



# OJJDP Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

John J. Wilson, Acting Administrator

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## Juveniles and Violence: Juvenile Offending and Victimization

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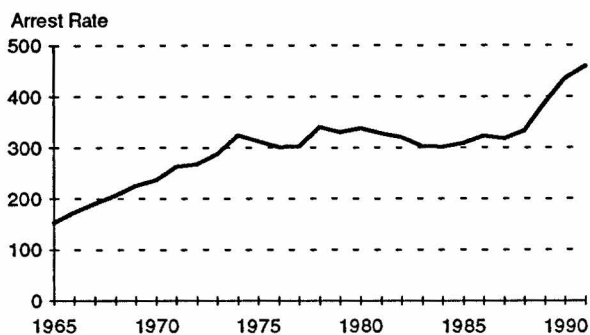
Concern is growing nationwide over the escalation in violent juvenile crime. At the same time, national trends indicate that young people are disproportionately the victims of violence. These trends directly affect the everyday lives of children, families, neighborhoods, and businesses. Violence affects the quality of life for those who experience it, witness it, or live in fear of being a victim. When young people are involved in the violence, the impact is magnified. New research documents that child maltreatment is a significant risk factor for serious delinquency. The statistical data and trends presented in this report establish the scope and trajectory of the problem and underscore the need to find solutions that change the outcomes for youth.

### Juvenile Offending

Current national data do not exist on the actual level of violent crime committed by juveniles. Policymakers and researchers rely on the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports of arrests of youth under the age of 18 as an indicator of the level of juvenile crime in the United States. Although only 5% of all juvenile arrests are for violent offenses, these arrests increased dramatically over the 5-year period from 1987 to 1991.

- Between 1987 and 1991, the number of Violent Crime Index arrests of juveniles increased by 50% — twice the increase for persons 18 years of age or older. Most alarming, juvenile arrests for murder increased by 85%, compared with 21% for those age 18 and older.
- The estimated 122,900 violent crime index arrests of juveniles in 1991 was the highest number in history, with 3,400 arrests for murder, 6,300 for forcible rape, 44,500 for robbery, and 68,700 for aggravated assault.
- Juveniles accounted for 17% of all violent crime arrests in 1991.
- Three of every 10 juvenile murder arrests involved a victim under age 18.
- Juveniles' use of guns in homicides increased from 64% to 78% between 1987 and 1991, during which time juvenile arrests for weapons violations increased 62%.
- In 1991 the nearly 50,000 juvenile weapons arrests accounted for more than 1 out of 5 weapons arrests. Black youth were arrested for weapons law violations at a rate triple that of white youth.
- The 1991 violent crime arrest rate for black youth was 5 times higher than that of white youth (1,456 per 100,000 compared with 283 per 100,000).

**Violent Crime Index arrest rates have risen sharply in recent years**

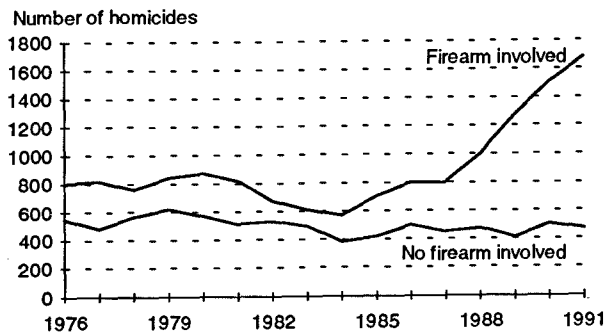


Arrest Rate = Arrests per 100,000 youth age 10-17

Note: Violent Crime Index offenses include murder, forcible rape, robbery and aggravated assault.

Data source: FBI, *Age specific and race-specific arrest rates for selected offenses 1965-1988, 1990, and unpublished 1989-1991 arrest rate data.*

### Guns are the most common weapon used in homicides by youth



Data source: FBI, *Supplemental Homicide Reports 1976-1991* (machine readable data files).

- Juvenile arrest rates for heroin/cocaine increased dramatically — more than 700% between 1980 and 1990. For black youths the rates increased more than 2,000%, compared with a 250% increase for white youth.
- In 1990, one in 5 high school students reported carrying a weapon somewhere, at least once, during the past month. One in 20 had carried a firearm.

### Percent of students saying they carried a weapon in the past month

	Total	Male	Female
Total	20%	32%	8%
White	17	19	5
Black	27	39	17
Hispanic	26	41	12

Data source: Centers for Disease Control, *Youth risk behavior survey 1990, 1991*.

- Among students who carried a weapon, knives and razors were more likely to be carried (55%) than were firearms (20%). More than half of the black males who carried a weapon carried a gun.

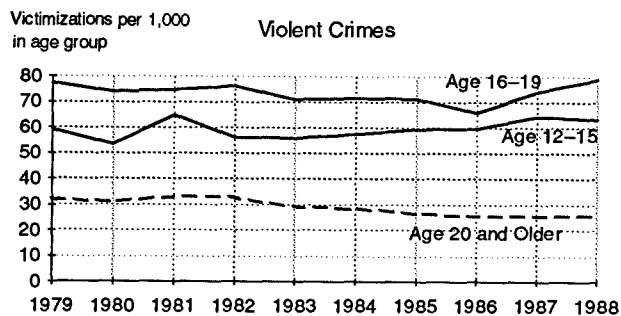
The scope and seriousness of the youth gang problem have increased in recent years. Gang violence has risen dramatically in a number of large cities, has emerged in smaller cities and communities across the country and has spread to juvenile correctional facilities. Indications are that youth gangs have become more violent, particularly those engaged in street-level drug-trafficking. Although the escalation of juvenile gang violence is a reality in many communities, there are no precise national estimates of the actual level of juvenile gang violence.

### Juvenile Victims of Violence

Contrary to popular perceptions of the risk of violent crime, teenagers are victimized at higher rates than adults. In the National Crime Victimization Surveys (1985-1988) youth under age 20 made up only 14% of the survey population, yet they accounted for 30% of violent crime victimizations.

- An estimated 960,000 youth between ages 12 and 19 were the victims of 1.9 million violent crimes — rape, robbery and assault — each year between 1985 and 1988.
- Approximately 67 out of every 1,000 teenagers were victims of a violent crime each year, compared with 26 per 1,000 persons age 20 or older (1985-1988).

### Teens are more likely than adults to be victims of violence



Note: Violent crimes include rape, robbery, aggravated assault and simple assault.

Data source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Teenage victims: A National Crime Survey report, 1991*.

- Teen victimizations were most likely to occur in or around school — 37% of the violent crime victimizations of youth between 12 and 15 years old occurred at school, compared with 17% of those 16 to 19 years of age.

### Students in schools where drugs were available fear attacks at school more than students in schools where drugs were not available

Drugs at school	Percent of students ever fearing an attack	
	At school	Going to and from school
Available	25%	16%
Not available	13	10

Data source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, *School Crime: A National Crime Victimization Survey report, 1991*.

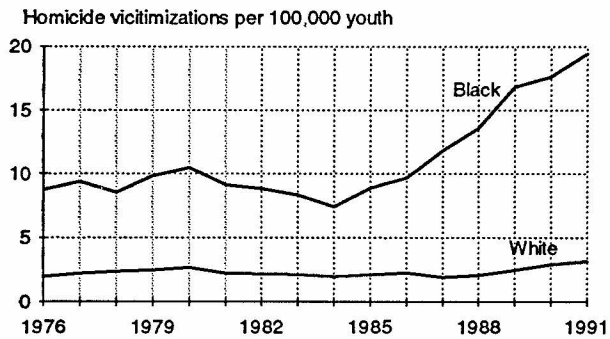
- Schools with gangs had higher victimization rates. Twelve percent of the students reporting gangs at school were victimized compared with 8% of those who reported no gang presence.

- FBI data show that in 1991 more than 2,200 youth under age 18 were murdered in the U.S. — an average of more than 6 youth homicide victims each day.

Although the prevalence of homicides of children age 13 and under has been relatively stable, teen homicides (age 14–17) have more than doubled — from 4 per 100,000 in 1984 to 11 per 100,000 in 1991.

- The 1991 homicide victimization rate among black youth was more than six times than the rate for white youth.

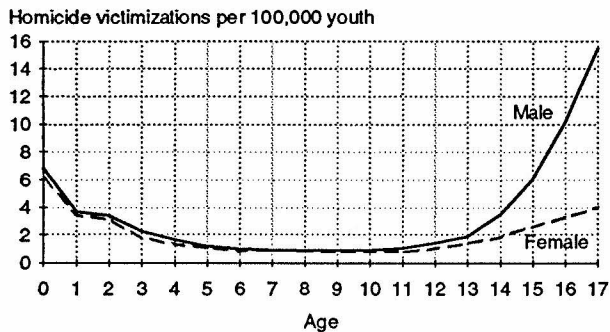
**The homicide victimization rate among black youth has increased substantially in recent years**



Data source: FBI, *Supplemental Homicide Reports 1976–1991* (machine readable data files).

- Adolescent homicide victims, those aged 10–17, were most often killed by a friend or other acquaintance (61%).
- More than 70% of teenage homicide victims were shot to death. The overwhelming majority of youth homicide victims in the 10–17 age range were male (73%).

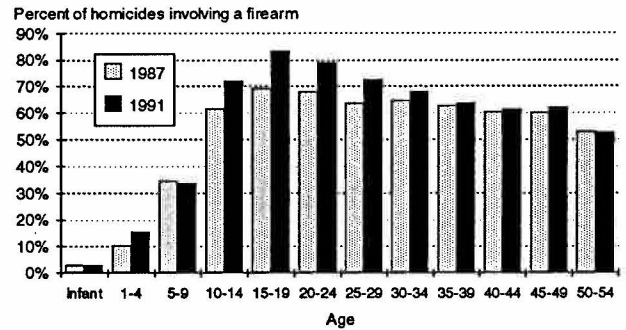
**Homicide victimization rates vary by age and sex**



Note: Rates are based on the 1976–1991 combined average.  
Data source: FBI, *Supplemental Homicide Reports 1976–1991* (machine readable data files).

- In 1991 more than 83% of murder victims between ages 15 and 19 were killed with firearms, compared with 66% of all murder victims.

**Homicides of 15–19-year-olds are most likely to involve a gun**

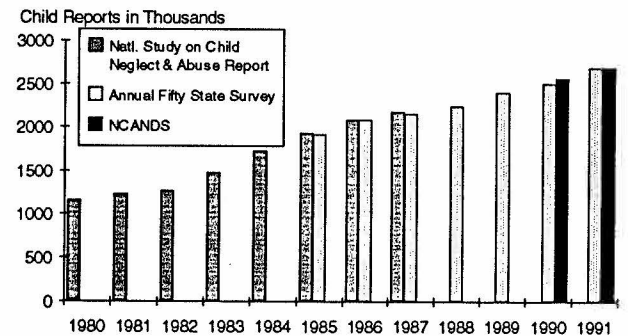


Data source: FBI, *Crime in the U.S. 1987, 1991, 1988 and 1992*.

**Child Maltreatment**

- An estimated 2.7 million children were reported to be abused or neglected in 1991.

**Child maltreatment reports have increased steadily since 1980**



Data source: National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect, *National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System: Working paper 2, 1991 summary data component, 1993*.

- Nationally, child protective service agencies received an estimated 1.8 million reports of child abuse and neglect in 1991 — 42% of which were substantiated or indicated maltreatment.
- More than 1,100 children are known to have died as a result of abuse and neglect in 1990 in the 43 States reporting such deaths. This translates into nearly 2 deaths for every 1,000 substantiated victims.
- OJJDP's Causes and Correlates of Delinquency longitudinal research program reports new findings on the effects of child abuse and neglect on subsequent

delinquency. Researchers found that virtually any level of maltreatment severe enough to come to the attention of Child Protective Services appears to be enough to put a child at risk for later involvement in delinquency. Abused children reported twice as much serious delinquency and were arrested twice as often when compared with youngsters who were not maltreated. Further, the effects of maltreatment were distinct from the effects of poverty or family structure.

### Teen Suicide

- In 1989, 2,009 youth aged 15-19 committed suicide, a rate of 11 suicides for every 100,000 youth in this age group.
- Firearms were used in 62% of the suicides among 15 to 19-year-olds.
- Between 1979 and 1989, the rate of suicide among youth aged 15-19 increased 35%.
- In 1989, 71% of the suicides of youth in the 15-19 age group were committed by white males, who had the highest rate (19 suicides per 100,000).

### A Comprehensive Strategy

Evidence continues to mount that a small proportion of offenders commit most of the serious and violent juvenile crimes. Decades of research on delinquent careers and prevention have identified the following risk factors as contributing to serious, violent and chronic juvenile crime:

- Weak family attachments.
- Lack of consistent discipline.
- Physical abuse and neglect.
- Poor school performance.
- Delinquent peer groups.
- High-crime neighborhoods.

Building on a strong foundation of basic research and on promising approaches for delinquency prevention, intervention and treatment, OJJDP has developed a Comprehensive Strategy for Serious, Violent and Chronic Offenders. Key principles for preventing and reducing at-risk behavior and juvenile delinquency include the following:

- Strengthen families in their role of providing guidance, discipline and strong values as their children's first teachers.

- Support core social institutions, including schools, churches and other local community-based organizations, to alleviate risk factors and help children develop to their full potential.
- Promote prevention strategies that reduce the impact of negative risk factors and enhance protective factors.
- Intervene immediately when delinquent behavior first occurs.
- Establish a broad range of graduated sanctions that provides both accountability and a continuum of services to respond appropriately to the needs of each delinquent offender.
- Identify and control the small percentage of juvenile offenders who are serious, violent and chronic offenders.

Acting OJJDP Administrator John J. Wilson, coauthor of the Comprehensive Strategy, stated, "OJJDP believes that nothing short of an unprecedented national commitment of public and private resources and energy are needed to reverse the rising tide of juvenile violence, juvenile victimization and family disintegration in our Nation. The current situation requires intensive, targeted intervention and cooperation at all levels in our communities, with a concentration on high-crime urban neighborhoods. That is where the problems are, and that is where the solutions will be found. We believe that affordable solutions are within our reach. We have tried to win the war on crime, drugs and street violence through expensive enforcement programs, with mixed success. It is now time to invest in a comprehensive strategy of care, prevention and treatment that focuses on our Nation's children."

### For More Information

Copies of *A Comprehensive Strategy for Serious, Violent, and Chronic Juvenile Offenders*, by John J. Wilson and James C. Howell, Ph.D., can be obtained by calling the Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse, toll free at (800) 638-8736. References for the statistics and other research cited in this report as well as related readings on juvenile violence are also available from the Clearinghouse.

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*This Fact Sheet was prepared by Barbara Allen-Hagen, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and Melissa Sickmund, Ph.D., National Center for Juvenile Justice. The graphics were developed by NCJJ for the forthcoming National Report on Juvenile Offending and Victimization, a product of the Juvenile Justice Statistics and Systems Development Program funded by OJJDP.*