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DEC 7 1994

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Teenage Males are Committing Murder at an Increasing Rate

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Prepared for the National Center for Juvenile Justice

Revised April 18, 1993

151569

U.S. Department of Justice
National Institute of Justice

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Teenage Males are Committing Murder at an Increasing Rate

The *Supplementary Homicide Reports* provide data on offenders as well as victims. In 29 percent of homicides, however, the identity of the perpetrator is unknown, at least at the time when the reports are completed by law enforcement authorities. From the vast majority of murders in which the offender is known, however, a profile of the juvenile murderer can be developed and trends in youth homicide can be examined.

The growth in homicides involving juvenile offenders has surpassed that among adults

From 1976-1991, nearly 23,000 juveniles were known perpetrators of homicide in the United States, an average of over 1,400 per year. Moreover, the number of juvenile offenders has more than doubled in recent years, from 969 juvenile offenders in 1984 to 2202 in 1991, while the number of adult offenders increased twenty percent during the same time period.

The rate of offending increases throughout adolescence. This is true for both boys and girls, but the growth during adolescence is particularly sharp for boys.

Teenage males commit a disproportionate share of the murders in this country

Teenagers, aged 14-17, of both sexes together represent 6.5% of U.S. population, and commit 6.1% of the nation's homicides. Teenage boys, however, are 3.3% of population yet commit 5.6% of the homicides. Finally, black male teenagers, while only 0.5% of the population are responsible for 2.8% of the killings.

Boys and girls tend to target different kinds of victims

Considerable media attention has been focused recently on homicides between juveniles. Since the late-1980s, more than 400 boys annually kill peers, fiends or acquaintances who are within three years of their age. Each year less than 30 girls kill their peers.

The typical male offender shoots a friend or acquaintance during an argument. Fifty-three percent of juvenile male killers target friends or acquaintances, while a third kill strangers. In 67% of murders, the teenage boy uses a gun, with a knife being used in another 18% of cases.

Juvenile Offenders

The typical female offender is almost as likely to kill a family member (41%) as she is to murder a friend or acquaintance (46%). In terms of weapon use, firearms do not predominate as much as in murders by males. While 42 percent of female offenders used a firearm, as many as a third of female juvenile offenders killed with a knife.

Both male and female offenders tend to kill males. Eighty-five percent of boys and seventy percent of girls killed males (generally friends, fathers or brothers).

The trends in homicide for male and female offenders are quite different. Homicides by male juveniles have more than doubled in number since the mid-1980s, whereas those for female juveniles have remained fairly steady in recent years.

There are large differences in offending rates by sex and race

Overwhelmingly, most (91%) juvenile offenders are male. Nearly half (47%) of all juveniles killers are white.

In terms of rate of offending per 100,00 persons, boys are nearly ten times more likely to commit murder than girls. Black juveniles are almost six times more likely to kill than white juveniles. Among teenagers, aged 14-17, black males are over ten times more apt to kill than black females, six times more likely to kill than white males, and more than sixty times more likely to commit murder than white females.

Almost all homicides are intra-racial. Fully 92 percent of the victims of white juveniles are white. However, only 76 percent of victims of black juveniles are black.

In terms of rate of offending per 100,000 persons, the participation in criminal homicide has increased for whites and blacks, and for boys but not girls.

Guns are the most common weapon used in homicides by juveniles

Sixty-five percent of homicides committed by juveniles involve firearms. Since 1983, the tendency to use guns in homicides has increased (55% to 78%). In terms of incidence, gun homicides have nearly tripled since 1983, while homicides involving other weapons have actually declined somewhat.

As the victim-offender relationship becomes more distant, the offenders become overwhelmingly male, the weapon more likely a gun, and the act more planned than spontaneous.

When juveniles commit murder, most of their victims are friends or acquaintances (53%), followed by strangers (32%). Relatively few of their victims are family members (15%). When juveniles do commit murder within the family, they typically kill fathers/step-fathers (30%) or brothers (17%).

When teenagers kill strangers, generally the perpetrator is male (96%) and black (57%), uses a gun (64%), and is involved in a felony-murder (62%). Similarly, when teens kill friends or acquaintances, the perpetrator is almost always male (92%), is equally likely to be white or black, kills with a firearm (62%), and frequently is motivated by an argument or brawl (45%). In family-related incidents, the offender is usually male (75%), is more often white (64%), murders with a firearm (64%), and tends to be inspired by an argument or brawl (51%).

A large and growing number of juveniles kill in groups of two or more

Multiple-offender killings have more than doubled since the mid-1980s. While a majority (77%) of incidents involve juvenile offenders acting alone, 14 percent involve two offenders, 6 percent involve three offenders, and 3 percent involve four or more accomplices. Group killings typically involve guns (64%) or knives (17%), other felonious acts (51%), offenders who are black (52%) and male (93%), and victims who are strangers (49%), male (86%), and white (60%).

Group killings fairly frequently cross racial lines. Whereas only 11 percent of single offender killings involve victims and offenders of different races, inter-racial attacks are involved in a quarter of group kills. These racially-inspired group killings typically involve black offenders killing white victims (71% of all intra-racial combinations) who are strangers (76%), often involve the element of robbery (60%).

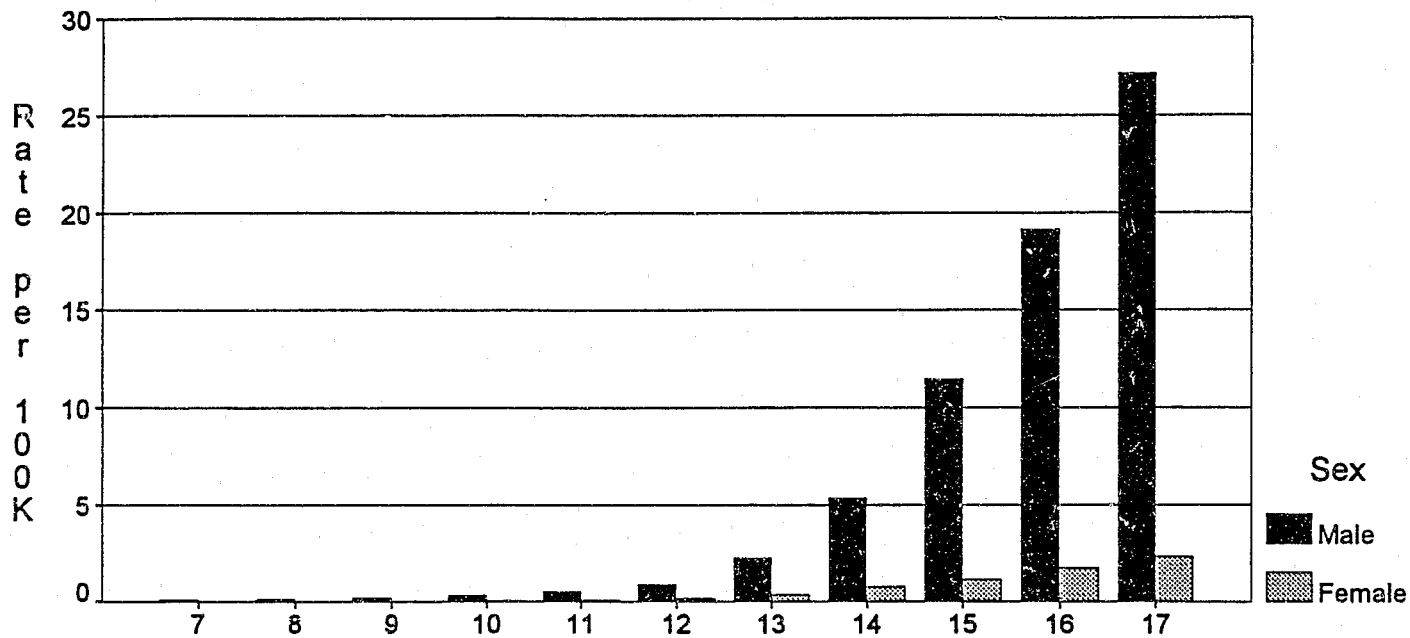
Trends in Juvenile Offending Rates by Age, Race, and Sex
(Rates per 100,000 Population)

	AGE							
	10-13				14-17			
	SEX				SEX			
	Male		Female		Male		Female	
	RACE		RACE		RACE		RACE	
	White	Black	White	Black	White	Black	White	Black
YEAR								
1976	.6	2.7	.1	.9	7.6	47.3	.9	7.2
1977	.8	2.5	.1	.5	7.8	44.1	.9	4.3
1978	.8	2.8	.1	.4	7.9	44.3	.9	5.8
1979	.7	2.8	.1	.9	9.5	47.7	.9	5.9
1980	.7	3.2	.1	.6	9.4	49.4	.7	5.1
1981	.8	1.9	.1	.4	8.2	51.2	.9	5.8
1982	.6	2.2	.1	.6	8.2	44.6	.9	4.5
1983	.6	1.8	.1	.4	7.9	37.0	1.1	5.3
1984	.7	1.5	.1	.5	7.0	32.0	.9	4.4
1985	.8	2.5	.1	.8	7.2	43.6	.7	4.7
1986	.8	2.0	.1	.2	9.3	49.8	.9	4.3
1987	.7	2.3	.1	.6	7.6	50.4	1.0	4.7
1988	.7	2.8	.1	.7	9.3	65.8	.7	4.7
1989	1.0	3.5	.0	.7	10.9	78.1	.7	4.9
1990	.8	2.5	.1	.3	13.2	102.5	1.0	5.1
1991	.5	4.3	.1	.8	13.6	111.8	.8	7.0

Victim/Offense Characteristics by Characteristics of
Juvenile Offenders for 1976-1991 Combined

	Total	SEX OF OFFENDER		RACE OF OFFENDER		SEX OF OFFENDER			
		Male	Female	White	Black	Male		Female	
						RACE OF OFFENDER		RACE OF OFFENDER	
		White	Black	White	Black				
AGE OF VICTIM									
Under 18	28.7%	28.1%	35.6%	31.3%	26.3%	31.0%	25.4%	34.6%	36.1%
18-29	36.3%	37.1%	28.1%	33.3%	38.9%	34.2%	39.5%	24.0%	31.9%
30-49	22.1%	22.0%	23.2%	22.3%	22.0%	21.9%	22.2%	26.3%	20.5%
50+	12.9%	12.8%	13.2%	13.1%	12.8%	12.9%	12.9%	15.1%	11.6%
RACE OF VICTIM									
White	56.1%	56.8%	49.1%	92.3%	22.6%	92.1%	24.0%	94.4%	8.7%
Black	41.7%	41.1%	48.9%	6.5%	76.3%	6.7%	74.9%	4.6%	90.7%
Other	2.1%	2.1%	2.0%	1.2%	1.1%	1.2%	1.1%	1.1%	.6%
SEX OF VICTIM									
Male	83.6%	84.9%	70.0%	81.8%	85.3%	83.0%	86.8%	69.8%	70.5%
Female	16.4%	15.1%	30.0%	18.2%	14.7%	17.0%	13.2%	30.2%	29.5%
WEAPON									
Firearm	64.7%	66.8%	42.4%	60.7%	68.8%	61.6%	72.0%	50.4%	35.7%
Knife	19.3%	18.1%	32.1%	22.2%	16.4%	22.4%	13.9%	20.7%	42.8%
Blunt Object	6.5%	6.6%	5.2%	7.2%	5.9%	7.3%	6.1%	6.0%	4.2%
Personal Weapon	6.2%	5.8%	10.8%	5.9%	6.3%	5.3%	6.1%	12.3%	8.9%
Other	3.3%	2.7%	9.5%	4.0%	2.5%	3.4%	2.0%	10.6%	8.5%
RELATIONSHIP									
Family	15.5%	12.8%	41.2%	20.7%	10.5%	18.1%	7.7%	46.8%	36.2%
Other Known	52.6%	53.3%	45.7%	51.9%	53.3%	53.4%	53.4%	37.6%	53.0%
Stranger	31.9%	33.9%	13.2%	27.4%	36.2%	28.6%	38.9%	15.6%	10.8%
CIRCUMSTANCES									
Felony	33.1%	34.2%	22.0%	27.4%	38.8%	27.3%	41.0%	27.6%	17.3%
Argument	36.0%	35.3%	42.9%	34.2%	37.7%	34.4%	36.1%	31.9%	52.7%
Other	30.9%	30.5%	35.1%	38.5%	23.5%	38.3%	22.9%	40.5%	30.1%

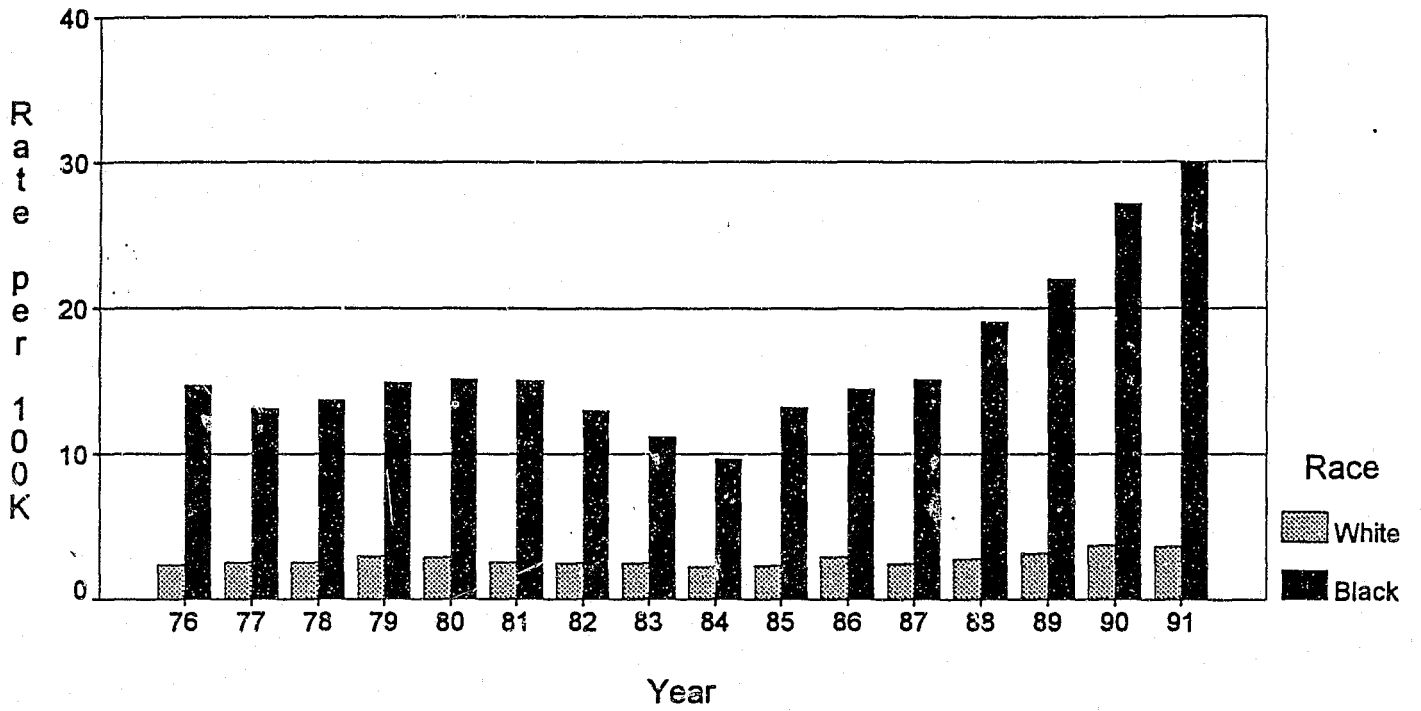
Offense Rate by Age and Sex



AGE

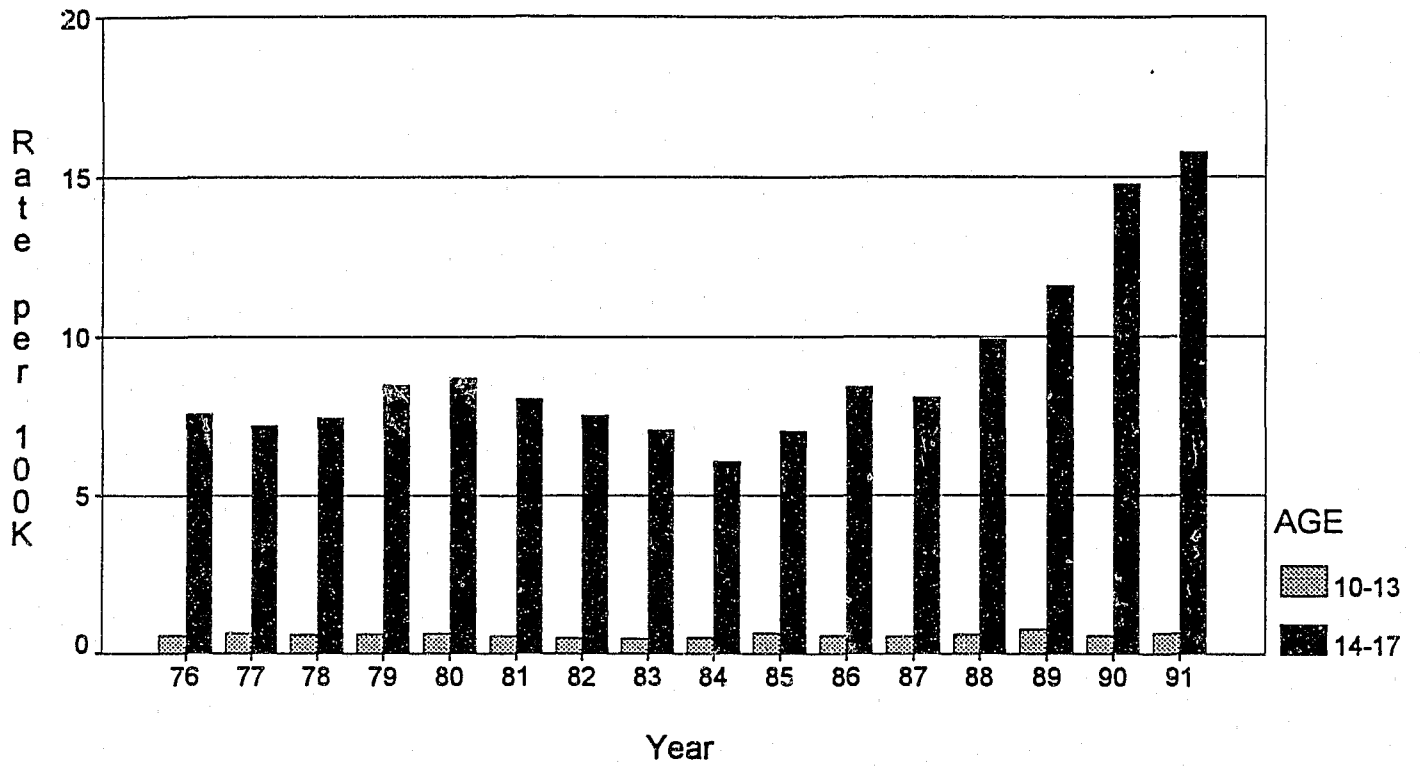
1976-1991 combined

Offense Rate by Year and Race

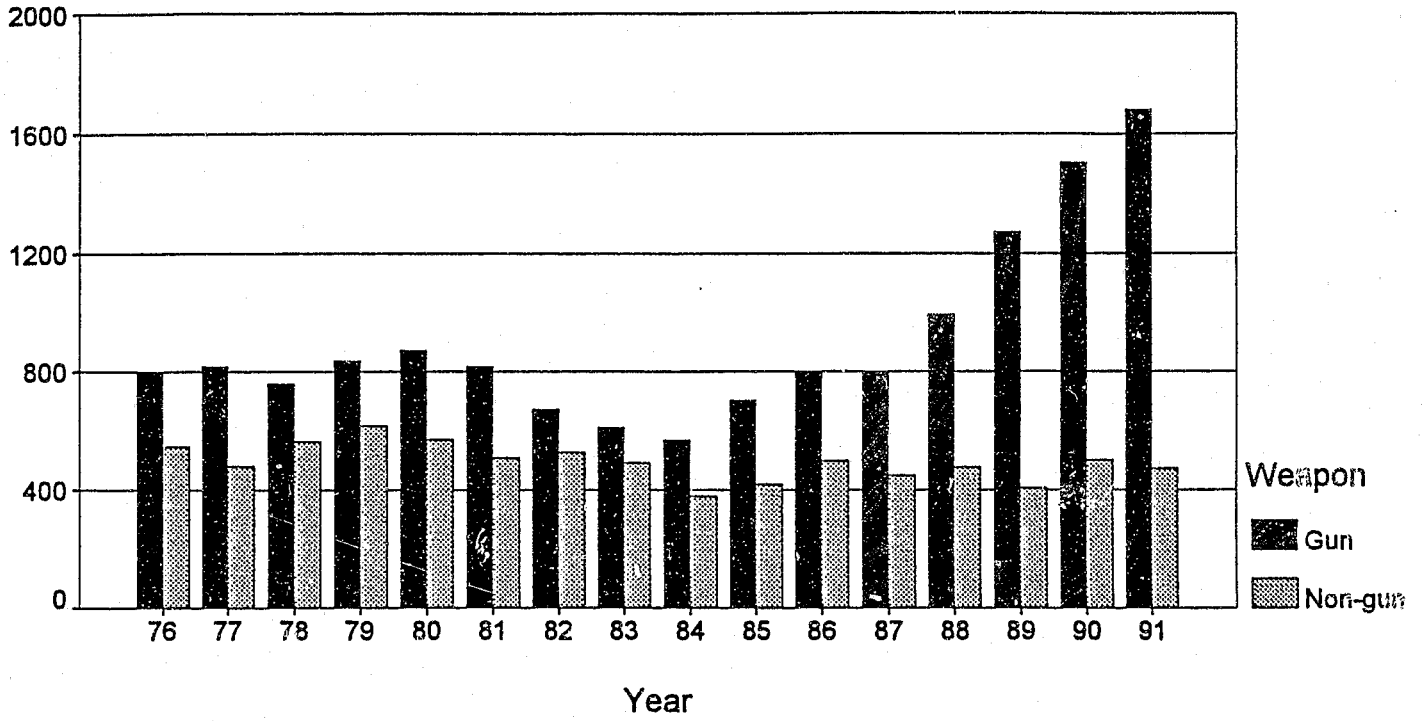


Ages 10-17

Offense Rate by Year and Age

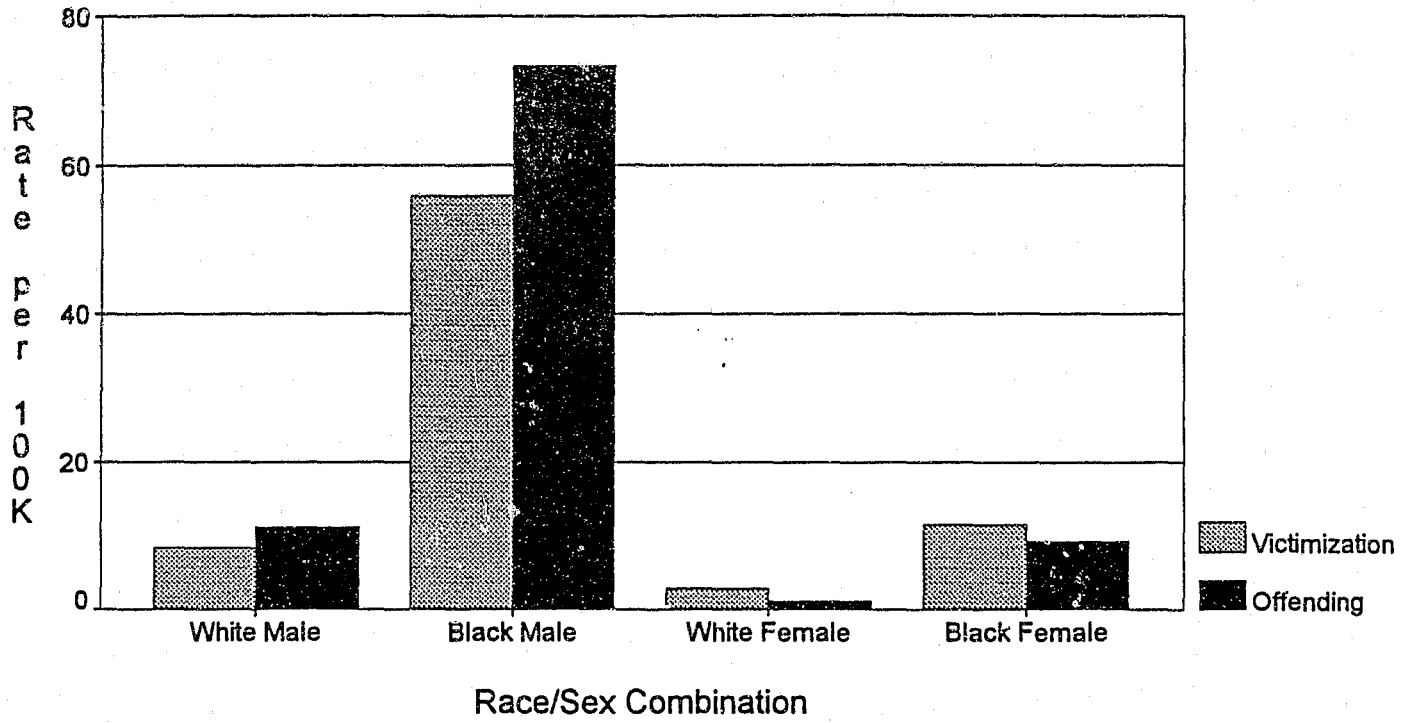


Juvenile Homicides by Year and Weapon



Offenders aged 10-17

Victimization and Offending Rates by Race and Sex



Ages 10-17