Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 2006 National Report

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Chapter 3

Juvenile offenders

High profile—often very violent—incidents tend to shape public perceptions of juvenile offending. It is important for the public, the media, elected officials, and juvenile justice professionals to have an accurate view of (1) the crimes committed by juveniles, (2) the proportion and characteristics of youth involved in law-violating behaviors, and (3) trends in these behaviors. This understanding can come from studying victim reports, juvenile self-reports of offending behavior, and official records.

As documented in the following pages, many juveniles who commit crimes (even serious crimes) never enter the juvenile justice system. Consequently, developing a portrait of juvenile law-violating behavior from official records gives only a partial picture. This chapter presents what is known about the prevalence and incidence of juvenile offending prior to the youth entering the juvenile justice system. It relies on data developed by the Bureau of Justice Statistics' National Crime Victimization Survey, the Bureau of Labor Statistics' 1997 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey, the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Supplementary Homicide Reports and its National Incident-Based Reporting System, and the National Institute on Drug Abuse's Monitoring the Future Study. Information on gangs is drawn from the National Youth Gang Survey, supported by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP). Information on the association between offending and contact with the juvenile justice system comes from one of OJJDP's Causes and Correlates Studies.

On the pages that follow, readers can learn the answers to many commonly asked questions: How many murders are committed by juveniles, and whom do they murder? What proportion of youth are involved in criminal behaviors? How many students are involved in crime at school? Is it common for youth to carry weapons to school? Are students fearful of crime at school? What is known about juveniles and gangs? How prevalent is drug and alcohol use? When are crimes committed by juveniles most likely to occur? Are there gender and racial/ethnic differences in the law-violating behaviors of juvenile offenders?

Self-reports and official records are the primary sources of information on juvenile offending

Self-report studies ask victims or offenders to report on their experiences and behaviors

There is an ongoing debate about the relative ability of self-report studies and official statistics to describe juvenile crime and victimization. Self-report studies can capture information on behavior that never comes to the attention of juvenile justice agencies. Compared with official studies, self-report studies find a much higher proportion of the juvenile population involved in delinquent behavior.

Self-report studies, however, have their own limitations. A youth's memory limits the information that can be captured. This, along with other problems associated with interviewing young children, is the reason that the National Crime Victimization Survey does not attempt to interview children below age 12. Some victims and offenders are also unwilling to disclose all law violations. Finally, it is often difficult for self-report studies to collect data from large enough samples to develop a sufficient understanding of relatively rare events, such as serious violent offending.

Official statistics describe cases handled by the justice system

Official records underrepresent juvenile delinquent behavior. Many crimes by juveniles are never reported to authorities. Many juveniles who commit offenses are never arrested or are not arrested for all of their delinquencies. As a result, official records systematically underestimate the scope of juvenile crime. In addition, to the extent that other factors may influence the types of crimes or offenders that enter the justice system, official records may distort the attributes of juvenile crime.

Official statistics are open to multiple interpretations

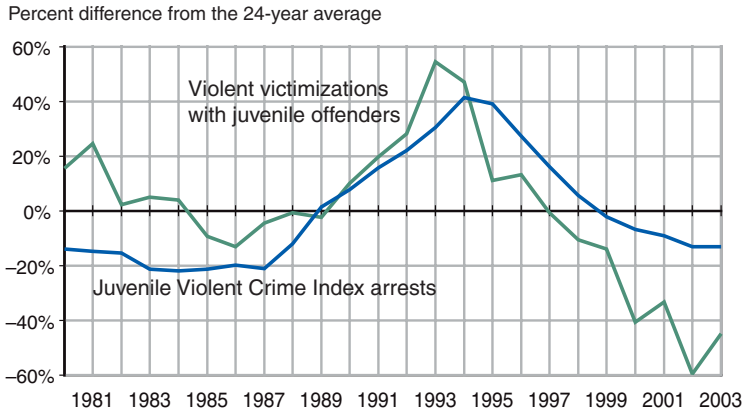
Juvenile arrest rates for drug abuse violations in recent years are substantially above those of two decades ago. One interpretation of these official statistics could be that juveniles have been breaking the drug laws more often in recent years. National self-report studies (e.g., Monitoring the Future), however, find that illicit drug use is substantially below the levels of the mid-1980s. If drug use is actually down, the higher arrest rates for drug crimes may represent a change in society's tolerance for such behavior and a greater willingness to bring these youth into the justice system for treatment or punishment.

Although official records may be inadequate measures of the level of juvenile offending, they do monitor justice system activity. Analysis of variations in official statistics across time and jurisdictions provides an understanding of justice system caseloads.

Carefully used, self-report and official statistics provide insight into crime and victimization

Delbert Elliott, Director of the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, has argued that to abandon either self-report or official statistics in favor of the other is "rather shortsighted; to systematically ignore the findings of either is dangerous, particularly when the two measures provide apparently contradictory findings." Elliott stated that a full understanding of the etiology and development of delinquent behavior is enhanced by using and integrating both self-report and official record research.

The growth and decline in violent crime by juveniles between 1980 and 2003 are documented by both victim reports and arrests



Violent crimes include rape, robbery, aggravated assault, and homicide. **Victimizations** are those in which the victim perceived that at least one offender was between the ages of 12 and 17.

In every year from 1980 to 2003, the number of victimizations was substantially greater than the number of arrests. To more clearly show the comparative trends in the two statistics, however, each value on the graph is the annual number's percent difference from the 24-year average of the statistic.

Source: Authors' analysis of BJS's Victim's perception of the age of the offender in serious violent crime and of the FBI's *Crime in the United States* for the years 1980 through 2003.

In 2002, the number of murders by juveniles dropped to its lowest level since 1984

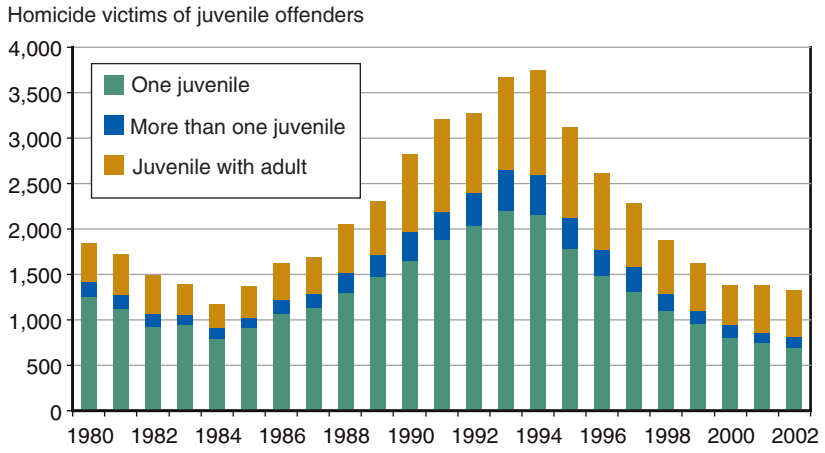
About one-third of murders in the U.S. are not solved

In 2002, the FBI reported that 16,200 persons were murdered in the U.S. In about 10,400 (64%) of these murders, the incident was cleared by arrest or by exceptional means—that is, either an offender was arrested and turned over to the court for prosecution or an offender was identified but law enforcement could not place formal charges (e.g., the offender died). In the other 5,800 murders (36%) in 2002, the offenders were not identified and their demographic characteristics are not known.

Estimating the demographic characteristics of these unknown offenders is difficult. The attributes of unknown offenders probably differ from those of known murder offenders. For example, it is likely that a greater proportion of known offenders have family ties to their victims and that a larger proportion of homicides committed by strangers go unsolved. An alternative to estimating characteristics of unknown offenders is to trend only murders with known juvenile offenders. Either approach—to trend only murders with known juvenile offenders or to estimate characteristics for unknown juvenile offenders—creates its own interpretation problems.

Acknowledging the weaknesses in the approach, the analyses of the FBI's Supplementary Homicide Reports (SHRs) presented in this Report assume that the offenders in cleared murders (known offenders) are similar to the offenders in unsolved murders (unknown offenders). This approach ensures that the number and characteristics of murder victims are consistent throughout the report.

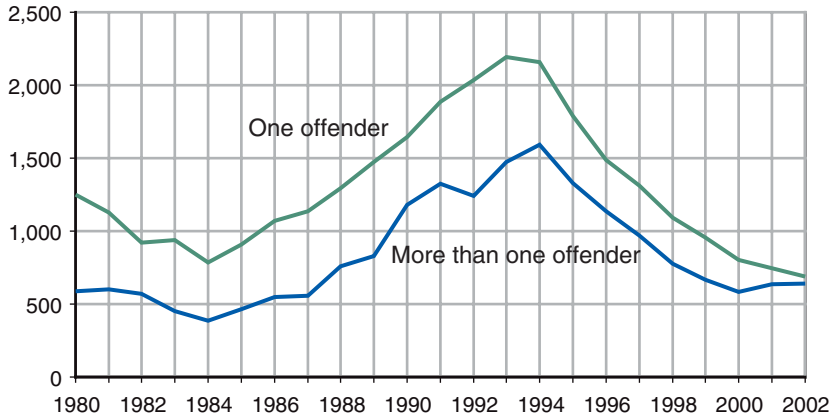
Between 1994 and 2002, the number of murders involving a juvenile offender fell 65%, to its lowest level since 1984



- In the 1980s, 25% of the murders involving a juvenile offender also involved an adult offender. This proportion grew to 31% in the 1990s and averaged 36% for the years 2000–2002.

Source: Authors' analyses of the FBI's *Supplementary Homicide Reports* for the years 1980 through 2002 [machine-readable data files].

Murders by juveniles in 2002 were less likely to be committed by a juvenile acting alone than in any year since at least 1980



- Between 1980 and 2002, the annual proportion of murders involving a juvenile offender acting alone gradually declined, from 66% in the 1980s, to 59% in the 1990s, to 55% in the years 2000 to 2002.
- Between 1994 and 2002, murders by juveniles acting alone fell 68% and murders with multiple offenders declined 60%.

Source: Authors' analyses of the FBI's *Supplementary Homicide Reports* for the years 1980 through 2002 [machine-readable data files].

In 2002, 1 in 12 murders involved a juvenile offender

Juvenile offenders were involved in an estimated 1,300 murders in the U.S. in 2002—8% of all murders. The juvenile offender acted alone in 52% of these murders, acted with one or more other juveniles in 9%, and acted with at least one adult offender in 39%.

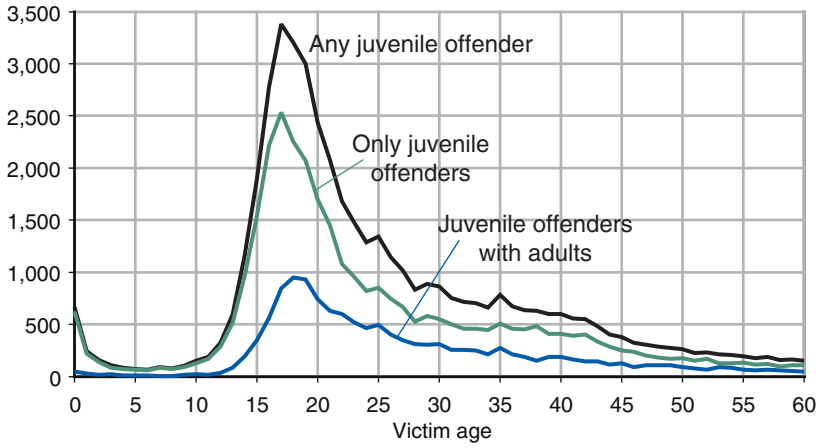
Because nearly half (48%) of the 1,300 murders with juvenile offenders involved multiple offenders, the number of offenders in these murders was greater than the number of victims. The 1,300 murders involved an estimated 1,600 juvenile offenders. Also involved in these 1,300 murders were 900 adult offenders, the vast majority (87%) of whom were under age 25.

In 2002, 82% of the victims of juvenile murderers were male, 51% were white, and 46% were black. Most (69%) were killed with a firearm. Family members accounted for 16% of the victims, acquaintances 47%, and strangers (i.e., no personal relationship to the juvenile offenders) 37%.

From 1980 through 2002, the proportion of murders with a juvenile offender that also involved multiple offenders gradually increased. In the first half of the 1980s, about one-third of all murders with juvenile offenders involved more than one offender; in 2002, this proportion was nearly half (48%). Similarly, the proportion of murders with a juvenile offender that also involved an adult gradually increased, from less than 25% in the first half of the 1980s to 39% in 2002. Throughout this period, on average, 89% of these adult offenders were under age 25.

Between 1980 and 2002, half of all murder victims killed by juveniles were ages 14–24

Homicide victims of juvenile offenders, 1980–2002

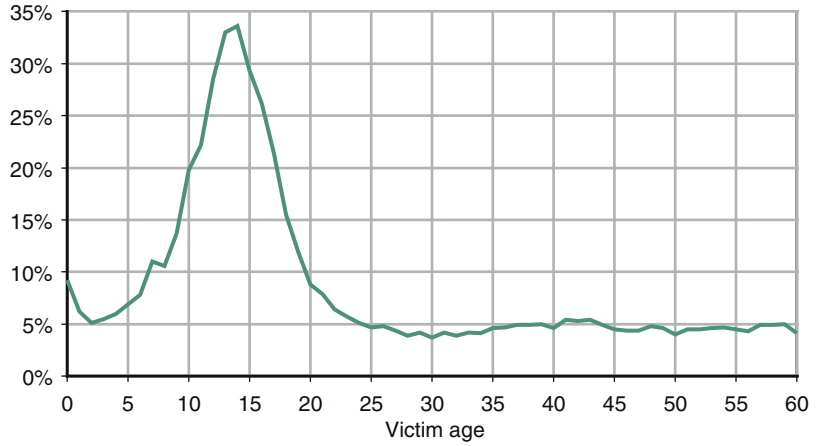


- Of all the murder victims of juvenile offenders, 25% were themselves under age 18, and 4% were over age 64.

Source: Authors' analyses of the FBI's *Supplementary Homicide Reports* for the years 1980 through 2002 [machine-readable data files].

Between 1980 and 2002, the murder victims most likely to be killed by a juvenile offender were age 14

Percent of all murder victims in age group killed by juveniles, 1980–2002



- Among all murder victims from 1980 through 2002, the proportion killed by juvenile offenders dropped from 34% for victims age 14 to 5% for victims age 25, then remained at or near 5% for all victims older than 25.

Source: Authors' analyses of the FBI's *Supplementary Homicide Reports* for the years 1980 through 2002 [machine-readable data files].

The drop in minority males killing minority males with firearms drove the decline in murders by juveniles

Murder trends shaped public perception of crime in the 1990s

During the 1990s, widespread concern about juvenile violence resulted in a number of changes in state laws with the intent to send more juveniles into the adult criminal justice system. The focal point of this concern was the unprecedented increase in murders by juveniles between 1984 and 1994. Then just as quickly the numbers fell: by 2002, juvenile arrests for murder were below the levels of the early 1980s. A better understanding of this rapid growth and decline is useful for juvenile justice practitioners and the public.

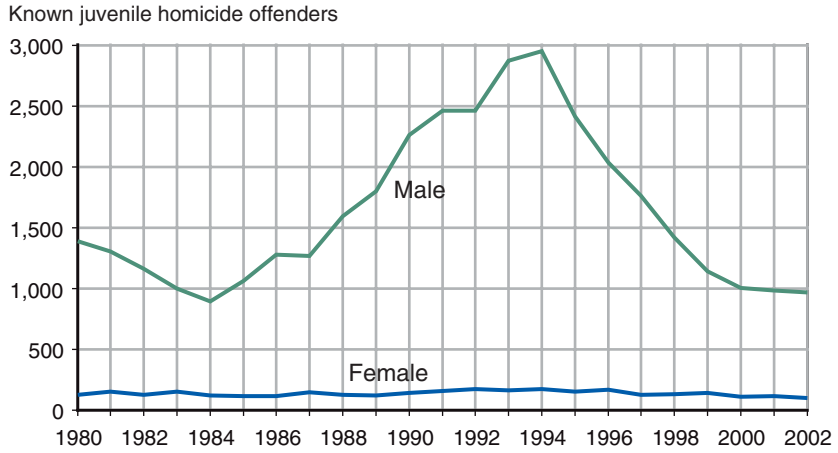
The overall trend in murders by juveniles is a composite of separate trends

Examining the FBI's SHR data to understand the characteristics of juvenile murder offenders and their crimes makes it clear that specific types of murders drove the overall trends. Between 1984 and 1994, the overall annual number of juveniles identified by law enforcement as responsible for a murder tripled. However, the number of juvenile females identified in murder investigations increased less than 40%, while the number of juvenile males increased more than 200%. Thus, the increase between 1984 and 1994 was driven by male offenders.

During the same period, the number of juveniles who committed murder with a firearm increased about 320%, while murders committed without a firearm increased about 40%. Thus, the overall increase was also linked to firearm murders.

Finally, from 1984 to 1994, the number of juveniles who killed a family member increased about 20%, while the numbers of juveniles who killed

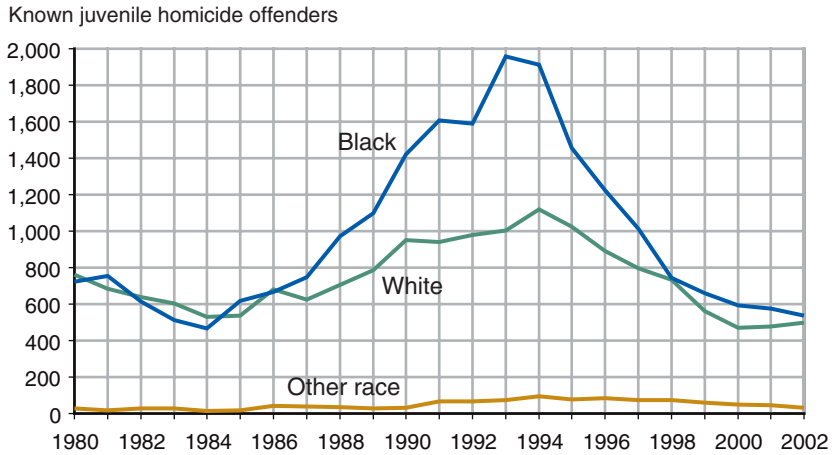
The annual number of male juvenile homicide offenders varied substantially between 1980 and 2002, unlike the number of female offenders



- The number of known male juvenile murder offenders in 2002 was lower than in any year since 1984.

Source: Authors' analyses of the FBI's *Supplementary Homicide Reports* for the years 1980 through 2002 [machine-readable data files].

In 2002, as in 1980, equal numbers of black juveniles and white juveniles committed murders



- Between 1984 and 1994, the number of known white juvenile murder offenders doubled and the number of black offenders quadrupled.
- In 2002, the numbers of known white murder offenders and black murder offenders were near their lowest levels in a generation.

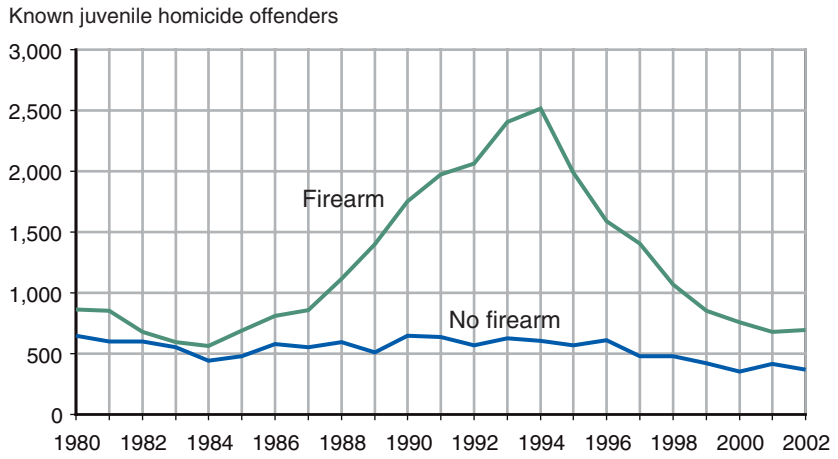
Source: Authors' analyses of the FBI's *Supplementary Homicide Reports* for the years 1980 through 2002 [machine-readable data files].

an acquaintance or a stranger both increased about 240%. Therefore, during the period, murders by female juveniles, murders with weapons other than a firearm, and murders of a family member contributed little to the large increase in juvenile murders. In fact, just 10% of the increase in murders by juveniles between 1984 and 1994 can be attributed to murders with these characteristics.

So what types of murders by juveniles increased between 1984 and 1994? Ninety percent (90%) of the overall increase was murders of nonfamily members committed by males with a firearm—generally a handgun. This type of murder increased 400% between 1984 and 1994. A closer look at these crimes reveals that the increase was somewhat greater for murders of acquaintances than strangers and somewhat greater for juveniles acting with other offenders than for a juvenile offender acting alone. Nearly three-quarters of the increase was the result of crimes committed by black and other minority males—and in two-thirds of these murders, the victims were minority males.

The decline in murders by juveniles from 1994 to 2002 reversed the earlier increase. About 80% of the overall decline was attributable to the drop in murders of nonfamily members by juvenile males with a firearm; most of this decline was in murders of minority males committed by minority juvenile males.

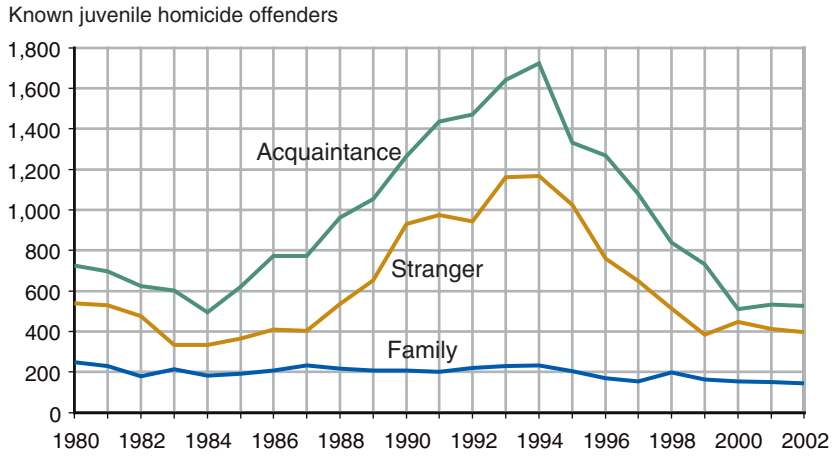
The national trend in murders by juvenile offenders reflected the growth and subsequent decline in crimes committed with firearms



- The large growth and decline in the annual number of juvenile offenders who committed their crimes with a firearm between 1980 and 2002 stands in sharp contrast to the relative stability of the nonfirearm pattern over the period.

Source: Authors' analyses of the FBI's *Supplementary Homicide Reports* for the years 1980 through 2002 [machine-readable data files].

Between 1980 and 2002, the annual number of juvenile offenders who killed family members changed little, in stark contrast to the number of those who killed acquaintances and strangers



- In 1980, 16% of known juvenile homicide offenders killed family members. The proportion was 7% in 1994 and 13% in 2002.

Source: Authors' analyses of the FBI's *Supplementary Homicide Reports* for the years 1980 through 2002 [machine-readable data files].

In the 10 years from 1993 through 2002, the nature of murders committed by juvenile offenders varied with the age, gender, and race of the offenders

	Known juvenile offenders, 1993–2002							
Characteristic	All	Male	Female	Younger than age 16	Age 16	Age 17	White	Black
Victim age	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Under 13	5	4	23	8	4	3	6	4
13 to 17	21	22	13	24	22	19	24	19
18 to 24	30	31	22	22	30	35	29	31
Above 24	44	44	42	46	43	43	41	46
Victim gender	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Male	85	87	62	81	85	87	83	86
Female	15	13	38	19	15	13	17	14
Victim race	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
White	50	50	51	51	50	49	90	22
Black	46	46	46	45	46	47	8	76
Other	4	4	3	4	4	4	2	2
Victim/offender relationship	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Family	9	7	36	15	8	7	14	7
Acquaintance	54	55	46	50	54	57	54	54
Stranger	37	38	18	35	38	37	32	40
Firearm used	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Yes	74	77	35	70	74	77	66	80
No	26	23	65	30	26	23	34	20
Number of offenders	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
One	46	45	55	47	45	46	44	48
More than one	54	55	45	53	55	54	56	52

- Between 1993 and 2002, a greater percentage of the victims of male juvenile murder offenders were adults than were the victims of female offenders (75% vs. 64%). The juvenile victims of female offenders tended to be younger than the juvenile victims of male offenders.
- Adults were the victims of 70% of white juvenile murder offenders and 77% of black juvenile murder offenders.
- Although 76% of the victims of black juvenile murder offenders were black, black murder offenders were much more likely than white offenders to have victims of another race (24% vs. 10%). In contrast, juvenile murder offenders' age and gender were unrelated to the race of the victim.
- Female juvenile murder offenders were much more likely than male juvenile murder offenders to have female victims (38% vs. 13%) and to have victims who were family members (36% vs. 7%).
- Firearms were more likely to be involved in murders by male offenders than female offenders (77% vs. 35%) and in murders by black offenders than white offenders (80% vs. 66%).
- Female juvenile murder offenders were more likely than male offenders to commit their crimes alone (55% vs. 45%). In contrast, juvenile murder offenders' age was unrelated to the proportion of crimes committed with co-offenders, and offenders' race was only weakly related to this aspect of the incident.

Note: Detail may not total 100% because of rounding.

Source: Authors' analyses of the FBI's *Supplementary Homicide Reports* for the years 1993 through 2002 [machine-readable data files].

8% of 17-year-olds reported ever belonging to a gang, 16% sold drugs, and 16% carried a handgun

Survey provides a portrait of law-violating behavior of youth

Most juvenile crime does not come to the attention of the juvenile justice system. To understand the amount of violent crime committed by juveniles, one could ask their victims. However, to understand the proportion of youth who commit various types of crimes (i.e., violent and nonviolent crime), one must ask the youth themselves.

To provide this and other information about youth, in 1997 the Bureau of Labor Statistics mounted the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY97). Between 1997 and 2001, the NLSY97 annually interviewed a nationally representative sample of nearly 9,000 youth who were ages 12–16 on December 31, 1996, asking them about many aspects of their lives—including law-violating behaviors. Results from the first five waves of interviews (through 2001) provide a detailed portrait of the law-violating behaviors of youth ages 12–17 at the beginning of the 21st century.

For most law-violating behaviors studied, males were significantly more likely than females to report engaging in the behavior by age 17. The one exception was running away from home. The differences among white, black, and Hispanic youth were not as consistent. For some behaviors (i.e., running away and carrying guns) there were no differences among the three racial groups. White youth were significantly more likely than black or Hispanic youth to report committing vandalism. Black youth were significantly more likely than white or Hispanic youth to report committing an assault. Black youth at age 17 were significantly less likely than white or Hispanic youth to report having sold drugs.

The prevalence of problem behavior among juveniles differs by gender, race, and age

	Proportion of youth reporting ever engaging in the behavior by age 17					
Behavior	All youth	Male	Female	White	Black	Hispanic
Suspended from school	33%	42%	24%	28%	56%	38%
Ran away from home	18	17	20	18	21	17
Belonged to a gang	8	11	6	7	12	12
Vandalized	37	47	27	39	33	34
Theft less than $50	43	47	38	44	38	41
Theft more than $50	13	16	10	12	15	14
Assaulted with intent to seriously hurt	27	33	21	25	36	28
Sold drugs	16	19	12	17	13	16
Carried a handgun	16	25	6	16	15	15

	Proportion of youth reporting behavior at specific ages					
Behavior	Age 12	Age 13	Age 14	Age 15	Age 16	Age 17
Suspended from school	6%	9%	14%	13%	12%	10%
Ran away from home	na	na	5	6	7	6
Belonged to a gang	2	2	2	2	2	2
Vandalized	14	17	16	14	13	9
Theft less than $50	0	13	14	13	12	11
Theft more than $50	3	3	4	5	5	4
Assaulted with intent to seriously hurt	9	10	11	11	11	9
Sold drugs	1	2	5	6	8	8
Carried a handgun	5	4	5	6	5	4

- By age 17, 33% of all youth said they had been suspended from school at least once, 18% had run away from home (i.e., had at least once left home and stayed away overnight without a parent's prior knowledge or permission), and 8% had belonged to a gang.
- By age 17, a greater proportion of juveniles reported that they had committed an assault with the intent of seriously hurting the person than reported ever having run away from home, sold drugs, carried a handgun, stolen something worth more than $50, or belonged to a gang.
- Males were significantly more likely than females to report ever being suspended from school (42% vs. 24%) or ever belonging to a gang (11% vs. 6%) and were 4 times more likely to report ever carrying a handgun (25% vs. 6%).
- White youth were significantly less likely than black or Hispanic youth to report ever belonging to a gang.
- With the exception of selling drugs, the proportions of youth who reported committing the above behaviors at age 17 are either the same or less than the proportions reporting the same behaviors at earlier ages.

Note: As a general rule, the confidence interval around the above percentages is about plus or minus 2 percentage points. Readers should consider figures to differ only when their confidence intervals do not overlap (i.e., a difference of at least 4 percentage points).

Source: Authors' adaptation of McCurley's Self-reported law-violating behavior from adolescence to early adulthood in a modern cohort.

About one-quarter of juveniles who offended at ages 16–17 also offended as adults at ages 18–19

Many juvenile offenders do not continue their law-violating behaviors into adulthood

Some persons commit crimes when they are juveniles and continue to do so into their adult years. Others commit crimes only as juveniles, while others begin their offending careers as adults. The analysis that follows summarizes the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth data for all youth who were interviewed at ages 16, 17, 18, and 19 during the first five waves of data collection (1997–2001) to study the continuity in offending from the juvenile years (ages 16–17) to the early adult years (ages 18–19).

Although the details vary somewhat with the type of offending behavior, the general pattern is consistent. For example, when interviewers asked youth at ages 16, 17, 18, and 19 if they had assaulted someone since the last interview with the intent of seriously hurting them, most (78%) reported never committing such a crime. Among the other 22% of youth who reported an assault in at least one of the four interviews, most (74%) reported the behavior at ages 16–17 and fewer (54%) reported assaulting someone at ages 18–19; about one-quarter (27%) reported the behavior at least once in both the juvenile period (ages 16–17) and the adult period (ages 18–19). This means that most of the youth who reported committing an assault in the later juvenile years stopped the behavior, reporting none in the early adult years. It also implies that half of the respondents who reported committing an assault as young adults did not do so as older juveniles. (The accompanying table provides similar details on other types of offenses and for subgroups of offenders.)

About two-thirds of juveniles who reported committing specific offenses at ages 16 or 17 did not report doing so at ages 18 or 19

Behavior/ demographic	Of all youth reporting the behavior at ages 16–19, the percent reporting: Only at ages 16–17	In both age groups	Only at ages 18–19
Vandalized	57%	24%	20%
Male	55	27	18
Female	59	17	24
White	60	21	19
Black	45	30	25
Hispanic	57	21	22
Theft less than $50	58	23	19
Male	55	25	20
Female	62	20	18
White	61	23	16
Black	50	22	29
Hispanic	53	21	26
Theft more than $50	57	14	29
Male	57	14	29
Female	58	14	29
White	59	14	27
Black	49	14	37
Hispanic	60	12	28

Behavior/ demographic	Of all youth reporting the behavior at ages 16–19, the percent reporting: Only at ages 16–17	In both age groups	Only at ages 18–19
Assaulted to seriously hurt	46%	27%	26%
Male	44	28	29
Female	51	27	23
White	47	29	24
Black	39	28	33
Hispanic	45	27	27
Sold drugs	40	29	31
Male	37	31	32
Female	46	26	27
White	42	30	28
Black	29	28	44
Hispanic	35	27	37
Carried a handgun	46	24	30
Male	44	27	29
Female	56	6	37
White	52	27	21
Black	33	14	53
Hispanic	28	26	46

- Among black youth ages 16–19 who reported assaulting someone with the intent to seriously injure, 39% reported the behavior only in the older juvenile years (ages 16–17), 33% only in the young adult years (ages 18–19), and 28% in both the older juvenile and young adult years. Among the 67% of black offenders who reported assaulting someone as older juveniles, less than half (28%) also reported assaulting someone as young adults.

Note: Detail may not total 100% because of rounding.

Source: Authors' analyses of the Bureau of Labor Statistics' *National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 cohort, 1997–2001 (rounds 1–5)* [machine-readable data files].

Juvenile law-violating behavior is linked to family structure and to school/work involvement

Juveniles' self-reported law-violating behavior is related to their family structure

A recent study using data from NLSY97 explored the factors associated with a youth's self-reported law-violating behaviors. One significant factor was a youth's family structure. In general, the research showed that juveniles who lived with both biological parents had lower lifetime prevalence of law-violating behaviors than did juveniles who lived in other family types.

For example, the study found that 5% of youth age 17 who lived with both biological parents reported ever being in a gang, compared with 12% of youth who lived in other family arrangements. Similarly, youth at age 17 living with both biological parents reported a lower lifetime prevalence, compared with youth living in other types of families, for a wide range of problem behaviors: marijuana use (30% vs. 40%), hard drug use (9% vs. 13%), drug selling (13% vs. 19%), running away from home (13% vs. 25%), vandalism (34% vs. 41%), theft of something worth more than $50 (19% vs. 17%), assault with the intent to seriously injure (20% vs. 35%).

Family structure is correlated with a youth's race and ethnicity; that is, white non-Hispanic youth are more likely to live in families with two biological parents than are black or Hispanic youth. Therefore, patterns that indicate racial or ethnic differences in self-reported behavior may in reality be reflecting differences in family structure.

Family structure is linked to problem behavior similarly for females and males

	Female respondents			Male respondents		
Experience	All	Both biological parents	All other families	All	Both biological parents	All other families
Suspended ever	17%	9%	26%	33%	23%	45%
Runaway ever*	12	7	17	11	7	15
Sex in past year*	28	20	35	30	22	40
Smoke in past month*	21	17	25	20	17	23
Drink in past month*†	23	21	26	23	23	24
Marijuana in past month*	9	6	11	10	8	13
Vandalize in past year†	10	8	13	19	18	21
Petty theft ever	30	25	34	38	33	43
Major theft in past year	3	2	4	6	4	8
Assault in past year	8	5	12	14	11	18
Gang in past year	1	1	2	3	2	4
Handgun in past year‡	2	1	2	9	9	10
Sell drugs in past year	4	3	5	7	5	9
Arrested in past year	4	2	5	7	4	10

* Not significantly different at the 95% level of confidence for comparisons of females and males.

† Not significantly different at the 95% level of confidence for comparisons of the two types of family structures for males.

‡ Not significantly different at the 95% level of confidence for comparisons of the two types of family structures for females or males.

Source: Authors' adaptation of McCurley and Snyder's Risk, protection, and family structure.

Many other factors influence a youth's involvement in law-violating behaviors

The study also found other factors related to juveniles' self-reported involvement in law-violating behaviors. The most closely related factor was the presence of friends or family members in gangs. For example, compared with juveniles who did not have friends or families in gangs, those who did were at least 3 times more likely to report having engaged in vandalism, a major theft, a serious assault, carrying a handgun, and selling drugs. They were also about 3 times more likely to use hard drugs and to run away from home.

Connectedness to school and/or work also was related to juveniles' self-reported law-violating behavior. Juveniles who were neither in school nor working had a significantly greater risk of engaging in a wide range of problem behaviors—using marijuana and hard drugs, running away from home, belonging to a gang, committing a major theft or a serious assault, selling drugs, and carrying a handgun.

Some problem behaviors cluster

Analyses of NLSY97 data also found that involvement in some problem behaviors predicted elevated involvement in other problem behaviors. For example, juveniles who reported belonging to a gang were twice as likely as other juveniles to have committed a major theft, 3 times more likely to have sold drugs, 4 times more likely to have committed a serious assault, and 5 times more likely to have carried a handgun.

School crime was common in 2003—1 in 8 students were in fights, 1 in 3 had property stolen or damaged

National survey monitors youth health risk behaviors

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) monitors health risk behaviors that contribute to the leading causes of death, injury, and social problems among youth in the U.S. Every 2 years, YRBS provides data representative of 9th–12th graders in public and private schools nationwide. The 2003 survey included responses from 15,214 students from 32 states and 18 large cities.

Fewer than 4 in 10 high school students were in a physical fight—4 in 100 were injured

According to the 2003 survey, 33% of high school students said they had been in one or more physical fights during the past 12 months, down from 43% in 1993. Regardless of grade level or race/ethnicity, males were more likely than females to engage in fighting. Fighting was more common among black and Hispanic students than white students.

Percent who were in a physical fight in the past year:

	Total	Male	Female
Total	33.0%	40.5%	25.1%
9th grade	38.6	44.8	31.9
10th grade	33.5	41.8	25.0
11th grade	30.9	38.5	23.0
12th grade	26.5	35.0	17.7
White	30.5	38.4	22.1
Black	39.7	45.6	34.0
Hispanic	36.1	42.6	29.5

Although physical fighting was fairly common among high school students, the proportion of students injured and treated by a doctor or nurse was relatively small (4%). Males were more likely than females to have been injured in a fight. Black and Hispanic students were more likely than white students to suffer fight injuries.

Percent who were injured in a physical fight in the past year:

	Total	Male	Female
Total	4.2%	5.7%	2.6%
9th grade	5.0	6.4	3.6
10th grade	4.2	6.2	2.2
11th grade	3.6	4.9	2.4
12th grade	3.1	4.3	1.8
White	2.9	4.0	1.7
Black	5.5	7.3	3.7
Hispanic	5.2	6.5	3.9

Nationwide, 13% of high school students had been in a physical fight on school property one or more times in the 12 months preceding the survey, down from 16% in 1993. Male students were substantially more likely to fight at school than female students at all grade levels and across racial/ethnic groups. Hispanic and black students were more likely than white students to fight at school. Fighting at school decreased as grade level increased.

Percent who were in a physical fight at school in the past year:

	Total	Male	Female
Total	12.8%	17.1%	8.0%
9th grade	18.0	23.3	12.2
10th grade	12.8	18.1	7.3
11th grade	10.4	14.2	6.4
12th grade	7.3	9.6	4.7
White	10.0	14.3	5.3
Black	17.1	21.5	12.6
Hispanic	16.7	19.3	13.8

About 3 in 10 high school students had property stolen or vandalized at school

High school students were more likely to experience property crime than fights at school. Nationally, 30% said they had property such as a car, clothing, or books stolen or deliberately damaged on school property one or more times during the past 12 months. A greater proportion of male than female students experienced such property crimes at school, regardless of grade level or race/ethnicity. Students' reports of school property crime decreased as grade level increased.

Percent who had property stolen or deliberately damaged at school in the past year:

	Total	Male	Female
Total	29.8%	33.1%	26.2%
9th grade	34.8	37.4	31.9
10th grade	30.5	34.3	26.6
11th grade	27.2	30.5	23.9
12th grade	24.2	27.9	20.2
White	28.2	30.6	25.6
Black	30.4	33.9	27.0
Hispanic	32.3	37.0	27.6

Fear of school-related crime kept 5 in 100 high schoolers home at least once in the past month

Nationwide in 2003, 5% of high school students missed at least 1 day of school in the past 30 days because they felt unsafe at school or when traveling to or from school, up from 4% in 1993. Hispanic and black students were more likely than white students to have missed school because they felt unsafe. Freshmen were more likely than other high school students to miss school because of safety concerns.

Percent who felt too unsafe to go to school in the past 30 days:

	Total	Male	Female
Total	5.4%	5.5%	5.3%
9th grade	6.9	7.1	6.6
10th grade	5.2	5.3	5.1
11th grade	4.5	4.3	4.6
12th grade	3.8	3.8	3.9
White	3.1	3.3	2.9
Black	8.4	7.9	9.0
Hispanic	9.4	8.9	10.0

The proportion of high school students who said they had avoided school because of safety concerns ranged from 3% to 9% across states.

The proportion of high school students who carried a weapon to school dropped to 6% in 2003

One-third of students who carried a weapon took it to school

The 2003 Youth Risk Behavior Survey found that 6% of high school students said they had carried a weapon (e.g., gun, knife, or club) on school property in the past 30 days—down from 12% in 1993. Males were more likely than females to say they carried a weapon at school. The proportion who carried a weapon to school was about one-third of those who said they had carried a weapon anywhere in the past month (17%). In addition, 6% of high schoolers reported carrying a gun (anywhere) in the past month, down from 8% in 1993.

Percent who carried a weapon on school property in the past 30 days:

	Total	Male	Female
Total	6.1%	8.9%	3.1%
9th grade	5.3	6.6	3.8
10th grade	6.0	8.9	3.0
11th grade	6.6	10.3	2.7
12th grade	6.4	10.2	2.5
White	5.5	8.5	2.2
Black	6.9	8.4	5.5
Hispanic	6.0	7.7	4.2

In 2003, 9% of high school students were threatened or injured with a weapon at school

The overall proportion of students reporting weapon-related threats or injuries at school during the year did not change from 1993.

Percent threatened or injured with a weapon at school in the past year:

	Total	Male	Female
Total	9.2%	11.6%	6.5%
9th grade	12.1	15.4	8.3
10th grade	9.2	11.3	7.0
11th grade	7.3	9.2	5.4
12th grade	6.3	8.5	3.9
White	7.8	9.6	5.8
Black	10.9	14.3	7.5
Hispanic	9.4	11.9	6.9

Across reporting states, the proportion of high school students carrying weapons to school in 2003 ranged from 3% to 10%

	Percent reporting they carried a weapon on school property in the past 30 days			Percent reporting they were threatened or injured with a weapon on school property in the past year		
Reporting states	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
U.S. total	6.1%	8.9%	3.1%	9.2%	11.6%	6.5%
Alabama	7.3	11.7	2.8	7.2	9.0	5.2
Alaska	7.1	11.8	1.7	8.1	10.9	4.9
Arizona	4.9	7.5	2.5	9.2	12.6	5.8
Delaware	5.0	6.6	2.9	7.7	9.7	5.5
Florida	5.3	7.7	2.8	8.4	10.5	6.2
Georgia	5.0	7.7	2.3	8.2	9.8	6.4
Idaho	7.7	11.1	3.9	9.4	12.0	6.5
Indiana	6.2	9.7	2.7	6.7	8.4	4.9
Kentucky	7.4	11.5	3.0	5.2	7.7	2.3
Maine	6.6	11.0	1.8	8.5	10.6	5.7
Massachusetts	5.0	7.6	2.2	6.3	8.2	4.2
Michigan	5.1	6.8	3.4	9.7	12.6	6.5
Mississippi	5.2	8.6	1.8	6.6	8.1	5.2
Missouri	5.5	8.5	2.2	7.5	9.3	5.6
Montana	7.2	10.6	3.2	7.1	9.0	4.8
Nebraska	5.0	8.3	1.5	8.8	12.0	5.5
Nevada	6.3	9.0	3.5	6.0	7.0	5.0
New Hampshire	5.8	8.9	2.4	7.5	9.5	5.3
New York	5.2	7.5	2.8	7.2	9.7	4.6
North Carolina	6.3	8.3	4.3	7.2	8.2	6.1
North Dakota	5.7	9.6	1.4	5.9	7.1	4.6
Ohio	3.6	5.2	2.0	7.7	8.9	6.3
Oklahoma	8.0	13.5	2.5	7.4	7.9	6.6
Rhode Island	5.9	8.6	3.0	8.2	10.8	5.2
South Dakota	7.1	12.4	1.5	6.5	8.6	4.4
Tennessee	5.4	8.4	2.5	8.4	10.7	6.1
Texas*	5.8	9.1	2.3	7.7	9.5	5.6
Utah	5.6	8.8	2.1	7.3	9.9	4.6
Vermont	8.3	12.8	3.3	7.3	9.5	4.9
West Virginia	6.6	9.5	3.5	8.5	10.3	6.7
Wisconsin	3.2	4.2	2.2	5.5	5.9	4.8
Wyoming	10.1	16.0	3.9	9.7	13.3	5.9
Median	5.8	8.8	2.5	7.5	9.5	5.4

* Survey did not include students from one of the state's large school districts.

Source: Authors' adaptation of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Youth risk behavior surveillance—United States, 2003.

More than half of high school seniors have used an illicit drug at least once—more have used alcohol

The Monitoring the Future Study tracks the drug use of secondary school students

Each year, the Monitoring the Future (MTF) Study asks a nationally representative sample of nearly 50,000 secondary school students in approximately 400 public and private schools to describe their drug use patterns through self-administered questionnaires. Surveying seniors annually since 1975, the study expanded in 1991 to include 8th and 10th graders. By design, MTF excludes dropouts and institutionalized, homeless, and runaway youth.

Half of seniors in 2003 said they had used illicit drugs

In 2003, 51% of all seniors said they had at least tried illicit drugs. The figure was 41% for 10th graders and 23% for 8th graders. Marijuana is by far the most commonly used illicit drug. In 2003, 46% of high school seniors said they had tried marijuana. About half of those in each grade who said they had used marijuana said they had not used any other illicit drug.

Put another way, more than half of the 8th and 12th graders and nearly half of the 10th graders who have ever used an illicit drug have used something in addition to, or other than, marijuana. About 3 in 10 seniors (28%) (slightly more than half of seniors who used any illicit drugs) used an illicit drug other than marijuana. Almost half of high school seniors had used marijuana at least once, 35% used it in the past year, and 21% used it in the previous month. MTF also asked students if they had used marijuana on 20 or more occasions in the previous 30 days. In 2003, 6% of high school seniors said they used marijuana that frequently.

In 2003, 14% of high school seniors reported using amphetamines at least once, making amphetamines the second most prevalent illicit drug after marijuana. Amphetamines also ranked second to marijuana in terms of current (past month) use. Specifically, 6% of seniors had used methamphetamine at least once and 4% had used ice (crystal methamphetamine). Narcotics other than heroin were the next most prevalent drug after amphetamines: 13% of seniors reported using a narcotic such as Vicodin, Percocet, or Oxycontin.

In 2003, 8% of seniors said they had used cocaine at least once in their life. More than half of this group (5% of all seniors) said they used it in the previous year, and about one-quarter of users (2% of seniors) had used it in the preceding 30 days. About 1 in 28 seniors reported previous use of crack cocaine: about 1 in 45 in the previous year, and about 1 in 110 in the previous month. Heroin was the least commonly used illicit drug, with less than 2% of seniors reporting they had used it at least once. Nearly half of seniors who reported heroin use said they only used it without a needle.

Alcohol and tobacco use is widespread at all grade levels

In 2003, more than 3 in 4 high school seniors said they had tried alcohol at least once; nearly 2 in 4 said they used it in the previous month. Even among 8th graders, the

More high school seniors use marijuana on a daily basis than drink alcohol daily

	Proportion of seniors in 2003 who used			
	in lifetime	in last year	in last month	daily*
Alcohol	76.6%	70.1%	47.5%	3.2%
Been drunk	58.1	48.0	30.9	1.6
Cigarettes	53.7	–	24.4	15.8
Marijuana/hashish	46.1	34.9	21.2	6.0
Amphetamines	14.4	9.9	5.0	0.5
Narcotics, not heroin	13.2	9.3	4.1	0.2
Inhalants	12.2	4.5	2.3	0.4
Tranquilizers	10.2	6.7	2.8	0.2
Sedatives	9.1	6.2	3.0	0.2
MDMA (ecstasy)	8.3	4.5	1.3	0.1
Cocaine, not crack	6.7	4.2	1.8	0.1
Methamphetamine	6.2	3.2	1.7	0.2
LSD	5.9	1.9	0.6	<0.1
Crystal methamphetamine	3.9	2.0	0.8	0.1
Crack cocaine	3.6	2.2	0.9	0.1
Steroids	3.5	2.1	1.3	0.2
PCP	2.5	1.3	0.6	0.2
Heroin	1.5	0.8	0.4	0.1

■ Three out of 10 seniors said they were drunk at least once in the past month.

* Used on 20 or more occasions in the last 30 days.

– Not included in survey.

Source: Authors' adaptation of Johnston et al.'s Monitoring the Future: National survey on drug use, 1975–2003.

use of alcohol was common: two-thirds had tried alcohol, and almost one-fifth used it in the month prior to the survey.

Perhaps of greater concern are the juveniles who indicated heavy drinking (defined as five or more drinks in a row) in the preceding 2 weeks. Recent heavy drinking was reported by 28% of seniors, 22% of 10th graders, and 12% of 8th graders.

Tobacco use was less prevalent than alcohol use, but it was the most likely substance to be used on a daily basis. In 2003, 54% of 12th graders, 43% of 10th graders, and 28% of 8th graders had tried cigarettes, and 24% of seniors, 17% of 10th graders, and 10% of 8th graders smoked in the preceding month. In addition, 16% of seniors, 9% of 10th graders, and 5% of 8th graders reported currently smoking cigarettes on a daily basis. Overall, based on various measures, tobacco use is down compared with use levels in the early to mid-1990s.

Higher proportions of males than females were involved in drug and alcohol use, especially heavy use

In 2003, males were more likely than females to drink alcohol at all and to drink heavily. Among seniors, 52% of males and 44% of females reported alcohol use in the past 30 days, and 34% of males and 22% of females said they had five or more drinks in a row in the previous 2 weeks. One in 20 senior males reported daily alcohol use compared with 1 in 50 females.

Males were more likely than females to have used marijuana in the previous year (38% vs. 32%), in the previous month (25% vs. 17%), and daily during the previous month (8% vs. 3%). The proportions of male and female high school seniors reporting overall use of illicit drugs other than marijuana in the previous year were more similar (21% and 18%), but there were variations across drugs. Males had higher annual use rates for cocaine, inhalants, steroids, LSD, and heroin. Males and females had similar use rates for amphetamines.

Blacks had lower drug, alcohol, and tobacco use rates than whites or Hispanics

In 2003, 10% of black seniors said they had smoked cigarettes in the past 30 days, compared with 29% of whites and 19% of Hispanics. Fewer than one-third of black seniors reported alcohol use in the past 30 days, compared with more than one-half of white seniors and nearly one-half of Hispanic seniors. Whites were 3 times more likely than blacks to have been drunk in the past month (36% vs. 12%). The figure for Hispanics was 24%.

The same general pattern held for illicit drugs. The proportion of seniors who reported using marijuana in the past year was lower among blacks (26%) than whites (38%) or Hispanics (31%). Whites were nearly 5 times more likely than blacks to have used cocaine in the previous year. Hispanics were nearly 4 times more likely.

Fewer than 1 in 10 high school students used alcohol or marijuana at school

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's 2003 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 6% of high school students said they had

Drug use was more common among males than females and among whites than blacks

	Proportion of seniors who used in previous year				
	Male	Female	White	Black	Hispanic
Alcohol*	51.7%	43.8%	52.3%	29.9%	46.4%
Been drunk*	34.9	26.9	35.6	11.7	23.9
Cigarettes*	26.2	22.1	29.4	10.0	19.0
Marijuana/hashish	37.8	31.6	37.9	26.3	31.1
Narcotics, not heroin	10.7	7.8	10.2	2.1	5.2
Amphetamines	9.8	9.6	12.4	2.8	6.8
Tranquilizers	6.9	6.3	8.7	1.3	4.5
Sedatives	6.7	5.4	7.6	1.7	4.1
Cocaine, not crack	5.4	2.9	4.9	1.0	3.9
Inhalants	5.2	2.9	4.9	1.5	2.7
MDMA (ecstasy)	4.8	4.0	6.4	1.4	5.3
Steroids	3.2	1.1	2.4	1.1	1.8
LSD	2.5	1.2	3.0	0.8	1.8
Crack cocaine	2.3	1.9	2.2	1.2	2.9
Heroin	0.8	0.5	0.8	0.7	0.8

Note: Male and female proportions are for 2003. Race proportions include data for 2002 and 2003, to increase subgroup sample size and provide more stable estimates.

*Alcohol and cigarette proportions are for use in the past 30 days.

Source: Authors' adaptation of Johnston et al.'s Monitoring the Future: National survey on drug use, 1975–2003.

at least one drink of alcohol on school property in the past month. Similarly, 6% said they used marijuana on school property during the same time period.

Overall, males were more likely than females to drink alcohol or use marijuana at school. This was true for most grades and racial/ethnic groups. Females showed more variation across grade levels than males, with a greater proportion of 9th graders drinking alcohol or using marijuana at school than 12th graders. Hispanic students were more likely than non-Hispanic white students to drink alcohol or use marijuana at school.

Percent who used on school property in the past 30 days:

	Total	Male	Female
Alcohol			
Total	5.2%	6.0%	4.2%
9th grade	5.1	5.1	5.2
10th grade	5.6	6.1	5.0
11th grade	5.0	6.4	3.5
12th grade	4.5	6.5	2.6
White	3.9	4.5	3.2
Black	5.8	7.9	3.8
Hispanic	7.6	7.4	7.9
Marijuana			
Total	5.8%	7.6%	3.7%
9th grade	6.6	8.1	5.1
10th grade	5.2	7.2	3.0
11th grade	5.6	7.9	3.3
12th grade	5.0	7.1	2.6
White	4.5	5.8	3.1
Black	6.6	9.7	3.6
Hispanic	8.2	10.4	6.0

In 2003, fewer than 1 in 3 high school students said they were offered, sold, or given drugs at school in the past year

Nationally, 29% of high school students said they were offered, sold, or given an illegal drug on school property at least once during the past 12 months. The proportion was higher for males than for females, especially among black and Hispanic students and among seniors. Hispanic students were more likely than white or black students to report being offered, sold, or given illegal drugs at school. Among females, seniors were less likely than 9th, 10th, and 11th graders to say they were offered, sold, or given an illegal drug on school property.

Percent who were offered, sold, or given an illegal drug on school property in past 12 months:

	Total	Male	Female
Total	28.7%	31.9%	25.0%
9th grade	29.5	32.1	26.7
10th grade	29.2	31.9	26.5
11th grade	29.9	33.5	26.1
12th grade	24.9	29.7	19.6
White	27.5	30.2	24.5
Black	23.1	27.7	18.3
Hispanic	36.5	40.6	32.5

High school students were nearly 3 times more likely to use alcohol than marijuana before age 13

	Percent who had used before age 13					
	Alcohol			Marijuana		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Total	27.8%	32.0%	23.3%	9.9%	12.6%	6.9%
9th grade	36.4	39.4	33.3	11.7	13.6	9.7
10th grade	28.5	33.3	23.5	10.8	14.3	7.3
11th grade	23.0	27.6	18.2	8.1	10.9	5.2
12th grade	20.3	25.1	15.2	7.8	11.0	4.3
White	25.7	30.0	21.2	8.7	10.5	6.8
Black	31.2	35.7	26.8	12.1	18.5	5.8
Hispanic	30.2	34.1	26.3	10.7	13.0	8.5

- Fewer than 1 in 3 high school students said they had drunk alcohol (more than just a few sips) before they turned 13; 1 in 10 high school students reported trying marijuana before age 13.
- Females were less likely than males to have used alcohol or marijuana before age 13, and whites were less likely than blacks.
- Juniors and seniors were generally less likely to say they used alcohol or marijuana before age 13 than were freshmen and sophomores.

Source: Authors' adaptation of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Youth risk behavior surveillance—United States, 2003.

Drinking and driving is a high-risk teen behavior

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for high school students, accounting for 77% of all deaths in 2002 among teens ages 14–17. According to the 2003 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey, 3 in 10 high school students said that in the past month they rode in a vehicle with a driver who had been drinking. The proportion varied across states, ranging from 18% to 43%.

In addition, 3 in 25 high school students said that in the past month they drove a vehicle after drinking alcohol. The proportion was lower for freshmen (who typically are not yet of driving age) than for other high school students. Across states, the proportion ranged from 7% to 27%.

Across states, the proportion of high school students who were offered, sold, or given an illegal drug on school property during the past year ranged from 18% to 35%

	Percent who used alcohol on school property in the past 30 days			Percent who used marijuana on school property in the past 30 days			Percent who were offered, sold,or given an illegal drug on school property in the past year		
Reporting states	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
U.S. total	5.2%	6.0%	4.2%	5.8%	7.6%	3.7%	28.7%	31.9%	25.0%
Alabama	4.1	5.4	2.7	2.6	3.5	1.7	26.0	28.1	23.8
Alaska	4.9	5.4	4.0	6.5	7.9	4.9	28.4	30.8	25.8
Arizona	6.6	9.3	4.1	5.6	7.4	3.9	28.1	31.2	25.2
Delaware	4.8	5.5	3.9	6.0	7.4	4.4	27.9	33.4	22.1
Florida	5.1	6.6	3.6	4.9	6.8	2.9	25.7	29.9	21.3
Georgia	3.7	4.3	3.1	3.2	4.4	2.0	33.3	38.4	28.3
Idaho	3.8	4.5	3.0	2.7	3.7	1.5	19.6	21.3	17.6
Indiana	3.9	4.2	3.6	3.8	4.9	2.7	28.3	32.3	23.9
Kentucky	4.8	5.4	4.1	4.3	5.8	2.6	30.4	31.7	28.9
Maine	3.7	4.9	2.1	6.3	9.1	3.3	32.6	38.5	26.4
Massachusetts	5.3	6.8	3.7	6.3	8.6	3.9	31.9	36.5	27.2
Michigan	4.6	4.9	4.3	7.0	8.4	5.5	31.3	34.6	28.0
Mississippi	4.9	6.0	3.8	4.4	7.3	1.5	22.3	27.6	16.6
Missouri	2.6	3.3	1.8	3.0	4.0	1.9	21.6	25.2	18.0
Montana	6.7	8.0	5.3	6.4	8.6	3.8	26.9	29.2	24.7
Nebraska	4.6	5.9	3.3	3.9	5.4	2.3	23.3	27.6	18.6
Nevada	7.4	7.7	7.1	5.3	5.5	5.1	34.5	35.5	33.4
New Hampshire	4.0	4.1	3.9	6.6	8.6	4.2	28.2	31.7	24.2
New York	5.2	6.5	3.9	4.5	6.0	3.0	23.0	27.5	18.4
North Carolina	3.6	3.8	3.4	3.5	4.9	2.0	31.9	34.2	29.6
North Dakota	5.1	7.5	2.6	6.3	7.9	4.4	21.3	25.5	16.8
Ohio	3.9	4.6	3.1	4.2	5.0	3.4	31.1	35.7	26.2
Oklahoma	3.2	3.4	2.7	4.3	5.6	3.1	22.2	25.2	19.1
Rhode Island	4.6	5.9	3.2	7.4	10.3	4.5	26.0	28.3	23.6
South Dakota	5.4	7.8	3.0	4.5	5.6	3.4	22.1	25.9	18.1
Tennessee	4.2	5.3	2.9	4.1	6.3	1.9	24.3	29.2	19.5
Texas*	4.6	5.7	3.4	4.8	6.8	2.7	27.3	28.1	26.5
Utah	3.8	5.0	2.7	3.7	5.9	1.3	24.7	29.5	19.8
Vermont	5.3	6.4	4.1	8.0	10.0	5.7	29.4	33.5	24.8
West Virginia	4.1	4.5	3.7	4.5	6.6	2.3	26.5	27.7	25.2
Wisconsin	–	–	–	–	–	–	26.3	28.4	23.9
Wyoming	6.2	6.3	6.1	5.1	6.4	3.8	18.1	20.1	16.0
Median	4.6	5.4	3.6	4.5	6.4	3.1	26.7	29.3	23.9

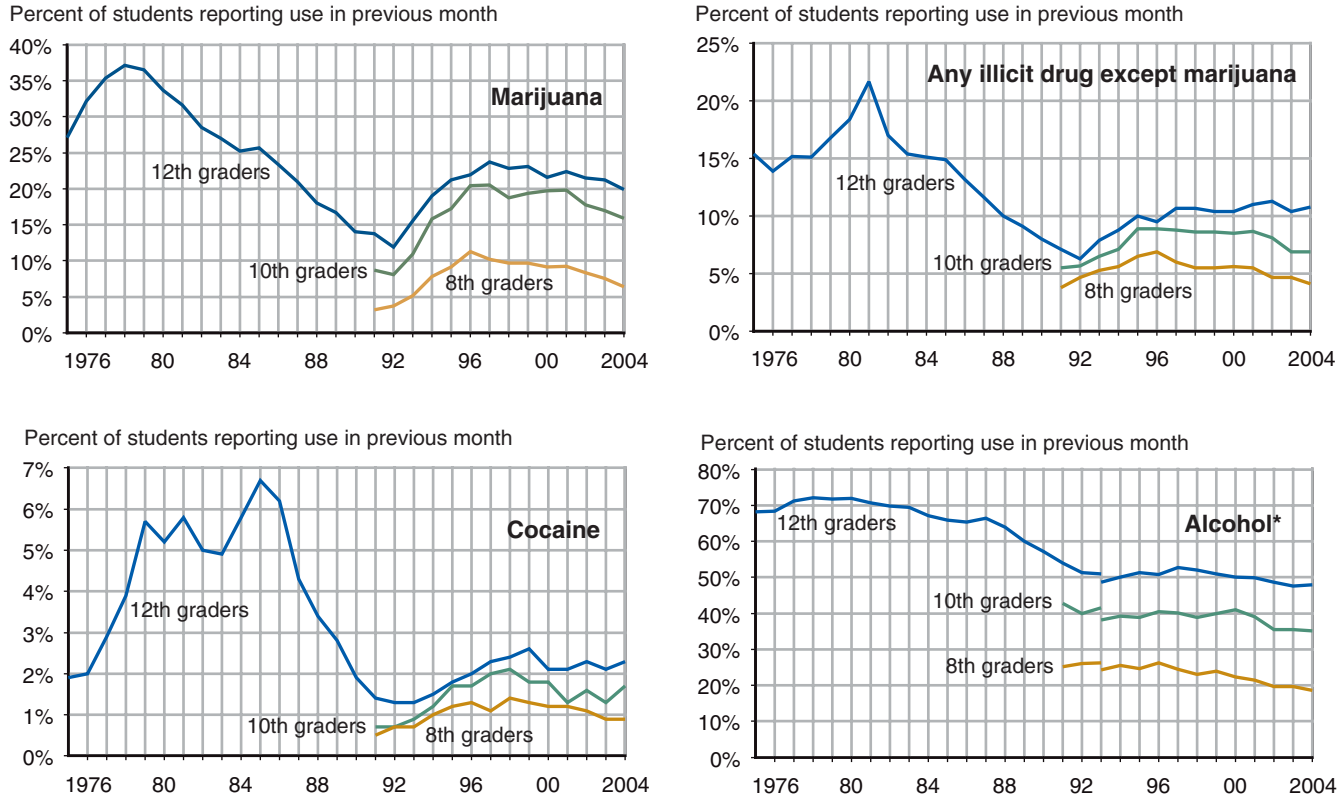
* Survey did not include students from one of the state's large school districts.

– Data not available.

Source: Authors' adaptation of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Youth risk behavior surveillance—United States, 2003.

Juvenile illicit drug use has been relatively constant since the mid-1990s after declining during the 1980s

In 2004, the proportion of high school seniors who reported using illicit drugs in the previous month was above levels of the early 1990s but well below levels of the early 1980s



- After years of continuous decline, reported drug use by high school seniors grew in several categories after 1992. Similar increases in drug use were reported by 8th and 10th graders, although their levels of use were below those of 12th graders.
- In recent years, the proportion of students reporting use of illicit drugs during the 30 days prior to the survey appears to have stabilized or declined for many categories of drug use. For marijuana, the most widely used illicit drug, use declined from 1997 to 2004 for 12th graders (–16%), 10th graders (–22%), and 8th graders (–37%).
- In 2004, the proportion of seniors who said they used marijuana in the past month was nearly double the proportion who reported past-month use of illicit drugs other than marijuana (20% vs. 11%) but less than half the proportion who reported past-month alcohol use (48%).
- Past-month cocaine use among seniors peaked in 1985 at nearly 7%. Although use levels for cocaine increased between 1992 and 1999 (100% for seniors), levels have stabilized recently (at around 2% for seniors).
- For all three grades, past-month alcohol use in 2004 was at or near its lowest levels since the mid-1970s—48% for 12th graders, 35% for 10th graders, and 19% for 8th graders.

* The survey question on alcohol use was revised in 1993 to indicate that a "drink" meant "more than a few sips." In 1993, half the sample responded to the original question and half to the revised question. Beginning in 1994, all respondents were asked the revised question.

Source: Authors' adaptation of Johnston et al.'s Overall teen drug use continues gradual decline; but use of inhalants rises. *Monitoring the Future press release*.

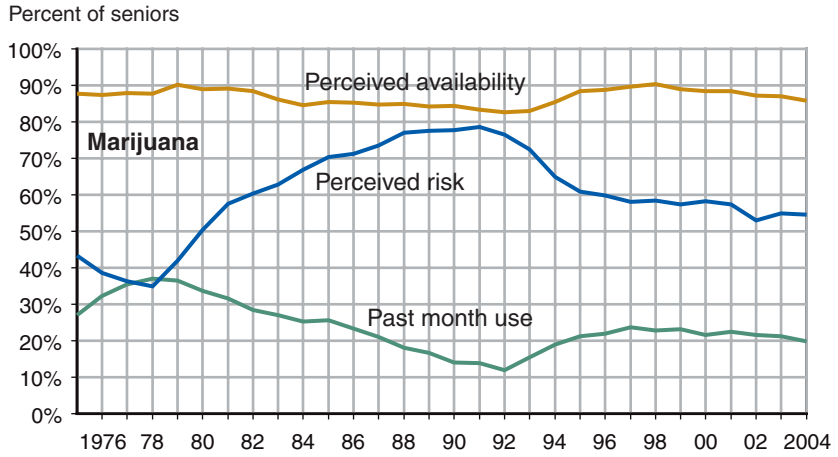
Change in students' use of marijuana and alcohol is tied to their perception of possible harm from use

The annual Monitoring the Future Study, in addition to collecting information about students' use of illicit drugs, alcohol, and tobacco, also collects data on students' perceptions regarding the availability of these substances and the risk of harm from using them.

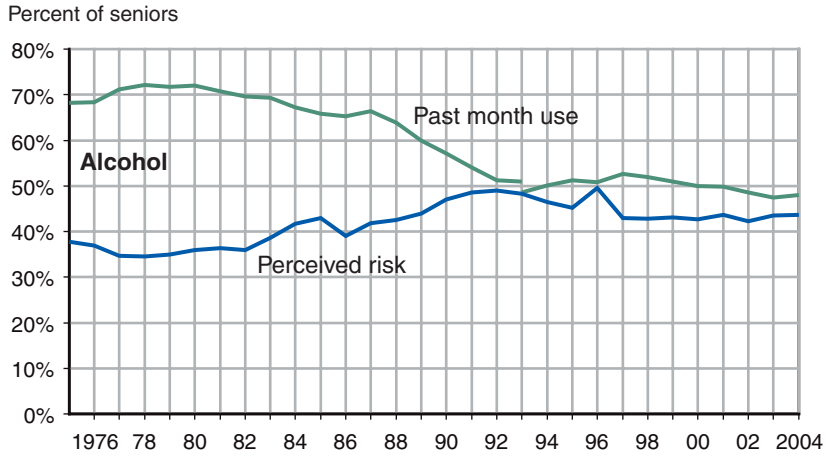
Between 1975 and 2004, the proportion of high school seniors reporting use of marijuana in the 30 days prior to the survey fluctuated, peaking in 1978 and then declining consistently through 1992. After that, reported use increased then leveled off, although the 2004 rate was still far below the peak level of 1978. When the perceived risk of harm (physical or other) from either regular or occasional use of marijuana increased, use declined; when perceived risk declined, use increased. The perception that obtaining marijuana was "fairly easy" or "very easy" remained relatively constant between 1975 and 2004.

Students' reported use of alcohol also shifted from 1975 to 2004. After 1978, alcohol use declined through 1993. Alcohol use fluctuated within a limited range thereafter, although the 2004 rate was far lower than the 1978 rate. As with marijuana, when the perceived risk of harm from either weekend "binge" drinking or daily drinking increased, use declined; when perceived risk declined, use increased.

Over the past 3 decades, while marijuana and alcohol availability remained constant, changes in use reflected changes in perceived harm



Perceived availability: Percent saying fairly easy or very easy to get.
Perceived risk: Percent saying great risk of harm in regular use.
Past month use: Percent using once or more in the past 30 days.



Perceived risk: Percent saying great risk of harm in having five or more drinks in a row once or twice each weekend.
Past month use: Percent using once or more in the past 30 days. (The survey question on alcohol use was revised in 1993 to indicate that a "drink" meant "more than a few sips." In 1993, half the sample responded to the original question and half to the revised question. Beginning in 1994, all respondents were asked the revised question.)

Source: Authors' adaptation of Johnston et al.'s Overall teen drug use continues gradual decline; but use of inhalants rises. *Monitoring the Future press release*.

Youth who use alcohol are more likely than other youth to report using marijuana and selling drugs

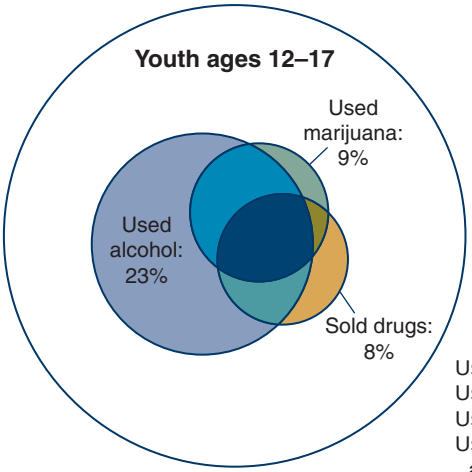
Juveniles report co-occurrence of substance use behaviors

The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth asked a representative sample of youth ages 12–17 in 1997 and 1998 to report if in the last 30 days they had (1) consumed alcohol, (2) used marijuana, and (3) sold or helped to sell any of a wide range of drugs. Analyses found that if one substance-related behavior was reported, others were much more likely.

More specifically, among youth ages 12–17 who used alcohol in the past 30 days, 32% reported using marijuana and 23% reported selling drugs; among youth who did not report using alcohol, just 2% reported using marijuana and 3% reported selling drugs. This pattern was seen in both older and younger youth. Of all youth ages 15–17 who reported alcohol use (35% of youth in this age group), 34% said they used marijuana and 25% reported selling drugs. Of youth ages 15–17 who reported they did not use alcohol in the past 30 days, just 4% used marijuana and 6% sold drugs. Of youth ages 12–14 who reported alcohol use (11% of youth in this age group), 27% said they used marijuana and 17% reported selling drugs. Of youth ages 12–14 who reported they did not use alcohol in the past 30 days, just 1% used marijuana and 1% sold drugs.

Although a significantly larger proportion of non-Hispanic white youth (26%) reported recent alcohol use than did non-Hispanic black (14%) and Hispanic (22%) youth, the proportion of these youth who also reported marijuana use and drug selling was the same across the three groups. Regardless of race/ethnicity, that proportion was greater among youth who used alcohol than among those who did not.

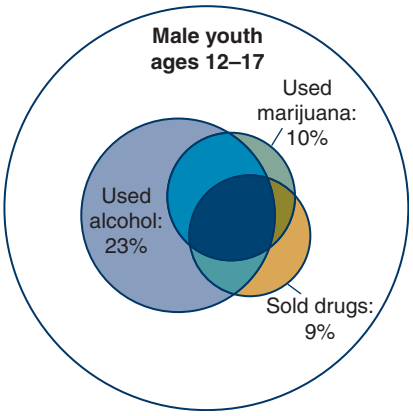
Most youth who either used marijuana in the past 30 days or reported selling drugs in the past 30 days also reported drinking alcohol in the period



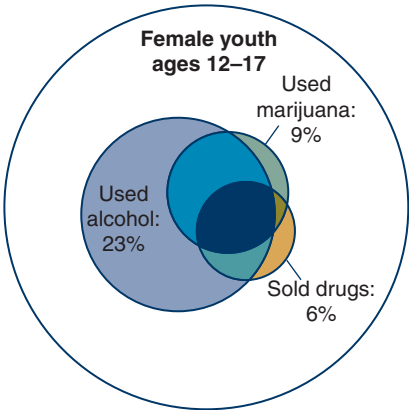
Used alcohol and marijuana: 7%
Used alcohol and sold drugs: 5%
Used marijuana and sold drugs: 4%
Used alcohol and marijuana and sold drugs: 4%

- Most youth ages 12–17 who reported using alcohol in the past 30 days did not report using marijuana or selling drugs in the past 30 days, although they were more likely to do so than youth who did not use alcohol.

Patterns of substance-related behavior co-occurrence were similar among males and females ages 12–17



Used alcohol and marijuana: 7%
Used alcohol and sold drugs: 4%
Used marijuana and sold drugs: 3%
Used alcohol and marijuana and sold drugs: 3%



Used alcohol and marijuana: 8%
Used alcohol and sold drugs: 6%
Used marijuana and sold drugs: 5%
Used alcohol and marijuana and sold drugs: 4%

- Although recent drug selling was more prevalent among males than females, the levels of alcohol and marijuana use did not differ significantly.

Source: Authors' adaptation of McCurley and Snyder's Co-occurrence of substance use behaviors.

The prevalence of youth gangs declined in nonurban areas, but gangs remain a substantial urban problem

Law enforcement agencies are the primary source for data on youth gangs nationwide

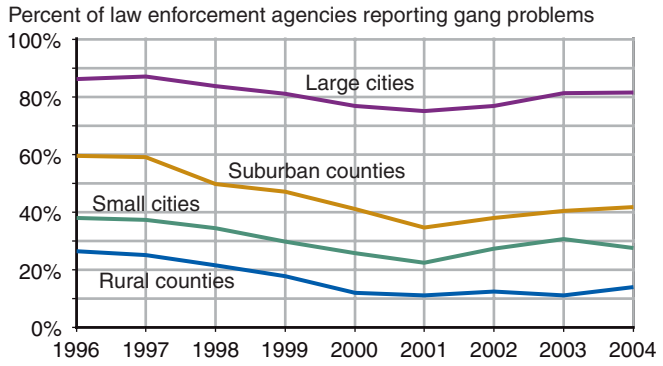
Accurately estimating the scope of the youth gang problem is difficult in part because of the lack of consensus about what "counts"—what combination of size, stability, hierarchy, symbolic communication, and ongoing criminal activity distinguishes a true gang from a transitory collection of individuals, not to mention what level of involvement in and adherence to the gang distinguishes a real member from a hanger-on or "wannabe." In addition, the available sources of information on gangs are unreliable. Gangs are, after all, inherently secret groups. Outsiders are apt to miss or misinterpret signs of their presence. Insiders are liable to distort the signs.

Nevertheless, based on surveys of local authorities, it appears that the overall number of communities with active youth gangs grew sharply during the last few decades of the 20th century, peaked in the mid-1990s, and recently declined somewhat.

A comparison of the number of localities reporting problems with youth gangs during the 1970s with the number reporting gang problems in the 1990s found a tenfold increase in gang jurisdictions—including more suburban, small-town, and rural jurisdictions with reported gang problems than ever before. On the basis of law enforcement agency responses to the 1996 National Youth Gang Survey, which gathered data on gangs from a representative sample of police and sheriff departments across the country, the nation's total youth gang membership was estimated at more than 846,000, with 31,000 gangs operating in 4,824 local jurisdictions. Estimates based on subsequent surveys have steadily receded from those highs. Based on the 2004 survey, youth gang membership was estimated at 760,000 and total youth gangs at 24,000. Youth gangs were estimated to be active in more than 2,900 jurisdictions served by city (population of 2,500 or more) and county law enforcement agencies.

The drop between 1996 and 2004 in the number of localities reporting gang problems was almost entirely attributable to small cities and suburban and rural jurisdictions—where gang problems had tended to be relatively minor and less persistent. Nearly 8 in 10 cities with populations of 50,000 or more continued to report gang problems. Thus, most Americans still live in or near areas that have problems with youth gangs.

The number of law enforcement agencies reporting gang problems appears to have stabilized



Notes: Large cities have populations of 50,000 or more. Small cities have populations of 2,500 to 49,999. The observed changes in the percentage of agencies in small cities and rural counties reporting gang problems between 2000 and 2004 are within the range attributable to sample error and, thus, do not indicate actual change.

Source: Authors' adaptation of Egley and Ritz's Highlights of the 2004 National Youth Gang Survey.

A third of public high school and middle school principals report gang activity in their schools

In a 1999–2000 survey of a nationally representative sample of public school principals, 18% reported "undesirable gang activities" in their schools—including 31% of the middle school and 37% of the secondary school principals. Apart from being more common in schools located in urban areas, in poor communities, and in communities with large minority populations, gang activity was strongly linked with school size: principals of schools with enrollments of 1,000 or more were about 4 times more likely to report gang activity than those with enrollments of less than 500.

In 2001 and again in 2003, as part of the School Crime Supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey, students ages 12–18 were asked about the presence of gangs in their schools during the prior 6 months. In both years, about 1 in 5 reported that gangs were present. Among minority students, students in city schools, and those in upper grades, much higher proportions reported gang presence. For instance, in 2003,

42% of urban Hispanic students said they attended schools in which gangs were present.

Youth gang members are overwhelmingly male and predominantly minorities

Law enforcement agencies responding to National Youth Gang Surveys over a number of years have reported demographic details regarding gang members in their jurisdictions, including age, gender, and racial and ethnic background. Although reported characteristics varied considerably by locality—with emergent gangs in less populous areas tending to have more white and more female members—overall, gang demographics have been fairly consistent from year to year.

Estimated race/ethnicity of U.S. youth gang members, 2004:

Hispanic	49%
Black	37
White	8
Asian	5
Other	1
Total	100%

On the basis of responses to the 2004 survey, gang membership was estimated to be 94% male. Youth gang membership was estimated to consist of 41% juveniles and 59% young adults (18 or older).

Gang demographic profiles based on law enforcement estimates differ from profiles emerging from youth surveys. Self-reported gang members tend to include many more females and nonminority males. For example, in one large-scale 1995 survey of public school 8th graders, 25% of self-reported gang members were white and 38% were female. Even when more restrictive criteria for gang membership were applied to these self-report results—in an effort to filter out fringe or inactive members and isolate only the most active core gang members—significant demographic differences from law enforcement estimates persisted.

Sustained gang membership is rare even among high-risk youth

Law enforcement estimates of nationwide juvenile gang membership suggest that no more than about 1% of all youth ages 10–17 are gang members. Self-reports, such as the 1997 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY97), find that 2% of youth ages 12–17 (3% of males and 1% of females) say they were in a gang in the past year. NLSY97 also found that 8% of 17-year-olds (11% of males and 6% of females) said they had ever belonged to a gang. These proportions obviously vary considerably from place to place. For example, researchers tracking a sample of high-risk youth in Rochester, NY, reported that 30% joined gangs between the ages of 14 and 18.

Gang membership tends to be short-lived, even among high-risk youth. Among the Rochester gang members, half of the males and two-thirds of the females stayed in gangs for a year or less, with very few youth remaining gang members throughout their adolescent years.

Many factors are related to whether youth join gangs

When asked directly what led them to join gangs, 54% of Rochester gang members said they had followed the lead of friends or family members who preceded them, 19% said they did it for protection, and 15% said it was for fun or excitement. Younger gang members were somewhat more likely to cite protection as the primary motivation.

However they may characterize their own motivations, gang members' backgrounds commonly include certain features that may make them more inclined to join gangs. The following risk factors have been found to predict gang membership:

- Individual factors: early delinquency (especially violence and drug use) and early dating and precocious sexual activity.
- Family factors: non-two-parent structure, poverty, and other gang-involved members.
- School factors: low achievement, commitment, and aspirations; truancy; negative labeling by teachers; and lack of a sense of safety in school.
- Peer factors: associations with delinquent or aggressive peers.
- Community factors: poverty, drug availability, gang presence, lack of a sense of safety and attachment.

Some risk factors are more predictive than others. In a longitudinal study of youth living in high-crime neighborhoods in Seattle, for example, pre-adolescents (ages 10–12) who later joined gangs were distinguished most markedly by very early marijuana use, neighborhood conditions making marijuana readily available, and learning disabilities. The presence of any of these factors in a juvenile's background more than tripled the odds of his or her later becoming a gang member. Childhood risk factors that were predictive of later sustained (as opposed to transient) gang membership included early violence, acting out, and association with antisocial peers.

The more risk factors present in a youth's background, the more likely that youth is to join a gang. In Seattle, for example, those with two or three identified risk factors at ages 10–12 were 3 times more likely to go on to join a gang than those with none or one, those with four to six risk factors were 5 times more likely, and those with seven or more were 13 times more likely. Having background risk factors in more than one area of life—that is, individual, family, community, etc.—increases the likelihood of gang involvement even more than a general accumulation of factors. The Rochester study, which divided risk factors into seven general domains, found that 61% of the boys and 40% of the girls with problems in all seven areas were gang members.

Gang members are responsible for a disproportionate share of violent and nonviolent offenses

By their own account, gang members are more likely to engage in criminal activity than their peers. In response to interview questions regarding their activities in the prior month, Seattle gang members were 3 times more likely than nongang members to report committing break-ins and assaults, 4 times more likely to report committing felony thefts, and 8 times more likely to report committing robberies. When asked about their activities during the prior year, gang members were 3 times more likely to say they had been arrested, and 5 times more likely to say they had sold drugs.

In surveys of high-risk youth, gang members represent a minority of these youth but account for most of the reported crime. In the Rochester study, gang members made up 30% of the sample but accounted for 54% of the arrests, 68% of the property crimes, 69% of the violent offenses, 70% of the drug sales, and 82% of the serious delinquencies. A similar study of high-risk Denver youth found that gang members constituted just 14% of the sample but committed 80% of the serious and violent crimes.

Guns are a key factor in gang members' heightened criminality

A body of longitudinal research discredits the notion that gangs are simply collections of antisocial individuals who would be offending at the same rates even if they were not organized into gangs. For one thing, gang members have been found to be more criminally active and violent than delinquents who are not gang affiliated, even those who associate to the same extent with other delinquents. Furthermore, this heightened criminality and violence occur only during periods of gang membership—not before or after. Rochester juveniles who were gang members during only 1 year between ages 14 and 18 committed more offenses during that 1 gang year than they did in any of the remaining 3 years. Denver youth involved in gangs over some part of a 5-year period committed 85% of their serious violent offenses, 86% of their serious property offenses, and 80% of their drug sales while gang-involved. All of these findings strongly suggest that the gang structure itself tends to facilitate or even demand increased involvement in delinquency.

A significant factor may be the strong association between gang membership and gun possession. Gang members are far more likely than nonmembers to own or have access to guns, to carry them on the street, and to use them to commit crimes. Gang membership both facilitates juveniles' access to guns—through illegal markets and through borrowing—and provides strong and constant incentives for being armed in public. Rochester gang members' rates of gun-carrying were 10 times higher than those of nonmembers. For these youth, gun-carrying not only multiplies opportunities to commit violent crimes and raises the risk that ordinary disputes will escalate into violence—it may increase a youth's crime-readiness by supplying an all-purpose, aggressive confidence that unarmed youth do not have.

Gang membership has lasting negative consequences for gang members themselves

Being a member of a gang sharply raises a young person's risk of being a *victim* of violence, not just a perpetrator. Gangs may harm members in subtle as well as obvious ways, cutting them off from people and opportunities that could help them with the transition to adulthood and disrupting their lives even after they have moved beyond the gang.

Researchers tracking the lives of Rochester gang members to age 22 found evidence of serious adult dysfunction that could not be explained by other factors. Young adults who had been in gangs were more likely to have ended their education prematurely, become pregnant or had children early, and failed to establish stable work lives—all of which were associated with an increased likelihood of being arrested as adults. The differences were more notable among those who had been in gangs for a long time and persisted even when gang members were compared with nonmembers who had histories of delinquency and association with delinquent peers.

The daily patterns of juvenile violent, drug, and weapons crimes differ on school and nonschool days

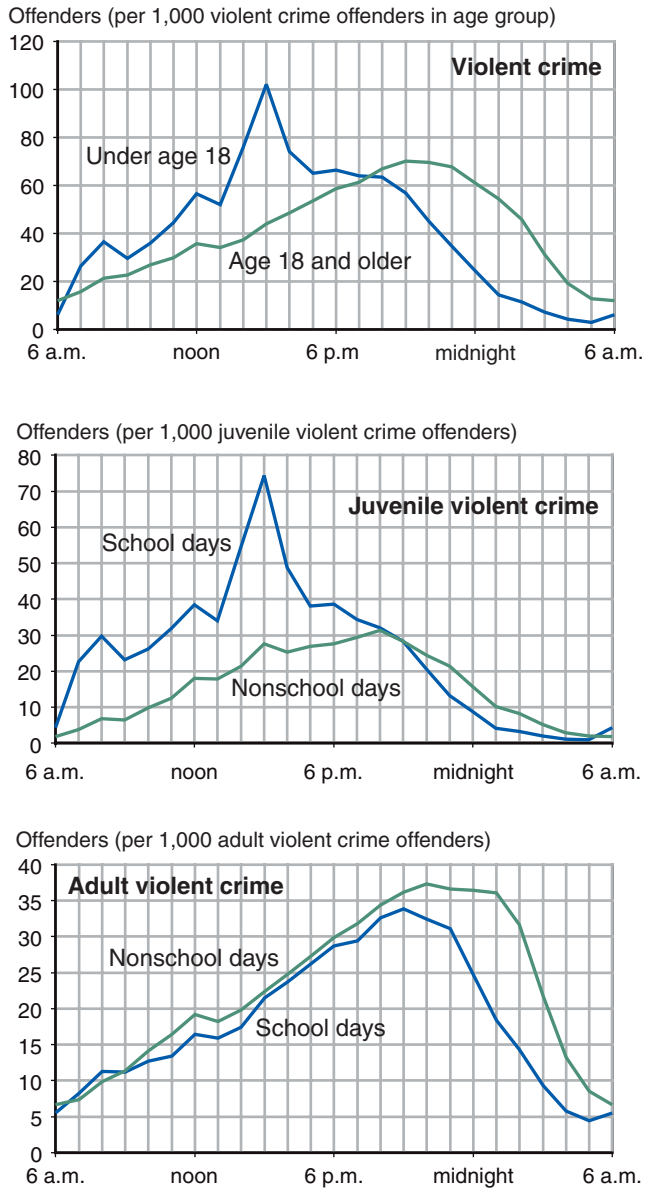
Peak time periods for juvenile violent crime depend on the day

The FBI's National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) collects information on each crime reported to contributing law enforcement agencies, including the date and time of day the crime occurred. For calendar year 2001, agencies in 20 states and the District of Columbia reported information on the time of day of reported crimes. Analyses of these data show that for many offenses juveniles commit crimes at different times than do adults, and the juvenile patterns vary on school and nonschool days.

The number of violent crimes by adult offenders increased hourly through the morning, afternoon, and evening hours, peaking around 10 p.m., then declining to a low point at 6 a.m. In contrast, violent crimes by juveniles peaked between 3 p.m. and 4 p.m. (the hour at the end of the school day) and then generally declined hour by hour until the low point at 6 a.m. At 10 p.m. when the number of adult violent crimes peaked, the number of violent crimes involving juvenile offenders was about half the number at 3 p.m.

The importance of the afterschool period in juvenile violence is confirmed when the days of the year are divided into two groups: school days (Mondays through Fridays in the months of September through May, excluding holidays) and nonschool days (the months of June through August, all weekends, and holidays). A comparison of the school- and nonschool-day violent crime patterns finds that the 3 p.m. peak occurs only on school days and only for juveniles. The timing of adult violent crimes is similar on school and nonschool days, with one exception: the peak occurs a

Unlike violent crime by adult offenders, violent crime by juvenile offenders peaks in the afterschool hours on school days



- The small difference in the adult patterns on school and nonschool days probably is related to the fact that nonschool days are also weekend or summer days.

Notes: Violent crimes include murder, violent sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault, and simple assault. Data are from 20 states and the District of Columbia.

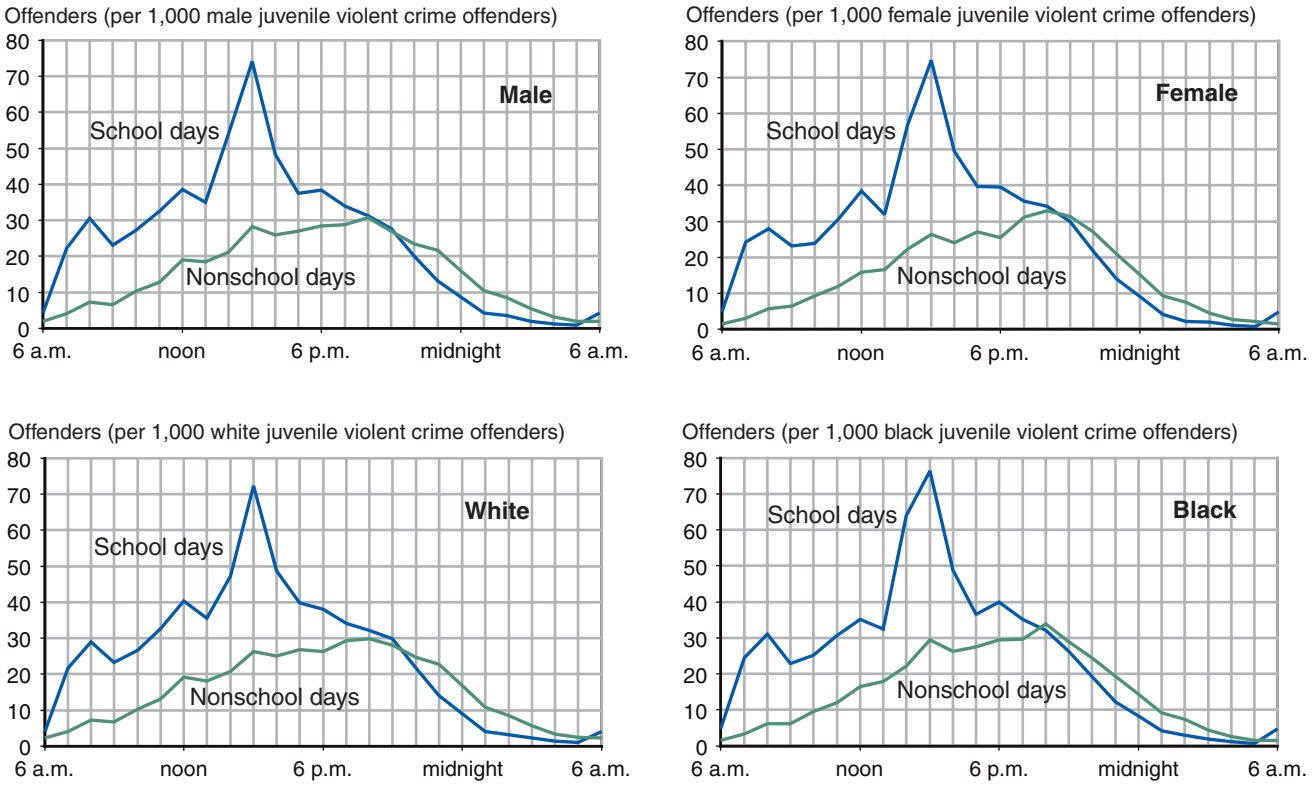
Source: Authors' analyses of the FBI's *National Incident-Based Reporting System master file* for the year 2001 [machine-readable data file].

little later on nonschool days (i.e., weekends and summer days). Finally, the time pattern of juvenile violent crimes on nonschool days is similar to that of adults.

Afterschool programs have more crime reduction potential than do juvenile curfews

The number of school days in a year is essentially equal to the number of nonschool days in a year. Based on 2001 NIBRS data, 61% of all violent crimes (i.e., murder, forcible rape, robbery, aggravated assault, and simple assault) committed by juveniles occur on school days. In fact, 1 of every 5 juvenile violent crimes (20%) occurs in the 4 hours between 3 p.m. and 7 p.m. on school days. A smaller proportion of juvenile violent crime (14%) occurs during the standard juvenile curfew hours of 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. However, the annual number of hours in the curfew period (i.e., 8 hours every day in the year) is 4 times greater than the number of hours in the 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. period on school days (i.e., 4 hours in half of the days in the year). Therefore, the rate of juvenile violence in the afterschool period is almost 6 times the rate in the juvenile curfew period. Consequently, efforts to reduce juvenile crime after school would appear to have greater potential to decrease a community's violent crime rate than do juvenile curfews.

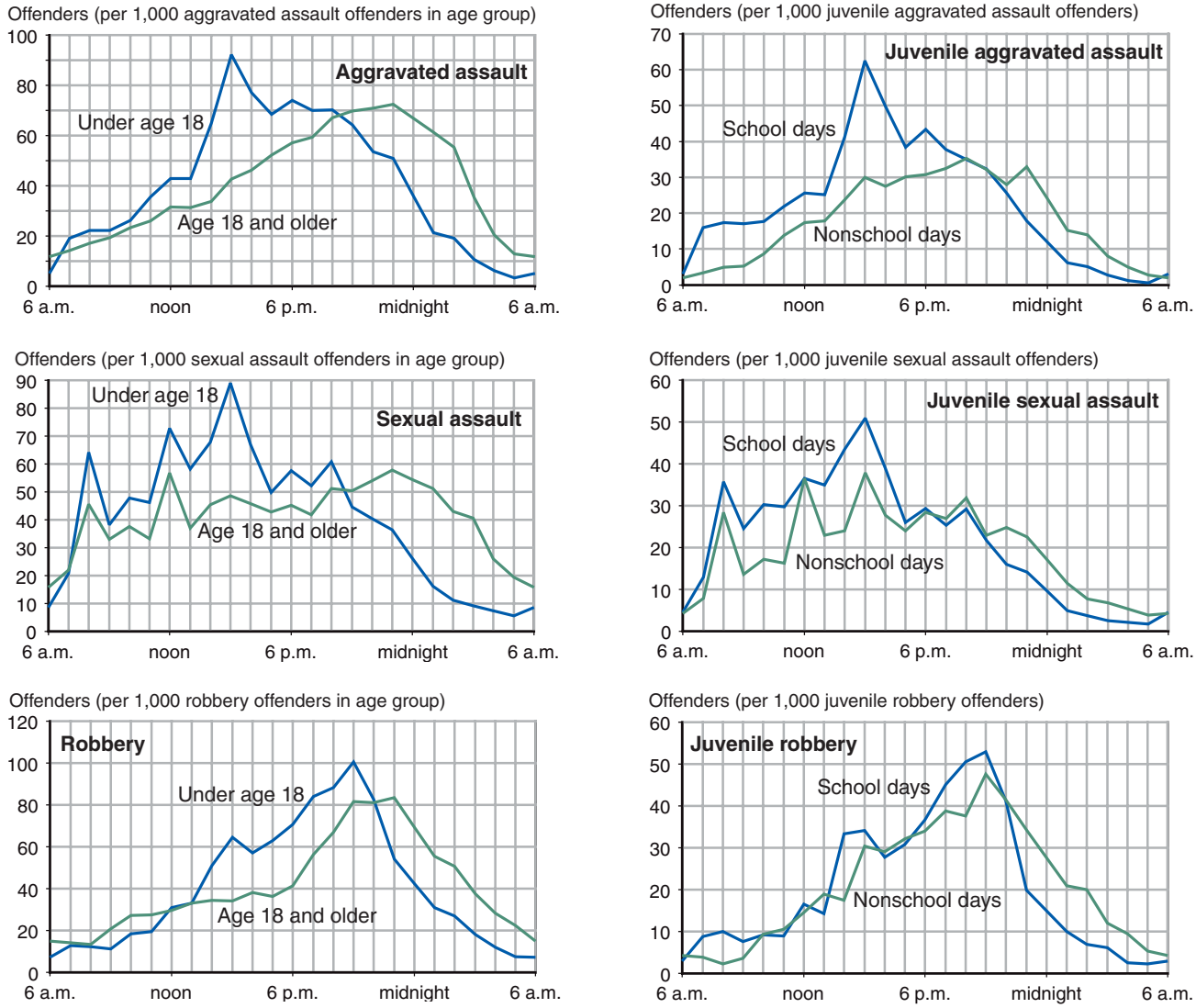
The daily patterns of juvenile violent crimes (including the afterschool peak on school days) are similar for males and females and for whites and blacks



Note: Violent crimes include murder, violent sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault, and simple assault. Data are from 20 states and the District of Columbia.

Source: Authors' analyses of the FBI's *National Incident-Based Reporting System master file* for the year 2001 [machine-readable data file].

Aggravated assaults by juvenile offenders peak at 3 p.m. on school days, coinciding with the end of the school day

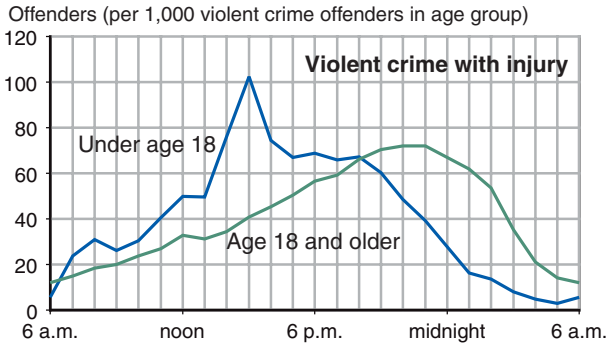


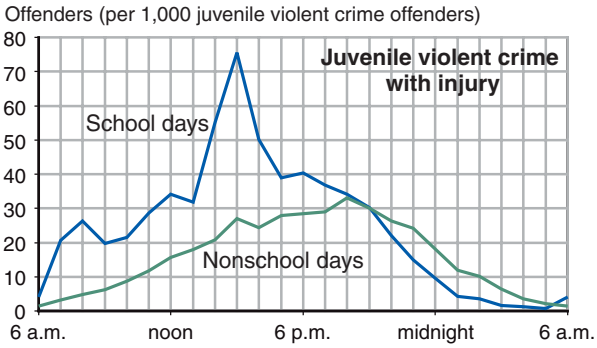
- Sexual assaults by juvenile offenders spike at 8 a.m. and 3 p.m. on both school and nonschool days and at noon on nonschool days.
- Unlike other violent crimes, the daily timing of robberies by juvenile offenders is similar to the adult patterns, peaking in the late evening hours on both school and nonschool days.
- Juveniles are most likely to commit a violent sexual assault between 2 p.m. and 5 p.m., especially on school days.
- Before 8 p.m., persons are more at risk of becoming an aggravated assault victim of a juvenile offender on school days than on nonschool days (i.e., weekends and all summer days).

Note: Data are from 20 states and the District of Columbia.

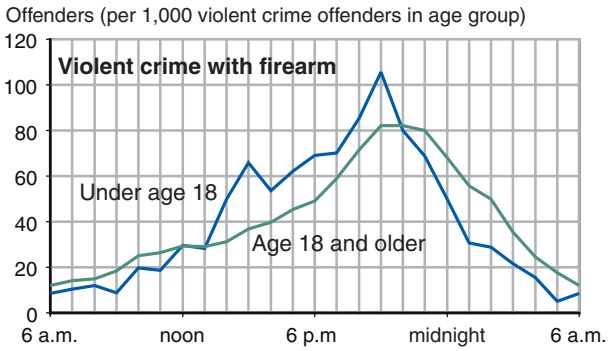
Source: Authors' analyses of the FBI's *National Incident-Based Reporting System master file* for the year 2001 [machine-readable data file].

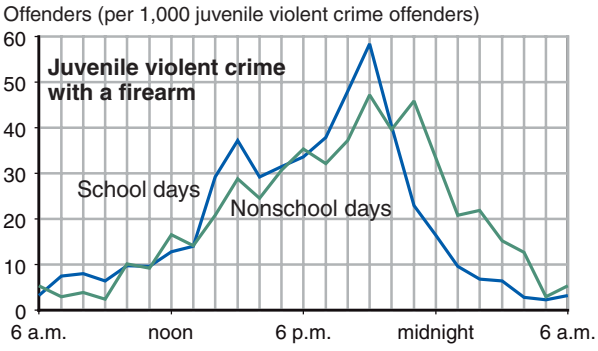
Violent crime that results in injury to the victim is most likely in the afterschool hours on school days for juvenile offenders, between 9 p.m. and midnight for adult offenders



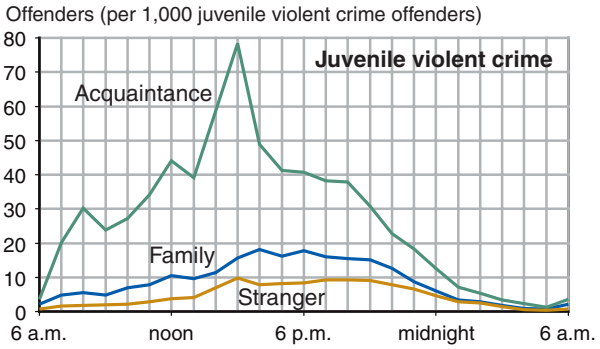


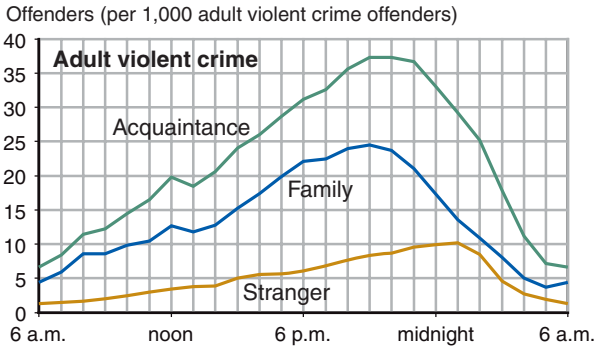
In a pattern similar to that for adults, juveniles are most likely to commit a crime with a firearm between 9 p.m. and 10 p.m.—although there is also a minor peak in the afterschool hours





The afterschool peak in juvenile violent crime largely involves crimes with victims who are acquaintances of the offenders



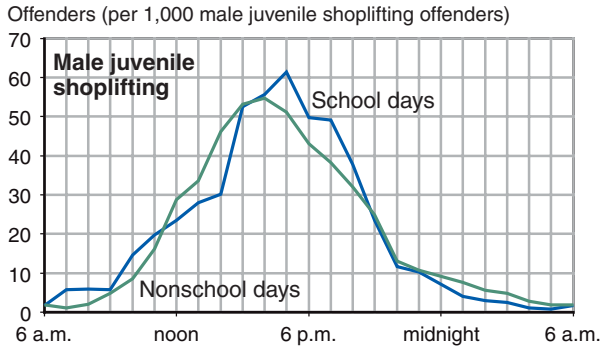


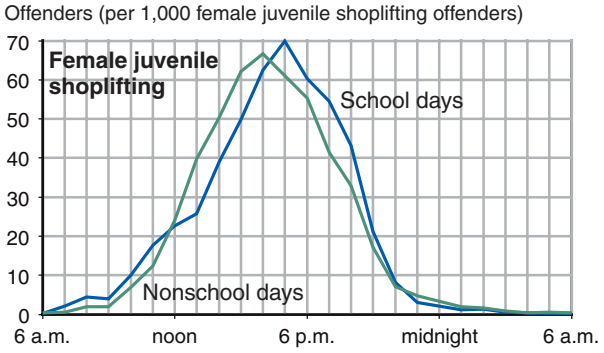
- The timing of violent crimes by adult offenders differs substantially from the juvenile pattern. For adult offenders, violent crimes against strangers peak in the hours after midnight; for victims who are family members, the most dangerous hours are between 8 p.m. and 11 p.m.

Note: Violent crimes include murder, violent sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault, and simple assault. Data are from 20 states and the District of Columbia.

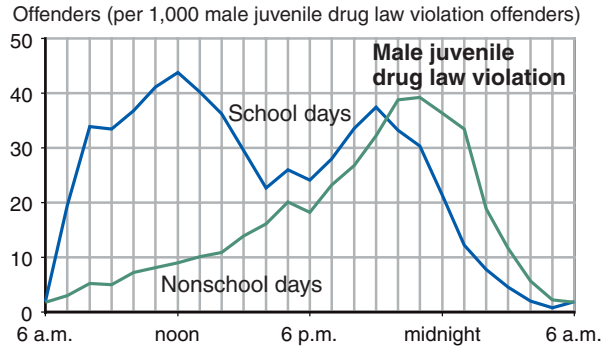
Source: Authors' analyses of the FBI's *National Incident-Based Reporting System master file* for the year 2001 [machine-readable data file].

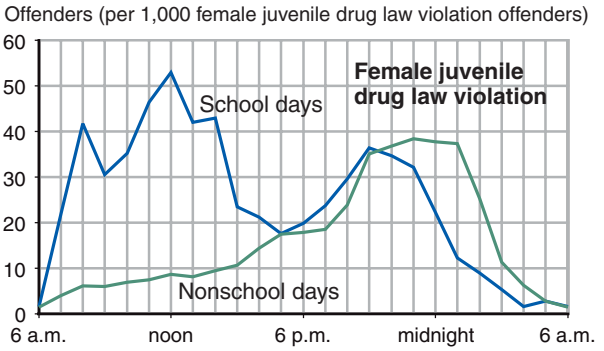
Unlike violent offending, the time patterns of shoplifting are similar on school and nonschool days for both male and female juvenile offenders—peaking between 3 p.m. and 6 p.m.





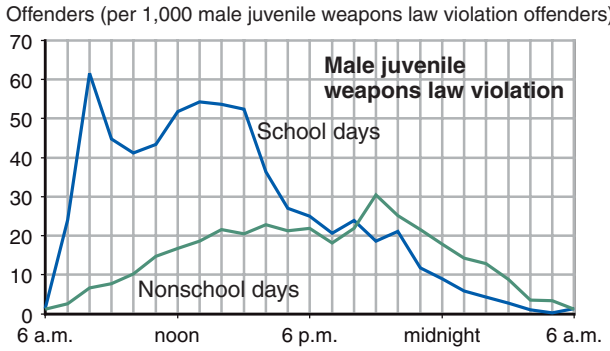
The time and day patterns of drug law violations known to law enforcement for both male and female juveniles indicate how often schools are a setting for drug crimes and their detection

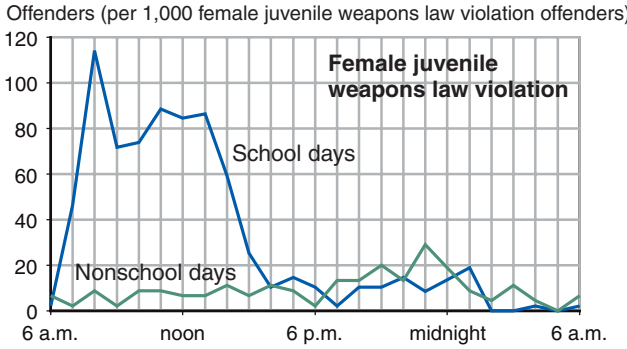




- Drug law violations by both male and female juveniles peak during school hours on school days and in the late evening hours on both school and nonschool days.

The time and day patterns of juvenile weapons law violations by males and especially by females reflect the major role schools play in bringing these matters to the attention of law enforcement





Note: Data are from 20 states and the District of Columbia.

Source: Authors' analyses of the FBI's *National Incident-Based Reporting System master file* for the year 2001 [machine-readable data file].

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