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Survey of Youth in Residential Placement:

Youth Characteristics and Backgrounds

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Preface

The Survey of Youth in Residential Placement (SYRP) is the third component in the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's constellation of surveys providing updated statistics on youth in custody in the juvenile justice system. It joins the Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement and the Juvenile Residential Facility Census, which are biennial mail surveys of residential facility administrators conducted in alternating years. SYRP is a unique addition, gathering information directly from youth through anonymous interviews. This report is part of a series on the first national SYRP, covering its development and design and providing detailed information on the youth's characteristics and backgrounds, the conditions of their confinement, their needs and the services they received, and their experiences of victimization in placement.

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Introduction

This report, the second in the series, presents findings from the Survey of Youth in Residential Placement (SYRP) on the characteristics of youth in placement, including their demographic characteristics, current and prior offenses, current disposition, family and educational backgrounds, and expectations for the future. These findings are based on interviews with a nationally representative sample of 7,073 youth in 2003, using audio-computer-assisted-self-interview (ACASI) methodology. The first report in this series, *Introduction to the Survey of Youth in Residential Placement* (Sedlak, 2010), summarizes the study design and implementation.

The SYRP sample was drawn from the full population of state and local facilities identified by the Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement and Juvenile Residential Facility Census surveys. SYRP youth resided in a nationally representative selection of 205 eligible, responsive facilities listed on the census as of 2002. These included detention and corrections facilities; community-based facilities such as shelters, group homes, and independent living programs; and camp programs, such as boot camps and forestry camps. The SYRP survey team interviewed the youth between the beginning of March and mid-June 2003.

Each participant in the SYRP sample is weighted to reflect the number of youth he or she represents in the national population of youth in custody. These weights allow the sample youth (n=7,073) to provide estimates about the full placement population (estimated at more than 100,000 youth, on a given day). All SYRP reports present findings in terms of estimated numbers (rounded to the nearest multiple of 10) and percentages (rounded to the nearest whole percent) in the national population of youth in residential placement.

Readers should note that the number of youth in residential placement has dramatically decreased since 2003 when the SYRP data were collected. The most recent data available indicate that, on October 22, 2014, juvenile residential placement facilities held 50,821 youth nationwide (OJJDP *Statistical Briefing Book*).

Demographic Characteristics

SYRP targets youth in placement who are between 10 and 20 years old. Based on the SYRP interviews in spring 2003, an estimated 101,040 youth in this age range are in residential placement in the United States because they were arrested for, charged with or adjudicated for an offense. Table 1 shows that this reflects a placement rate of 224 youth per 100,000 in the general population—about one-fourth of 1% of 10- to 20-year-olds nationwide.¹

Sex

Females comprise 15% of all youth in residential placement. The placement rate for females is less than one-fifth the rate for males (70 females versus 370 males per 100,000).² The data do not indicate how much of this difference stems from lower rates of offending, apprehension/arrest, or placement.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Youth in Placement in 2003

Demographic Characteristic	Estimated Number of Youth (95% CI)		Percent (95% CI)		Placement Rate per 100,000 General Population Youth (95% CI)	
All youth in placement	101,040	(92,580–109,490)	100%		224	(205–243)
Sex						
Male	85,720	(76,970–94,460)	85	(81–89)	370	(332–408)
Female	15,320	(11,390–19,250)	15	(11–19)	70	(52–88)
Age						
10 to 12*	1,240	(780–1,710)	1	(1–2)	10	(6–13)
13	3,460	(2,680–4,230)	3	(3–4)	80	(62–98)
14	9,720	(8,370–11,070)	10	(8–11)	233	(201–266)
15	19,320	(17,130–21,510)	19	(17–21)	469	(416–522)
16	26,210	(22,930–29,490)	26	(24–28)	646	(565–726)
17	25,130	(22,110–28,150)	25	(23–27)	612	(538–686)
18	10,710	(8,560–12,860)	11	(9–12)	262	(210–315)
19	3,250	(2,520–3,970)	3	(3–4)	86	(67–105)
20	2,000	(1,580–2,430)	2	(2–2)	53	(42–64)
Race/Ethnicity†						
White only, non-Hispanic	34,160	(29,650–38,680)	35	(31–38)	123	(106–139)
Black or African American only, non-Hispanic	31,180	(25,790–36,570)	32	(27–36)	463	(383–544)
Hispanic (any race)	23,880	(20,930–26,840)	24	(21–27)	317	(278–357)
Other single race, non-Hispanic	3,110	(2,060–4,170)	3	(2–4)	145	(96–194)
Mixed race, non-Hispanic	6,380	(5,350–7,410)	6	(6–7)	751	(629–873)

Notes: Estimated totals are rounded to the nearest multiple of 10. CI = confidence interval. The 95-percent confidence interval (CI) indexes the precision of an estimate, specifying the range in which the estimate would fall in 95 out of 100 comparable replications of the study. The placement rates in the last column are computed as ratios of the estimated number of youth in placement to the number of youth in the general population in the demographic group. The general population information is derived from census estimates for April 2003 (U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, 2004). See Endnote 1.

* Estimates for this category are less reliable, based on fewer than 100 participating youth.

† Excludes youth who did not respond to the race/ethnicity categories and those who chose only the “some other race” answer in response ($n = 170$ of the survey participants, or 2.3% of the estimated youth in placement).

Age

The majority of youth in placement (51%) are 16 or 17 years old, whereas only about one-third (32%) are 13–15 years old. More than 15% are ages 18–20 years; preteens (ages 10–12 years) comprise only 1% of the placement population.³

OFFENSE QUESTIONS

The SYRP interview asked youth about their offenses by presenting a series of five lists twice. The first time occurred early in the interview, when SYRP asked the youth to indicate the offenses that led to their current stay in custody by selecting all items in each lists that applied.^a Later in the interview, youth were asked to indicate all offenses they were convicted of at any time in the past.^b

FIRST LIST

- Violating curfew
- Running away from home
- Running away from a placement or facility^c
- Skipping school without an excuse
- Using or having alcohol in your possession
- Violating house arrest or electronic monitoring

SECOND LIST

- Selling drugs
- Using or having an illegal drug in your possession
- Testing positive for using drugs^c

THIRD LIST

- Using force or threat to get money or things from someone, also known as robbery
- Attacking or hitting someone, also known as assault
- Having or trying to have sexual relations with someone against their will
- Killing someone
- Kidnapping someone

FOURTH LIST

- Stealing or trying to steal a car or other motor vehicle
- Taking a car or other motor vehicle for a drive without the owner's permission
- Breaking into a locked building to steal something, also known as burglary
- Stealing or trying to steal money or things, also known as theft
- Purposely setting fire to a house, building, car or other property
- Purposely damaging or destroying property that did not belong to you

FIFTH LIST

- Driving a car under the influence of alcohol or drugs
- Being drunk in public
- Carrying a weapon
- Being paid for having sexual relations with someone
- Trespassing
- Something else

^a Each list included "none of the above" as an alternative. The exact wording of the question introducing each list depended on two conditions: (1) if the youth indicated they had been convicted of the offenses that led to their current time in custody, the question asked what they were "convicted of" doing; otherwise, it asked what they were "accused of" doing; (2) if youth indicated they were in custody because they violated the conditions of their probation or parole, the question asked what they were (convicted/accused) of doing that violated the terms of their probation or parole; otherwise, it simply asked what they were (convicted/accused) of doing that led to their current custody.

^b The introductions to these questions, stressed they were about prior convictions; youth were instructed not to include the offenses that led to their current stay, which they reported earlier in the interview.

^c This alternative was presented only in the current offense list to youth who said they were in custody for violating the conditions of their probation/parole.

Race/ethnicity

SYRP adopted the methodology used in the 2000 decennial census, asking separate questions about Hispanic ethnicity and race and permitting youth to select more than one race. Table 1 classifies the youth into mutually exclusive categories that correspond to available census tabulations (U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, 2004). Youth who identify as Hispanic are classified separately⁴ and non-Hispanic youth who identify as a single race are classified separately from those who select more than one race.⁵

About one-third (35%) of youth in residential placement are White non-Hispanic and no other race. Nearly another one-third (32%) are Black or African American and no other race, and close to one-fourth (24%) are Hispanic. Very few identify themselves as any other single race category—3% classify as American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, or Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander. An estimated 6% identify as multiracial.

The placement rates for these subgroups are quite different, as table 1 shows. With one exception, placement rates for all listed race/ethnicity groups differ significantly from each other. The exception is that the placement rate for whites (123 per 100,000) does not differ statistically from the rate for "other single race" (145 per 100,000). Compared with these placement rates, which are the lowest, the placement rates of other

rates/ethnicities are disproportionately higher: 463 per 100,000 for Black/African American youth, 317 per 100,000 for Hispanic youth, and 751 per 100,000 for mixed race youth.⁶

Sex Differences in Age and Race

Females in the placement population are younger than males by an average of 6 months, a statistically significant difference.⁷ More females than males are ages 13–15 (43% versus 30%), whereas fewer females than males are ages 18–20 (7% versus 17%). Females are also a significantly smaller percentage of Black/African American youth in placement (11% of Black/African American youth are females versus 17% for other races).

Current Offenses

What types of offenders are youth in residential placement? The SYRP interview asks youth about all the offenses that led to their current stay in the residential facility. Youth who are not yet adjudicated are asked what offenses they were accused of, and adjudicated youth are asked to select the offenses for which they were convicted.⁸ The interview presents the offense questions in a series of five lists, asking youth to indicate all the offenses on each list that led directly to their current stay in placement. The sidebar presents these lists, giving the exact wording of the answer alternatives that described the offenses.

All Current Offenses

Nearly one-third of the youth (31%) report just one offense. Another one-third (33%) indicate two or three offenses on these lists, and the remaining one-third (34%) acknowledge four or more of the listed offenses.⁹

Table 2 shows the distribution of youth by all offenses they say led to their current placement. Youth are counted in every offense category they report, so the rows in the table sum to more than the overall population in placement and the percentages sum to more than 100 percent. An estimated 11% of all youth in placement report murder, rape, or kidnapping as a current offense; 14% report robbery, and 26% report some type of assault. A combined total of an estimated 43% of the placement population acknowledges one or more of these person offenses as leading to their current placement. More than one-third of the youth (35%) say they are in placement because they were accused or found guilty of burglary, arson, or theft, and more than one-fourth (28%) indicate they are in placement for one of the other property crimes, such as vandalism, trespassing, or joyriding. Taken together, property offenses are reasons for placement for 45% of the youth.

More than one-fourth of the youth (28%) indicate that their current placement stems from a drug offense, and nearly one-fourth (23%) report one or more offenses in the category of public order offenses (driving under the influence, being drunk in public, carrying a weapon, or prostitution). More than two in five youth (42%) give one or more status offenses as the reason they are in placement (violating curfew, running away from home, truancy, possessing alcohol), and almost one-

third (30%) report a technical violation (violating house arrest or electronic monitoring, running away from a placement or facility, testing positive for drugs). One-fourth (26%) say that they are in placement because of an offense not mentioned on the SYRP lists.

Probation/Parole Violators As Compared to Other Youth

In other placement data collections, probation/parole violation typically accounts for the vast majority of “technical violations.” SYRP designers wanted to determine whether youth who violated the terms of their probation or parole did so by committing another classifiable offense. Therefore, before presenting the offense lists, SYRP asks youth whether they are in placement because they were told they had violated the terms of their probation or parole. Nearly three in five youth (58%, an estimated 58,180) answer “yes” to this question. These youth respond to the offense lists by

Table 2. Offenses Leading to Youth’s Current Placement in 2003

Current Offense	All Youth in Placement, 2003			Percentage of Probation/Parole Violators (95% CI) (N = 58,180)	Percentage of Non-Violators (95% CI) (N = 42,700)
	Estimated Number (95% CI)		Percentage (95% CI)		
All offenses	101,040 (92,580–109,490)		100%	100%	100%
Person	43,320 (39,650–46,990)		43 (41–45)	36 (34–38)	53 (50–55)
<i>Murder, rape, kidnapping</i>	10,730 (9,070–12,400)		11 (9–12)	5 (4–6)	18 (15–21)
<i>Robbery</i>	14,520 (12,710–16,330)		14 (13–16)	13 (11–15)	16 (15–18)
<i>Assault with a weapon</i>	9,310 (8,230–10,390)		9 (8–10)	9 (8–10)	10 (9–12)
<i>Assault without a weapon</i>	17,110 (15,040–19,180)		17 (16–18)	18 (16–20)	16 (14–17)
Property	45,310 (40,270–50,350)		45 (43–47)	46 (44–49)	43 (41–45)
<i>Burglary, arson, or theft</i>	35,190 (31,090–39,290)		35 (33–37)	36 (33–38)	34 (31–36)
<i>Other property</i>	28,060 (24,970–31,150)		28 (26–29)	32 (29–34)	22 (21–24)
Drug	28,590 (25,290–31,900)		28 (26–30)	34 (32–36)	21 (18–23)
Public order	23,080 (20,340–25,820)		23 (21–25)	24 (22–26)	21 (19–23)
Status†	42,760 (38,560–46,960)		42 (40–44)	59 (57–62)	19 (18–21)
Technical violation*	30,730 (27,670–33,800)		30 (29–32)	53 (50–55)	NA
Other	26,100 (23,030–29,160)		26 (24–27)	30 (27–32)	21 (19–23)

Notes: CI = confidence interval; NA = not applicable. The 95-percent confidence interval (CI) indexes the precision of an estimate, specifying the range in which the estimate would fall in 95 out of 100 comparable replications of the study. Estimated totals are rounded to the nearest multiple of 10. Rows sum to more than the estimated total number of youth in placement because youth are classified in every offense category they reported. The table excludes 139 participating youth (representing 2.3% of the estimated total placement population) who do not indicate any current offense among those listed. Youth not yet adjudicated are classified according to the offense(s) they are charged with or are accused of committing.

* This category includes violations of probation or parole that are not classifiable as offenses in other categories in this table (e.g., testing positive for drugs, violating house arrest or electronic monitoring, or running away from a placement or facility).

† A status offense is an offense only prohibited for a certain group of people, here defined by age (e.g., a person under age 18 drinking alcohol).

indicating what they did (or what they were accused of doing) that violated their probation/parole conditions, whereas other youth indicate simply what they were convicted of, arrested for, or accused of doing that led to their current placement. Table 2 shows that probation/parole violators and nonviolators offer different profiles of offenses as reasons for their current placements. The differences are significant in all but two categories: assault with a weapon and index property offenses (burglary, arson, and theft).¹⁰ The largest differences occur for person offenses (reported by notably fewer probation/parole violators, primarily in the murder, rape, and kidnapping category), status offenses (reported by the majority of probation/parole violators), and technical violations (only applicable to probation/parole violators and indicated by more than half of these youth).

Circumstances of Current Offenses

SYRP asks youth about specific circumstances of the offenses that led to their current placement, focusing on features that could affect adjudication, disposition, and placement decisions. Youth are asked whether they were under the influence of alcohol or drugs and whether they had accomplices during any of the offenses that led to their current placement. Youth who report person offenses are also asked whether a weapon was involved, whether anyone was injured, and, if so, how many victims were injured.

As table 3 shows, a substantial percentage of youth in placement (44%) acknowledge that they were (or were accused of being) under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol at the time of one or more of the offenses that led to their current placement. These youth predominantly say this involved both drugs and alcohol (21% report both, 18% report drugs alone, and 5% report alcohol alone). Table 3 also gives the percentage of youth in each offense category who indicate they were (or were accused of being) under the influence at the time of the offense. Not surprisingly, the highest level of substance involvement is for youth with drug offenses, with 61% of youth in this category reporting being under the influence at the time.

Public order offenses, which include driving under the influence and public drunkenness, also have a high rate of substance involvement, with 58% of youth who report offenses in this category acknowledging substance influence. Overall, only slightly more than one-third of person offenders say their offenses occurred while they were under the influence (36%), but percentages are notably higher for robbery (47%) and assault with a weapon (52%). About one-half of youth who are in placement for status offenses or technical violations (51%) were under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol at the time of those offenses.

Table 3 also shows the percentage of youth in each category who say they committed (or were accused of committing) their offenses with others. Most youth (55%) had accomplices during the offenses that led to their current placement. This is especially true for youth in placement for property offenses (67%) or robbery (62%). Accomplices accompanied more than one-half of youth who report assault with a weapon (55%), drug offenses (52%), public order offenses (51%), and status offenses (52%). Even in the offense categories with the lowest involvement of accomplices, about one-third of youth say that they committed these offenses with others.

Table 3. Percentage of Youth in Placement in 2003 Who Were Under the Influence of Alcohol or Drugs or Acted With an Accomplice During Their Current Offense

Current Offense	Percentage of Youth With the Current Offense Who Were . . .		Odds of Being Under the Influence if With Accomplice (OR)
	Under the Influence of Alcohol or Drugs (95% CI)	With An Accomplice (95% CI)	
All youth	44 (42–46)	55 (54–57)	2.9
Person	36 (34–39)	44 (42–46)	2.5
<i>Murder, rape, kidnapping</i>	29 (24–33)	31 (27–36)	2.1
<i>Robbery</i>	47 (43–51)	62 (59–65)	2.1
<i>Assault with a weapon</i>	52 (48–56)	55 (49–61)	2.1
<i>Assault without a weapon</i>	29 (25–34)	32 (30–35)	2.2
Property	46 (43–48)	67 (64–69)	3.0
<i>Burglary, arson, or theft</i>	46 (44–49)	70 (67–73)	2.8
<i>Other property</i>	47 (44–50)	63 (60–66)	4.1
Drug	61 (59–64)	52 (49–55)	4.8
Public order	58 (55–61)	51 (47–54)	4.4
Status	51 (47–54)	52 (49–54)	4.2
Technical violation	51 (48–54)	34 (31–37)	2.2

Notes: CI = confidence interval; OR = odds ratio. The 95-percent confidence interval (CI) indexes the precision of an estimate, specifying the range in which the estimate would fall in 95 out of 100 comparable replications of the study. The table excludes 139 participating youth (representing an estimated 2.3% of the total placement population) who do not indicate any current offense among those listed. Youth not yet adjudicated are classified according to the offense(s) they are charged with or are accused of committing.

Youth who say they were with accomplices at the time of the offenses that led to their placement are much more likely to report that they committed, or were accused of committing, these offenses while under the influence of drugs or alcohol. For instance, considering youth who report a public order offense, 40% of those who were not with accomplices but 75% of those who were with accomplices were under the influence at the time. Odds ratios compare the chances that an event will occur under different circumstances. Table 3 gives the odds ratios for youth being under the influence given that they were with accomplices at the time of the offenses that led to their current placement.¹¹

All odds ratios in table 3 are statistically significant. Regardless of the offense involved, youth who are with others during an offense are far more likely to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol. For person offenders, the odds of being under the influence are more than twice as great when the youth is with accomplices. This is also true for youth whose offense is a technical violation of probation or parole conditions. Youth who commit property offenses while with accomplices have three times the odds of doing so while under the influence, but the effect is much more pronounced (more than four times the odds) for those who report the less serious property offenses (e.g., trespassing, vandalism, joyriding). Among youth in placement for public order or status offenses, the odds that they commit this offense while under the influence of drugs or alcohol are also more than four times as high if they were with accomplices at the time. The strongest association between accomplices and substance use occurs for drug offenders, who are nearly five times as likely to be

under the influence when they act with accomplices. Although these findings are essentially correlational in that they do not indicate any causal directionality, they reveal an important dynamic underlying juvenile offenses: drug or alcohol use during delinquent behavior tends to occur more often in contexts with accomplices.

Table 4 reveals that 38% of youth in placement because of a person offense used a weapon.¹² About two-thirds of youth in placement for murder or kidnapping say they used (or were accused of using) weapons, as do more than one-half of youth in placement for robbery and more than one-third of those in placement for assault. Among youth with person offenses, those who report using weapons least frequently were those with a rape offense (9%).

The majority of person offenders using weapons (55%) identify these as a firearm (handgun, rifle, shotgun, or military type weapon); 37% report sharp implements (knife, scissors, or pencil), 13% indicate blunt objects (rock, club), and 23% say they used some other type of weapon. One-fourth (25%) of youth who indicate weapon use identify more than one type of weapon, so these percentages sum to more than 100.

Table 4 also shows that nearly one-half of the youth in placement for person offenses injured their victims (48%). (By definition, this includes all youth in placement for murder.) The majority of youth in placement for assault (59%) and/or kidnapping (53%) report that they injured their victims, as do about one-third of those in placement for robbery (37%) and one-fifth of those in placement for rape (21%). Among youth who report injuring victims, more than one-half indicate injuring one victim (53%), more than one-fourth (29%) say they injured two or three individuals, and 18% injured three or more victims.

Table 4. Youth's Weapon Use and Victim Injury During Their Current Person Offenses*

Current Offense	Youth in Placement in 2003 for a Person Offense			Odds of Injuring Victim if Using a Weapon (OR)
	Estimated Number (95% CI)	Percentage Using Weapon (95% CI)	Percentage Injuring Victim (95% CI)	
All youth	43,320 (39,650–46,990)	38 (35–40)	48 (46–50)	2.6
Murder, rape, kidnapping	10,730 (9,070–12,400)	24 (20–28)	40 (35–45)	15.1
Murder	2,560 (1,970–3,140)	69 (61–77)	100 NA	NA
Rape	7,950 (6,280–9,620)	9 (7–12)	21 (15–27)	5.5
Kidnapping†	1,150 (790–1,510)	64 (55–73)	53 (42–65)	7.9
Robbery	14,520 (12,710–16,330)	53 (49–56)	37 (33–40)	2.4
Assault	26,420 (23,640–29,200)	35 (33–38)	59 (57–62)	2.3

Notes: CI = confidence interval; OR = odds ratio; NA = Not applicable (no variability in this condition). The 95-percent confidence interval (CI) indexes the precision of an estimate, specifying the range in which the estimate would fall in 95 out of 100 comparable replications of the study. Estimated totals are rounded to the nearest multiple of 10. Rows sum to more than the estimated total number of person offenders because youth are classified in every offense category they report. Youth not yet adjudicated are classified according to the offense(s) they are charged with or accused of committing.

* Questions about weapon use and victims were only asked of youth who reported a person offense as a reason for their current placement.

† Estimates in this category are less reliable because they are based on fewer than 100 cases.

Table 4 presents the ratio of the odds of injuring a victim when using a weapon relative to the odds of injuring a victim without a weapon. All odds ratios are statistically significant. In all categories of offenses, youth using weapons are significantly more likely to injure their victims. This is especially true of those who are in placement for the most violent crimes (murder, rape, and/or kidnapping). The odds that these youth injured their victims are more than 15 times greater if they had a weapon at the time of the offense than if they did not.

Most Serious Current Offense

All tables to this point have considered all offenses leading to a youth's current placement. Although that perspective reveals how circumstances differ across offense categories, an alternative approach that classifies youth according to their most serious current offense provides more information about the population of offenders in residential placement. Moreover, as discussed later in the "Conclusions" section below, this strategy corresponds to the approach used in OJJDP's Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement (CJRP).

Table 5 shows the distribution of the juvenile residential population by the most serious offense the youth report as the reason for their current placement. This classification uses the list order in the table to rank offense categories from most to least serious.

An estimated 11% of all youth in placement in 2003 report murder, rape, or kidnapping as their most serious current offense. Taken together with those who report robbery and assault with a weapon, an estimated 30% of youth are in their current placement because they were accused or convicted of one of the more serious violent offenses. Considering that simple assault (with no weapon)¹³ is the most serious reason for the placement of another estimated 13% of youth, person offenses account for the current placements of an estimated 43% of the placement population).¹⁴

An estimated 19% of youth report one of the index property crimes (arson, burglary, or theft), while 7% indicate other property crimes (vandalism, trespassing, joyriding) as their most serious current offense charge or conviction. Thus, some form of property offense is the most serious reason for the current placement of about one-fourth (26%) of youth. Current placements stem from drug offenses for an estimated 10% of youth and from public order charges for 3% of youth who identify current offenses. Another estimated 10% are in placement because of status offenses, whereas only 3% report that they are in their current placement because of nothing more serious than a technical violation and 4% report an offense not listed explicitly in the SYRP interview as the most serious reason they currently are in placement.

The survey asks whether youth were involved in a gang at the time of any of the offenses that led to their current placement. More than one-fourth (28%) say that they were members of a gang at the time of their current offense. In general, percentages reporting gang membership are higher among the more serious current offenders and lower for youth whose most serious current offense is lower in the hierarchy. The highest levels of gang membership are among youth who list robbery (45%) or assault with a weapon (40%) as their most serious current offense, whereas youth who are in placement because of status offenses or technical violations report notably lower levels of gang involvement (18% and 17%, respectively).

Table 5. Most Serious Offense Leading to Youth's Current Placement in 2003 and Their Most Serious Career Offense

Offense	Youth With Offense as Most Serious Leading to Current Placement			Youth With Offense as Most Serious of Career		
	Estimated Number* (95% CI)		Percent (95% CI)	Estimated Number* (95% CI)		Percent (95% CI)
All youth	101,040	(92,580–109,490)	100	101,040	(92,580–109,490)	100
Person	43,320	(39,650–46,990)	43 (41–45)	57,410	(52,820–62,000)	57 (55–59)
<i>Murder, rape, kidnapping</i>	10,730	(9,070–12,400)	11 (9–13)	13,310	(11,540–15,070)	13 (11–15)
<i>Robbery</i>	13,010	(11,380–14,640)	13 (12–15)	17,610	(15,530–19,680)	18 (16–19)
<i>Assault with a weapon</i>	6,130	(5,300–6,970)	6 (6–7)	8,460	(7,340–9,590)	8 (8–9)
<i>Assault without a weapon</i>	13,440	(11,770–15,120)	14 (12–15)	18,030	(15,870–20,190)	18 (17–20)
Property	25,420	(22,180–28,670)	26 (24–27)	25,990	(22,900–29,090)	26 (25–27)
<i>Burglary, arson, or theft</i>	18,920	(16,280–21,560)	19 (18–21)	20,120	(17,710–22,520)	20 (19–21)
<i>Other property</i>	6,510	(5,510–7,510)	7 (6–7)	5,880	(4,690–7,060)	6 (5–7)
Drug	9,380	(8,110–10,640)	10 (8–11)	7,340	(6,230–8,460)	7 (6–8)
Public order	3,220	(2,640–3,810)	3 (3–4)	1,750	(1,360–2,140)	2 (1–2)
Status	9,880	(8,370–11,390)	10 (9–11)	4,930	(3,660–6,200)	5 (4–6)
Technical violation	3,080	(2,460–3,710)	3 (3–4)	630††	(400–860)	1† (<1–1)
Other	4,420	(3,530–5,310)	4 (4–5)	1,880	(1,460–2,300)	2 (1–2)

Notes: CI = confidence interval. Estimated totals are rounded to the nearest multiple of 10; estimated percentages are rounded to the nearest whole percentage. The percentages shown are based only on youth with identified offenses, excluding youth who did not provide an answer, as described below.

* Columns sum to slightly less than the estimated total number of youth in placement because of participants who answered "none of the above" or "don't know" to the offense questions or said they would rather not answer these questions. This precluded current offense estimates for 2.3% of the population (139 survey participants) and career offense estimates for 1.1% of the population (64 survey participants).

† Estimates in this category are less reliable, based on fewer than 100 participating youth.

Youth who say they are in their current placement because of a person offense are also asked if they knew any of their victims and, if so, to indicate the nature of the relationship. Most person offenders (69%) were acquainted with their victims. These include youth who report victimizing their parents or stepparents (12%), foster parents or grandparents (3%); siblings or stepsiblings (13%); other relatives (7%); friends or ex-friends (22%), boyfriends, girlfriends, or ex-boyfriends/girlfriends (8%), teachers or students at school (24%), and other acquaintances (23%).¹⁵

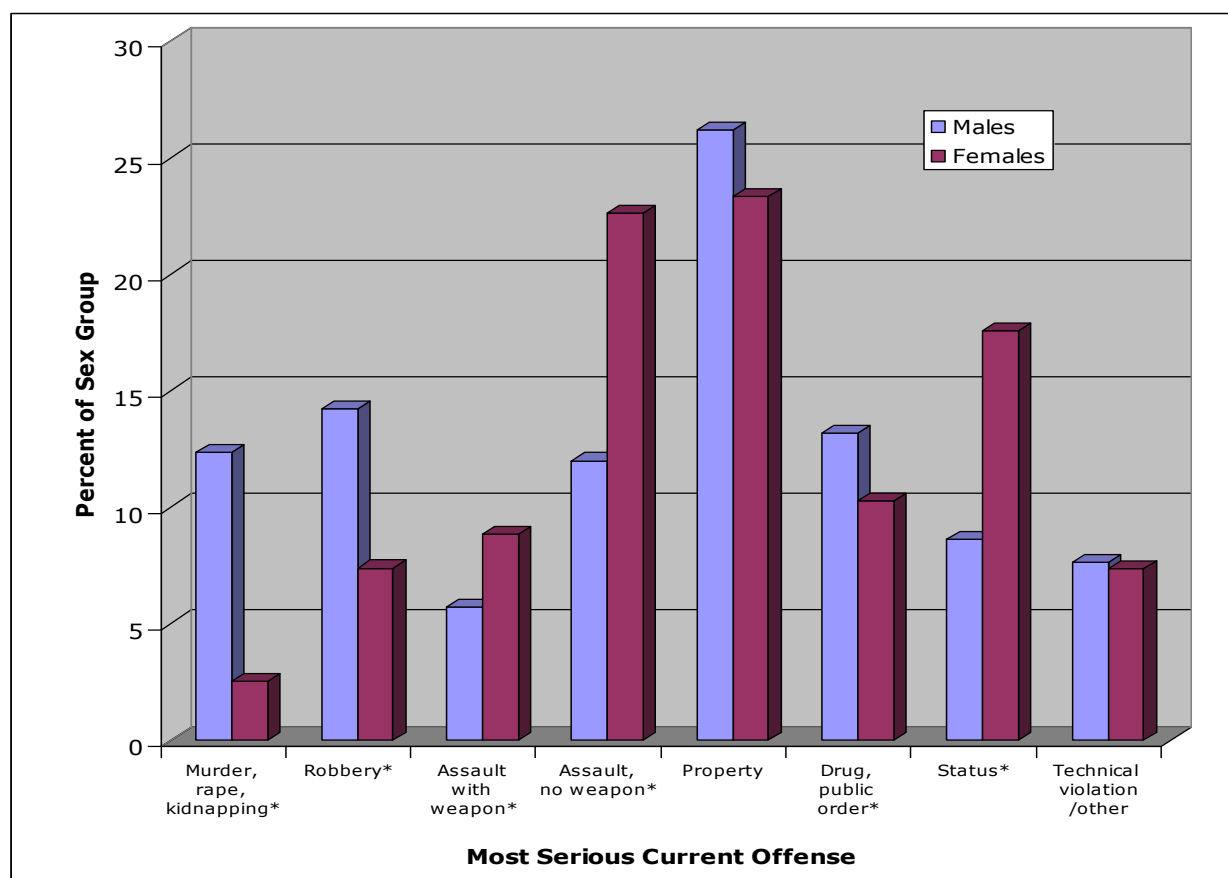
Sex Differences in Current Offenses

Males and females differ in their offense patterns; figure 1 shows males and females by their most serious current offense category. The differences are significant in six of the eight offense categories in the figure (the only categories where males' and females' percentages do not differ are property

offenses and technical violations/other offenses). Significantly higher percentages of males than females are in placement for murder, rape, or kidnapping (12% versus 3%), robbery (14% versus 7%), and drug or public order offenses (13% versus 10%). In contrast, females are more likely than males to have a status offense (18% versus 9%) or an assault, whether with a weapon (9% versus 6%) or without a weapon (23% versus 12%), as the most serious reason for their current placement.

A higher percentage of females than males report being under the influence of drugs or alcohol at the time of their current offense (48% versus 43%). Although fewer females than males were under the influence of alcohol alone (3% versus 5%) and about the same percentage of each sex were under the influence of drugs alone (18%), females more often than males say that they were under the combined influence of both drugs and alcohol (27% versus 20%) at the time of their offense. The percentage of youth who act with accomplices during their current offense does not differ by sex, but females are less likely than males to report being members of a gang at the time of the offenses leading to their current placement (23% versus 29%).

Figure 1. Males and Females in Placement in 2003 by their Most Serious Current Offense



* Statistically significant differences in percentage of males and percentage of females with the offense.

Among person offenders, females are significantly more likely to know their victims (82% versus 67%). This reflects the fact that more females than males say their victims are parents or stepparents (26% versus 10%), their romantic partners or ex-partners (18% versus 7%), and teachers or students at school (32% versus 23%). Also, whereas the males and females in the person offender group do not differ in whether they had (or were accused of having) a weapon during the offense leading to

their current placement, they do report distinctly different kinds of weapons. Among youth who report a weapon, significantly more males than females indicate a firearm (58% versus 34%), whereas females are more likely than males to report use of a sharp object (61% versus 33%).

Patterns of Involvement in the Juvenile Justice System

Career Offense Profiles

Characterizing types of offenders in placement solely on the basis of their most recent offenses provides a limited perspective on this population. Current offenses are generally not the sole consideration when a court decides whether and where to place youth. The youth's overall offense history is also a key consideration. Knowing about a youth's offense history is perhaps especially important when describing youth who are in their current placement because of technical violations of probation or parole, because one needs to know their prior convictions to understand better their historical offense patterns, needs, and challenges. To provide a richer perspective on the kinds of offenders in placement, the SYRP interview also asks about previous convictions (i.e., offenses for which the youth pled guilty or were found guilty by a judge), again using the series of five offense lists so that youth could select all offenses for which they had been convicted in the past. Combining all information about a youth's offenses (that is, identifying the most serious offense across all prior convictions as well as the current placing offenses) summarizes the youth's offense career. Table 5 shows that this overall career offense profile is shifted upward in the offense hierarchy relative to the current offense profile, with career offense histories showing higher percentages of youth who are person offenders and lower percentages in the less serious offense categories. Specifically, career offense profiles show that the majority of youth in placement (57%) are or have been person offenders. Although the percentage of property offenders remains at about one in four (26%) in the career offense hierarchy, a smaller percentage of the placement population fall below that level in comparison to the current offense profile.

Prior Involvement

The SYRP interview also asks youth whether, before their current stay in placement, they were ever taken into placement and kept overnight ("put in a facility where you stayed overnight for getting into trouble with the law") or were ever placed on probation or parole. Youth's answers to these questions, together with their responses about any prior convictions, classify them into three general levels of prior involvement with the juvenile justice system: youth with a prior conviction, youth with prior placement or probation but no prior conviction, and youth with no prior involvement. Table 6 shows the most serious career offense for youth in these three groups. (The rows in this table combine some of the table 5 career offense categories.) Note that this "no prior involvement" classification can include youth with previous arrests or court referrals that did not result in conviction, probation/parole, or time in placement.

The most striking findings in table 6 are the numbers of youth in each category of prior involvement. The large majority of youth in placement have prior convictions—an estimated 84,390 youth, or 85% of youth in placement). An estimated 10,180 youth, reflecting 10% of the total population, report no prior convictions but indicate that they were kept overnight for getting into

Table 6. Youth's Most Serious Career Offense in 2003, by Their Prior Involvement in the Justice System

Most Serious Career Offense	Prior Involvement in Justice System		
	No Prior Placement, Probation, or Conviction	Custody or Probation Only	Any Prior Conviction
Total N, 100%	5,170 (4,290–6,060)	10,180 (8,540–11,810)	84,390 (76,950–91,830)
Murder, rape, kidnapping	35	13*	12
Other person, property	46	52	74
Drug, public order	9*	10*	9
Other	9*	25	5

Notes: "Prior involvement" was defined by youth's responses indicating that they had any prior conviction, or that they had ever been put on probation or were ever kept overnight for getting into trouble with the law. CI = confidence interval. Estimated totals are rounded to the nearest multiple of 10. The 95-percent confidence interval (CI) indexes the precision of an estimate, specifying the range in which the estimate would fall in 95 out of 100 comparable replications of the study. "Don't know" responses and/or refusals to answer specific component questions precluded classification of the most serious career offense for 64 survey participants and determination of prior involvement in the justice system for an additional 70 participants. These youth represent 2.1% of the total custody population.

* The estimate for this category is less reliable, based on fewer than 100 participating youth in the numerator.

trouble with the law or were placed on probation or parole at some time before their current stay in placement. True first offenders constitute a very small component of the placement population, comprising only an estimated 5,170 youth, or 5% of youth in placement.¹⁶

Table 6 also shows that these three groups have significantly different career offense profiles. First offenders (that is, youth who report no indication of prior involvement) are substantially more likely to report that they are currently in placement for a crime in the most serious

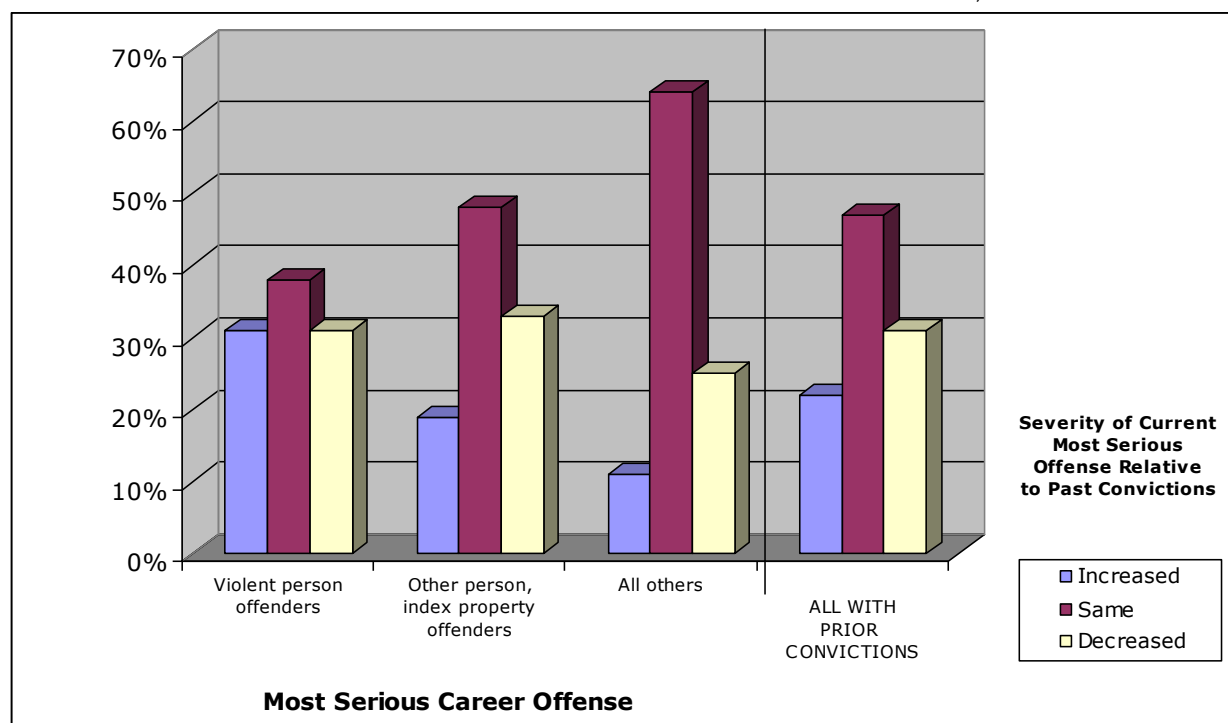
category—murder, rape, or kidnapping. The first row in the table shows that more than one-third of youth with no prior involvement in the justice system (35%) identify one of these offenses as their most serious career offense, compared with only 13% of youth with prior placement or probation and just 12% of youth with prior convictions. Youth with prior convictions are more likely than the other groups to report career offenses that include other person offenses or property crimes (74% of this group compared with 46% and 52% of other youth). Youth with only prior placement or probation show the least serious career profiles of all the groups: a larger percentage of these youth report their most serious career offenses in the lowest categories in the hierarchy: status offenses, technical violations, and other offenses not specified on the SYRP lists (25% versus 9% of first offenders and 5% of youth with prior convictions).

Career Trajectories

As noted above, youth's current and career offenses yield very similar profiles, albeit with the career offense distribution shifted upward in severity. At the same time, the vast majority of youth (85%) report having prior convictions. Is the similarity in current and career offense profiles of youth in placement due to the fact that most youth simply repeat the same offenses? Figure 2 graphs youth who have prior convictions according to their most serious career offense, showing the career trajectory in each category—that is, whether the most serious current offense is more serious,

equivalent, or less serious relative to the most serious prior conviction (using the offense hierarchy given in Table 5).¹⁷ Only about one-half (47%) of all youth who have any past convictions report current offenses at the same level of severity as the offenses for which they were previously convicted; 31% have less serious current offenses; and the remaining 22% have more serious current offenses relative to their previous convictions.¹⁸ Thus, the similarity of the current and career profiles appears to be only partly due to repetitive offending at the same level of severity; it is also partly due to a counterbalancing between offenders with less serious current offenses and those with more serious current offenses, along with the influx of some new offenders at the most serious offense levels.

Figure 2. Severity of Most Serious Current Offense Relative to Severity of Most Serious Past Conviction, for All Youth with Prior Convictions and for Youth with Different Career Offenses, 2003



Note: Violent person offenses were murder, rape, kidnapping, robbery or assault with a weapon; other person offenses were assaults without a weapon; index property offenses were arson, burglary, or theft; other offenses were other property offenses, public order offenses, and status offenses. These trajectory patterns should be interpreted with caution, since youth may not clearly differentiate between their current and past offense(s).

Figure 2 also reveals that the relative severity of prior convictions and current offenses differs for offenders at different levels in the career offense hierarchy. The figure classifies youth into three general career offense categories, by relative seriousness: (1) youth with any history of the more violent person offenses such as murder, rape, kidnapping, robbery, or assault with a weapon; (2) youth whose most serious career offense is assault without a weapon or any of the index property crimes (arson, burglary, theft); and (3) youth with any other career offense (including any other property offense such as joyriding, vandalism, or trespassing; any drug or public order offense; or any status offense). The figure depicts significant differences across all three groups in the percentages whose offenses have increased in severity over their careers (i.e., those whose current

offenses are more serious than their prior convictions). These escalating offenders are 31% of the most serious career offender group, 19% of the second offender group, and just 11% of the least serious career offender group. The least serious career offenders are predominantly repeat offenders (64%), whose most serious current offense is in the same category as their prior convictions. In contrast, such repeat offenders constitute a significantly lower percentage of violent person offenders (38%). Finally, significantly higher percentages of youth whose most serious career offense was a violent person offense or an other person or index property offense decreased in their offense severity compared with the least serious career offenders (31% and 33% versus 25%, respectively).

Sex Differences in Offense and Involvement Patterns

Differences between females' and males' career offense profiles closely parallel the patterns shown in figure 1 in connection with their current offense profiles and so are not revisited here. The measure of prior involvement in the justice system does not differ by sex, but the career trajectory measure does. Females are more likely to have current offenses that are less serious than their prior convictions (35% of females versus 30% of males), whereas more males exhibit an escalating pattern of offenses (23% versus 20% of females).

Adjudication and Placement Status

Adjudicated and Committed Youth

Table 7 shows that an estimated two-thirds of the youth in placement (66%) are both adjudicated and committed (i.e., disposed and assigned to placement in their current program). Much smaller percentages of youth in placement are adjudicated and awaiting disposition or placement (7%) or are not yet adjudicated (14%). The remaining 13% of youth in placement are known to be adjudicated, but their disposition/placement status cannot be determined because of incomplete administrative data.¹⁹

Not surprisingly, the adjudication/placement profile of the detention population differs sharply from that of youth in other programs (except for the subgroup of adjudicated youth with undetermined disposition/placement status, who appear to be distributed proportionally across program types). Nearly two in five detention residents (38%) but very few youth in other programs (6%) are not yet adjudicated. Similarly, although one in five detention center residents are adjudicated but not yet disposed or placed (21%), this is the case for only 2% of youth in other programs. On the other hand, four-fifths of youth in other programs (80%) are adjudicated and known to be disposed to their current program, whereas this is true for slightly more than one-fourth of the youth in detention programs (28%).

The career offense profiles of committed youth and of youth who are not committed (by the definition given above) are remarkably similar, with only small, although significant, differences between the two groups. Larger percentages of committed youth have their most serious career offense in one of the higher offense categories (15% versus 11% in the murder, rape, and/or

kidnapping category; 45% versus 42% in the other person offense categories), whereas slightly but significantly more of the youth who are not committed have a career offense in the lowest categories in the hierarchy (10% versus 6% in the categories of status offenses, technical violations, and other unspecified offenses).

Table 7. Youth's Adjudication and Placement Status, for All Youth in Placement in 2003 and by Whether They Are in a Detention Program*

Adjudication/Placement Status	Youth in All Programs N=101,040 (95% CI)	Youth in Detention Programs N=26,590 (95% CI)	Youth in Other (Nondetention) Programs N=74,450 (95% CI)
All youth	100 %	100 %	100 %
Adjudicated, placed in current program	66 (61–71)	28 (19–37)	80 (73–86)
Adjudicated, awaiting disposition or placement	7 (5–9)	21 (15–26)	2 (<1–3)
Adjudicated, undetermined placement status	13 (9–17)	13 (6–20)	13 (8–18)
Not yet adjudicated	14 (11–17)	38 (31–45)	6 (3–8)

Notes: CI = confidence interval. The 95-percent confidence interval (CI) indexes the precision of an estimate, specifying the range in which the estimate would fall in 95 out of 100 comparable replications of the study.

* SYRP defines a program as a group of living units within a facility that provide the same primary function or type of program, based on information provided by the facility administrator. This analysis distinguished youth in living units that primarily served a detention program from those in other types of programs (i.e., correctional program or training school, shelter, group home, halfway house, independent living, boot camp, ranch or forestry camp, or residential treatment).

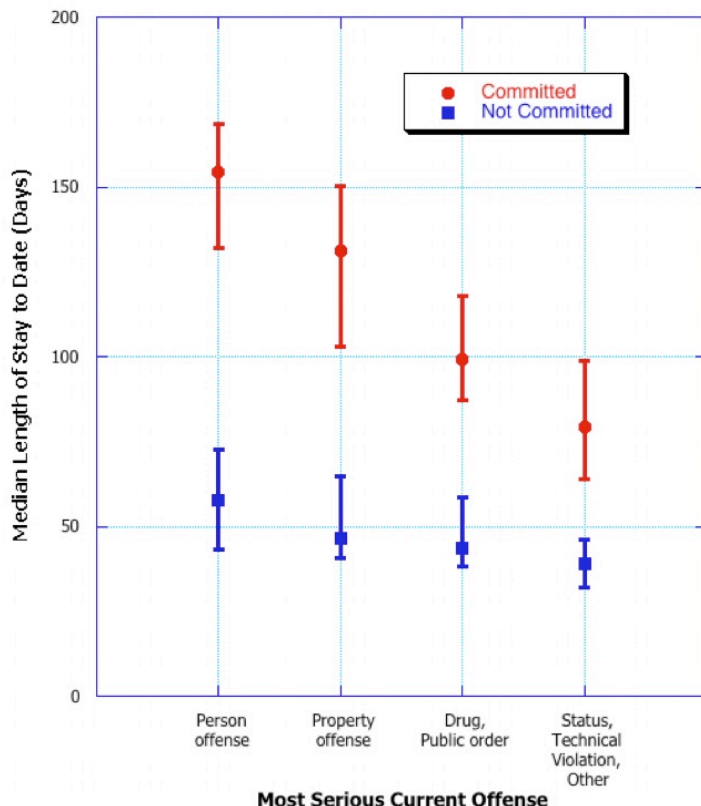
Length of Stay

The amount of time youth offenders stay in a facility depends on many factors, including time in detention prior to adjudication, the nature and severity of their offense(s), and their commitment status. SYRP does not assess youth's total length of stay but asks how long they have been in their facility at the time of their interview. From that perspective, SYRP provides nearly a point-in-time cross-sectional view of the placement population in their current facility.

The average length of stay is 173 days (nearly 6 months). However, the distribution is skewed by a small number of youth who have been in placement for very long periods, so the median of 92 days (about 3 months) is more informative. At the time of the SYRP, about one-third of youth (35%) were in their present facility for 60 days or less, and the same percentage (35%) were there for 61 to 180 days (2 to 6 months). The remainder (29%) describe longer facility stays; slightly more than 1 in 10 (11%) were in their facility for more than a year.²⁰

Figure 3 shows that length of stay varies by both offender type and commitment status. This figure shows median length of stay as a function of the youth's current most serious offense, but using their most serious career offense produces a nearly identical graph. Overall, committed youth are in their facilities longer than youth who are not committed. Among committed youth, the more serious

Figure 3. Estimated Median Length of Stay in 2003, by Youth's Commitment Status and Most Serious Career Offense



Note: Bars indicate 95% confidence intervals on estimates of median length of stay.

offenders are in their facilities longer, with person offenders staying the longest. Uncommitted youth report uniformly short stays (typically less than 50 days), regardless of their most serious current offense.

Sex Differences in Length of Stay

Although males and females do not differ in their commitment status—comparable percentages of each sex are adjudicated and in placement in their current facility—females are in their facilities for significantly less time than males. More females than males report being in their facility for 60 days or less (44% versus 34%), whereas correspondingly fewer females and more males

report longer stays. The median stay to survey date is 94 days for males, but just 72 days for females. Females' shorter stays are consistent with their less serious offense profiles (figure 1).

Family Background

SYRP asks youth a number of questions about their backgrounds, including who raised them, whom they were living with when taken into placement, their own caretaking responsibilities at the time, and the language adults in their family used.

Responsible Caretaker When Growing Up

Youth in placement come from a variety of family constellations. SYRP asks, “Who was responsible for taking care of you when you were growing up?” Respondents may choose more than one answer from options that include parents, grandparents, siblings, other relatives, friends, and agencies.

Table 8 classifies youth according to whether they indicate that two parents raised them (either in a two-parent household or by parents residing in separate households), a single parent, or only

nonparent caretakers. Parents included both biological and stepparents. Less than one-half of youth in placement (46%) had two parents care for them while they were growing up, although this could have been in separate households. Slightly more than two in five mention only one parent (42%), typically their mother (89% of this subgroup). The remaining youth, about 1 in 10 (11%) of the estimated population in placement, report no parental care while they were growing up. One-half of these (50%) identify a grandparent as their caretaker.

Overall, 9% of the total population in placement report they spent some time being raised by a foster parent, group home, or other agency. Not surprisingly, this sector is disproportionately larger among youth who report no parental involvement while growing up, one-fourth of whom (25%) report that a foster parent, group home, or other agency cared for them while they were growing up.

Table 8. Family Background of Youth in Placement in 2003

Family Background	Estimated Number (95% CI)		Percentage (95%CI)	
All youth	101,040	(92,580–109,490)	100	%
Caretaker when growing up				
Two parents	46,770	(42,100–51,440)	46	(45–48)
One parent	42,690	(39,390–45,990)	42	(41–44)
No parent	11,580	(10,070–12,990)	11	(11–12)
Living arrangement when taken into placement				
Two parents	29,980	(26,150–33,800)	30	(28–32)
One parent	45,390	(41,850–48,940)	45	(43–47)
No parent	25,670	(22,230–28,110)	25	(24–27)

Notes: CI = confidence interval. The 95-percent confidence interval (CI) indexes the precision of an estimate, specifying the range in which the estimate would fall in 95 out of 100 comparable replications of the study. Parents include both biological and stepparents. Youth who reported that two parents took care of them while they were growing up did not necessarily live in a two-parent household. Estimated totals are rounded to the nearest multiple of 10; estimated percentages are rounded to the nearest whole percentage.

Living Arrangements When Taken Into Placement

SYRP also asks youth whom they were living with at the time they were taken into placement. Here, too, respondents can choose as many answers as apply, with options ranging from parents and siblings to extended family, friends, acquaintances, agencies, and foster homes. Youth also have the option to indicate that they were living alone or were homeless at the time they entered placement.

As table 8 shows, only 3 in 10 youth were living with two parents when they entered placement (30%). Less than one-half (45%) were living with just one parent (typically their mother, for 84% of this subgroup). One-fourth of the youth were not living with any parent when they entered placement. Some of these youth were living with grandparents, siblings, or other relatives (11%); others were in foster homes or group homes (5%), or were living with friends (6%). The remaining youth report they were living on their own (2%), were homeless (<1%), or were living in some circumstance not listed (1%).²¹

Information on the living arrangements of youth ages 12–17 in the U.S. population at the time of the 2003 SYRP is available (U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, Fertility and Family Statistics Branch, 2004). This information provides the basis for computing placement rates for youth in this age range in different living arrangements (based on the SYRP estimates of youth in placement for the same age range, 12–17). Not surprisingly, the placement rate is lowest for youth in two-parent households, with an estimated 153 youth per 100,000 among youth in placement. The placement rate for youth in single-parent households is more than three times higher (558 per 100,000). Youth not living with any parent have the highest placement rate, with 1,652 per 100,000 (or 1.6 youth per 100) in the placement population.

Language Used at Home

The interview asks youth what language the adults in their family mainly use. For the majority, English is the predominant language at home (84%). Spanish is the family language for 12% of youth, and the rest (4%) say that adults in their families mainly use some other language.

Caretaking Responsibilities

Nearly one-half of youth in placement (48%) indicate that, at the time they were taken into placement, they were helping to take care of other family members, such as younger children or grandparents.

Sex Differences in Family Backgrounds

The same percentage of males and females (46%) report that two parents were involved in caring for them while growing up. However, several significant sex differences emerged on other measures. More males than females were raised by a single parent (43% versus 39%), whereas more females name no parent as taking care of them when they were growing up (15% versus 11%). Specifically, a higher percentage of females say they were raised by a foster parent, a group home, or an agency (14% versus 8%).

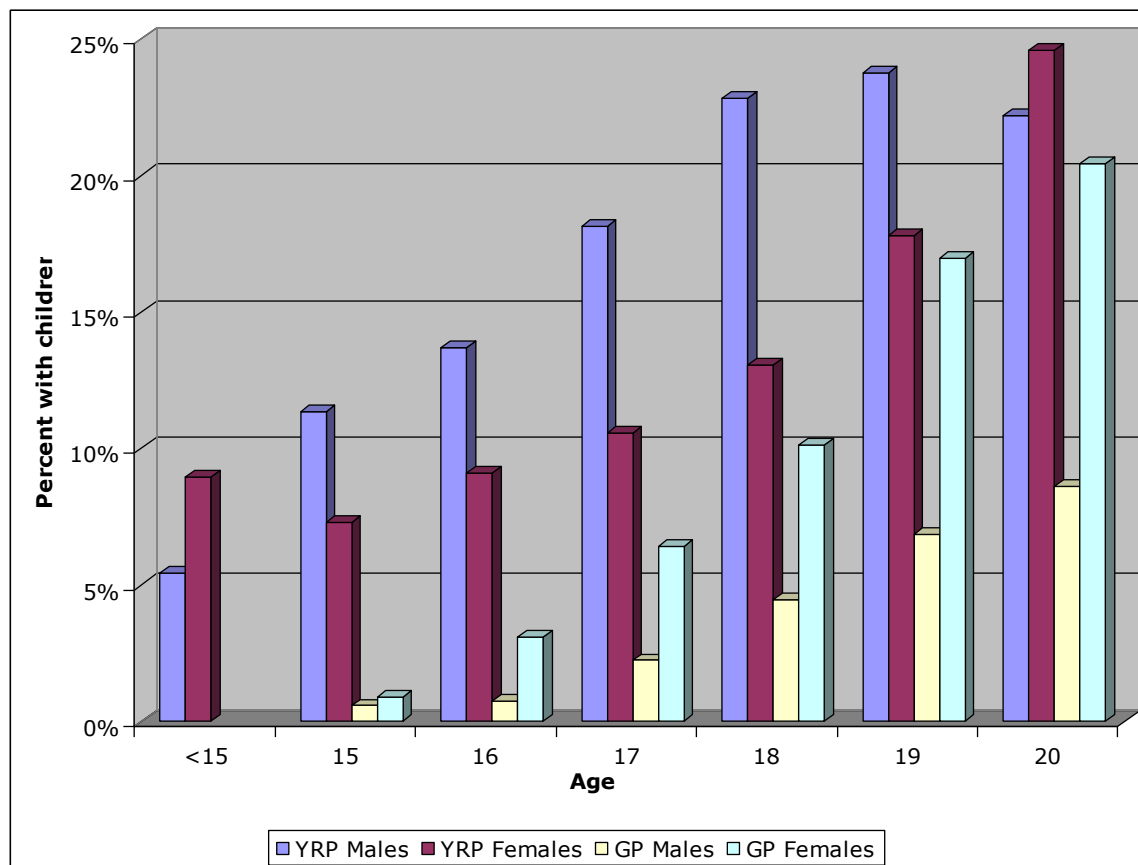
Similar patterns are evident in living arrangements at the time the youth entered placement. Although the percentages of males and females living with two parents do not differ, more males than females were living with a single parent (46% versus 40%), whereas more females were not living with any parent (32% versus 24%). Comparable percentages of males and of females were living with other relatives, but excluding youth who were living with some relative, females were more likely to have been in a foster or group home (7% versus 4%) or living with friends (10% versus 6%).

Males are slightly but significantly more likely to report that Spanish is the main language for adults in their families (13% versus 10%). Males and females are equally likely to report that they were responsible for the care of others when they entered their current stay in placement.

Childbearing

SYRP asks whether the youth have children themselves. Overall, 14% report that they have children, and this is true for significantly more males (15%) than females (9%). These rates of parenthood are also significantly higher than in the general population, where only 4% of 12- to 20-year-olds, 2% of males, and 6% of females are parents (U.S. Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2003). Figure 4 shows the patterns across the age range.

Figure 4. Youth in Placement in 2003 Who Have Children Compared With General Population Youth, by Age and Sex



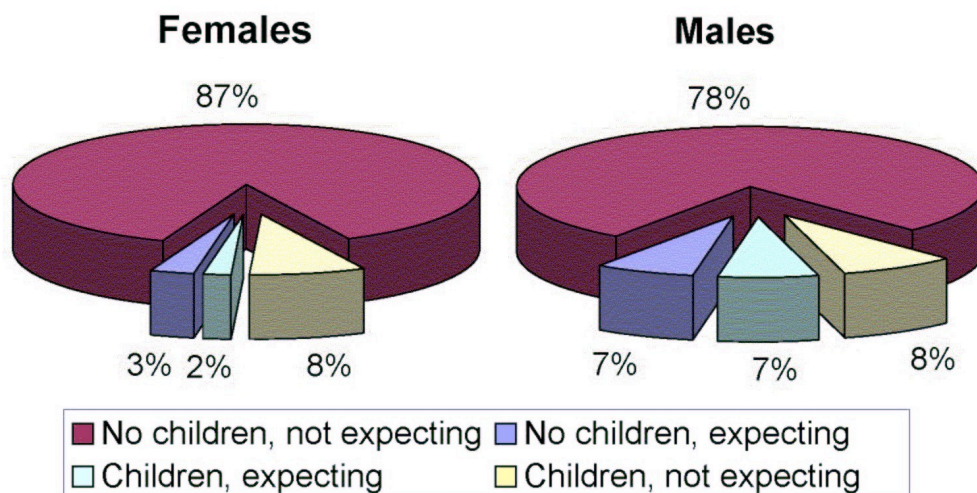
Note: YRP=Youth in residential placement; GP=General population.

Three features of this figure are noteworthy. First, the percentage of youth who are parents rises dramatically with age in all groups. Second, sex differences in childbearing among youth in placement are strongest for the 17- and 18-year-olds, which are the only ages where sex differences among youth in placement are statistically significant. This pattern is very different from that in the general population, where females ages 16 and older are more likely to report that they are parents than their male age peers and where this sex difference increases in size and significance with increasing age. Third, although significantly higher percentages of offender males are parents than their age peers in the general youth population at all age levels,²² this is only true for offender females ages 17 and younger. The rates of parenthood among the older females in placement do not differ significantly from those for females in the general population.

The SYRP interview also asks whether a youth is expecting a child—females are asked whether they are currently pregnant and males are asked whether a girl is currently pregnant with their child. Twelve percent say they are expecting a child, some of whom already have children. A combined estimated total of 20,450 youth, or one-fifth of the residential offender population have or are expecting children. Figure 5 shows that a significantly higher percentage of males report they are expecting children (totaling 13% of males versus only 5% of females).²³ This could reflect lower rates of offending by pregnant females, lower rates of placement for female offenders who are pregnant when they are apprehended, or a combination of both dynamics.

Whatever the dynamic that selectively excludes pregnant females from the placement population, it appears to account for the sex differences in rates of parenthood among youth in placement 15 years or older. The overall sex difference in the percentage of youth who are expecting a child led the authors to reexamine the sex differences in figure 4. Further analyses showed that they predominantly reflect differences in the percentages of youth who report that they not only have a child but are also expecting a child. Considering only youth who have children and are not currently expecting, the differences between males and females disappeared, except in the youngest age group (under 15 years). Among these younger youth, significantly more females reported that they were already parents when they entered placement.

Figure 5. Parental Status of Females and Males in Residential Placement in 2003



Educational Background

SYRP asks youth several questions about their educational status, including their enrollment status when they were taken into placement, their school experiences during the year before they entered placement, their grade level, and whether they have any diagnosed learning disability.

School Enrollment

Although the majority of youth in placement (76%) say that they were enrolled in school at the time they entered placement, this leaves nearly one in four youth (24%) who were not enrolled in school at the time. Only 3% of youth were not in school when entering placement because they had already graduated or earned a general equivalency diploma (GED). Some (7%) were expelled, but most (12%) had dropped out. A few (2%) say that school was not in session at the time.²⁴

The school enrollment rate of youth in placement at the time of their entry is significantly lower than that of their peers in the general population, where 88% of youth between 10 and 20 years of age are enrolled in school (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). Consistent with this, the dropout rate for youth in placement is significantly higher than the annual rate found for youth in the general population, which was 4% for all students in grades 10 to 12 in 2003 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005).

School Attendance, Discipline, and Achievement

More than one-half of youth in placement (53%) say that they skipped classes in the year preceding their most recent entry into placement, and a slightly larger percentage say they were suspended from school at some point during that year (57%). One in four youth (25%) acknowledge that they repeated a grade and more than one-fourth (28%) that they were expelled. There is substantial overlap between those expelled and those suspended, and when considering these subgroups together, 61% of youth in placement say they had been either suspended or expelled from school in the year preceding their last entry into placement.

Grade retention and school suspension are significantly more prevalent in the placement population than in the general population, where 2000 survey data are available reflecting the 12- to 17-year-old age group (Lugaila, 2003). The rates given above reflect the full SYRP population of 10- to 20-year-olds, so to permit comparison with the general population rates, SYRP rates were computed for this narrower age range. Of 12- to 17-year-old youth in placement, 59% say they were suspended in the year preceding their entry into placement, as compared with the lifetime rate of just 10% for their age peers in the general population. Moreover, 26% of 12- to 17-year-olds in placement say they repeated a grade in the year before entering placement, which is more than twice the lifetime rate in the general population (where just 11% of youth in the same age range had ever repeated a grade).

Describing their experiences in the year before entering their current period of placement, 3 in 10 youth (31%) say that they won an award. Nearly one-half (46%) claim that they participated in sports or clubs, and two in five youth (42%) report that they got good grades.

Attainment of Modal Grade Level

Youth identify their current grade level (or the grade level they were in when last enrolled in school). They also report whether they graduated or earned a GED before entering placement or since coming to their current facility. The authors used these answers, together with youth's age, to classify them relative to the grade attainment modal for their age (Hauser, Pager and Simmons, 2000;

Lugaila, 2003; Shin, 2005; U.S. Census Bureau, 2006).²⁵ Those whose current or last-attended grade is less than the modal level for their age are considered below grade level, as are youth who are older than the modal age for graduation but who have not yet graduated or earned a GED.²⁶

By this analysis, nearly one-half of youth in placement (48%) are below the modal academic level for their age. This percentage is substantially higher than in the general youth population, where by the same definition 28% of youth ages 10–20 are below the academic attainment that is modal for their age (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005).²⁷

Learning Disability

Additionally, SYRP data indicate that youth in placement have disabilities that would make school more difficult for them. Three out of 10 youth in placement (30%) report that an expert (such as a doctor or a counselor) has told them that they have a learning disability. This percentage is about six times greater than the prevalence of learning disabilities in the general population, where only 5% of youth between the ages of 10 and 20 have specific learning disabilities (U.S. Office of Special Education Programs, 2003).²⁸

Sex Differences in Educational Backgrounds

Males and females do not differ in rates of school enrollment when entering placement or in reasons given for not attending school at the time. Only a few differences between males and females emerge in connection with school experiences. Significantly more males than females participated in sports or clubs (47% of males compared to 40% of females) and report that they were expelled during the year preceding their entry into placement (29% compared to 23%). In contrast, more females than males report that they received good grades (47% compared to 41%). Consistent with this, more males are below the modal grade attainment for their age (50% compared to 41%) and more males say they were told they have a learning disability (31% compared to 25%).

Expectations About Release, Specific Plans, and Future Offenses

The SYRP interview asks youth what they know regarding their release and also for their thoughts about their future offense behaviors and the consequences of these behaviors.

Expectations About Release

More than one-half of youth in placement (51%) say they have been told when they will be released. Regardless of whether they were told, all youth are asked when they expect to be released. One-third (33%) say they expect to be released in 1 month or sooner, and almost one-fourth (23%) think they will be in placement for another 1–3 months. One-fifth (20%) expect their release in another 3 to 6

months, and the final one-fifth (20%) believe they will be in placement longer than 6 more months. Only 4% declined to project their release date.

Not surprisingly, youth who are committed (i.e., adjudicated and assigned to placement in their current program) expect their further time in placement to be considerably longer than other youth. More than one-half of these other youth (51%) think they will be released in 1 month or less, whereas only 26% of committed youth believe they will be freed that soon.

As for what they were told would happen after they leave their current facility, one-half of youth (50%) say they will be placed on probation or parole, 11% think they will be released with no court supervision, and 8% expect to go to another facility. Close to one-third of the population in placement (30%) say they have not been told what will happen when they leave.

Selecting from the answer alternatives listed in table 9 regarding what they think will be required of them after their release, majorities of youth in placement in 2003 say they will have to report to a probation or parole officer (59%) or attend school regularly (56%). About 4 in 10 (42%) say they will have to take drug tests, and 40% say they will be required to work at least part time. Only a little more than one-third (35%) say they will be expected to go to counseling, and just a little more than one-fifth (22%) say they will have to pay for damages they caused. Some youth (13%) say that “something else” (not listed among these answer alternatives) will be expected of them, but more than one-fifth (21%) say they do not know what requirements will be imposed after their release.

Table 9. Youth's Beliefs About What Will Be Required of Them After Their Release, 2003

Requirement	Percent (95% CI)
Report to a probation or parole officer	59 (56–61)
Attend school regularly	56 (53–59)
Take drug tests	42 (39–46)
Work at least part time	40 (38–43)
Go to counseling	35 (32–38)
Pay money for damages they caused	22 (21–24)
Something else	13 (12–14)
Don't know	21 (20–23)

Notes: CI = confidence interval. The 95-percent confidence interval (CI) indexes the precision of an estimate, specifying the range in which the estimate would fall in 95 out of 100 comparable replications of the study. Rows sum to more than the 100% because youth could select as many expectations as apply to them.

Specific Plans

The last section of the SYRP interview asks youth whether they have made any plans for when they leave the facility.²⁹ A large majority report that they have made plans to find a job (84%) and to go to school (80%). Nearly three-fourths say they have set goals of some kind for themselves (74%). About one-fourth (26%) have made plans to get alcohol or drug treatment.

Less than one-half respond that they have made plans to find a place to live (43%). Answers to this item differ depending on youth's living arrangements at the time they entered placement. Only a minority of youth who were living with relatives when they entered placement have made plans for a place to live upon their release (40%), perhaps because most of these simply assume they will return to their former households. By contrast, a majority of youth who were living in other circumstances when they entered placement say they have made plans for finding a place to live afterward (60%).

Thoughts About Future Offenses

SYRP asks youth whether they think they will reoffend in the future. To assess youth's thoughts on the workings of the juvenile justice system and on graduated sanctions,³⁰ SYRP asks whether they expect to be apprehended and confined for any future offenses and what they believe their future punishments will be. Table 10 details youth's responses.

Table 10. Youth's Expectations About Future Offenses, 2003		
Expectation	Percentage Reporting (95% CI)	
Likelihood of committing a future offense		
Definitely will commit	5	(4–5)
Probably will commit	9	(8–10)
Probably will not commit	27	(26–29)
Definitely will not commit	59	(57–61)
Likelihood of arrest if youth reoffends*		
Definitely will be arrested	42	(41–44)
Probably will be arrested	19	(18–19)
Probably will not be arrested	14	(13–15)
Definitely will not be arrested	25	(23–27)
Likelihood of being locked up if arrested for reoffense*		
Definitely will be locked up	56	(54–59)
Probably will be locked up	20	(19–21)
Probably will not be locked up	9	(8–10)
Definitely will not be locked up	15	(13–17)
Relative punishment for reoffense*		
Less than current punishment	11	(10–12)
About the same as current punishment	14	(13–15)
More than current punishment	75	(73–77)

Notes: CI = confidence interval. The 95-percent confidence interval (CI) indexes the precision of an estimate, specifying the range in which the estimate would fall in 95 out of 100 comparable replications of the study. Percentages are based on estimated total number of youth with nonmissing answers, excluding youth who answered "don't know" or who refused to answer (an estimated 1% or less of all youth in placement).

*Denominators used to compute these percentages also exclude youth who were not asked these questions (an additional 7% of all youth in placement).

The first question ("How likely is it that you will commit a crime within 12 months after you are released?") is asked of all youth, regardless of whether they report any offense as the reason for currently being in placement. In response, the majority say they will not do so, with more than half (59%) indicating they definitely will not and more than one-fourth more (27%) that they probably

will not. Fewer than one in seven (a combined 14%) say they expect to commit a crime within 12 months of their release.

Interestingly, responses on this question differ depending on youth's prior involvement in the justice system. Among youth with no prior involvement, 78% say that they definitely will not commit a crime in the future. Fewer youth among those with only prior placement or prior probation endorse this statement, with 68% saying they definitely will not reoffend. Youth with prior convictions are the least likely to definitively deny that they will reoffend in the future (56%). However, even in this last group, youth who deny they will reoffend are in the majority.

Although these are the socially desirable responses, the anonymity of the interview should have minimized youth's concerns about conveying a good image. Despite this, the majority of youth in all groups affirm they will not reoffend.

Subsequent questions in this series are asked only of youth who reported a current crime, and they refer to the specific offenses the youth indicated earlier.³¹ The second question asks: "If you committed the same crime(s) in the future, how likely do you think it is that you will be arrested?" Answers to this question are less encouraging because only a modest majority (a combined 61%) think that arrest is at all likely. One-fourth (25%) think that they "definitely will *not* be arrested." Combining these youth with those who think they "probably will not be arrested," well more than one-third of youth (39%) consider arrest unlikely if they were to repeat their offense(s) in the future.

Following the arrest question, youth are asked: "If, in the future, you are arrested for committing (this/these) crime(s), how likely do you think it is that you will be locked up?" Taken together, more than three-fourths (76%) consider it likely that they will be remanded to placement again, with slightly less than one-fourth (24%) believing it unlikely that they will again be "locked up."

Finally, SYRP asks about the relative severity of punishment the youth expect they will receive for a future reoffense "If . . . the court decides that you are guilty . . ." of a future reoffense. Three-fourths (75%) believe that the future punishment will be greater than their current punishment.

Youth's expectations about the workings of the juvenile justice system are revealing, particularly considering that nearly two-fifths of youth in placement think they are unlikely to be apprehended for any repeat offense (most of whom say they "definitely will not be arrested"). Perhaps these youth feel they will be better at eluding law enforcement in the future, knowing what they now know about how they were caught for their current offense. Perhaps they recognize the considerable challenge that officers face in solving crime and apprehending those responsible. Whatever their reasoning, youth's answers on this series of SYRP questions suggest that arrest or apprehension is the weakest link in the sanctioning process—the point where deterrence is most vulnerable and likely to fail.

Sex Differences in Expectations About Release and Future Offenses

Similar percentages of males and of females have been told when they will be released. However, just as females have shorter lengths of stay, they also expect the additional time until their release to be shorter. More females than males expect to stay just 1 additional month or less (44% of females versus 33% of males), whereas more males expect to stay longer than 6 additional months (22% of males versus 14% of females).

Males and females differ in what they expect will happen after their release and in some of the specific plans they have made. More females than males say they expect to be placed in another facility (13% of females versus 7% of males). More females also expect to have to attend school regularly (66% of females versus 54% of males), take drug tests (47% of females versus 42% of males), and go to counseling (49% of females versus 32% of males). More females say they have made specific plans to go to school after their release (87% of females versus 79% of males) and to get alcohol or drug treatment (39% of females versus 24% of males).

The findings that more females expect a school requirement and that more females have made specific plans for going to school upon release are consistent with the fact, reported earlier, that the females in the placement population are younger than the males. Females' higher expectations for drug tests and counseling and their specific plans for getting drug or alcohol treatment upon release probably reflect their heavier use of drugs and alcohol, noted both above (see "Sex Differences in Current Offenses," above) and in *Youth's Needs and Services: Findings from the Survey of Youth in Residential Placement* (Sedlak and McPherson, 2010).

Males' and females' expectations about future offenses do not differ, but two differences do emerge in their beliefs about future sanctions: one concerning the likelihood of arrest and the other regarding the relative severity of future punishment. More females think that they probably will be arrested if they reoffend in the future (22% versus 18%), and fewer females think that they definitely will not be arrested (21% versus 26%).³² At the same time, fewer females expect that a future punishment for comparable offenses will be more severe than their current punishment (68% versus 76%); rather, more females think that such future punishment would be about the same as their current punishment (19% versus 13%).

Youth's Strengths and General Aspirations for Education and Life

The SYRP interview asks youth what they consider to be their personal strengths, what their educational aspirations are, and what they envision for their future lives.

Personal Strengths

SYRP asks youth to identify their personal strengths from the list of areas shown in table 11, selecting as many as they feel apply.

On average, youth select 5 strengths from the 11 listed (4.6). Majorities of the youth select sports (63%), working with people (60%), working with their hands (60%), and music (55%). Math, working with computers, art, and writing are each selected by more than one-third of the youth (34% to 40%). Nearly one-fourth indicate science (24%) and dance (23%) as areas of special strength or talent, and more than one-fourth (28%) indicate that their strengths include something not on the list provided.

Table 11. Youth's Perceptions of Their Strengths, for All Youth in Placement in 2003 and by Sex

Strength	All youth (95% CI)	Males (95% CI)	Females (95% CI)
Sports	63 (61–65)	66 (64–68)	47 (43–50)
Working with people	60 (59–62)	59 (57–60)	73 (69–76)
Working with your hands	60 (58–62)	64 (62–66)	42 (38–45)
Music	55 (53–57)	54 (52–56)	64 (60–68)
Math	40 (38–41)	41 (39–42)	32 (28–37)
Working with computers	38 (37–40)	38 (36–40)	43 (40–45)
Art	36 (34–38)	35 (33–37)	43 (39–47)
Writing	34 (32–36)	31 (29–33)	54 (50–58)
Science	24 (22–25)	ND	ND
Dance	23 (21–25)	17 (16–19)	52 (49–56)
Something else	28 (26–29)	27 (25–28)	33 (29–36)

Notes: CI = confidence interval; ND = no difference. The 95-percent confidence interval (CI) indexes the precision of an estimate, specifying the range in which the estimate would fall in 95 out of 100 comparable replications of the study. Percentages are based on estimated total number of youth with nonmissing answers, that is, the denominator used to compute the percentages excludes youth who answered "don't know" or who refused to answer (33 survey participants representing less than 1% of the population in placement), as well as another 453 sampled youth (representing an additional 7% of placement population) who were not asked the questions at the very end of the interview.

Educational Aspirations and Expectations

Despite the high incidence of learning disabilities among youth in placement and their below modal grade performance, more than two-thirds of youth aspire to higher education. SYRP asks youth how far they would go in school if they could go as far as they wanted. About one-fifth of youth in placement (21%) say that they would like to go to graduate school, medical school, or law school. Nearly another one-half (47%, CI 46–49%) have the goal of college, including those who want just to have some college (7%) and those who want to actually graduate college (40%). Nearly one-

fourth (24%) target graduating high school or attending a technical school, with twice as many focusing on high school graduation (16%) as on technical school (8%). Only very few youth prefer less than a high school diploma (3%) or something other than the options listed (4%). When asked how far they thought they would actually go in school, the majority say they expect they will go at least as far as they want (57%).³³

Future Life Circumstances

Majorities of youth in placement think that, in their future lives, they will be married (73%), have children (77%), and have a steady job (88%). Very few say they expect that none of these circumstances will be true in their lives (4%).

Sex Differences in Strengths, Educational Aspirations, and Expected Life Circumstances

Females and males differ in their selections of nearly all types of personal strengths as shown in table 11. Significantly fewer females see themselves as strong in the areas of sports, working with their hands, or math. More females see themselves as strong in working with people, music, working with computers, art, writing, dance, and something not provided among the strengths listed on the interview. Interestingly, there is no difference in the percentages of males and females who perceive themselves to be strong in science.

There are striking differences in the educational aspirations of males and females. If they could go as far as they wanted in their educations, more males than females say they would graduate from high school or attend a technical school (25% versus 15%) or go to college (49% versus 41%). In contrast, considerably more females say they would go to graduate school, medical school, or law school (37% versus 18%). Similar percentages of males and females think they will reach their educational goals.

Differences in females' and males' visions for their future lives are small but significant, with more females saying that they expect to be married (76% versus 72%) and to have a steady job (91% versus 87%).

Conclusions

The SYRP findings presented here represent a major advance in available statistics about youth in placement. They provide a rich portrait of their characteristics, backgrounds, and expectations. SYRP results offer information about the national population of youth in placement not available through any other source. For example, until now no information has been available for the national population in placement regarding the overall prevalence of all offenses for which youth are incarcerated or the characteristics of these offenses, such as the presence of accomplices and youth's use of drugs or alcohol during their offenses.

A number of SYRP findings reiterate topics that are part of OJJDP's Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement (total population size, age, sex, race/ethnicity, and current offense profile). The sidebar clarifies the complementary relationship of these two surveys on these common topics. SYRP goes well beyond the CJRP topics to document information about the national population of youth in placement that is currently not available through any other source. For some findings, the SYRP data demonstrate the generalizability of results that, until now, have emerged only in studies with local or otherwise noncomparable youth samples. Other observations provide unprecedented glimpses into the backgrounds, expectations, and beliefs of juveniles in placement that could only be obtained by direct questioning of the youth themselves.

Verification and Extension of Other Findings

Many of the topics covered in this report are well-known to juvenile justice researchers, although some are relatively new in the published literature. Even when SYRP findings pertain to a widely treated issue, however, the results reported here extend knowledge and provide some new twists. The following discussion highlights several issues where the findings reported here underscore, clarify, and/or enlarge current understanding on the subject.

Race/ethnicity. SYRP indicates that multiracial youth have a substantially higher placement rate as compared with other race/ethnicity categories (table 1). Interestingly, this finding is consistent with the results of a recent, albeit small, study of Seattle middle-school adolescents (Choi et al., 2006) that found higher rates of violent behaviors among multiracial youth. The SYRP results indicate that the elevated rates of delinquency among multiracial youth are not geographically limited, but are also evident in the placement population nationwide. Reasons for the elevated rates of violence and placement in this population are unclear at present, but may be associated with less stable social contexts for this subgroup. Other factors may also influence the SYRP findings: mixed-race juveniles may have higher placement rates (if there is disparity in juvenile justice response to these youth) or the multiple-race question format itself may somehow contribute to these results.³⁴ Further research is needed to better understand these findings, as they have important implications for disproportionate minority confinement (DMC) programs and policies..

Current offenses. SYRP offers a unique first look at the details of all acknowledged offenses leading to youth's current placement status, including the contexts and consequences of these offenses. Until SYRP, no information was available for the national population in placement on the overall prevalence of different placing offenses, the presence of accomplices, use of drugs or alcohol during the offenses, or weapon use and injury to victims among the violent offenders. Because of different offender populations and/or study methodology, SYRP distributions and specific percentage rates differ somewhat from those reported elsewhere (e.g., Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2005; Perkins, 2003; National Opinion Research Center, 2003). Nevertheless, several aspects of the SYRP findings are consistent with earlier observations, such as the tendency of juveniles to commit their offenses with others (McCord and Conway, 2005; Warr, 1996) or while under the influence of drugs or alcohol (Wallisch, 1992; White et al., 2002). Moreover, although others (Stormshak, Comeau, and Shepard, 2004) have observed that delinquent youth tend to have both drug and alcohol problems deviant peers, SYRP reveals a previously unreported result: that having accomplices and being under the influence co-occur even in the context of the same offense.

Similarities and Differences Between SYRP and CJRP

SYRP and the Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement (CJRP)¹ both provide information about the size of the custody population, its age, sex, and race/ethnicity composition, and the youth's most serious current offenses. On the first three measures, the SYRP findings closely parallel those reported for the 2003 CJRP (Sickmund, Sladky, and Kang, 2005), with the 95-percent confidence intervals for all these SYRP estimates including the CJRP numerical totals. Apart from the variability resulting from SYRP's sample methodology, differences in population size and in age and sex distributions may stem from changes over time and seasonal fluctuations: SYRP describes the population in spring, whereas CJRP reflects the population in October.

It should be noted that despite comparable numerical estimates, the custody rates provided here (in the last column of table 1) are somewhat lower than those given in the CJRP data (OJJDP *Statistical Briefing Book*), differences that reflect slightly different population denominators. CJRP rates reflect the number of juveniles in the general population ages 10 through the upper age of the *original* court jurisdiction in each state,² whereas SYRP rates are based on all juveniles ages 10 through the upper age of *extended* juvenile court jurisdiction.³ The latter approach appeared more appropriate for SYRP because the survey explicitly targeted youth through age 20 and because a number of youth are in custody for some time.

The two surveys offer rather different race/ethnicity classifications, reflecting their different methodologies and answer categories: CJRP requires administrators to assign a single race/ethnicity classification to each youth, whereas SYRP permits youth to identify as multiracial. The CJRP-type classification has been universally used until fairly recently, and it still remains the standard for available administrative data (Snyder and Sickmund, 2006). SYRP's expanded answer choices conform to the current Census Bureau standard for measuring race/ethnicity. Moreover, it was this expansion that revealed that multiracial youth have a substantially higher custody rate, a finding presented in table 1 and noted on p.3.

The pattern observed in SYRP concerning the most serious offense leading to the current placement (table 5) is notably more heavily weighted toward person offenses than the CJRP data indicate (Sickmund, 2004; Sickmund, Sladky and Kang, 2005). The SYRP data show that 43% of youth are in their current placement because of a person offense, whereas the CJRP data show only 34%. Other features of the SYRP findings indicate that this discrepancy is an understandable consequence of measurement differences between the SYRP interview answers and administrative data on placing offenses.¹ These differences undoubtedly include the way the questions are formatted and worded, as well as the respondents' interpretation, access to information, and memory.

CJRP asks facility administrators for a single response that summarizes the youth's offense record. In contrast, the SYRP self-report measure may be more comprehensive than the administrative data, since the interview explicitly asked separate questions about all offenses, affording youth more opportunities to consider and include a more serious offense. The vast majority of youth in placement have previous convictions, so when asked to recall and report on the events that led to their current placement, they may not clearly distinguish these events from their prior offenses. In actuality, their view on this may be quite realistic, since courts undoubtedly do consider offense histories when deciding to place youth.

Finally, differences between what the youth did and the charges to which they finally pled should be systematic, with pled charges less serious. If youth respond by describing what they actually did and administrative records indicate the charge for which they were adjudicated after their plea, then self-report data will convey offenses that are more serious. (For example, a youth may describe an assault while the record may show a disorderly conduct charge). Given these dynamics of memory, interpretation, and circumstances, neither the self-report nor the administrative record is necessarily more valid. Both methods provide important, alternative perspectives on offender youth in placement.

SYRP data concerning offense behaviors go well beyond what administrators (surveyed through CJRP) can currently provide, giving details about the circumstances of current offenses (tables 2, 3, and 4), identifying patterns of past involvement in the justice system and true first offenders (table 6), and classifying youth by their most serious career offense (table 5). Until records systems become substantially more advanced, researchers must rely on youth interviews for this extensive information.

¹ CYRP surveys residential facilities in the United States to collect data on youth in custody. SYRP collects data from facilities and the youth themselves. Like SYRP, CJRP collects information on sex, age, race/ethnicity, most serious offense, court adjudication status, and more.

² This is the oldest age at which a juvenile court has jurisdiction over an individual for law-violating behavior. In 2003 there were 38 states in which the juvenile court had original jurisdiction over all youth who were younger than age 18 at the time of the offense, arrest, or referral to court (Juvenile Justice Geography, Policy, Practice & Statistics). In many states, the juvenile court has original jurisdiction over young adults who committed offenses while they were juveniles.

³ This is the oldest age for which the juvenile court can retain jurisdiction over youth's dispositions in delinquency matters. Extended jurisdiction laws enable the juvenile court to provide sanctions and services even for older juveniles who have reached the age at which original juvenile court jurisdiction ends. This upper limit varies by state, depending on what is considered to be in the best interests of the juvenile and the public. In 2003, there were 33 states that extended juvenile jurisdiction through age 20 (Juvenile Justice Geography, Policy, Practice & Statistics).

Females' offense patterns. SYRP findings underscore the historically higher rates of status offenses among females (Chesney-Lind, 2001; Chesney-Lind and Shelden, 2004). FBI data on arrests of youth younger than 21 years old at the time of SYRP show that females are charged with status offenses twice as frequently (12% of arrested females versus 6% of the arrested males).³⁵ The related SYRP findings, displayed in figure 1, indicate that status violations are the most serious offenses leading to placement for twice as many females as males (18% versus 9%).

Snyder and Sickmund (2006) observe that one major story over the decade preceding their report had been the rise in the representation of females among juveniles arrested. The Uniform Crime reports show that between 1999 and 2008 juvenile arrests for aggravated assaults dropped 21.8 percent for males but only 2.5 percent for females. During this same period, simple assault arrests for juvenile males decreased 5.8 percent but increased 15.9 percent for juvenile females (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2009). However, the evidence does not implicate increased violent behavior by females (Steffensmeier et al., 2005). Rather, the shift appears primarily to be related to changes in arrest policies, such as mandatory and pro-arrest laws for domestic violence (Snyder and Sickmund, 2006), because females more often tend to have violent altercations with those they know, including family members (Chesney-Lind, 2001). This explanation is further supported by the SYRP finding that females who are in placement for violent offenses more often report that they know or are related to their victims (82% of females versus 67% of males with current person offenses).

Committed youth in detention programs. The percentage of youth who are committed (i.e., adjudicated and disposed to their current program) is substantially lower in detention programs than in other types of programs (28% versus 80%, as given in table 7). Although the fact of this difference is not remarkable, it is noteworthy that the percentage of committed youth is as high as 28% among the population in detention, in view of the fact that the National Juvenile Detention Association (NJDA) opposes sentencing youth to detention facilities (Roush, 1999). Nevertheless, time-limited postadjudication sentences to detention have become increasingly popular. About the time of the SYRP data collection, detention was used as sanction for violations of probation in 40 states (National Center for Juvenile Justice, 2006).

Educational deficiencies. A long-standing body of literature documents a number of educational deficiencies among delinquent youth. Specifically, delinquent youth have been observed to function below expected academic levels (Wang, Blomberg, and Li, 2005; Zabel and Nigro, 2001). They have poor school attendance and higher rates of grade retention³⁶ (Laird, 1980; Silberberg and Silberberg, 1971; Wang, Blomberg, and Li, 2005; Zabel and Nigro, 1999). When they are in school, they also exhibit more disciplinary problems, resulting in higher rates of suspension (Finn, Scott, and Zarichny, 1988; Loeber and Farrington, 1998; Wang, Blomberg, and Li, 2005; Zabel and Nigro, 1999). The SYRP results corroborate these findings in the nationwide population of youth in placement, yet also document that over two-thirds of youth in placement have aspirations of higher education.

Family circumstances. A number of researchers have linked being raised in a single-parent family with increased delinquency (Anderson, 2002; Demuth and Brown, 2004; Manning and Lamb, 2003; McCord, Widom, and Crowell, 2001; McKnight and Loper, 2002). The SYRP findings document higher placement rates nationwide for youth who entered placement from single-parent and no-parent living conditions. Interestingly, SYRP also indicates that slightly, but significantly, more females enter placement from no-parent living arrangements and from foster family or agency care.

Childbearing rates among youth in placement. Other researchers have observed strong associations between teen fatherhood and delinquent behavior in geographically delimited smaller samples of offender and at-risk youth (Thornberry et al., 2000; Unruh, Bullis, and Yovanoff, 2003, 2004). The SYRP findings indicate that this association is characteristic of the national population of offender males in residential placement. The association is attenuated for offender females in placement, probably because pregnant females are less prevalent in the placement population than males who are expectant fathers (figure 5).

Youth Expectations About Future Offending and Sanctions

The SYRP questions that assess youth's beliefs about the workings of juvenile justice and their expectations regarding future offenses bear on the success of policy and program emphasis on graduated sanctions and accountability in the system. Even considering that the socially desirable response is to say they will not reoffend, it is noteworthy that the majority of youth in all groups do affirm they will not reoffend in the future. Regardless of how one interprets this prediction, their answers to other questions in this series are quite revealing about their views on the reliability of the sanctioning system. They generally expect to be returned to placement if they are found to reoffend, and they recognize that sanctions will be graduated, in that their future sanction for repeating their offense will be more severe. One-fourth of the youth in placement (25%) think it is very unlikely that they will be apprehended for any repeat offense (table 10). Perhaps these youth feel they will be better at eluding law enforcement in the future, or perhaps they recognize the considerable challenge that officers face in solving crime and apprehending those responsible. Whatever their reasoning, their answers identify this step as the weakest link in the sanctioning process.

The findings here also indicate that the large majority youth in placement have very positive future aspirations. Despite the fact that many are below grade level and report past attendance and disciplinary problems in school, two-thirds of youth in placement (68%) say that, if they could go as far as they wanted to in school, they would go to college or even beyond. About eight in nine youth (88%) say that in the future they expect they will have a steady job. These results suggest that the youth themselves offer a firm foundation for interventions that advance their education and job skills, especially if these efforts attempt to engage and build on individuals' hopes and dreams.

Implications

Several findings have implications for reducing recidivism and enhancing positive outcomes:

- **Develop programs that address the specific needs of youth who are parents or expectant parents.** SYRP discovered that 20 percent of youth in placement already have children or are expecting a child. Juvenile justice programs have not commonly focused on the unique needs of these young parents and have overlooked how youth's unmet needs may affect their children. To reduce youth's recidivism and enhance the outcomes for their children, future initiatives should focus on programs that support parent-child bonds, improve youth's parenting skills, develop realistic release plans to preserve these new families, and enhance youth's ability to support and safely parent their children in the future.

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- **Capitalize on youth's aspirations to motivate positive changes in their lives.** SYRP found that most youth say they want to go to college, or even to graduate school, and that the large majority expect to hold a steady job in the future. Intervention programs to reduce recidivism could motivate critical changes in youth's behavior by tapping their own specific aspirations for their further education and productive future lives.

SYRP can inform program and policy by providing details about the kinds of offenders in placement. Further analyses of the SYRP data can answer a wide range of questions about youth's offense patterns, including the following:

- **Do certain combinations of offenses typically occur together?** What types of offenses do the same youth tend to commit?
- **How do the offenses that gang members report differ from the offenses that other youth report?** Do gang members have different offense profiles than other youth? Are gang members more likely to report using a weapon, injuring their victims, having accomplices, or being under the influence of alcohol or drugs when they committed their offenses?
- **How do youth's current offenses relate to their family situations?** What are the current offenses of youth who were living with two parents when they entered placement, and do these offenses differ from the offenses of youth who were living with a single parent or with no parent? What kinds of offenses do youth commit if they have children of their own or are expecting a child?
- **Do different types of offenders have different expectations about their future education or employment or about their future offending and sanctions?** Are violent offenders less positive about their future education or employment? Are they more skeptical about the workings of the justice system?

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Notes

¹ SYRP custody rates are computed as rates per 100,000 in the residential U.S. population of youth with corresponding demographic characteristics who are within the ages covered by extended juvenile court jurisdiction. Numbers of youth in the general population, ages 10 through 20, were obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau's monthly population estimates for April 2003, which was the midpoint of SYRP data collection (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). These were adjusted by removing youth of ages not within the purview of the juvenile court in states where extended court jurisdiction ends before age 20.

² The SYRP reports only discuss differences that are statistically significant.

³ Fewer than 100 SYRP respondents are in this age category ($n = 82$). Here and throughout the SYRP reports, estimates that are based on fewer than 100 respondents are flagged as less reliable.

⁴ The SYRP observes answer patterns similar to those the U.S. Census Bureau found, which indicate that many Hispanic respondents regard their Hispanic ethnicity as their racial identity.

⁵ The classification of SYRP answers follows that used by the Census with one exception: the Census imputes specific racial identifications for respondents who select only "some other race" in answering the race question. These are assigned missing values in SYRP (comprising just 2.3% of the weighted sample). If SYRP were to impute race categories for these youth, the estimated numbers and custody rates for non-Hispanics in table 1 would all be just slightly higher.

⁶ Because the multiracial group is relatively small (an estimated 6% of the total population) and because youth who indiscriminately endorsed multiple answer categories throughout the interview could have inflated this category, the authors verified these findings by excluding outliers, as described in *Introduction to the Survey of Youth in Residential Placement* (Sedlak, 2010). The higher custody rate for multiracial youth withstood all of these tests. Excluding youth who scored above zero on the outlier index yielded placement rates within the 95-percent confidence intervals of those in table 1. Similarly, excluding youth who were more serious offenders in their self-report than in the administrative data (i.e., an estimated 44% of the total custody population) produced a race/ethnicity distribution that closely paralleled the distribution shown in table 1, with all percents within the confidence intervals given there.

⁷ Throughout this report, use of the term "significant" always refers to the statistical significance of the difference or relationship at issue. In some cases, a statistically significant difference may be of relatively small size.

⁸ Although the term "convicted" is not used in the juvenile justice domain, cognitive testing of the interview questions demonstrated that this terminology was clear and optimally understandable to youth in custody. Because the youth indicated whether they were "convicted" of the offenses that led to their current time in custody and, later in the interview, reported on their prior "convictions," this is the term used throughout this report, rather than the term "adjudication."

⁹ Some participants (n=139) did not select any of the listed offenses. They represent an estimated 2% of the custody population.

¹⁰ The FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program uses several indexes to track changes in the volume and nature of reported crimes. The Property Crime Index includes burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson (Snyder & Sickmund, 2006).

¹¹ For example, Table 3 shows that the odds of being under the influence if with an accomplice is 4.4 for public order offenders. Among public order offenders who were not with accomplices at the time of the offense, 40% were under the influence at the time, whereas 75% of the public order offenders who were with accomplices were under the influence at the time. The simple odds of being under the influence for each subgroup is as follows: the odds of being under the influence at the time for youth who were not with accomplices were 40% to 60%, or 2 to 3, but for those who were with accomplices, the odds were 75% to 25%, or 3 to 1. The *odds ratio* for public order offenders being under the influence of drugs or alcohol when they were with accomplices as compared with when they were not with accomplices is the *ratio* of these two odds: the odds of being under the influence if with accomplices (0.75/0.25, or 3) divided by the odds of being under the influence if not with accomplices (0.4/0.6, or 0.67), which is more than 4, as shown in table 3. In other words, the chances that a youth is under the influence of drugs or alcohol during a public order offense is more than four times greater if he or she is with accomplices at the time. (The percentages in this example are rounded from the actual percentages, so they produce an odds ratio of 4.5. Using the exact percentages yields the value of 4.4 shown in table 3).

¹² Questions regarding the use of a weapon and victims were only asked of youth who reported a person offense as the offense leading to their current placement.

¹³ Whereas assault without a weapon can be aggravated (i.e., not simple assault) if the victim is seriously injured, the SYRP distinguished only whether or not the youth had a weapon during the assault. The interview did not ask about the extent of injury to victims.

¹⁴ Note that a youth's current placement may be due to more than one offense. As shown in tables 2–5, an estimated 43,320 youth in residential placement report a person offense. In tables 2 and 3, youth are counted in every offense category they report; therefore, it is not correct to add the estimates for different categories in those earlier tables (e.g., to add the number of youth with person offenses to the number with property offenses) because the sum will be more than the total number of youth represented in the two categories. Table 5 is different in that it assigns each youth to a unique offense category, first based on the most serious offense that led to the youth's current placement and then based on the youth's most serious career offense (considering the youth's reports across both current offenses and prior convictions). Thus, table 5 counts each youth only once, and it is correct to sum subcategories of interest to obtain the total number of youth in the combined categories. For example, in table 5, adding the estimated number of youth who report a person offense to the number who identify a property offense correctly yields the total number of youth who report person or property offenses.

¹⁵ These percentages sum to more than 69% of person offenders because youth with multiple victims report all types of relationships that apply.

¹⁶ Due to “don’t know” responses and refusals to answer specific component questions, prior involvement could not be determined for 88 of the survey participants, representing an estimated 1.3% of the total custody population, or about 1,300 youth in placement.

¹⁷ The patterns of differences between current placing offenses and prior convictions should be interpreted with caution in light of the possibility, discussed in the text, that youth may not clearly differentiate between their current and past offenses.

¹⁸ Figure 2 is based on a sample total of 5,595 survey participants (unweighted) representing 78% of the weighted total population of youth in custody and 93% of the weighted total of youth with prior convictions. The remaining youth with prior convictions could not be classified into the categories shown in the figure.

¹⁹ Facility administrators provided information about adjudication and placement status for 6,243 participating youth, representing 83% of the total population in custody. Based on youth’s interview answers concerning whether they were convicted of the offense(s) that led to their placement, another 219 survey participants (representing 4% of the population in placement) were classified as not yet adjudicated. The remaining 611 participants (representing 13% of the placement population) said that they were convicted of their current offenses (i.e., were adjudicated) but their disposition (placement status) could not be determined.

²⁰ Length of stay information is missing for 137 survey participants, representing 2% of the population of youth in custody.

²¹ Youth’s living arrangements were classified hierarchically in the order mentioned in the text. Thus, less than 1% of youth described themselves as homeless and not living with parents, relatives, in a group or foster home, with friends, or on their own. Excluding other living arrangements the youth indicated, 3% of the population in placement considered themselves homeless at the time they were taken into custody. They represent 1% of youth who also said they were living with at least one parent and 6% of youth who were not living with any parent at the time.

²² A statistical comparison for youth younger than 15 years is not possible because no youth in this age group in the general population survey reported that they were parents.

²³ The component percentages for males (7% and 7%) do not sum exactly to the combined estimate (13%) because of rounding.

²⁴ Although youth can choose multiple reasons in answering this question, they were categorized hierarchically for the subgroups described here, using the order mentioned in the text.

²⁵ Reports concerning children in the general population identify the modal grade for a child of a specific age in October (Hauser, Pager, and Simmons, 2000). Using this approach, the modal grades for children ages 10, 12, 14, and 16 are grades 5, 7, 9, and 11, respectively. To ensure comparability with the general population data, the authors computed SYRP participants’ ages as of October 2002 to determine whether they were at or below the modal grade for their age during the 2002-2003 academic year.

²⁶ This approach follows the standard approach for youth through age 17, where the modal status is still enrollment in school, but it departs from the U.S. Census approach by incorporating youth who are older and for whom the modal status is high school graduation.

²⁷ The general population rate presented in the text was computed using Census figures for 2003 school enrollment and graduation status (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005, table 2) covering the age range corresponding to the SYRP universe: 10- to 20-year-olds. Published Census estimates concerning the overall percentage of youth who are below modal grade level differ because they exclude high school graduates and do not include the 18- to 20-year-olds.

²⁸ The number of children served for specific learning disabilities under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is the only data source that provides a measure of children with learning disabilities in the general population. It covers children in both public and private schools as well as juveniles in residential placement who have a diagnosed learning disability. The total number of children with a learning disability served under IDEA was used to index the diagnosed learning disabilities in the U.S. child population. The denominator, the number of youth in the population ages 10–20, was computed from the monthly postcensal single-year age estimates for the U.S. resident population for April 2003, which is approximately the midpoint of the SYRP data collection period (U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, 2004).

²⁹ The denominator used to calculate the percentages presented here reflects only those youth who answered this question (i.e., 6,620 survey participants, representing an estimated total of 94,290 youth in custody). Youth are not asked this question if they do not report any specific current offense (453 survey participants, representing an estimated 7% of the total population in custody). See table 10 and its associated text and footnotes for further explanation.

³⁰ “Graduated sanctions” refers to justice system responses that can take a variety of specific forms but always involve a continuum of consequences (dispositions, punishments, services, or intervention programs) calibrated to address the severity and chronic nature of the specific crimes and the individual offender’s history and characteristics.

³¹ Youth who were not asked these questions include those who do not report any specific current offense leading to their current placement (453 survey participants, representing about 7% of the custody population). Between 65 and 105 survey participants, representing another 1% or less of the estimated population, replied “don’t know” or refused to answer questions in this series. Thus, youth representing about 8% of the total population in custody are missing values for the questions with asterisks in table 10 and were therefore excluded from the denominators used to calculate the percentages presented there.

³² As explained in note 31, youth with missing values on these questions (an estimated 8% of the custody population) are excluded from the table 10 findings. They are also excluded from the related tests for sex differences on the table 10 questions.

³³ The denominator for this percentage excludes youth who say “don’t know,” who refuse to answer the component questions, or who select “other” as their educational aspiration and do not expect to attain this “other” (58 survey participants, representing less than 1% of the custody population).

³⁴ Custody rates are computed by dividing the estimated total of youth in custody in the group by the number of general population youth in the group. Whereas SYRP youth answered about their race/ethnicity directly, it is likely that many of the youth in the general population ages 10–20 are classified through proxy responses by their household representatives. Household representatives may give single race classifications for some youth who would classify themselves in multiple-race categories. This would understate the denominator for this subgroup, artificially inflating its observed custody rate. Future research on the multiple-race methodology is needed to assess this possibility.

³⁵ These rates were computed from information provided in tables 39 and 40 of *Crime in the United States, 2003* (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2004).

³⁶ “Grade retention” means that the youth was “held back” and repeated a grade in school.