

SPEAK UP! AUGUST 2021

A SURVEY ABOUT THE HEALTH,
NEEDS, AND EXPERIENCES OF
EMERGING ADULTS



Youth Needs
Assessment



LONE STAR
JUSTICE ALLIANCE

Acknowledgements

Lone Star Justice Alliance (LSJA) would like to thank The University of Texas Health Sciences Center at Houston (UTHealth) and The University of Texas Steve Hicks School of Social Work, who helped develop and analyze the following survey. LSJA also partnered with the Salvation Army's Young Adult Resource Center (YARC) and Tony's Place, a drop-in center for youth and young adults who identify as LGBTQ+ or struggle with housing insecurity, to administer the survey. Lastly, LSJA would like to thank all contributing authors, listed below, who aided in the collection and analysis of the information. Without all of these hard-working and dedicated individuals, the report would not have come together.

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Letter from the Executive Director

Lone Star Justice Alliance (LSJA) is a nonprofit legal organization that improves the lives of youth and emerging adults in the justice system. We envision a justice system that uses developmentally appropriate responses to behavior and treats youth and emerging adults with equity and dignity to promote resilience, conserve costs, and increase public safety.

Imagine investing \$5 billion in a company that fails 75% of the time.

Each year Texas spends more than \$5 billion to incarcerate nearly 150,000 people in our state prisons, 3/4 of which are people of color. And yet 75% of emerging adults who enter this system reoffend within 3 years. Research has shown that far from being rehabilitative, in many cases, prison increases the likelihood of future harm.ⁱ Crime victims agree: 52% of crime victims report that prison makes people worse.ⁱⁱ This could explain why, in the richest nation in the world, with arguably the largest and most expensive criminal justice system in human history, the majority of victims never report these crimes: they prefer *nothing* to everything we have to offer.^{iiiiv}

Few would label the existing system a success. But what alternatives are available?

Established in August 2017, LSJA launched with a desire to reimagine justice for youth and emerging adults. From inception, we dedicated ourselves to relying upon evidence-based research to guide our programmatic development. To this end, in May 2018, we **published a report, *Transformative Justice: A Developmental Approach to System-Involved Emerging Adults***, that identified the ways in which emerging adults (aged 17 to 24) differ from older adults, making them vulnerable to justice system involvement; the intervention strategies that provide the best evidence available about what works in justice system response for emerging adults; and ultimately, outlined an approach for meeting the needs of emerging adults in their communities to produce positive health and public safety outcomes for all residents in Texas. In that report, we relied upon the Pew Charitable Trust's evidence-based policymaking framework, to assess then-existing programs to help determine the most effective method of appropriating resources in support of community health and safety. Ultimately, we recommended that local criminal justice systems establish an alternative to incarceration programs for emerging adults charged with a felony offense to provide participants community-based services through a localized, integrated program structured to support positive life outcomes, improving participants' health outcomes while simultaneously reducing their criminogenic risk and the likelihood of their continued justice system involvement.

"My Greatest needs are money and understanding. Money I can get on my own, However, understanding is out of my control. You can't make someone see your point of view, you can only show them."

– Survey Respondent

This report builds upon those lessons, by asking young adults about their unmet health needs, their views on the current system, and their vision for reform. Ultimately, **we agree with Glenn Martin that "[t]hose closest to the problem are closest to the solution, but furthest from resources and power."** With the voices of young adults at the forefront, we look forward to crafting a solution to the current challenges that plague our justice and health systems.



Elizabeth Henneke

Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	2
LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR	3
TABLE OF CONTENTS	4
SUMMARY OF EMERGING ADULTS IN THE JUSTICE SYSTEM	5
EMERGING ADULT PRISON POPULATION	5
EMERGING ADULT BRAIN DEVELOPMENT	6
UNMET HEALTH NEEDS	7
SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH	8
SURVEY AND FOCUS GROUP METHODS	9
DESIGN	9
RECRUITMENT	9
ADMINISTRATION	9
SUMMARY OF EMERGING ADULT NEEDS AND EXPERIENCE SURVEY	10
GENERAL DEMOGRAPHICS	10
CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM INVOLVEMENT	11
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT	14
MEDICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH	14
ACCESS TO MEDICAL CARE	15
SUBSTANCE USE	16
TREATMENT	16
SEX, GENDER, AND SEXUALITY	17
FAMILY NETWORK & CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCE	18
PARENTHOOD	18
SUPPORT SYSTEM	18
HOUSING	19
EMPLOYMENT & INCOME	19
NEEDS AND CONCERNS	20
RESILIENCE AND STRENGTHS	21
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	22

Summary of Emerging Adults in the Justice System

DEFINITIONS

Emerging Adulthood: The phase of development between adolescence and adulthood, which encompasses the transition from a child who is dependent on parents or supervision and guidance, as well as emotional and financial support, into a fully mature, independent adult who engages as a productive and healthy member of society.

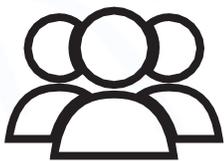
Similar terminology: "Young adults", "Transition Age Youth"
Source: Harvard Kennedy School

Emerging adults are an overrepresented population in the adult criminal justice system, with distinct susceptibility to reform and rehabilitation.^v Importantly, studies also indicate that emerging adults are especially susceptible to behavior change and that individualized, community-based interventions, structured to address their unique needs, can set them on the right path.^{vi} Without appropriate intervention, however, the unmet needs that contributed to the involvement of emerging adults in the justice system are likely to be exacerbated, resulting in intensified emotional and behavioral challenges and potentially compromising public safety.^{vii} Therefore, greater investment in this age group could have significant implications, not only for individual lives, but also for an overall reduction in crime. If the needs of emerging adults are addressed early, without the life-lasting distinction of a misdemeanor or felony, it will prevent justice-involvement and decrease the overall cost of incarceration for the state. The survey administered sought to recognize the unique needs and struggles of the emerging adult population.

Emerging Adult Prison Population

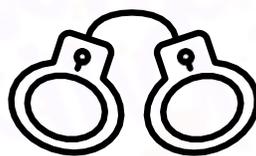
Emerging adults are disproportionately represented in our justice system.^{viii}

Emerging adults are:



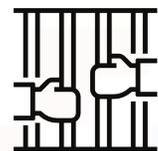
10%

of the US
population



29%

of arrests



21%

of people admitted
into adult prisons

Within the general emerging adult population, Black men are disproportionately incarcerated. In state and federal prisons, incarceration rates for **Black males ages 18 to 19 were nine times greater than white males, and three times greater than Hispanic males.^{ix} For the ages of 20 to 24, Black Males were seven times greater than white males, and two-and-a-half times greater than Hispanic males.^x**

Emerging Adult Brain Development

Current research in neurobiology and psychology demonstrates that adolescent brain development continues into the mid-twenties, making **emerging adults biologically immature compared to older adults**.^{xi} Emerging adults are more likely to engage in anti-social behaviors as a result of hindered capacity to regulate behaviors, greater sensitivity to immediate rewards and peer influence, and narrower ability to make future-oriented decisions.^{xii} Impulsive and risk-seeking behaviors occur as the brain system that influences pleasure-seeking and emotional reactivity develops more rapidly than the brain system that supports self-control, meaning that emerging adults develop an “accelerator long before they can steer and brake”.^{xiii}

As a result, emerging adults are more vulnerable to criminal justice involvement. Emerging adults **violate probation three times as frequently** as older adults.^{xiv}

Research on emerging adults asserts that purely punitive methods of institutional confinement do not decrease recidivism and may actually increase recidivism.^{xv}

75% of justice-involved emerging adults recidivate (higher than any other age group)^{xvi}

This is not to say that emerging adults should not be held accountable for their actions, however we must recognize that, more so than for other age groups, emerging adult behavior is often a reflection of the individual's environmental and peer influences.^{xvii}

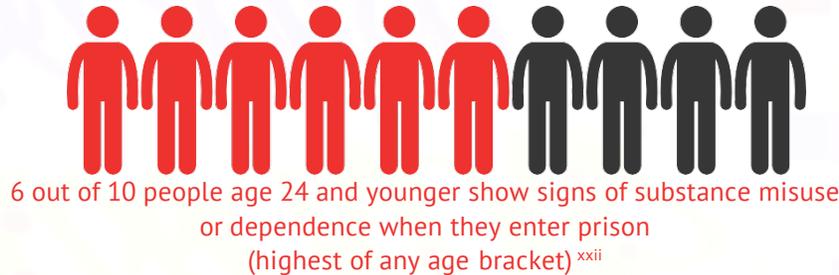
The immaturity of the **emerging adult brain also allows individuals to be uniquely prone to behavioral change.**^{xviii} These findings have been validated by the Supreme Court in three seminal cases ruling that adolescents have diminished culpability and an increased likelihood of being positively rehabilitated.^{xix}

Evidence suggests that emerging adults require a distinct rehabilitation model that focuses on behavioral change and community-based interventions and is structured to address their individual needs. (Shiraldi, Western, & Bradner, 2015)^{xx} Without intervention, the unmet needs that contributed to the involvement of emerging adults in the justice system are likely to be exacerbated, resulting in worsened emotional and behavioral problems and continued justice-involvement. Affected emerging adults may experience individual trauma from continued justice-involvement and potentially compromise public safety.

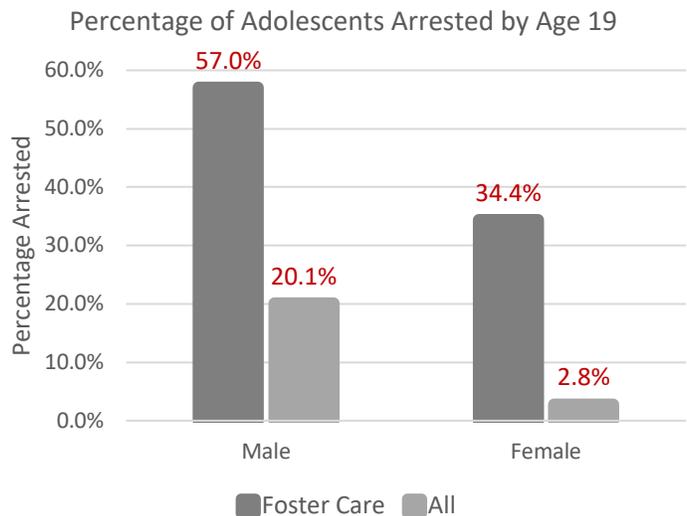
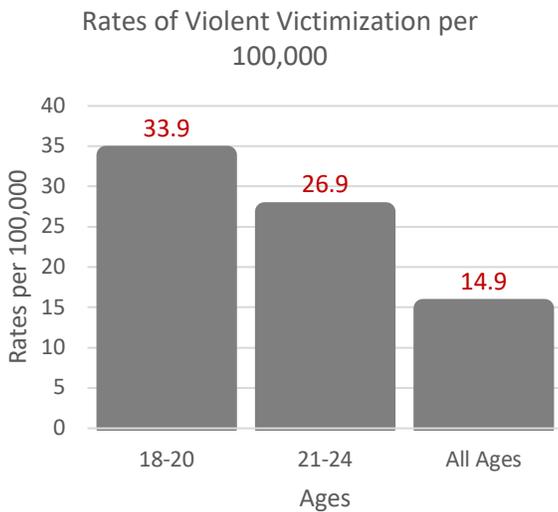
Unmet Health Needs

Empirical research has shown that emerging adults' involvement with the justice system is intricately tied to their health outcomes.

The majority of youth held in juvenile detention and other residential facilities have at least one diagnosable mental health disorder and are more likely than other age groups to have substance use or co-occurring disorders. ^{xxi}



Justice-involved emerging adults are often victims themselves. Emerging adults have the highest rates of violent crime victimization, compared to other age groups. ^{xxiii} Additionally, those with a history in foster care are more than 10x more likely to report being arrested. ^{xxiv}



According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), without appropriate evaluation and effective treatment services, individuals with a behavioral health diagnosis are likely to deteriorate, resulting in a worsening of emotional and behavioral problems and an increased likelihood of making contact with law enforcement. ^{xxv} Despite health-related needs driving emerging adults' justice system involvement, the majority of existing programs don't provide a health-based alternative to incarceration for this age group and few existing programs have been evaluated by third parties. ^{xxvi}

Social Determinants of Health

Compounding these health and developmental factors, justice-involved emerging adults face significant challenges that further increase their risk for justice system-involvement.^{xxvii} In the public health field, these challenges are referred to as social determinants of health and are also known as criminogenic risk factors in the criminology field. Social determinants of health span several social systems, suggesting the need for an integrated approach to comprehensively and simultaneously meet the needs of emerging adults that focuses on upstream prevention, harm-reduction, restoring people to full physical, mental, and social health, and valuing life.

Chronic unemployment and limited work readiness skills^{xxviii}: The general population of emerging adults has difficulty finding work because most have little or no job experience or vocational skills.^{xxix} This challenge is especially acute for justice-involved emerging adults, who often have less education and a public criminal record, limiting their earning power and their likelihood of establishing successful, conventional lifestyles.^{xxx}

Housing instability: Many emerging adults under justice system supervision lack the stable housing necessary to succeed in their community.^{xxxi} Criminal histories further bar individuals from securing the safe, supportive housing needed to promote independence.

Involvement with the child protection and foster care systems: Up to two thirds of youth who are involved with the juvenile justice system are also involved with the child welfare system, and research shows that these youth tend to have higher recidivism rates than youth not involved in both of these systems.^{xxxii}

Limited basic academic skills^{xxxiii}: Justice-involved emerging adults tend to have low education levels (less than two thirds have their high school diploma) and deficient literacy skills; many qualify for special education services, yet few existing educational programs that are structured to help individuals recover high school credits or earn a GED successfully attract emerging adults.^{xxxiv}

Survey and Focus Group Methods

Lone Star Justice Alliance needed to identify the needs of emerging adults in Texas in order to design a developmentally appropriate intervention for justice-involved emerging adults. The information above is extracted from LSJA's initial research; however, because policies at the state and local levels primarily govern access to available services in each identified area, needs can vary widely across state and local jurisdictions.

LSJA partnered with The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston (UTHealth) and The University of Texas Steve Hicks School of Social Work ("School of Social Work") to design and administer a survey and hold a focus group for emerging adults.

Design

LSJA partnered with two Master of Public Health students at UTHealth to design the survey tool, which should take no longer than twenty minutes to complete, with the aim of preventing respondents from rushing through questions. The questions were phrased to reflect the language of validated tools while supporting the likelihood that participants with low literacy levels would be able to complete the survey. Although the tool was designed for participants to complete independently, a member of the UTHealth research team was always on hand to answer any questions while participants completed the survey.

LSJA then partnered with five School of Social Work students to collect qualitative data through a more concentrated focus group question and answer session. The focus group was intended to gather comprehensive data about emerging adults' knowledge of and feelings towards the criminal justice system.

Recruitment

Survey participants were recruited through a formal announcement at the beginning of a Young Adult Resource Center (YARC) and Tony's Place workshop, one week before the launch of the survey. Case managers followed up with reminders. In order to generate interest, the research team facilitated a creative activity to identify a name for the survey and to design a logo for the survey to display on a flier that was posted to advertise the opportunity to participate in the survey. The flier design is displayed on the acknowledgement page of this report.

Focus group planning involved marketing to the community, advertising through social media-based sign-up options, and encouraging participation by providing food and prizes. Community partner organizations were sent information to give to their qualifying clients. Final members of the group were Transformative Justice program participants and clients of Williamson County Juvenile Services.

Administration

The survey was administered at YARC two days per week and at Tony's Place one day per week over a four-week period from mid-October to mid-November in 2018. After completing the survey, participants received a \$5 METRO card to compensate them for their time and energy. Participants were not asked for personal identifying information and all data collected remained anonymous.

The focus group was hosted on November 4, 2019, with four participants from the Georgetown, Texas area. A total of four participants does not provide a large enough sample size to be generalizable. However, the responses provide insight into emerging adult opinions of the justice system and possible avenues for reform.

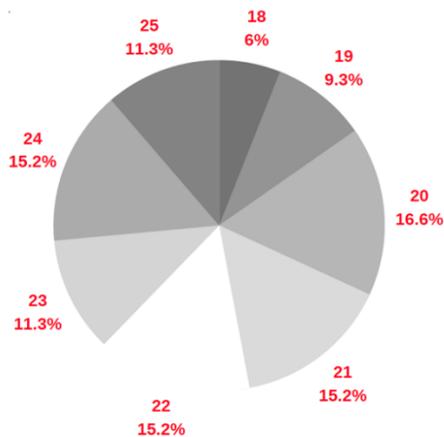
Summary of Emerging Adult Needs and Experience Survey

Survey administration at Tony's Place and YARC produced a total of 151 complete responses. Both organizations serve youth at risk of experiencing homelessness or are currently experiencing homelessness. Distinctions will be made throughout the following analysis between justice-involved individuals and those who are not justice-involved.

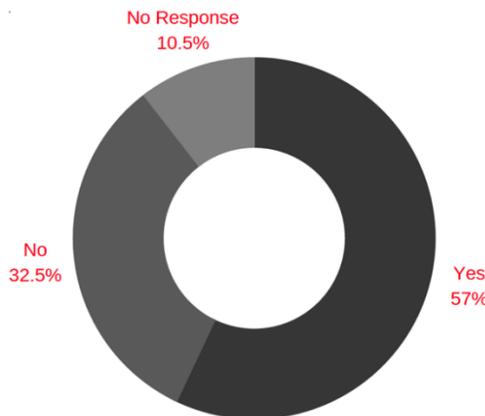
General Demographics

Participants' ages were relatively evenly distributed between 18 to 25, with the average age of respondents at 21.8 years old. A significant majority of respondents reported their race as Black/African American, with the second most frequently reported race as white/European American. Over half of respondents reported being justice-involved, with at least one arrest during their life.

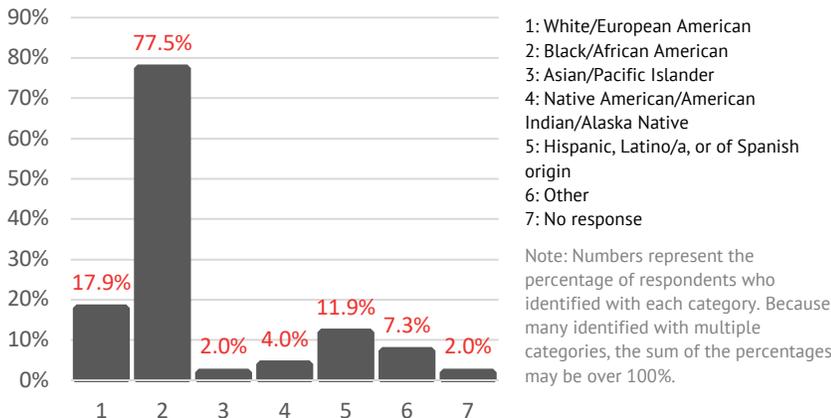
Age of Respondents



Arrested for Misdemeanor or Felony in Lifetime



Race of Respondents



The focus group consisted of the following individuals who will be highlighted throughout the report:

Participant #1:
17-years-old, Male, Hispanic/Latino

Participant #2:
18-years-old, Male, Hispanic/Latino

Participant #3:
19-years-old, Female, Hispanic/Latino

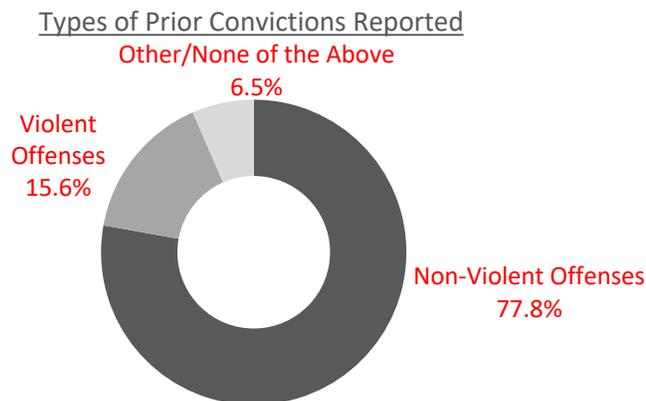
Participant #4:
22-years-old, Female, White/European American

Criminal Justice System Involvement

In order to adequately understand the needs of justice-involved emerging adults, survey data was disaggregated by “justice-involved” and “non-justice-involved.” These stratifications will differentiate between the needs and experiences of emerging adults exclusively experiencing unstable housing and those who also have a history of criminal justice involvement. Prior system involvement increases an individual’s risk of homelessness, employment insecurity, or future justice system involvement.

97 respondents indicated a history of arrest, misdemeanor or felony charges, conviction, incarceration, parole, or probation.

The majority of convictions reported by the emerging adults surveyed were non-violent crimes, including drug- and alcohol-related crimes, property crimes, trespassing, loitering, jaywalking, or squatting; fraud/forgery; and criminalized sex work. Violent crimes accounted for about a fourth of reported convictions and predominantly included aggravated offenses and family violence.



“ Before even addressing an alternative to jail, I feel like you have to be in the mindset of **‘why are we putting these people in jail?’** So they are not a threat to society? We’re throwing them in a cell just to keep them there? Or are we putting them there so that they can learn to get better? **I feel like jail is just somewhere you go to just sit there.**”

- Participant #3

*Average age of **FIRST time** spending one or more nights in prison was 17.08 years old.*

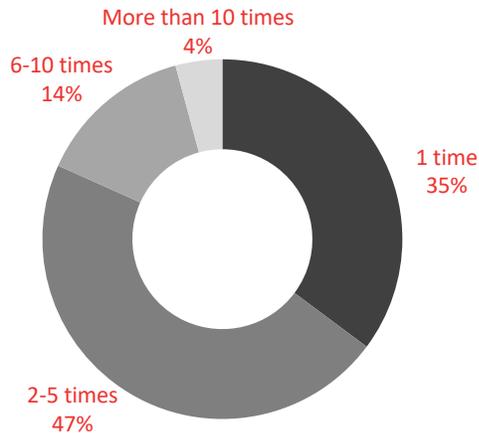
*Average age of **FIRST time** charged with a misdemeanor was 17.23 years-old; median 18-years-old.*

*Average age of **FIRST time** charged with a felony was 18.68 years-old; median 19-years-old.*

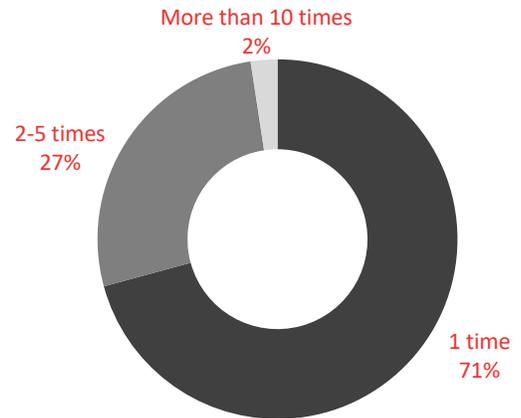
Recidivism:

Emerging adults recidivate (commit new offenses after previous justice-involvement) at a high rate, compared to other age ranges. Most respondents had been charged with or convicted of a misdemeanor between two and five times. Although the majority of respondents had only been only charged with a felony once, a quarter of respondents reported between two and five previous felony charges.

Number of Times Charged with or Convicted of a Misdemeanor



Number of Times Charged with or Convicted of a Felony



“When asked about the effectiveness of the criminal justice system: **“I’ve gone to jail before, and I’m still going back, so I don’t think it does anything.”**
- Participant #4

“On paper you can make anything look good, you can make every law look good. But **no one person is going to fit into that mold of what a good citizen is**, everyone has their own things, whether it’s mental, physical, environmental.” - Participant #3

“The justice system should focus on **“address[ing] the needs**. It should be focused on the person and **why** they’re doing the things they’re doing.” - Participant #2

Educational Attainment

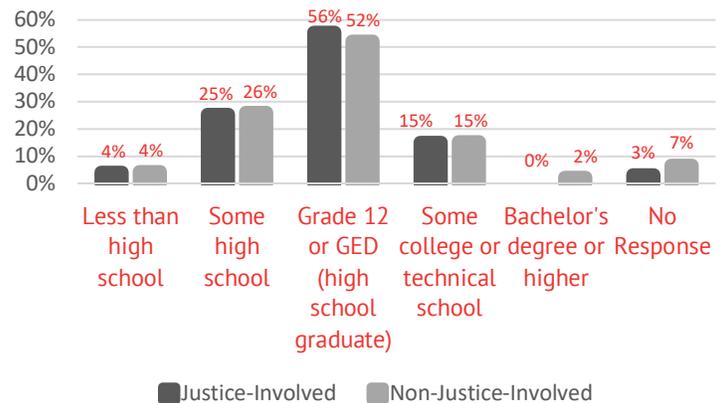
Higher educational attainment increases the probability of employment and expected wages. There were negligible differences in educational attainment levels between justice-involved and non-justice-involved respondents in the population sample surveyed. However, the average of the sample was well below the population average from national data.

Only 60% of respondents reported finishing high school, which is well below the national completion rate of 90%. Additionally, fewer than 1% of respondents reported obtaining a college degree, which is below the national average of 34% for those under 26 years old.^{xxxv}

At 14%, fewer justice-involved respondents were in school than non-justice-involved respondents (24%).

Of those in school, 8% of justice-involved respondents were at a college or university compared to 17% of non-justice-involved. Of those attending school in either group of respondents, approximately half were attending community college.

Highest Level of Education of Respondents



Medical and Mental Health

Overall, 90% of justice-involved respondents reported having at least one medical diagnosis, while 78% of non-justice-involved respondents reported a medical condition.

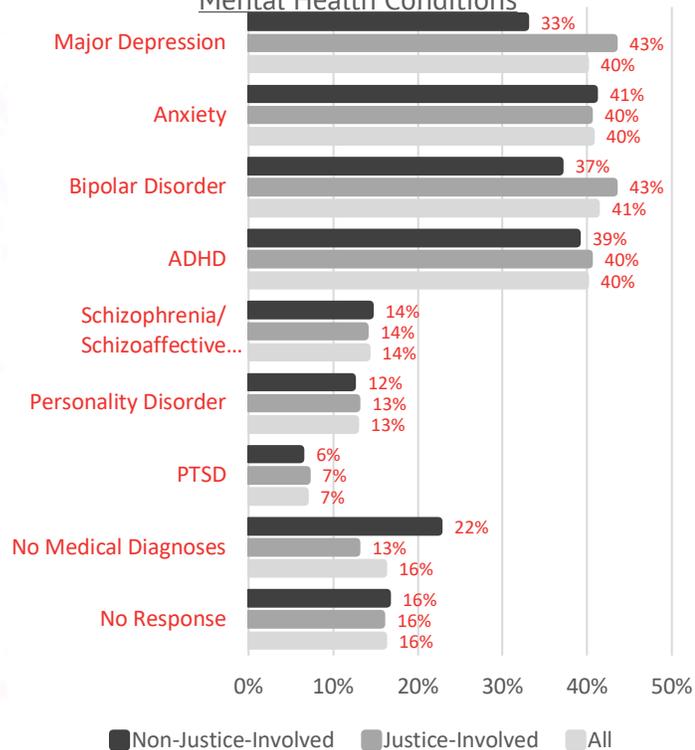
Justice-involved respondents reported slightly higher rates of most mental health conditions. **Rates of diagnoses for every condition for both groups are higher than would be expected, based on national lifetime prevalence rates.**^{xxxvi}

Nationally, 13.1% of emerging adults have major depression, and 22.3% have an anxiety disorder. This means that **justice-involved survey respondents were 3.3 times as likely to have major depression and two times more likely to have anxiety than the overall emerging adult population.**^{xxxvii}

With bipolar disorder diagnoses at 43% and 37% respectively, both **justice-involved and non-justice-involved respondents reported rates of bipolar disorder at over five times higher than the expected 7% lifetime prevalence for 18 to 29 year-olds.**^{xxxviii}

Only **HALF of the respondents with diagnoses were seeing a healthcare provider for mental health treatment.**

Percentage of Respondents Reporting Mental Health Conditions



Access to Medical Care

The survey showed that health insurance and medical service utilization are a need for the broader emerging adult population, specifically those with unstable housing and regardless of justice-involvement.

Justice-involved and non-justice-involved respondents had health insurance at similar rates (47% and 45% respectively). This is significantly lower than Harris County as a whole, where 87% of residents under 65 years of age have health insurance.^{xxxix} Those who were insured among both justice-involved and non-justice-involved survey groups primarily used Medicare or Medicaid (44% and 50%, respectively), and the Harris Health Gold Card (21% and 18%, respectively). Fewer respondents relied on a parent or family member for health insurance than had their own form of insurance among either justice-involved (15%) or non-justice-involved (5%) respondents.

61% of non-justice-involved respondents and 63% of justice-involved respondents reported not having a doctor or clinic where they usually seek care: In neither respondent group did the majority use Patient-Centered Medical homes – medical practices in which medical care is centralized, to be more efficient and less costly.

Both groups of respondents also showed a high utilization of emergency medical services within the prior 6 months, which can be extremely expensive.

58% of respondents reported using emergency services in the prior six months, and 38% reported three or more instances. Emergency departments are often used when the patient has nowhere else to go, for insurance or medical home-related reasons.

45% of respondents were transported in an ambulance in the six months prior, with 19% reporting three or more instances.

Perceptions of Police Violence Among Emerging Adults

— “ —

I've met a lot of bad cops. I've seen cops outside. Still wearing uniform or not. Some of them just take it for granted so much. The things they talk about. How they explain some of the stuff. Or they'll talk about a situation that just happened while they were working. It just seems so disrespectful, some of them shouldn't have a badge.

— ” —
Participant #4

— “ —

When I was younger. My dad's a cop. I would get his phone sometimes and there would be group chats of them talking about the craziest stuff. And just stuff that shouldn't be talking about who is trying to keep the community safe. And there are supervisors who were joking about people who had just gotten locked up. To them it's a joke because they're just there to pick you up and lock you up. They don't have to worry about the consequences. They have all the power.

— ” —
Participant #3

— “ —

If they didn't want these problems they need to address that when the justice system was put in place. It's always been corrupt. Especially, like you look at people in jails. Who's the majority? People of color. And people of color. That culture. Mental health isn't something you talk about. It's always been corrupt. Until you talk about that it's not going to change.

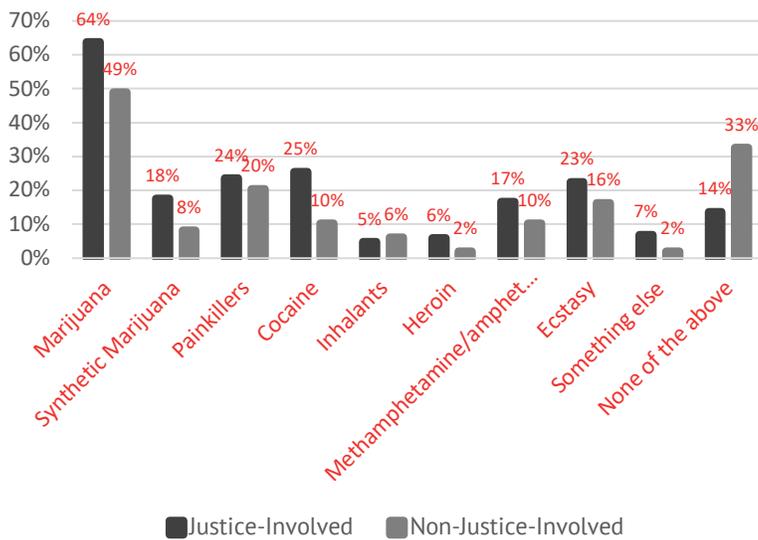
— ” —
Participant #3

Substance Use

As previously stated, substance use is more prevalent for justice-involved respondents than non-justice-involved respondents. The survey results were consistent with these trends, as justice-involved respondents use all substances referenced in the survey at higher rates than non-justice-involved respondents.

Justice-involved respondents used marijuana, cocaine, painkillers, and ecstasy more commonly than other substances. Marijuana was used by 70% of justice-involved respondents while the other three were each used by about 25% of justice-involved respondents. For all substances, this population showed higher rates of use compared to the emerging adult population.

Percentage of Respondents With Experience Using Substances



"If you're in [the drug classes], and they're like telling you everything to do, but then you're able to leave, and you're supposed to automatically say, "They said don't smoke, they said don't do this, I'm gonna go and get my life right," **how do they expect you to just do that without any outside help.** You go to that class 1-2 hours a week, but all the rest of the week you're left with all that but don't have anyone to talk to about that. It's just rude. **Having any kind of support, not even talking,** just to have someone to keep being after you instead of just expecting you to go that 1 hour a week, 2 hours a week."

- Participant #3



It is important to note that the survey asked whether respondents had ever used the substance in their life and not if they consistently used it. The high percentage may reflect the availability of these substances for emerging adults, and that justice-involved participants had more access to these substances. It could also indicate frequent use of the substances.

Alcohol:

60% of non-justice-involved respondents reported never having consumed alcohol, versus 42% of justice-involved respondents.

Of respondents who did drink alcohol, justice-involved respondents reported drinking more frequently. **More than one in ten justice-involved respondents reported drinking four or more times a week**, compared to fewer than one in twenty of those not justice-involved.

One in four justice-involved respondents reported binge drinking (six-plus drinks on one occasion) daily or weekly, compared to one in twenty non-justice-involved respondents. Nationally, one in eleven young adults are heavy drinkers.^{x1}

Treatment

More justice-involved respondents reported seeking treatment for alcohol or drugs than non-justice-involved (27% and 17% respectively). Respondents from both groups were most likely to use inpatient services as treatment – 37% of justice-involved and 27% of non-justice-involved respondents.

Sex, Gender, and Sexuality

Transgender respondents represented a small percentage of those surveyed; however, they were more likely to have been justice-involved than cisgender respondents.

Seven out of seven respondents who self-identified as transgender women (women assigned male at birth) were justice-involved.

One out of three respondents who self-identified as transgender men (men assigned female at birth) were justice-involved.

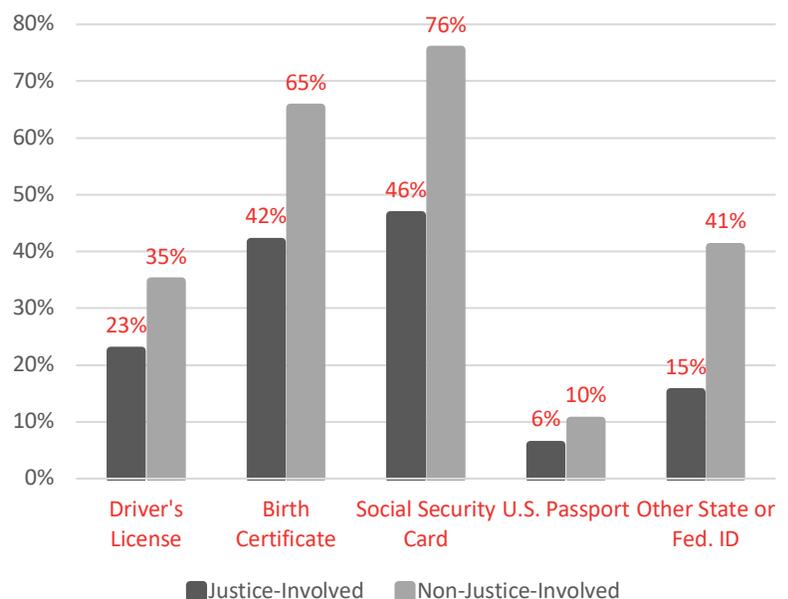
Transgender-emerging adult respondents had a higher rate of justice-involvement (80%) than their cisgender counterparts (67%), including 100% of transgender women reporting justice-involvement. The over-representation of trans respondents in the justice-involved subgroup is consistent with the U.S. adult population. Current research reports that 16% of transgender adults have been incarcerated, compared to 3% of cisgender adults.^{xii} Incarcerated trans-identified individuals are also thirteen times more likely than their cisgender peers to experience sexual assault while incarcerated.^{xiii}

Straight, bisexual, and pansexual respondents reported similar rates of justice involvement (64 to 67%), while respondents who identified as “gay/lesbian” were *less* likely to have been justice-involved (41%). However, **justice-involved respondents reported more frequent discrimination based on gender identity or sexual orientation** at the places they seek services or support. 25% of justice-involved respondents reported “sometimes” or “often” experiencing discrimination, compared to 10% of non-justice-involved respondents.

Essential Documents

While 81% of justice-involved and 86% of non-justice-involved respondents possessed at least one type of document, **justice-involved respondents possessed fewer types of documentation than non-justice involved respondents.** Lack of essential identifying documents can prevent individuals from obtaining housing, employment, education, public benefits, voting, and many other aspects of life.^{xliii}

Percentage of Respondents Possessing Identifying Documentation



Family Network & Childhood Experience

Justice-involved individuals are often more likely to have experienced trauma. The following indicates the cyclical nature of children's experiences with trauma and justice-involvement, leading to future trauma and justice-involvement for their children.

Respondents who were justice-involved were more likely to live with someone misusing drugs and also more likely to live with someone who had served time or been sentenced than respondents who were not justice-involved.

- 52% of justice-involved respondents reported instances of living with someone who used illegal substances or misused legal substances, compared to 38% of non-justice-involved respondents.

52% of justice-involved respondents reported living with someone who had served time or were sentenced to serve time in a correctional facility, compared to 43% of non-justice-involved respondents.

Justice-involved respondents were more likely to report having experienced abuse before they were 18 years old, had an open case with Child Protective Services (CPS), and/or been in foster care.

- 60% of justice-involved respondents reported experiencing physical, sexual, or psychological abuse from their parent or other adults in the home, compared to 50% of non-justice-involved respondents.
- 65% of justice-involved respondents reported Child Protective Services had visited their family, compared to 52% of non-justice-involved respondents.
- 51% of justice-involved respondents reported ever being in foster care, compared to 30% of non-justice-involved respondents. The average reported age for entering foster care was 9.9-years-old.

Parenthood

Justice-involved respondents were more likely to have children and less likely to have their children living with them.

Justice-involved respondents were **FOUR TIMES MORE LIKELY** to have a CPS case open for their children.

- 44% of justice-involved respondents reported having children compared to 31% of non-justice-involved respondents.
- Of those who were parents, 62% of justice-involved respondents reported the children were not currently living with them compared to 47% of non-justice-involved respondents. For both groups, the majority of the children not living with them were staying with family.
- Of those who were parents, 24% of justice-involved respondents reported ever having an open case with the children welfare system, compared to 7% of non-justice-involved.

Support System

When asked about who they can turn to for support:

Only half of the respondents said they had a friend they could turn to.

Fewer than one in three said they could turn to a parent or guardian.

One in five said they had NO ONE to turn to.

Housing

Housing was a major concern for both justice-involved and non-justice-involved respondents. It must be noted that the survey was conducted at a drop-in center, often used by individuals experiencing housing insecurity. Housing insecurity is a contributing factor and often a result of justice system involvement^{xliv} and people experiencing homelessness are actually more likely to be victims of violent crimes.^{xlv}

Over half of respondents considered themselves homeless, with approximately the same percentage for justice-involved as non-justice-involved respondents.

Relative to those who were not justice-involved, justice-involved respondents reported:

Higher prevalence of sleeping outdoors/on streets (19.77% compared to 10.2%).

Lower prevalence of staying with family or friends (16.28% compared to 24.29%).

Lower prevalence of staying at a shelter (11.63% compared to 16.33%).

Higher prevalence of living in own apartment/home (27.91% compared to 14.29%).

Justice-involved respondents had lacked permanent stable housing for longer periods on average than non-justice-involved respondents.

Justice-involved respondents most frequently reported having lived without permanent stable housing for one to five years (27%).

Non-justice-involved respondents most frequently reported one year (19%) and six months (19%) without permanent stable housing.

Employment & Income

Unemployment among respondents was 71%, with negligible differences for justice-involved vs. non-justice-involved respondents, which indicates its prevalence as a challenge for the emerging adult population at risk of homelessness.

31% of respondents reported receiving government income (such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)/cash assistance, SSI, SNAP, or Housing Choice Voucher). **20% reported having full-time jobs** and **22% reported having part-time jobs** or informal work.

Reasons provided to explain unemployment:

43% of justice-involved respondents said their **criminal background** was a barrier.

37% of respondents reported a **lack of resources** (childcare, permanent housing, transportation, etc.).

25% of respondents reported an **inability to meet job requirements** (uniform or proper identification).

14% of respondents cited **health issues**.

13% of respondents said they "**think they cannot keep a job**".

11% of respondents cited the use of **drugs or alcohol**.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The emerging adult population has the highest recidivism of any other age group, indicating that the current systems for health and criminal justice are failing them. Justice-involved respondents in this survey showed higher rates of medical diagnoses, family trauma, substance use, and chronic housing instability.

For many of these individuals, they grew up in challenging circumstances and justice involvement did not help. In many cases, it amplified them. Criminal backgrounds prevent employment. Jail time exacerbates mental health challenges and substance misuse. Time spent incarcerated takes parents away from their children and maintains the cycle. The needs of this population are not only numerous but chronic and often multigenerational.

Therefore, programs must address these circumstances and challenges that contribute to the justice-involvement of this population. Programs should prioritize intensive and sustained support to intervene with the cycle. Treatment teams should be multidisciplinary to address needs that often intersect and compound each other.

The results of this survey indicate trends that warrant further investigation and review. We know that none of the trends demonstrated by the data exist in isolation. We may benefit from an analysis of the intersections of different factors – mental health, gender identity and sexuality, and justice involvement, for example.

Emerging adults are highly amenable to interventions that address social determinants of health and criminogenic risk factors. This population is resilient. We must acknowledge and strengthen their coping mechanisms and life skills. Only with a comprehensive approach and sustainable support systems will the justice-involved emerging adult population avoid recidivism and achieve their goals.

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