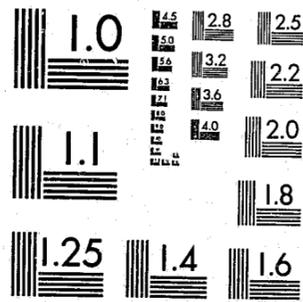


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The Use of the NCS Victimization Survey Data  
to Assess the Nature, Extent, and Correlates  
of Serious Delinquent Behavior

78-JN-AX-0029

Final Report

Research Goals

To date, researchers interested in the nature, extent, and correlates of delinquent behavior have relied exclusively on official -- police, court, and prison records -- and self-report data. The availability of the National Crime Survey (NCS) data on personal and commercial victimization offers an important opportunity to bring to bear a third source of data that avoids many of the problems and limitations inherent in official and self-report data. Thus, the major purpose of this research was to provide a comprehensive descriptive analysis of the involvement of juveniles (under 18 years of age) in illegal behaviors in which victims come face-to-face with offenders (rape, personal and commercial robbery, assault and personal larceny). For comparative purposes, the criminal involvements of juvenile offenders were compared with those of youthful offenders (18 to 20 years old) and adult offenders (21 or older). Throughout the research effort emphasis was placed on the extent to which these victimization results are compatible with the results from studies of official and self-reported delinquencies in terms of the characteristics of juvenile offenders and the nature of their illegal activities.

Grant Products

Numerous research questions were organized into five substantive areas and five research monographs (approximately 80 pages each) which bear on these areas of concern were produced. These include:

- 1) Juvenile Criminal Behavior in the United States: Its Trends and Patterns

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- ii) Juvenile Criminal Behavior: An Analysis of Rates and Victim Characteristics
- iii) Juvenile Criminal Behavior in Urban, Suburban, and Rural Areas
- iv) Juvenile Criminal Behavior and Its Relation to Economic Conditions
- v) Juvenile Criminal Behavior and Its Relation to Neighborhood Characteristics

The major findings of each research monograph is summarized below.

Juvenile Criminal Behavior in the United States: Its Trends and Patterns

This monograph uses 1973-1977 National Crime Survey data to provide a general descriptive analysis of the extent, the nature, and the seriousness of criminal victimizations committed by juveniles compared with youthful and adult offenders. Examination of changes over time in these areas is also provided. With respect to the serious criminal behavior of juveniles, this analysis has led to two major policy-relevant conclusions. First, juvenile crime is less serious -- in terms of weapon use, completion of theft, financial loss, and rate of injury -- than adult crime. Second, over the five year period studied here, juvenile crime did not become increasingly serious.

Some findings include:

- 1) In the period from 1973 to 1977 the total number and rate of personal crimes attributable to juvenile (under 18 years old) and youthful offenders (18 to 20 years old) remained relatively stable, although there was a slight increase in the number and rate of personal crimes attributable to adults (21 or older).
- 2) The vast majority of rapes were committed by adults, whereas the vast majority of personal larcenies were committed by juveniles and youthful offenders.

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- 3) Although the number of offenders involved in the incident varied substantially by type of crime, groups of three or more offenders were generally found much more often among juveniles than among adults.
- 4) There was a systematic increase in the use of weapons as the offender age group increased. In personal crimes guns were rarely used by juveniles, and there was no evidence that among juveniles weapon use generally, or gun use specifically, increased between 1973 and 1977.
- 5) Overall, there were no substantial differences in the rate, the seriousness, or the type of injury sustained in crimes committed by juveniles, youthful offenders, or adults. In addition, among all three offender age groups, the rate of physical injury to victims did not increase between 1973 and 1977.
- 6) In the theft-motivated crimes of robbery (both personal and commercial) and personal larceny, completion of the theft was directly related to the age of offender. In addition, financial losses due to theft of cash or property were least in the theft-motivated crimes by juveniles, and greatest in those by adults.

#### Juvenile Criminal Behavior: An Analysis of Rates and Victim Characteristics

Using the 1973-1977 National Crime Survey victimization data this monograph addresses three major substantive areas. The first section involves a comparative analysis of the risk and seriousness of criminal victimization committed by juvenile, youthful, and adult offenders, including an analysis

of variation by victim characteristics such as age, sex, race, income, and marital status. The second section focuses on an analysis of rates of offending by age, race, and sex of offenders. The third section examines offender characteristics in conjunction with victim characteristics. For example, do victims tend to be victimized by offenders with similar or different demographic characteristics?

Regarding the first question, an analysis of rates of victimization by juveniles, youthful offenders, and adults showed that:

- 1) In the total population, the risk of being victimized by a juvenile offender was less than one-half the risk of being victimized by an adult offender. Victimization committed by adults were also more serious than those by juveniles.
- 2) An individual's age is a strong correlate of his or her risk of being victimized by juveniles, youthful offenders, or adults. For example, the risk of criminal victimization by juveniles is greater among other juveniles; young people -- 12 to 19 year olds -- face a far greater risk of being victims of juveniles than of adults. However, when young people are victimized, their victimizations are most serious when adult offenders, not juvenile offenders, are involved.
- 3) The elderly are more than twice as likely to be victimized by adults as by juveniles; moreover, victimizations committed against the elderly were least serious when juvenile offenders were involved.

4) Even though women were substantially less likely to be victimized than were men, when women were victimized, their victimizations were about as serious as those suffered by men. In addition, the relationship between sex and the risk of victimization by juveniles, youthful offenders, and adults varied somewhat with the age of the victim. In every age group in the United States, the male risk of victimization by youthful offenders and adults was greater than the female risk. However, in every age group over 19 years old, the female risk of victimization by juveniles was greater than the male risk.

5) Blacks in the United States had consistently higher rates of total personal victimization by juveniles, youthful offenders, and adults than did whites, and they also were consistently victims of more serious crimes. Racial differences in the risk of victimization were greatest when adults were the offending group.

6) Although there is a strong inverse relationship between family income and the risk of personal victimization by adults, there is no inverse relationship between family income and the risk of personal victimization by juveniles. Also as family income in the United States increases, the seriousness of criminal victimization decreases, but not substantially.

Analysis of rates of offending (taking into account the number of potential offenders in each offender age group) showed that:

- 1) Males had rates of offending about four to fifteen times that of females (depending on the offenders' age group); a finding congruent with both arrest and self-reported delinquency data.
- 2) Blacks had a rate of offending about five times that of whites. This is consistent with arrest data, but not with most studies, particularly early studies, that have used self-report methods. Racial differences in rates of offending were especially strong for the theft offenses.
- 3) The rate of offending was greatest in the 18 to 20 year old age group.
- 4) For theft crimes committed by juveniles, black females had a rate of offending slightly greater than that for white males.
- 5) Trend data for the 1973 to 1977 period indicate that the overall decline in juvenile rates of offending (McDermott and Hindelang, in press: Figure 2) are attributable primarily to a decline in rates of offending among black juveniles.

Analysis of the characteristics of the offender in conjunction with those of the victim showed that:

- 1) Male offenders victimized males in about 7 out of 10 personal crimes, regardless of offender age. Female offenders increasingly victimized

males as age increased -- from 1 in 10 male victims for juvenile female offenders to 3 in 10 male victims for adult female offenders.

- 2) For all personal crimes except larceny, the age of the offender was correlated with the age of the victim.
- 3) Although white offenders victimized whites almost exclusively, black offenders victimized whites in a majority of personal crimes.
- 4) Stranger offending was more likely when the victim was male, older, and of a different race than the offender.

#### Juvenile Criminal Behavior in Urban Suburban, and Rural Areas

This monograph examines the nature and extent of juvenile criminal behavior across urban, suburban, and rural areas. Specifically, the monograph focused on the patterns of victimization, the elements of the victimization incident, and the consequences of the victimization event across the urban-rural dimension. The 1973-1977 National Crime Survey victimization data are used to address these major issues.

Our analysis of the patterns of victimization across the urban-rural dimension showed that:

- 1) Overall, rates of victimization and seriousness weighted rates were greater in urban areas than were the comparable rates in suburban and rural areas.

- 2) Crimes of theft -- robbery and personal larceny-- were far more common in urban areas than in rural areas. On the other hand, crimes of violence, especially assault, accounted for more of the personal crimes in rural areas compared with urban areas. For the most part these patterns held for juveniles, youthful offenders, and adults.
- 3) The rate of commercial robbery, like personal robbery, was higher in urban areas compared with rural settings. Also commercial robberies were committed disproportionately by adult offenders in all ecological areas.
- 4) The rates of offending in total personal victimization in urban, suburban, and rural areas have remained fairly constant over the period 1973 to 1977. In fact, in this period, there was a slight overall decrease in the rates of offending in all three ecological areas.
- 5) In all geographical areas, 18 to 20 year olds, males, and blacks showed the highest rate of offending. Within each subgroup, the extent of urbanization was a factor in that generally the urban rates were higher than suburban rates, which were in turn higher than the rural rates.

As to the second general question regarding the nature of victimizations across the urban-rural dimension we found that:

- 1) Overall, there was a larger proportion of victimizations by strangers in urban areas compared with rural areas. These relationships appeared strongest for juvenile offenders and weakest for adults.
- 2) Although the number of offenders involved in the incident varied by type of crime, group crime was generally a characteristic of urban centers. Conversely, lone offenders were more prevalent in rural areas.
- 3) Overall, the use of weapons in personal victimization was stable across the urban-rural dimension. Weapon use did, however, vary considerably with age of offender. Generally, there was little difference in the types of weapons (gun, knife, other) used in urban, suburban, and rural areas.

An examination of the consequences of victimizations by the extent of urbanization revealed that:

- 1) In robberies, no substantial differences appeared in the proportion of completed thefts across the urban-rural dimension among all three offender age groups.
- 2) In personal larcenies, more victims in rural areas reported a completed theft compared with victims of personal larceny in urban areas. This pattern was evident for juvenile and youthful offenders but was non-existent for adults.

- 3) Financial loss -- cash stolen, property stolen, and property damage -- did not seem to be influenced by the extent of urbanization. Regardless of geographical area, financial losses were skewed toward lower values.
- 4) For the crimes of robbery and assault, there were no differences in the proportion of injured victims across urban, suburban, and rural areas. For the crime of robbery, however, the proportion of injured victims did increase with age of offender.

#### Juvenile Criminal Behavior and Its Relation to Economic Conditions

This monograph examines the extent to which quarterly fluctuations in economic conditions (1973-1978) are associated with the concomitant fluctuations in juvenile criminal behavior (1973-1978). Particular attention is given to the economic indicator of unemployment with peripheral attention given to additional indicators such as the Consumer Price Index and Gross National Product.

It is our view that for the 1973 to 1978 period these findings should be interpreted as not having demonstrated an important relationship between the economic and rate of offending indicators used in this study.

Overall, the analysis focused on three major issues. First, the general relationship between economic conditions (unemployment, Consumer Price Index, and Gross National Product) and overall rates of offending (total, robbery, aggravated assault, and simple assault) was analyzed. In all cases these economic conditions were shown not to be related to NCS rates of offending for these personal crimes.

The second issue addressed was the relationship between age-race-sex specific unemployment rates and comparable age-race-sex specific rates of offending (total, robbery, aggravated assault, and simple assault). This analysis showed virtually no relationship between quarterly fluctuations in age-race-sex specific unemployment rates and comparable age-race-sex specific rates of offending. Two exceptions were found:

- 1) The unemployment rate for white males 14 to 17 was positively related to the rate of robbery offending for white males 12 to 17.
- 2) The unemployment rate for white males 21 or older was negatively related to the robbery rate of offending for this subgroup.

The third major issue explored was the interrelationship between adult unemployment and juvenile crime. Specifically, sex and race specific adult unemployment rates were correlated with comparable sex and race offending rates for juvenile (12 to 17) and youthful (18 to 20) offenders. Out of 32 relationships only four were found to be statistically significant ( $p < .10$ ). These cases were:

- 1) Adult unemployment for white males was positively related to the rate of robbery for white males 12 to 17.
- 2) Adult unemployment for white females was negatively related to the rate of aggravated assault for white males 18 to 20.

- 3) Adult unemployment for black females was positively related to the total rate of offending for black males 12 to 17.
- 4) Adult unemployment for black females was positively related to the rate of robbery for black males 12 to 17.

Generally, it appears that for the relationships under investigation in this report, few significant relationships were found when various economic indices were correlated with rates of offending (total, robbery, aggravated assault, and simple assault). Furthermore, the relationships found to be statistically significant can most likely be explained by the law of probability in that as the number of regression analyses increased, the number of significant relationships found increased as well.

#### Juvenile Criminal Behavior and Its Relation to Neighborhood Characteristics

Using 1973 to 1978 National Crime Survey victimization data in conjunction with neighborhood characteristic data from the 1970 Census this monograph explores the relationship between juvenile victimization and offending and neighborhood characteristics. Three major areas are analyzed: rates of victimization, rates of offending, and characteristics of the victimization event across various neighborhood dimensions. The personal crimes examined include rape, robbery, assault, and personal larceny (purse snatch and pocket picking).

Our analysis of the variation in rates of personal victimization across neighborhood characteristic dimensions showed that:

- 1) Neighborhood economic status has a moderate negative relationship with victimization in urban areas. The relationship was found to be stronger for adult

victimization than juvenile victimization and for theft rather than violent victimization. In contrast, juveniles in rural areas have higher rates of victimization in high economic status neighborhoods than in low economic status neighborhoods.

- 2) The relationship between neighborhood unemployment and victimization was found to be moderate and positive for juvenile and adult victimization, but weak and inconsistent for 18 to 20 year old victimization. The relationship was stronger for theft than violent victimization, especially among blacks. Extent of urbanization differences were also revealed with urban victimization being more strongly related to neighborhood unemployment than rural victimization.
- 3) White rates of victimization were found to be positively related to the percent black in neighborhoods. This relationship was found to be stronger for theft victimizations than violent victimizations. In contrast, black rates of victimization were higher in all white neighborhoods or predominately black neighborhoods than in the intermediate percent black category.
- 4) Neighborhood mobility was found to have a relatively strong positive relationship with the victimization of all the population subgroups examined (age, race, and sex-specific). In most instances, rates of victimization in neighborhoods characterized by high

residential mobility were twice as large as comparable rates in neighborhoods marked by low residential mobility.

- 5) Rates of personal victimization for all population subgroups examined (i.e., age, race and sex-specific) were found to be much higher in neighborhoods characterized by high structural density than in less structurally dense neighborhoods. The relationship was stronger with adult victimization than juvenile victimization. Neighborhood structural density was also found to be more strongly related with theft victimization than violent victimization and rural victimization than urban victimization.

As to the second question regarding whether neighborhood characteristics are differentially related to the offending behavior of population subgroups, we found that:

- 1) Rates of theft offending are considerably higher in low economic status urban neighborhoods than in either medium or high economic status urban neighborhoods for juvenile, youthful and adult offenders. A similar but weaker pattern was evident for the violent offending of urban adults. Juvenile and adult offending were found to have a moderate negative relationship with neighborhood economic status in suburban areas but a weak and inconsistent relationship in rural areas.
- 2) Both theft and violent offending have a positive relationship with neighborhood unemployment for all offender age groups. This relationship is stronger for theft crimes, especially for adult offenders.

- 3) A strong positive relationship was found between theft offending and the percent black in a neighborhood for juvenile, youthful, and adult offenders. Violent offending shows a weaker yet still overall positive relationship with percent black for all offender age groups.
- 4) White juvenile offending in both theft and violent crimes is positively related to neighborhood mobility. Black juveniles, in contrast, show a positive relationship only for violent crimes. For adults, neighborhood mobility is positively related to both black and white offending in theft and violent crimes.
- 5) An overall strong positive relationship was found between rates of offending and neighborhood structural density, with the relationship being stronger for theft crimes than violent crimes. This pattern was evident for the offending behavior of all race and age specific population subgroups except for the violent offending of black 18 to 20 year olds.

An examination of whether certain characteristics of the victimization event, namely weapon use and seriousness of the victimization event, are related to neighborhood characteristics has revealed that:

- 1) The use of weapons, particularly gun use, in robbery offending is more prevalent in neighborhoods with a higher percentage of blacks than in neighborhoods with a lower percentage of blacks. In addition, victimizations committed by youthful and adult offenders in high percent black neighborhoods were

shown to be of a more serious nature than those in all white neighborhoods.

- 2) In low economic status neighborhoods, juveniles and youthful offenders, but not adult offenders, are more likely to use weapons than their counterparts in high economic status neighborhoods.
- 3) Neighborhood mobility, structural density and unemployment were shown to be unrelated to both extent of weapon use and the seriousness of the victimization event.

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