits with child, to medicines, drumming”*



Thank You!

Acknowledgements:

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