The Nature and Extent of Delinquency

CHAPTER OUTLINE

OFFICIAL STATISTICS
Crime Trends in the United States
Measuring Official Delinquency

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The National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS)
Focus on Delinquency: The Rise and Fall of Juvenile Crime Rates

SELF-REPORTED DELINQUENCY
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Race and Delinquency
Social Class and Delinquency
Age and Delinquency

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Delinquency in a Birth Cohort
Stability in Crime: From Delinquent to Criminal
What Causes Chronic Offending?
Policy Implications

JUVENILE VICTIMIZATION
What Does This Mean to Me? Aging and Wisdom
Victimization in the United States
The Victims and Their Criminals
Focus on Delinquency: Adolescent Victims of Violence

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES
After reading this chapter you should:

1. Know what is meant by the term official delinquency.
2. Understand how the FBI’s Uniform Crime Report (UCR) is compiled.
3. Be familiar with recent trends in juvenile delinquency.
4. Understand how self-report data are collected and what they say about juvenile crime.
5. Recognize the factors that affect the juvenile crime rate.

7. Appreciate the factors that cause racial differences in delinquency.
8. Be able to debate the issue of class position and delinquency.
9. Be aware of the debate over the role age plays in delinquency.
10. Understand the concept of the chronic persistent offender.
11. Be familiar with the relationship between childhood and victimization.
In late August 2003, players from the varsity and junior varsity football teams of Mepham High School in Bellmore, Long Island, New York, went to a four-day training camp in Pennsylvania. While there, three varsity players, ages sixteen and seventeen, began hazing several junior varsity players, ages thirteen and fourteen. The hazing soon began to resemble a bizarre sexual ritual. The young boys were sodomized with a broomstick, pinecones, and golf balls.

After the trip, when one of the boys told his parents what had happened, his mother complained to school authorities but was told it was her responsibility to call the police. It was not, she found out, school policy to notify authorities about incidents that happened off campus. The press soon got hold of the story, and it made headlines around the nation.

The Bellmore-Merrick school board decided to cancel all of the Mepham team’s football games. Later, the district charged the senior boys with offenses including involuntary deviate sexual intercourse, kidnapping, aggravated assault, unlawful restraint, and false imprisonment. On November 13, 2003, a Pennsylvania juvenile court judge decided to refuse the prosecution’s attempts to try the case in adult court and ordered the boys be tried in juvenile court, where they could receive appropriate treatment. One of the teens was ordered to spend time in a detention center, another sent to a military-style boot camp, and the third received probation. All three were barred from returning to school once their sentence was completed; they were to be homeschooled for the remainder of their high school career. VIEW THE CNN VIDEO CLIP OF THIS STORY AND ANSWER RELATED CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS ON YOUR JUVENILE DELINQUENCY: THE CORE 2E CD.

The Mepham hazing incident is but one of millions of serious illegal acts committed by young people each year. Who commits delinquent acts, and where are they most likely to occur? Is the juvenile crime rate increasing or decreasing? Are juveniles more likely than adults to become the victims of crime? To understand the causes of delinquent behavior and to devise effective means to reduce its occurrence, we must seek answers to these questions.

Delinquency experts have devised a variety of methods to measure the nature and extent of delinquency. We begin with a description of the most widely used sources of data on crime and delinquency. We also examine the information these resources furnish on juvenile crime rates and trends. These data sources will then be used to provide information on the characteristics of adolescent law violators.
forcible rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny, arson, and motor vehicle
theft. Police record every reported incident of these offenses and report them on a
quarterly basis to the FBI. Data are broken down by city, county, metropolitan area,
and geographical divisions. In addition, the UCR provides information on individuals
who have been arrested for these and all other criminal offenses, including vandalism,
liquor law violations, and drug trafficking. These are known as Part II offenses. The
arrest data are presented by age, sex, and race.

The UCR uses three methods to express crime data. First, the number of crimes
reported to the police and arrests made are expressed as raw figures (for example,
16,204 murders occurred in 2002). Second, crime rates per 100,000 people are com-
puted. That is, when the UCR indicates that the murder rate was 5.6 in 2002, it means
that about 6 people in every 100,000 were murdered between January 1 and Decem-
ber 31, 2002. Third, the FBI computes changes in the number and rate of crime over
time. For example, murder rates declined 4.5 percent between 1998 and 2002.

Crime Trends in the United States
The U.S. index crime rate skyrocketed between 1960 (3.3 million index crimes re-
ported to police agencies) and 1981 (13.4 million index crimes recorded). By 1991
the FBI was recording more than 14 million crimes annually. Both the number and
rate of crimes have been declining ever since. In 2002 about 11.8 million crimes were
reported to the police, a number almost identical to that of the year before. Despite
this recent stabilization, the number of reported crimes has declined by about 3 mil-
lion from the 1991 peak, and as Figure 2.1 shows, the crime rate has also declined.2
But despite this dramatic decline, millions of serious criminal incidents still occur
each year.

Measuring Official Delinquency
Because the UCR arrest statistics are disaggregated (broken down) by suspect’s age,
they can be used to estimate adolescent crime. Juvenile arrest data must be interpreted
with caution, however. First, the number of teenagers arrested does not represent the
actual number of youths who have committed delinquent acts. Some offenders are

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**Part II offenses**
All crimes other than Part I offenses; recorded by local law en-
forcement officers, arrests for these crimes are tallied quarterly and sent
to the FBI for inclusion in the UCR.

**disaggregated**
Analyzing the relationship between two or more independent
variables (such as murder convictions and death sentence) while
controlling for the influence of a dependent variable (such as race).

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**Figure 2.1** Crime Rate Trends, 1960–2002

*Rate per 100,000 population (in 1000s)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Rate per 100,000 population (in 1000s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

More than 350,000 youth are arrested each year for serious crimes, including rape, murder, and robbery. Here, David P. Socha, 17, (center) of Paxton, Massachusetts, covers his head while being escorted past his family, after Socha’s arraignment on a charge of making a false bomb threat while boarding a flight with his family at Logan International Airport. Socha was released on his own recognizance.

never counted because they are never caught. Others are counted more than once because multiple arrests of the same individual for different crimes are counted separately in the UCR. Consequently, the total number of arrests does not equal the number of people who have been arrested. Put another way, if two million arrests of youths under eighteen years of age were made in a given year, we could not be sure if two million individuals had been arrested once or if five hundred thousand chronic offenders had been arrested four times each. In addition, when an arrested offender commits multiple crimes, only the most serious one is recorded. Therefore, if two million juveniles are arrested, the number of crimes committed is at least two million but it may be much higher.

Despite these limitations, the nature of arrest data remains constant over time. Consequently, arrest data can provide some indication of the nature and trends in juvenile crime. What does the UCR tell us about delinquency?

Official Delinquency In 2002 (the latest data available), about 13.7 million arrests were made, or about 5,000 per 100,000 population. Of these, about 2.2 million were for serious Part I crimes and 11.5 million for less serious Part II crimes. Juveniles under eighteen who make up about 26 percent of the population were responsible for about 26 percent of all arrests for index crimes, including 16 percent of the violent crime arrests and about 31 percent of the property crime arrests (see Table 2.1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2.1</th>
<th>Arrests by Age of Offender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Under 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part I or Index violent crime</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part I or Index property crime</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part I or Index total</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total all crimes</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Because of rounding, percentages may not add to 100.

“Under 18” includes “Under 15.”

About 1.2 million juvenile arrests were made in 2002 for Part II offenses. Included in this total were 90,000 arrests for running away from home, 139,000 for disorderly conduct, 133,000 for drug-abuse violations, and 103,000 for curfew violations.

**Juvenile Crime Trends**  
Juvenile crime continues to have a significant influence on the nation’s overall crime statistics. As Figure 2.2 shows, the juvenile arrest rate began to climb in the 1980s, peaked during the mid-1990s, and then began to fall; it has since been in decline. Even the teen murder rate, which had remained stubbornly high, has undergone a decline during the past few years. For example, 1,700 youths were arrested for murder in 1997, a number that by 2002 had declined by almost half (to 973). Similarly, 3,800 juveniles were arrested for rape in 1997, and 3,300 in 2002. This decline in juvenile violence is especially welcome considering that its rate was approaching epidemic proportions.

Though juvenile crime rates have been in decline for the past decade, they tend to ebb and flow over long periods of time. What factors account for change in the crime and delinquency rate? This is the topic of the Focus on Delinquency box entitled “The Rise and Fall of Juvenile Crime Rates.”

**What the Future Holds**  
Some experts, such as criminologist James A. Fox, predict a significant increase in teen violence if current population trends persist. The nation’s teenage population will increase by 15 percent, or more than nine million, between now and 2010; the number in the high-risk ages of fifteen to seventeen will increase by more than three million, or 31 percent. There are approximately fifty million school-age children in the United States, many younger than ten—more than we have had for decades. Although many come from stable homes, others lack stable families and adequate supervision; these are some of the children who will soon enter their prime crime years. As a result, Fox predicts a wave of youth violence even greater than that of the past ten years.4

In contrast, economist Steven Levitt believes that even though teen crime rates may eventually rise, their influence on the nation’s total crime rate may be offset by the growing number of crime-free senior citizens.5 Levitt also believes that punitive policies such as putting more kids behind bars and adding police may help control delinquency. One problem on the horizon remains the maturation of “crack babies,” who spent their early childhood years in families and neighborhoods ravaged by crack cocaine. Coupled with a difficult home environment, these children may turn out to be extremely prone to delinquency activity, producing the increase in the delinquency predicted by James A. Fox.6

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**Figure 2.2**  
**Juvenile Arrest Rates for All Crimes, 1980–2002**

![Graph showing juvenile arrest rates from 1980 to 2002](source)
ARE THE UCR DATA VALID?

Questions have been raised about the validity and accuracy of UCR’s “official” crime data. Victim surveys show that less than half of all victims report the crime to police. Because official data are derived entirely from police records, we can assume that a significant number of crimes are not accounted for in the UCR. There are also concerns that police departments make systematic errors in recording crime data or manipulate the data in order to give the public the impression that they are highly effective crime fighters.

Using official arrest data to measure delinquency rates is particularly problematic. Arrest records count only adolescents who have been caught, and these youths may be different from those who evade capture. Victimless crimes such as drug and alcohol use are significantly undercounted using this measure. Another problem is that arrest decision criteria vary among police agencies. Some police agencies practice full enforcement, arresting all teens who violate the law, whereas others follow a policy of discretion that encourages unofficial handling of juvenile matters through social service agencies.

Although these questions are troubling, the problems associated with collecting and verifying the official UCR data are consistent and stable over time. This means that, although the absolute accuracy of the data can be questioned, the trends and patterns they show are probably reliable. In other words, we cannot be absolutely sure about the actual number of adolescents who commit crimes, but it is likely that the teen crime rate has been in a significant decline.

The National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS)

The FBI is currently instituting a new program that collects data on each reported crime incident. Instead of submitting statements of the kinds of crime that individual citizens reported to the police and summary statements of resulting arrests, the new program will require local police agencies to provide at least a brief account of each incident and arrest, including the incident, victim, and offender information. Under NIBRS, law enforcement authorities will provide information to the FBI on each criminal incident involving forty-six specific offenses, including the eight Part I crimes, that occur in their jurisdiction; arrest information on the forty-six offenses plus eleven lesser offenses is also provided in NIBRS. These expanded crime categories would include numerous additional crimes, such as blackmail, embezzlement, drug offenses, and bribery; this would allow a national database on the nature of crime, victims, and criminals to be developed. So far, twenty-two states have implemented their NIBRS program and twelve others are in the process of finalizing their data collections. When this new UCR program is fully implemented and adopted across the nation, it should provide significantly better data on juvenile crime than exists today.
The Rise and Fall of Juvenile Crime Rates

Crime rates climb and fall, reflecting a variety of social and economic conditions. Although there is still disagreement over what causes crime rate fluctuations, the following factors are considered to play a major role in determining patterns and trends.

Age

Change in the age distribution of the population deeply influences crime and delinquency rates. Because juvenile males commit more crime than any other population segment, as a general rule the crime rate follows the proportion of young males in the population. The postwar baby-boom generation reached their teenage years in the 1960s, just as the crime rate began a sharp increase. With the “graying” of society and a decline in the birthrate, it is not surprising that the overall crime rate began to decline in the mid-1990s. Some criminologists fear crime rates will begin to climb when (and if) the number of juveniles in the population begins to increase.

Economy

In the short term, a poor economy may actually help lower crime rates. Unemployed parents are at home to supervise children and guard their homes. Because there is less to spend, a poor economy means that there are actually fewer valuables worth stealing. Recent research (2002) on the relationship between unemployment and crime conducted by Gary Kleck and Ted Chiricos discovered that there was no relationship between unemployment rates and the rate of robbery, shoplifting, residential burglary, theft of motor vehicle parts, and automobile theft.

Despite the weak association, it is possible that long-term periods of economic weakness and unemployment eventually lift crime rates. Chronic teenage unemployment rates may produce a perception of hopelessness that leads to crime and delinquency. Violence may be a function of urban problems and the economic deterioration in the nation’s inner cities. Our nation’s economy is now fueled by the service and technology industries. Youths who at one time might have obtained low-skill jobs in factories and shops find that these legitimate economic opportunities no longer exist. Low-skill manufacturing jobs have been dispersed to overseas plants; most new jobs that don’t require specialized skills are in the low-paying service area. Lack of real economic opportunity may encourage drug dealing, theft, and violence. Experts fear that a long-term economic downturn coupled with a relatively large number of teens in the population will produce the high delinquency rates of the late eighties and early nineties.

Drugs

Drug use has been linked to fluctuations in the crime and delinquency rate. Abusers are particularly crime-prone, so as drug use levels increase, so too do crime rates. When teen violence skyrocketed in the 1980s, it was no coincidence that this period also witnessed increases in drug trafficking and arrests for drug crimes. Teenage substance abusers commit a significant portion of all serious crimes and inner-city drug-abuse problems may account in part for the persistently high violent-crime rate. Groups and gangs that are involved in the urban drug trade recruit juveniles because they work cheaply, are immune from heavy criminal penalties, and are daring and willing to take risks. Arming themselves for protection, these youthful dealers pose a threat to neighborhood adolescents, who in turn arm themselves for self-protection. The result is an “arms race” that produces an increasing spiral of violence.

Drug abuse may also have a more direct influence on teen crime patterns—as when alcohol-abusing kids engage in acts of senseless violence. Users may turn to theft and violence for money to purchase drugs and support drug habits. Increases in teenage drug use may be a precursor to higher violence rates in the future.

Media

Some experts argue that violent media can influence youth crime. As the availability of media with a violent theme skyrocketed with the introduction of home video players, DVDs, cable TV, computer and video games, and so on, so too did teen violence rates. According to a recent analysis of all available scientific data conducted by Brad Bushman and Craig Anderson, watching violence on TV is correlated to aggressive behavior, especially among kids with a preexisting tendency toward crime and violence.

Ongoing Social Problems

As the level of social problems increase—divorce, school dropout, teen pregnancy, and racial conflict—so do crime and delinquency rates. For example, cross-national research indicates that child homicide rates are greatest in those nations, including the United States, that have the highest rates of children born out of wedlock and with teenage mothers. Children living in single-parent homes are twice as likely to
be impoverished than those in two-parent homes, and are consequently at greater risk for juvenile delinquency. The number of teen pregnancies is on the decline and so too are teen crime rates.

**Abortion**

In a controversial work, John J. Donohue III and Steven D. Levitt found empirical evidence that the recent drop in the crime rate can be attributed to the availability of legalized abortion. In 1973, *Roe v. Wade* legalized abortion nationwide. Within a few years of the *Roe v. Wade* decision, more than one million abortions were being performed annually, or roughly one abortion for every three live births. Donohue and Levitt suggest that the decrease in the crime rate that began approximately eighteen years later, in 1991, can be related to the fact that the first group of potential offenders affected by the abortion decision began reaching the peak age of criminal activity. It is possible that the link between crime rates and abortion is the result of two mechanisms: (1) selective abortion on the part of women most at risk to have children who would engage in delinquent activity, and (2) improved child-rearing or environmental circumstances caused by better maternal, familial, or fetal circumstances because women are having fewer children. If abortion were illegal, they find, crime rates might be 10 to 20 percent higher than they currently are with legal abortion.

**Guns**

Another important influence on violence rates is the number of weapons in the hands of teens. In 2002, twenty-five thousand kids were arrested on weapons-related charges. More than 60 percent of the homicides committed by juveniles involve firearms. Guns can turn a schoolyard fight into a homicide. Their presence creates a climate in which kids who would otherwise shun firearms begin to carry them to “protect” themselves. As the number of guns in the hands of children increases, so do juvenile violence rates.

**Gangs**

The explosive growth in teenage gangs has also contributed to teen violence rates. Surveys indicate that there are more than 750,000 gang members in the United States. There is evidence that a significant portion of murders in some cities, such as Chicago and Los Angeles, are gang-related. A large and growing number of juveniles who kill do so in groups of two or more; multiple-offender killings have doubled since the mid-1980s. Gang-related violence is frequently compounded by the use of firearms. Research indicates that in major cities about one-third of kids who are gang members carry a gun all or most of the time.

**Juvenile Justice Policy**

Some law-enforcement experts have suggested that a reduction in crime rates may be attributed to a recent get tough attitude toward delinquency and drug abuse. Police have become more aggressive. New laws call for mandatory incarceration for juvenile offenders. Juveniles may even be eligible for the death penalty. Putting potentially high-rate offenders behind bars may help stabilize crime rates.

**CRITICAL THINKING**

1. Are there any other factors, in addition to those mentioned here, that influence juvenile crime rates? For example, do you believe that pop culture icons who seem to embrace drugs, sex, and rebellion influence adolescent behavior?

2. How has the post-9/11 world, with its emphasis on security and patriotism, influenced teens? Does a national calamity such as the 9/11 attacks encourage or discourage youthful misbehavior?

**INFOTRAC COLLEGE EDITION RESEARCH**

To find out more about the factors that influence juvenile arrest rates, use the term as a key word search on InfoTrac College Edition.

school; boys in a detention center may be asked to respond to a survey; or youths randomly selected from the population of teenagers can be questioned in their homes. Self-report information can be collected in one-to-one interviews or through a self-administered questionnaire, but more commonly this information is gathered through a mass distribution of anonymous questionnaires.

Self-report surveys can include all segments of the population. They provide information on offenders who have never been arrested and are therefore not part of the official data. They also measure behavior that is rarely detected by police, such as drug abuse, because their anonymity allows youths freely to describe their illegal activities. Surveys can also include items measuring personality characteristics, behavior, and attitudes.

Table 2.2 shows one format for self-report questions. Youths are asked to indicate how many times they have participated in illegal or deviant behavior. Other formats allow subjects to record the precise number of times they engaged in each delinquent activity. Note that the reporting period is limited to the previous twelve months here, but some surveys question lifetime activity.

Questions not directly related to delinquent activity are often included in self-report surveys. Information may be collected on self-image; intelligence; personality; attitudes toward family, friends, and school; leisure activities; and school activities. Self-report surveys also gather information on family background, social status, race, and sex. Reports of delinquent acts can be correlated with this information to create a much more complete picture of delinquent offenders than official statistics can provide.

Criminologists have used self-report studies of delinquency for more than forty years.8 They are a valuable source of information on the activities of youths who have had contact with the juvenile justice system as well as on the dark figures of crime—that is, those who have escaped official notice.

**What Self-Report Data Show**

Most self-report studies indicate that the number of children who break the law is far greater than official statistics would lead us to believe.9 In fact, when truancy, alcohol consumption, petty theft, and recreational drug use are included in self-report scales, delinquency appears to be almost universal. The most common offenses are truancy, drinking alcohol, using a false ID, shoplifting or larceny under five dollars, fighting, using marijuana, and damaging the property of others. In chapter 10, self-report data will be used to gauge trends in adolescent drug abuse.

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**Table 2.2 Self-Report Survey Sample**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Never Did Act</th>
<th>One Time</th>
<th>2–5 Times</th>
<th>6–9 Times</th>
<th>10+ Times</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stole something worth less than $50</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stole something worth more than $50</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used cocaine</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was in a fistfight</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carried a weapon such as a gun or a knife</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fought someone using a weapon</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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dark figures of crime
Incidents of crime and delinquency that go undetected by police.
Researchers at the University of Michigan’s Institute for Social Research (ISR) conduct an annual national self-report survey, called Monitoring the Future (MTF), that involves a sample of about three thousand youths. Table 2.3 contains some of the data from the 2002 MTF survey.

A surprising number of these typical teenagers reported involvement in serious criminal behavior: about 12 percent reported hurting someone badly enough that the victim needed medical care (6 percent said they did it more than once); about 29 percent reported stealing something worth less than $50, and another 10 percent stole something worth more than $50; 28 percent reported shoplifting; 11 percent had damaged school property.

If the MTF data are accurate, the juvenile crime problem is much greater than official statistics would lead us to believe. There are approximately forty million youths between the ages of ten and eighteen. Extrapolating from the MTF findings, this group accounts for more than 100 percent of all the theft offenses reported in the UCR. Some 3 percent of the students said they had used force to steal (which is the legal definition of a robbery). At this rate, high school students commit 1.2 million robberies per year. In comparison, the UCR tallies about 240,000 robberies for all age groups in 2002. Over the past decade, the MTF surveys indicate that with a few exceptions, self-reported teenage participation in theft, violence, and damage-related crimes seems to be more stable than the trends reported in the UCR arrest data.

There is also some question about the accuracy of self-report data. For example, there is evidence that reporting accuracy differs between racial, ethnic, and gender groups. One recent study found that although girls are generally more willing than boys to disclose drug use, Hispanic girls are significantly more likely than Hispanic boys to underreport their use of cocaine. Such gender-cultural differences might provide a skewed and inaccurate portrait of criminal and or delinquent activity. In this case, self-report data might delude delinquency experts into believing that there is not much risk that Hispanic females will become substance abusers, but in reality their abuse rates are inaccurate because they are reluctant to admit their drug usage.11

### Table 2.3 Self-Reported Delinquent Activity of High School Seniors, 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Crime</th>
<th>Total (%)</th>
<th>Committed Only Once (%)</th>
<th>Committed More Than Once (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Set fire on purpose</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damaged school property</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damaged work property</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auto theft</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auto part theft</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breaking and entering</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theft (under $50)</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theft (over $50)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoplifting</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was involved in gang fight</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hurt someone badly enough that they needed medical care</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used force to steal</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hit teacher or supervisor</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Got into a serious fight</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CORRELATES OF DELINQUENCY

An important aspect of delinquency research is measurement of the personal traits and social characteristics associated with adolescent misbehavior. If, for example, a strong association exists between delinquent behavior and family income, then poverty and economic deprivation must be considered in any explanation of the onset of adolescent criminality. If the delinquency-income association is not present, then other forces may be responsible for producing antisocial behavior. It would be fruitless to concentrate delinquency control efforts in areas such as job creation and vocational training if social status were found to be unrelated to delinquent behavior. Similarly, if only a handful of delinquents are responsible for most serious crimes, then crime control policies might be made more effective by identifying and treating these offenders. The next sections discuss the relationship between delinquency and the characteristics of gender, race, social class, and age.

Gender and Delinquency

Males are significantly more delinquent than females. The teenage gender ratio for serious violent crime is approximately four to one, and for property crime approximately two to one, male to female.

One relationship reverses this general pattern: girls are more likely than boys to be arrested as runaways. There are two possible explanations for this. Girls could be more likely than boys to run away from home, or police may view the female runaway as the more serious problem and therefore more likely to process girls through official justice channels. This may reflect paternalistic attitudes toward girls, who are viewed as likely to “get in trouble” if they are on the street.

Between 1993 and 2002, the number of arrests of male delinquents decreased about 16 percent, whereas the number of female delinquents arrested actually increased about 6 percent. The change in serious violent crime arrests was even more striking: that for males decreased by 33 percent, while females’ violent crime arrests remained relatively stable during this period of declining juvenile crime, decreasing only 2 percent. However, as Figure 2.3 shows, both the male and female juvenile arrest rates are down from their peak. Though the number of crimes committed
by young girls is higher now than a decade ago (because the number of girls in the population has increased) the average girl is actually “less delinquent” than her older sisters.

Self-report data also seem to show that the incidence of female delinquency is much higher than believed earlier, and that the most common crimes committed by males are also the ones most female offenders commit. Table 2.4 shows the percentages of males and females who admitted engaging in delinquent acts during the past twelve months in the latest MTF survey. As the table indicates, about 33 percent of boys and 26 percent of girls admit to shoplifting, 14 percent of boys and 5 percent of girls said they stole something worth more than $50, and 18 percent of boys and 5 percent of girls said they hurt someone badly enough that they required medical care. Although self-report studies indicate that the content of girls’ delinquency is similar to boys’, the few adolescents who reported engaging frequently in serious violent crime are still predominantly male. However, as the official arrest data show, over the past decade girls have increased their self-reported delinquency whereas boys report somewhat less involvement. Because the relationship between gender and delinquency rate is so important, this topic will be discussed further in chapter 6.
There are approximately 41 million White and 8.5 million African-American youths ages five to seventeen, a ratio of about five to one. Yet racial minorities are disproportionately represented in the arrest statistics (see Figure 2.4). African-American youths are arrested for a disproportionate number of murders, rapes, robberies, and assaults, while White youths are arrested for a disproportionate share of arsons. Among Part II crimes, White youths are disproportionately arrested for alcohol-related violations.

Self-Report Differences

Official statistics show that minority youths are much more likely than Whites to be arrested for serious criminal behavior. To many delinquency experts, this pattern reflects discrimination in the juvenile justice system. In other words, African-American youths are more likely to be formally arrested by the police, who, in contrast, will treat White youths informally. One way to examine this issue is to compare the racial differences in self-reported data with those found in the official delinquency records. Given the disproportionate numbers of African

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### Table 2.4  Self-Reported Delinquent Activity of High School Seniors, by Gender, 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Crime</th>
<th>Males (%)</th>
<th>Females (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Serious fight</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gang fight</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hurt someone badly</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used a weapon to steal</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stole (under $50)</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stole (over $50)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoplifted</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breaking and entering</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committed arson</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damaged school property</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


### Figure 2.4  Juvenile Arrest Rates for All Crimes, by Race, 1980–2002


Race and Delinquency

There are approximately 41 million White and 8.5 million African-American youths ages five to seventeen, a ratio of about five to one. Yet racial minorities are disproportionately represented in the arrest statistics (see Figure 2.4). African-American youths are arrested for a disproportionate number of murders, rapes, robberies, and assaults, while White youths are arrested for a disproportionate share of arsons. Among Part II crimes, White youths are disproportionately arrested for alcohol-related violations.
Americans arrested, charges of racial discrimination would be supported if we found little difference between the number of self-reported minority and White crimes.

Early researchers found that the relationship between race and self-reported delinquency was virtually nonexistent.\textsuperscript{14} This suggests that racial differences in the official crime data may reflect the fact that African-American youths have a much greater chance of being arrested and officially processed.\textsuperscript{15} Self-report studies also suggest that the delinquent behavior rates of African-American and White teenagers are generally similar and that differences in arrest statistics may indicate discrimination by police.\textsuperscript{16} The MTF survey, for example, generally shows that offending differences between African-American and White youths are marginal.\textsuperscript{17} However, some experts warn that African-American youths may underreport more serious crimes, limiting the ability of self-reports to be a valid indicator of racial differences in the crime rate.\textsuperscript{18}

**Bias Effects?** How can the disproportionate number of African-American youngsters arrested for serious crimes be explained? One view is that it is a result of bias by the police and courts. According to this view, ethnic minority group members are more likely to be formally arrested than Whites.\textsuperscript{19} Police routinely search, question, and detain all African-American males in an area if a violent criminal has been described as "looking or sounding Black"; this is called *racial profiling*. African-American youth who develop a police record are more likely to be severely punished if they are picked up again and sent back to juvenile court.\textsuperscript{20} Consequently, the racial discrimination that is present at the early stages of the justice system ensures that minorities receive greater punishments at its conclusion.

Juvenile court judges may see the offenses committed by African-American youths as more serious than those committed by White offenders. They seem more willing to give White defendants lenient sentences or dismiss their cases.\textsuperscript{21} As a result, African-American youths are more likely to get an official record.

According to this view then, the disproportionate number of minority youth who are arrested is less a function of their involvement in serious crime and more the result of the race-based decision making that is found in the juvenile justice system.\textsuperscript{22} Institutional racism by police and the courts is still an element of daily life in the African-American community, a factor that undermines faith in social and political institutions and weakens confidence in the justice system.\textsuperscript{23}

**Race Matters** The other point of view holds that although evidence of racial bias does exist in the justice system, there is enough correspondence between official and self-report data to conclude that racial differences in the crime rate are real.\textsuperscript{24} If African-American youths are arrested at a disproportionately high rate for crimes such as robbery and assault, it is a result of offending rates rather than bias on the part of the criminal justice system.\textsuperscript{25}
According to this view of race and delinquency, racial differentials in the crime rate are tied to the social and economic disparity suffered by African-American youths. Too many are forced to live in the nation’s poorest areas that suffer high crime rates. The burden of social and economic marginalization has weakened the African-American family structure. When families are weakened or disrupted, their ability to act as social control agents is compromised.

Even during times of economic growth, lower-class African Americans are left out of the economic mainstream, causing a growing sense of frustration and failure. As a result of being shut out of educational and economic opportunities enjoyed by the rest of society, this population may be prone, some believe, to the lure of illegitimate gain and criminality. However, even among at-risk African-American kids growing up in communities characterized by poverty, high unemployment levels, and single-parent households, those who do live in stable families with reasonable incomes and educational achievement are much less likely to engage in violent behaviors than those lacking family support. Consequently, racial differences in the delinquency rate would evaporate if the social and economic characteristics of racial minorities were improved to levels currently enjoyed by Whites, and African-American kids could enjoy the same social, economic, and educational privileges.

In summary, official data indicate that African-American youths are arrested for more serious crimes than Whites. But self-report studies show that the differences in the rates of delinquency between the races is insignificant. Therefore, some experts believe that official differences in the delinquency rate are an artifact of bias in the justice system: police are more likely to arrest and courts are more likely to convict young African Americans. To those who believe that the official data have validity, the participation of African-American youths in serious criminal behavior is generally viewed as a function of their socioeconomic position and the racism they face.

Social Class and Delinquency

Defining the relationship between economic status and delinquent behavior is a key element in the study of delinquency. If youth crime is purely a lower-class phenomenon, its cause must be rooted in the social forces that are found solely in lower-class areas: poverty, unemployment, social disorganization, culture conflict, and alienation. However, if delinquent behavior is spread throughout the social structure, its cause must be related to some non-economic factor: intelligence, personality, socialization, family dysfunction, educational failure, or peer influence. According to this line of reasoning, providing jobs or economic incentives would have little effect on the crime rate.

At first glance, the relationship between class and crime seems clear. Youths who lack wealth or social standing are the most likely to use criminal means to achieve their goals. Communities that lack economic and social opportunities produce high levels of frustration. Kids who live in these areas believe that they can never compete socially or economically with adolescents being raised in more affluent areas. They may turn to criminal behavior for monetary gain and psychological satisfaction. Family life is disrupted in these low-income areas, and law-violating youth groups thrive in a climate that undermines and neutralizes adult supervision.

Research on Social Class and Delinquency

The social class–delinquency relationship was challenged by pioneering self-report studies, specifically those that revealed no direct relationship between social class and the commission of delinquent acts. Instead, socioeconomic class was related to the manner of official processing by police, court, and correctional agencies. In other words, although both poor and affluent kids get into fights, shoplift, and take drugs, only the indigent are likely to be arrested and sent to juvenile court. This finding casts doubt on the assumption that poverty and lower-class position is a significant cause of delinquent behavior.
Those who fault self-report studies point to the inclusion of trivial offenses—for example, using a false ID—in most self-report instruments. Although middle- and upper-class youths may appear to be as delinquent as those in the lower class, it is because they engage in significant amounts of such status offenses. Lower-class youths are more likely to engage in serious delinquent acts.37

In sum, there are those experts who believe that antisocial behavior occurs at all levels of the social strata. Other experts argue that, while some middle- and upper-class youths engage in some forms of minor illegal activity and theft offenses, it is members of the underclass who are responsible for the majority of serious delinquent acts.38 The prevailing wisdom is that kids who engage in the most serious forms of delinquency (for example, gang violence) are more likely to be members of the lower class.

**Age and Delinquency**

It is generally believed that age is inversely related to criminality: as people age, the likelihood that they will commit crime declines.39 Official statistics tell us that young people are arrested at a disproportionate rate to their numbers in the population, and this finding is supported by victim surveys. Youths ages fifteen to nineteen make up about 7 percent of the total U.S. population, but they account for 27 percent of the index crime arrests and 21 percent of the arrests for all crimes. In contrast, adults age fifty and older, who make up slightly less than a third of the population, account for only about 6 percent of arrests. Figure 2.5 shows that even though the number of arrests have been in decline, the peak age for arrest remains the teen years.

**Why Age Matters** Why do people commit less crime as they age? One view is that the relationship is constant: regardless of race, sex, social class, intelligence, or any other social variable, people commit less crime as they age.40 This is referred to as the aging-out process, sometimes called desistance from crime or spontaneous remission. According to some experts, even the most chronic juvenile offenders will commit less crime as they age.41

There are also experts who disagree with the concept of spontaneous remission. They suggest that age is one important determinant of crime but that other factors...
Delinquency rates tend to go down as people mature. Increasing levels of responsibility result in lower levels of criminality. Young people who marry, enlist in the armed services, or enroll in vocational training courses are less likely to pursue criminal activities. Although having a baby will place great stress upon them, this teen couple will simply have less time to get into trouble than before their child was born.

directly associated with a person’s lifestyle, such as peer relations, also affect offending rates.42 The probability that a person will become a persistent career criminal is influenced by a number of personal and environmental factors.43 Evidence exists, for example, that the age of onset of a delinquent career has an important effect on its length: those who demonstrate antisocial tendencies at a very early age are more likely to commit more crimes for a longer period of time. This is referred to as the developmental view of delinquency.

In summary, some criminologists believe youths who get involved with delinquency at a very early age are most likely to become career criminals. These researchers believe age is a key determinant of delinquency.44 Those opposed to this view find that all people commit less crime as they age and that because the relationship between age and crime is constant, it is irrelevant to the study of delinquency.45

Why Does Crime Decline with Age? Although there is certainly disagreement about the nature of the aging-out process, there is no question that people commit less crime as they grow older. Delinquency experts have developed a number of reasons for the aging-out process:

- *Growing older means having to face the future.* Young people, especially the indigent and antisocial, tend to “discount the future.”46 Why should they delay gratification when faced with an uncertain future?
- *With maturity comes the ability to resist the “quick fix” to their problems.*47 Research shows that some kids may turn to crime as a way to solve the problems of adolescence, loneliness, frustration, and fear of peer rejection. As they mature, conventional means of problem solving become available. Life experience helps former delinquents seek out nondestructive solutions to their personal problems.48
- *Maturation coincides with increased levels of responsibility.* Petty crimes are risky and exciting social activities that provide adventure in an otherwise boring world. As youths grow older, they take on new responsibilities that are inconsistent with criminality.49 For example, young people who marry, enlist in the armed services, or enroll in vocational training courses are less likely to pursue criminal activities.50
Personalities can change with age. As youths mature, rebellious youngsters may develop increased self-control and be able to resist antisocial behavior.\textsuperscript{51} 

Young adults become more aware of the risks that accompany crime. As adults, they are no longer protected by the relatively kindly arms of the juvenile justice system.\textsuperscript{52}

Of course, not all juvenile criminals desist as they age; some go on to become chronic adult offenders. Yet even they slow down as they age. Crime is too dangerous, physically taxing, and unrewarding, and punishments too harsh and long-lasting, to become a way of life for most people.\textsuperscript{53}

CHRONIC OFFENDING: CAREERS IN DELINQUENCY

Although most adolescents age out of crime, a relatively small number of youths begin to violate the law early in their lives (early onset) and continue at a high rate well into adulthood (persistence).\textsuperscript{54} The association between early onset and high-rate persistent offending has been demonstrated in samples drawn from a variety of cultures, time periods, and offender types.\textsuperscript{55} These offenders are resistant to change and seem immune to the effects of punishment. Arrest, prosecution, and conviction do little to slow down their offending careers. These chronic offenders are responsible for a significant amount of all delinquent and criminal activity.

Current interest in the delinquent life cycle was prompted in part by the “discovery” in the 1970s of the chronic juvenile (or delinquent) offender. According to this view, a relatively small number of youthful offenders commit a significant percentage of all serious crimes, and many of these same offenders grow up to become chronic adult criminals.

Chronic offenders can be distinguished from other delinquent youths. Many youthful law violators are apprehended for a single instance of criminal behavior, such as shoplifting or joyriding. Chronic offenders begin their delinquent careers at a young age (under ten years, referred to as early onset), have serious and persistent brushes with the law, and may be excessively violent and destructive. They do not age out of crime but continue their law-violating behavior into adulthood.\textsuperscript{56} Most research shows that early, repeated delinquent activity is the best predictor of future adult criminality.

A number of research efforts have set out to chronicle the careers of serious delinquent offenders. The next sections describe these initiatives.

Delinquency in a Birth Cohort

The concept of the chronic career offender is most closely associated with the research efforts of Marvin Wolfgang.\textsuperscript{57} In 1972, Wolfgang, Robert Figlio, and Thorsten Sellin published a landmark study, Delinquency in a Birth Cohort. They followed the delinquent careers of a cohort of 9,945 boys born in Philadelphia from birth until they reached age eighteen. Data were obtained from police files and school records. Socioeconomic status was determined by locating the residence of each member of the cohort and assigning him the median family income for that area.
About one-third of the boys (3,475) had some police contact. The remaining two-thirds (6,470) had none. Those boys who had at least one contact with the police committed a total of 10,214 offenses.

The most significant discovery of Wolfgang and his associates was that of the so-called chronic offender. The data indicated that 54 percent (1,862) of the sample’s delinquent youths were repeat offenders. The repeaters could be further categorized as nonchronic recidivists and chronic recidivists. Nonchronic recidivists had been arrested more than once but fewer than five times. In contrast, the 627 boys labeled chronic recidivists had been arrested five times or more. Although these offenders accounted for only 18 percent of the delinquent population (6 percent of the total sample), they were responsible for 52 percent of all offenses. Known today as the “chronic 6 percent,” this group perpetrated 71 percent of the homicides, 82 percent of the robberies, and 64 percent of the aggravated assaults.

Arrest and juvenile court experience did little to deter chronic offenders. In fact, the greater the punishment, the more likely they were to engage in repeat delinquent behavior. Strict punishment also increased the probability that further court action would be taken. Two factors stood out as encouraging recidivism: the seriousness of the original offense and the severity of the punishment. The researchers concluded that efforts of the juvenile justice system to eliminate delinquent behavior may be futile.

Wolfgang and his colleagues conducted a second cohort study with children born in 1958 and substantiated the finding that a relatively few chronic offenders are responsible for a significant portion of all delinquent acts. Wolfgang’s results have been duplicated in a number of research studies conducted in locales across the United States and also in Great Britain. Some have used the records of court-processed youths and others have employed self-report data.

**Stability in Crime: From Delinquent to Criminal**

Do chronic juvenile offenders grow up to become chronic adult criminals? One study that followed a 10 percent sample of the original Pennsylvania cohort (974 subjects) to age thirty found that 70 percent of the “persistent” adult offenders had also been chronic juvenile offenders. Chronic juvenile offenders had an 80 percent chance of becoming adult offenders and a 50 percent chance of being arrested four or more times as adults. Paul Tracy and Kimberly Kempf-Leonard conducted a follow-up study of all the subjects in the second 1958 cohort. By age twenty-six, Cohort II subjects were displaying the same behavior patterns as their older peers. Kids who started their delinquent careers early, committed a violent crime, and continued offending throughout adolescence were most likely to persist in criminal behavior as adults. Delinquents who began their offending careers with serious offenses or who quickly increased the severity of their offending early in life were most likely to persist in their criminal behavior into adulthood. Severity of offending rather than frequency of criminal behavior had the greatest impact on later adult criminality.

These studies indicate that chronic juvenile offenders continue their law-violating careers as adults, a concept referred to as the **continuity of crime**. Kids who are disruptive as early as age five or six are most likely to exhibit disruptive behavior throughout adolescence.

**What Causes Chronic Offending?**

Research indicates that chronic offenders suffer from a number of personal, environmental, social, and developmental deficits, as shown in Exhibit 2.1.

Other research studies have found that involvement in criminal activity (for example, getting arrested before age fifteen), relatively low intellectual development, and parental drug involvement were key predictive factors for future chronic offending. Measurable problems in learning and motor skills, cognitive abilities, family relations, and other areas also predict chronicity. Youthful offenders who persist are more likely to abuse alcohol, become economically dependent, have lower aspira-
Apprehension and punishment seem to have little effect on their offending behavior. Youth who have long juvenile records will most likely continue their offending careers into adulthood.

Policy Implications
Efforts to chart the life cycle of crime and delinquency will have a major influence on both theory and policy. Rather than simply asking why youths become delinquent or commit antisocial acts, theorists are charting the onset, escalation, frequency, and cessation of delinquent behavior. Research on delinquent careers has also influenced policy. If relatively few offenders commit a great proportion of all delinquent acts and then persist as adult criminals, it follows that steps should be taken to limit their criminal opportunities. One approach is to identify persistent offenders at the beginning of their offending careers and provide early treatment. This might be facilitated by research aimed at identifying traits (for example, impulsive personalities) that can be used to classify high-risk offenders. Because many of these youths suffer from a variety of problems, treatment must be aimed at a broad range of educational, family, vocational, and psychological problems. Focusing on a single problem, such as a lack of employment, may be ineffective.

Juvenile Victimization

Juveniles are also victims of crime, and data from victim surveys can help us understand the nature of juvenile victimization. One source of juvenile victimization data is the result of an ongoing cooperative effort of the Bureau of Justice Statistics of the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Census Bureau called the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS). The NCVS is a household survey of victims of criminal behavior that measures the nature of the crime and the characteristics of victims.
The total annual sample size of the NCVS has been about forty thousand households, containing about seventy-five thousand individuals. The sample is broken down into subsamples of ten thousand households, and each group is interviewed twice a year. The NCVS has been conducted annually for more than fifteen years.

Victimization in the United States

The NCVS provides estimates of the total number of personal contact crimes (assault, rape, robbery) and household victimizations (burglary, larceny, vehicle theft). The survey indicates that currently about twenty-three million criminal incidents occur each year. Being the target or victim of rape, robbery, or assault is a terrible burden, and one that can have considerable long-term consequences. If we translate the value of pain, emotional trauma, disability, and risk of death into dollar terms, the cost is $450 billion, or $1,800 for every person in the United States. At first glance these figures seem overwhelming, but victimization rates are stable or declining for most crime categories.

Many of the differences between NCVS data and official statistics can be attributed to the fact that victimizations are frequently not reported. During 2002, only 49 percent of all violent victimizations and 40 percent of all property crimes were reported to the police. For example, 71 percent of robberies and 43 percent of simple assaults were reported to the police in 2002.

Young Victims

NCVS data indicate that young people are much more likely to be the victims of crime than adults. The chance of victimization declines with age. The difference is particularly striking when we compare teens under age nineteen with people over age sixty-five—in 2002, teens were more than fifteen times as likely to become victims than their grandparents (see Table 2.5). The data also indicate that male teenagers have a significantly higher chance than females of becoming victims of violent crime, and that African-American youth have a greater chance of becoming victims of violent crimes than Whites of the same age.
As part of their Monitoring the Future program, the Institute for Social Research also collects data on teen victimization. The most recent data available (2002) indicate that each year a significant number of adolescents become crime victims (see Table 2.6). This and other self-report surveys reveal that the NCVS seriously underreports juvenile victimization, and that the true rate of juvenile victimization may actually be several times higher.73

### The Victims and Their Criminals

NCVS data can also tell us something about the relationship between victims and offenders. This information is available because victims of violent personal crimes, such as assault and robbery, can identify the age, sex, and race of their attackers.

In general, teens tend to be victimized by their peers. A majority of teens were shown to have been victimized by other teens, whereas victims age twenty and over identified their attackers as being twenty-one or older. However, people in almost all age groups who were victimized by groups of offenders identified their attackers as teenagers. Violent crime victims report that a disproportionate number of their attackers are young, ranging in age from sixteen to twenty-five.

The data also tell us that victimization is intraracial (that is, within race). White teenagers tend to be victimized by White teens, and African-American teenagers tend to be victimized by African-American teens.

Most teens are victimized by people with whom they are acquainted, and their victimization is more likely to occur during the day. In contrast, adults are more often
victimized by strangers, and at night. One explanation for this pattern is that youths are at greatest risk from their own family and relatives. (Chapter 8 deals with the issue of child abuse and neglect.) Another possibility is that many teenage victimizations occur at school, in school buildings, or on school grounds. The issue of teen victimization is discussed further in the following Focus on Delinquency feature.

Table 2.6  Self-Reported Victimization Among High School Seniors, 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Once (%)</th>
<th>More Than Once (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Something stolen (under $50)</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Something stolen (over $50)</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damaged property</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Injured with a weapon</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threatened with a weapon</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Adolescent Victims of Violence

How many adolescents experience extreme physical and sexual violence and what effect does the experience have on their lives? To answer these critical questions, Dean Kilpatrick, Benjamin Saunders, and Daniel Smith conducted interviews with 4,023 adolescents ages twelve to seventeen to obtain information on their substance use, abuse, delinquency, and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as well as their experiences with sexual assault, physical assault, physically abusive punishment, and witnessing acts of violence.

Kilpatrick and his colleagues found that rates of interpersonal violence and victimization among adolescents in the United States are extremely high. Approximately 1.8 million adolescents ages twelve to seventeen have been sexually assaulted and 3.9 million have been severely physically assaulted. Another 2.1 million have been punished by physical abuse. The most common form of youth victimization was witnessing violence, with approximately 8.8 million youths indicating that they had seen someone else being shot, stabbed, sexually assaulted, physically assaulted, or threatened with a weapon.

There were distinct racial and ethnic patterns in youth victimization. There is a much higher incidence of all types of victimization among African-American and Native American adolescents; more than half of African-American, Hispanic, and Native American adolescents had witnessed violence in their lifetimes. Native American adolescents had the highest rate for sexual assault victimizations; Whites and Asians reported the lowest. Native Americans, African-Americans, and Hispanics also reported the highest rate of physical assault victimization—20 to 25 percent of each group reported experiencing at least one physical assault.

Gender also played a role in increasing the exposure to violence. Girls were at greater risk of sexual assault than boys (13.0 percent versus 3.4 percent). Boys were at significantly greater risk of physical assault than girls (21.3 percent versus 13.4 percent). A substantial number of all adolescents (43.6 percent of boys and 35 percent of girls) reported having witnessed violence. Physically abusive punishment was similar for boys (8.5 percent) and girls (10.2 percent).

What Are the Outcomes of Abuse and Violence?

The research discovered a clear relationship exists between youth victimization and mental health problems and delinquent behavior. For example:

- Negative outcomes in victims of sexual assault were three to five times the rates observed in nonvictims.
- The lifetime prevalence of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is 8.1 percent, indicating that approximately 1.8 million adolescents had met the criteria for PTSD at some point during their lifetime.
- Girls were significantly more likely than boys to have lifetime PTSD (10.1 percent versus 6.2 percent).
- Among boys who had experienced sexual assault, 28.2 percent had PTSD at some point in their lives. The rate of lifetime PTSD among boys who had not been sexually assaulted was 5.4 percent.
SUMMARY

- Official delinquency refers to youths who are arrested.
- Arrest data come from the FBI’s Uniform Crime Report (UCR), an annual tally of crimes reported to police by citizens.
- The FBI gathers arrest statistics from local police departments. From these, it is possible to determine the number of youths who are arrested each year, along with their age, race, and gender.
- About two million youths are arrested annually.
- After a long increase in juvenile crime, there has been a decade decrease in the number of juveniles arrested for nonviolent and violent crimes.
- Dissatisfaction with the UCR prompted criminologists to develop other means of measuring delinquent behavior. Self-reports are surveys in which subjects are asked to describe their misbehavior. Although self-reports indicate that many more crimes are committed than are known to the police, they also show that the delinquency rate is rather stable.
- The factors that are believed to shape and control teen delinquency rates include gang activity, drug abuse, and teen gun ownership, abortion rates, economy, punishment, and social conditions.
- Delinquents are disproportionately male, although female delinquency rates are rising faster than those for males.
- Minority youth are overrepresented in the delinquency rate, especially for violent crime. Experts are split on the cause of racial differences. Some believe they are a function of system bias, others see them as representing actual differences in the delinquency rate.
- Disagreement also exists over the relationship between class position and delinquency. Some hold that adolescent crime is a lower-class phenomenon, whereas others see it throughout the social structure. Problems in methodology have obscured the true class-crime relationship. However, official statistics indicate that lower-class youths are responsible for the most serious criminal acts.
- There is general agreement that delinquency rates decline with age. Some experts believe this phenomenon is universal, whereas others believe a small group of offenders persist in crime at a high rate. The age-crime relationship has spurred research on the nature of delinquency over the life course.
- Delinquency data show the existence of a chronic persistent offender who begins his or her offending career early in life and persists as an adult. Wolfgang and his colleagues identified chronic offenders in a series of cohort studies conducted in Philadelphia.
- Ongoing research has identified the characteristics of persistent offenders as they mature, and both personality and social factors help us predict long-term offending patterns.
- The National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) is an annual national survey of the victims of crime that is conducted by agencies of the federal government.
- Teenagers are much more likely to become victims of crime than are people in other age groups.
1. What factors contribute to the aging-out process?
2. Why are males more delinquent than females? Is it a matter of lifestyle, culture, or physical properties?
3. Discuss the racial differences found in the crime rate. What factors account for differences in the African-American and White crime rates?
4. Should kids who have been arrested more than three times be given mandatory incarceration sentences?
5. Do you believe that self-reports are an accurate method of gauging the nature and extent of delinquent behavior?

As a juvenile court judge you are forced to make a tough decision during a hearing: whether a juvenile should be waived to the adult court. It seems that gang activity has become a way of life for residents living in local public housing projects. The “Bloods” sell crack, and the “Wolfpack” controls the drug market. When the rivalry between the two gangs exploded, sixteen-year-old Shatiek Johnson, a Wolfpack member, shot and killed a member of the Bloods; in retaliation, the Bloods put out a contract on his life. While in hiding, Shatiek was confronted by two undercover detectives who recognized the young fugitive. Fearing for his life, Shatiek pulled a pistol and began firing, fatally wounding one of the officers. During the hearing, you learn that Shatiek’s story is not dissimilar from that of many other children raised in tough housing projects. With an absent father and a single mother who could not control her five sons, Shatiek lived in a world of drugs, gangs, and shootouts long before he was old enough to vote. By age thirteen, Shatiek had been involved in the gang-beating death of a homeless man in a dispute over ten dollars, for which he was given a one-year sentence at a youth detention center and released after six months. Now charged with a crime that could be considered first-degree murder if committed by an adult, Shatiek could—if waived to the adult court—be sentenced to life in prison or even face the death penalty.

At the hearing, Shatiek seems like a lost soul. He claims he thought the police officers were killers out to collect the bounty put on his life by the Bloods. He says that killing the rival gang boy was an act of self-defense. The DA confirms that the victim was in fact a known gang assassin with numerous criminal convictions. Shatiek’s mother begs you to consider the fact that her son is only sixteen years old, that he has had a very difficult childhood, and that he is a victim of society’s indifference to the poor.

Would you treat Shatiek as a juvenile and see if a prolonged stay in a youth facility could help this troubled young man, or would you transfer (waive) him to the adult justice system? Does a sixteen-year-old like Shatiek deserve a second chance? Is Shatiek’s behavior common among adolescent boys or unusual and disturbing?

To help you answer these questions and to learn more about gang membership, click on Web Links under the Chapter Resources at http://cj.wadsworth.com/siegeljdcore2e, to go to the federal site for the National Criminal Justice Reference service, a U.N. site that offers important information, and a site on a private treatment center.