



JUVENILE JUSTICE BULLETIN



NATIONAL SURVEY OF  
**Children's Exposure to Violence**



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# Children's Exposure to Violence and the Intersection Between Delinquency and Victimization

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The association between delinquency and victimization is a common focus in juvenile justice research. Some observers have found that victimization and delinquency largely overlap, with most victims engaging in delinquency and most delinquents being victimized at some point in their lives (Lauritsen, Laub, and Sampson, 1992; Lauritsen, Sampson, and Laub, 1991; Singer, 1986). The literature in the bullying and peer victimization field paints a different picture. It points to three distinct groups of children: in addition to the children who are both victims and offenders (often referred to as bully-victims or, as in this bulletin, delinquent-victims), a second group are primarily victims and a third group are primarily offenders (Dodge et al., 1990; Olweus, 1978, 2000). One may explain the contrast in this way: many studies have relied simply on measures of association between delinquency and victimization (e.g., correlation or regression analyses) (see, e.g., Chang, Chen, and Brownson,

2003; Jensen and Brownfield, 1986; Sullivan, Farrell, and Kliever, 2006). When researchers look beyond the association between delinquency and victimization (even when that association is strong), they are likely to find groups of children who are primarily victims or primarily offenders. Research has not fully explored how large these groups are and how their characteristics and experiences differ.

## Defining Delinquents, Victims, and Delinquent-Victims in the NatSCEV Study Group

The National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence (NatSCEV) is a national study that is both large and comprehensive in its assessment of victimization and delinquency (see "History of the National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence"). Thus, it provides a look at how

## DEFENDING CHILDHOOD PROTECT HEAL THRIVE

### A Message From OJJDP

Children are exposed to violence every day in their homes, schools, and communities. Such exposure can cause them significant physical, mental, and emotional harm with long-term effects that can last well into adulthood.

The Attorney General launched Defending Childhood in September 2010 to unify the Department of Justice's efforts to address children's exposure to violence under one initiative. Through Defending Childhood, the Department is raising public awareness about the issue and supporting practitioners, researchers, and policymakers as they seek solutions to address it. A component of Defending Childhood, OJJDP's Safe Start initiative continues efforts begun in 1999 to enhance practice, research, training and technical assistance, and public education about children and violence.

Under Safe Start, OJJDP conducted the National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence, the most comprehensive effort to date to measure the extent and nature of the violence that children endure and its consequences on their lives. This is the first study to ask children and caregivers about exposure to a range of violence, crime, and abuse in children's lives.

As amply evidenced in this bulletin series, children's exposure to violence is pervasive and affects all ages. The research findings reported here and in the other bulletins in this series are critical to informing our efforts to protect children from its damaging effects.



Access OJJDP publications online at [ojjdp.gov](http://ojjdp.gov).

Learn more about the Attorney General's Defending Childhood Initiative at [justice.gov/ag/defendingchildhood](http://justice.gov/ag/defendingchildhood).

Find out more about OJJDP's Safe Start Initiative at [safestartcenter.org](http://safestartcenter.org).

## History of the National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence

Under the leadership of then-Deputy Attorney General Eric Holder in June 1999, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) created the Safe Start initiative to prevent and reduce the impact of children's exposure to violence. As a part of this initiative and with a growing need to document the full extent of children's exposure to violence, OJJDP launched the National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence (NatSCEV) with the support of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

NatSCEV is the first national incidence and prevalence study to comprehensively examine the extent and nature of children's exposure to violence across all ages, settings, and timeframes. Conducted between January and May 2008, it measured the past-year and lifetime exposure to violence for children age 17 and younger across several major categories: conventional crime, child maltreatment, victimization by peers and siblings, sexual victimization, witnessing and indirect victimization (including exposure to community violence and family violence), school violence and threats, and Internet victimization. This survey marks the first attempt to measure children's exposure to violence in the home, school, and community across all age groups from 1 month to age 17, and the first attempt to measure the cumulative exposure to violence over the child's lifetime. The survey asked children and their adult caregivers about not only the incidents of violence that children suffered and witnessed themselves but also other related crime and threat exposures, such as theft or burglary from a child's household, being in a school that was the target of a credible bomb threat, and being in a war zone or an area where ethnic violence occurred.

OJJDP directed the development of the study, and the Crimes against Children Research Center at the University of New Hampshire designed and conducted the research. It provides data on the full extent of violence in the daily lives of children. NatSCEV documents the incidence and prevalence of children's exposure to a broad array of violent experiences across a wide developmental spectrum. The research team asked followup questions about specific events, including where the exposure to violence occurred, whether injury resulted, how often the child was exposed to a specific type of violence, and the child's relationship to the perpetrator and (when the child witnessed violence) the victim. In addition, the survey documents differences in exposure to violence across gender, race, socioeconomic status, family structure, region, urban/rural residence, and developmental stage of the child; specifies how different forms of violent victimization "cluster" or co-occur; identifies individual-, family-, and community-level predictors of violence exposure among children; examines associations between levels/types of exposure to violence and children's mental and emotional health; and assesses the extent to which children disclose incidents of violence to various individuals and the nature and source of assistance or treatment provided (if any).

victimization and delinquency converge or diverge among youth of different ages.

Using the interview data from NatSCEV (see "Methodology" on page 7) (Finkelhor, Turner, Ormrod, and Hamby, 2009), the research team categorized adolescents ages 10 to 17 into one of four groups: those youth who were primarily delinquents and not victims (primarily delinquents), those who were primarily victims and not delinquents (primarily victims), those who were both delinquents and victims (delinquent-victims), and those who were neither victims nor delinquents. The criteria for defining these groups are based on work done in an earlier study (Cuevas et al., 2007) and take into account that many

children have minor victimizations and that they engage in different kinds of delinquency, including violent delinquency, property delinquency, and forms of mild delinquency, such as skipping school or getting drunk.

In the interest of clarity, the researchers defined the subgroups in terms of key characteristics that the literature on victimization and delinquency suggests (Dodge et al., 1990; Jennings, Piquero, and Reingle, 2012; Malinosky-Rummell and Hansen, 1993; McGrath, Nilsen, and Kerley, 2011; Olweus, 1978, 2000; Windle and Mason, 2004). Table 1 illustrates the typology groups and defining criteria.

## Definition of Victimized Versus Nonvictimized Youth

From previous analyses (Finkelhor, Hamby et al., 2005; Finkelhor, Ormrod et al., 2005a; Hamby et al., 2004), the researchers determined that one of the best measures of victimization intensity is the number of types of victimization per respondent based on the screening categories that the Juvenile Victimization Questionnaire (JVQ) uses (see "Methodology" on page 7). Although simply adding up the number of different types of victimization (including parental abuse, sex offenses, property offenses, and peer victimizations) does not take into account repeated victimizations of the same type, analyses have suggested that factoring in repeated victimizations and other measures of victimization severity does not produce substantively different results in identifying highly victimized youth (Finkelhor, Hamby et al., 2005; Finkelhor, Ormrod, and Turner, 2007).

For the purposes of this study, the researchers defined victimized youth as those who suffered three or more victimizations in the past year. They chose this number because the mean number of types of victimization in the past year per respondent in the NatSCEV study was 2.68 and because the JVQ and NatSCEV include many common kinds of victimizations, such as being hit by a sibling or having property stolen. Consequently, the researchers categorized non-/low-victimized youth as those who suffered two victimizations or fewer in the past year.

## Definition of Delinquent Versus Nondelinquent Youth

Based on the literature on delinquency (e.g., Snyder and Sickmund, 2006; Windle and Mason, 2004), the researchers considered it important to distinguish among types of delinquent behavior. The researchers clearly delineated the study's delinquency measures into the following types: those that involved violent behavior (assaults and carrying weapons), those that involved property delinquency (breaking something, stealing from a store), those that involved drug and alcohol use (drinking, smoking marijuana), and those that involved minor delinquency (truancy, cheating on tests). Violent behavior and property delinquency are categorized as separate types, and for the most part delinquency involving substance use or minor forms of rule violating is categorized as mild delinquency (see table 1).

As with victimized youth, some categories of delinquent youth are defined as those who committed more delinquent acts than the past-year mean (i.e., two or more types of delinquent acts within the past year). Given the inclusion of relatively minor and perhaps normative delinquent acts in the Frequency of Delinquency Behavior (Loeber and Dishion, 1983) (see “Methodology” on page 7), the researchers decided that defining those who committed fewer than the mean number of delinquent acts in the past year as nondelinquent would adequately identify youth with no or only minor delinquency.

### Categories of Delinquent-Victims

The researchers first defined three groups of youth who fell into the delinquent-victim overlap category (see table 1). They defined “Violent Delinquent-Victims,” consistent with descriptions from other studies of victimization and delinquency (Haynie et al., 2001; Olweus, 1978, 2000; Schwartz, Proctor, and Chien, 2001), as youth who in the past year engaged in violent, interpersonal acts or carried weapons and who experienced three or more violent victimizations in the past year. As suggested in the trauma response literature (Briere et al., 1997; Finkelhor, 1990; Kilpatrick et al., 2003; Wilsnack et al., 2004; Windle and Mason, 2004), the research team termed the second defined group as “Delinquent Sex/Maltreatment Victims,” who had experienced sexual victimization or a form of child maltreatment and had engaged in two or more delinquent acts in the past year. They defined the third group, “Property Delinquent-Victims,” as delinquent and highly victimized youth whose delinquencies were related solely to property crime and who had three or more victimizations of any type in the past year.

### Categories of Primarily Delinquent Youth

In contrast to these three groups of delinquent-victims, the study also categorized some youth as primarily delinquent. These were youth who had rates of victimization below the mean of three in the past year, but who had engaged in violent (youth categorized as “Assaulters”) or property delinquency (youth categorized as “Property Delinquents”), which were the most serious and least frequent delinquencies (see table 1).

### Categories of Youth Who Are Primarily Victims

The researchers defined two groups who were primarily victims but not delinquents. These were the “Mild Delinquency Victims,” who had greater than mean levels of victimization (three or more victimizations within the past year) but no property or violent delinquency, and “Nondelinquent Sex/Maltreatment Victims,” who had experienced a sexual victimization or a form of child maltreatment but had committed fewer than two delinquent acts in the past year (see table 1). This last group was distinguished as a separate category because the victimization literature suggests special seriousness for youth who experience even one incident of sexual victimization or child maltreatment, which are also acts that lead to the involvement of child protective services or police referrals (Briere et al., 1997; Egeland et al., 2002; Finkelhor, 1990; Kilpatrick et al., 2003; Wilsnack et al., 2004; Windle and Mason, 2004; Wood et al., 2002).

The grouping criteria illustrate, to some degree, the intricacy of establishing these categories given the complexity of victimization and delinquent behavior. As such, the categorizing approach examines both the number of types of behavior (above or below the mean for victimization and delinquency) and the type of delinquency or victimization (e.g., violent, property, sexual, or maltreatment). As a result, some youth may fit into more than one of the established categories. To keep the groups mutually exclusive, the researchers established a hierarchy for categorizing individuals who fell into more than one typology group (e.g., a youth who committed a violent act or carried a weapon within the previous year and had been sexually victimized in addition to undergoing three or more violent victimizations, and who therefore would fall into both the violent delinquent-victim and delinquent sex/maltreatment victim typology groups). The hierarchy is as follows, from the most severe to the least severe combination

**Table 1: Delinquency and Victimization Criteria for Typology Groups**

	Name	Delinquency Criteria	Victimization Criteria
<b>Delinquent-victims</b>	Violent Delinquent-Victims	Any interpersonal violence or weapon carrying	≥3 violent victimizations
	Delinquent Sex/Maltreatment Victims	≥2 delinquencies	Any sexual victimizations or child maltreatment
	Property Delinquent-Victims	Property delinquency, no interpersonal violence	≥3 victimizations
<b>Primarily delinquent</b>	Assaulters	Any interpersonal violence or weapon carrying	<3 violent victimizations
	Property Delinquents	Property delinquency, no interpersonal violence	<3 victimizations
<b>Primarily victims</b>	Nondelinquent Sex/Maltreatment Victims	<2 delinquencies	Any sexual victimizations or child maltreatment
	Mild Delinquency Victims	No violent and no property delinquency	≥3 victimizations
<b>Low delinquency/victimization</b>	Mild Delinquency Non-/Low-Victimized Youth	No violent and no property delinquency	<3 victimizations

Source: Cuevas et al., 2007.

of delinquency and victimization: violent delinquent-victims, delinquent sex/maltreatment victims, assaulters, non-delinquent sex/maltreatment victims, property delinquent-victims, property delinquents, mild delinquency victims, and mild delinquency non-/low-victimized youth (note that assaulters and nondelinquent sex/maltreatment victims, although they are categorized as primarily delinquent and primarily victims, respectively, are regarded as higher in the hierarchy than property delinquent-victims). This ordering was presented in the original typology using the Developmental Victimization Survey (DVS) data (Cuevas et al., 2007), which established this order according to which group of individuals was most similar based on their demographic characteristics. For consistency, the ordering remained the same for the purposes of this analysis based on the NatSCEV data.

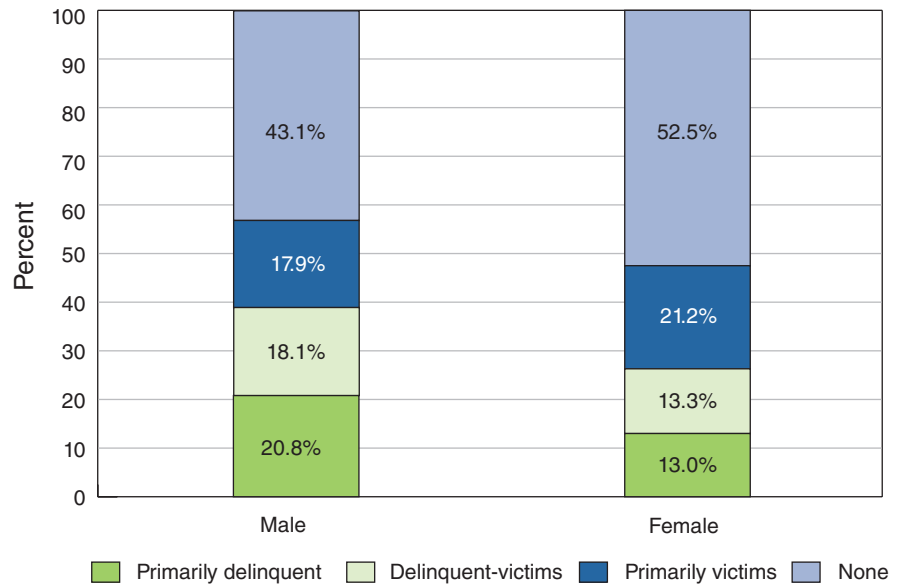
## Findings by Gender and Typology Group for Delinquents, Victims, and Delinquent-Victims

### Victimization and Delinquency Patterns Among Boys

Among boys overall, the primarily delinquent group comprised 20.8 percent of the total sample (see “Methodology” on page 7 for sample size). Boys who were primarily victims with little or no delinquency comprised 17.9 percent of the total sample, and the group who were both victimized and delinquent comprised 18.1 percent (figure 1). Substantial percentages of all three groups were evident throughout the developmental course for boys ages 10 to 17 (figure 2). However, the proportion of boys in the primarily victim group differed between ages 12 and 13 (declining from 27.8 percent to 15.5 percent). At ages 13 and 14, the proportion of boys in the delinquent-victim group increased from 14.7 percent to 28.2 percent and was elevated through age 17.

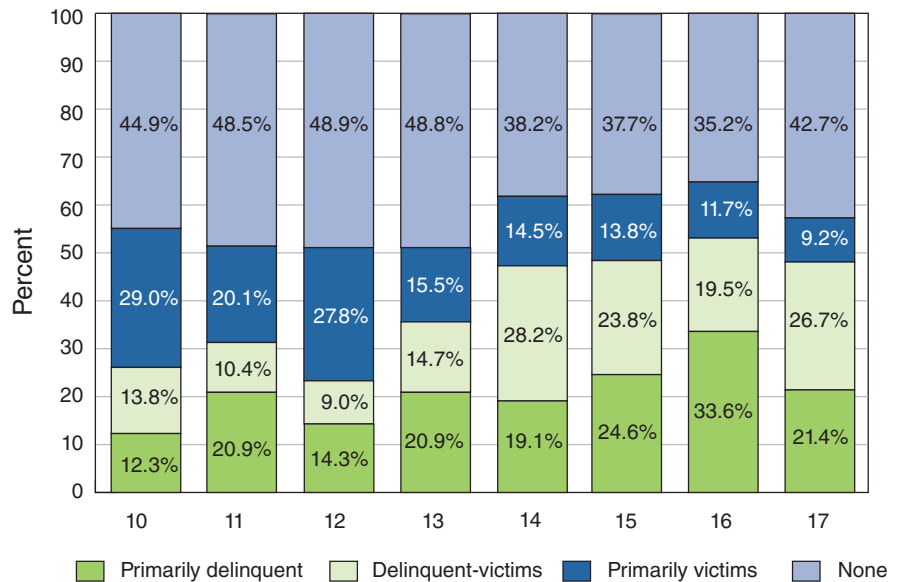
The boys in the delinquent-victim group had considerably more victimization than the boys who were primarily victims, disclosing 6.3 and 4.5 different kinds of victimization in the past year, respectively (table 2). This delinquent-victim group had a greater percentage of victims than the primarily victim group in every category of victimization except for bullying victimization. These boys had particularly

**Figure 1: Victimization-Delinquency Co-occurrence by Gender, Ages 10 to 17**



Percentages may not add up to 100% because of rounding.

**Figure 2: Victimization-Delinquency Co-occurrence by Males, Ages 10 to 17**



Percentages may not add up to 100% because of rounding.

**Table 2: Characteristics by Delinquent/Victim Group and Gender**

NatSCEV 10- to 17-year-olds N = 2,090 (unweighted)	Delinquent/Victim Group					
	Males (n = 1,039)			Females (n = 1,051)		
	Primarily Delinquent (a)	Delinquent- Victims (b)	Primarily Victims (c)	Primarily Delinquent (d)	Delinquent- Victims (e)	Primarily Victims (f)
<b>Total n (unweighted)</b>	222	198	167	140	155	214
<b>Age</b>	13.9 <sup>c</sup>	14.2 <sup>c</sup>	12.7 <sup>a,b</sup>	13.9	14.4 <sup>f</sup>	13.3 <sup>e</sup>
<b>Total number of victimization screeners</b>	2.0 <sup>b,c</sup>	6.3 <sup>a,c</sup>	4.5 <sup>a,c</sup>	2.7 <sup>e,f</sup>	6.4 <sup>d,f</sup>	4.2 <sup>d,e</sup>
<b>Victimization type (% yes)</b>						
Witness family violence	15 <sup>b</sup>	26 <sup>a,c</sup>	12 <sup>b</sup>	18 <sup>e</sup>	36 <sup>d,f</sup>	19 <sup>e</sup>
Exposure to community violence	49 <sup>b,c</sup>	70 <sup>a</sup>	63 <sup>a</sup>	54 <sup>e</sup>	71 <sup>d</sup>	63
Assault	57 <sup>b,c</sup>	91 <sup>a,c</sup>	80 <sup>a,b</sup>	62 <sup>e</sup>	90 <sup>d,f</sup>	68 <sup>e</sup>
Sexual victimization	0 <sup>b,c</sup>	40 <sup>a,c</sup>	13 <sup>a,b</sup>	7 <sup>e,f</sup>	58 <sup>d,f</sup>	27 <sup>d,e</sup>
Property victimization	24 <sup>b,c</sup>	56 <sup>a,c</sup>	43 <sup>a,b</sup>	38 <sup>e</sup>	63 <sup>d,f</sup>	45 <sup>e</sup>
Maltreatment	1 <sup>b,c</sup>	45 <sup>a,c</sup>	25 <sup>a,b</sup>	4 <sup>e,f</sup>	59 <sup>d,f</sup>	33 <sup>d,e</sup>
Bullying	16 <sup>b,c</sup>	40 <sup>a,c</sup>	58 <sup>a,b</sup>	34 <sup>e,f</sup>	51 <sup>d</sup>	53 <sup>d</sup>
Internet victimization	5 <sup>b</sup>	14 <sup>a,c</sup>	1 <sup>b</sup>	12 <sup>e</sup>	33 <sup>d,f</sup>	7 <sup>e</sup>
<b>Past-year adversity score (mean)</b>	1.1 <sup>b</sup>	1.9 <sup>a,c</sup>	1.1 <sup>b</sup>	1.6 <sup>e</sup>	2.2 <sup>d,f</sup>	1.6 <sup>e</sup>
<b>Total delinquency score (mean)</b>	2.7 <sup>b,c</sup>	3.9 <sup>a,c</sup>	0.3 <sup>a,b</sup>	2.0 <sup>e,f</sup>	3.3 <sup>d,f</sup>	0.3 <sup>d,e</sup>
Violent delinquency (mean)	1.3 <sup>b,c</sup>	1.5 <sup>a,c</sup>	0.0 <sup>a,b</sup>	1.0 <sup>e,f</sup>	0.8 <sup>d,f</sup>	0.0 <sup>d,e</sup>
Property delinquency (mean)	0.6 <sup>b,c</sup>	0.9 <sup>a,c</sup>	0.0 <sup>a,b</sup>	0.4 <sup>e,f</sup>	0.8 <sup>d,f</sup>	0.0 <sup>d,e</sup>
Drugs/minor delinquency score (mean)	0.8 <sup>b,c</sup>	1.4 <sup>a,c</sup>	0.3 <sup>a,b</sup>	0.6 <sup>e,f</sup>	1.7 <sup>d,f</sup>	0.2 <sup>d,e</sup>
<b>Mental health symptoms (mean)</b>						
Anger	9.8 <sup>b</sup>	11.3 <sup>a,c</sup>	9.3 <sup>b</sup>	10.8 <sup>e,f</sup>	12.4 <sup>d,f</sup>	9.7 <sup>d,e</sup>
Depression	11.5 <sup>b</sup>	12.3 <sup>a</sup>	11.7	13.2 <sup>e</sup>	15.3 <sup>d,f</sup>	12.6 <sup>e</sup>
Anxiety	6.4 <sup>b</sup>	7.2 <sup>a</sup>	6.9	7.5 <sup>e,f</sup>	8.3 <sup>d,f</sup>	6.6 <sup>d,e</sup>
<b>Parenting characteristics (mean scale scores)</b>						
Warmth	38.0	37.9	38.5	38.5	37.9	38.1
Inconsistency/harshness	11.2	11.3	10.6	10.4 <sup>e</sup>	11.8 <sup>d,f</sup>	10.8 <sup>e</sup>
Supervision/monitoring	4.9	5.0	4.8	4.7	5.0	4.8
<b>Social support score</b>	27.1 <sup>b</sup>	25.7 <sup>a,c</sup>	27.5 <sup>b</sup>	27.6 <sup>e</sup>	24.7 <sup>d,f</sup>	27.1 <sup>e</sup>

Notes: Estimates are weighted. Sample sizes are unweighted. Superscript letters indicate that a value is significantly different from the value in the column labeled with the same letter in parentheses. Comparisons were made using one-way analysis of variance and post-hoc Bonferroni tests.

Past-year adversity score: total number of adverse events, out of 15 possible, that the youth experienced in the past year. Examples of items: natural disaster, a parent going to prison, and homelessness.

Total delinquency score: total number of delinquency types, out of 15 possible, that the youth committed in the past year. Violent, property, and drugs/minor delinquency scores are subsets of total delinquency. Violent delinquency items: destruction or damage of property, physical assault against a peer or adult, carrying a weapon, and injuring someone enough to require medical care. Property delinquency items: theft at school, theft at home, theft from a store, graffiti, and avoiding paying for things such as movies or bus rides. Drugs/minor delinquency items: cheating on tests at school, skipping school, tobacco use, marijuana use, and other drug use.

Scores for mental health symptoms, parenting characteristics, and social support are adjusted for age.

Mental health symptoms were measured using the anger, depression, and anxiety subscales of a shortened version of the Trauma Symptom Checklist for Children (Briere, 1996).

Parenting characteristics are sum scores of items rated on four-point scales asking how often parents engage in certain parenting behaviors. Higher scores indicate more frequent behavior associated with each characteristic. Warmth scale: 10 items such as encouraged a child to talk about his/her troubles, gave comfort and understanding when a child was upset, and hugged a child to express affection. Inconsistent/harsh parenting: five items such as lost control of temper when child misbehaved and punishments given to child depend on parent's mood. Supervision/monitoring scale: four items such as child is home without adult supervision overnight and child goes out with friends whom parent does not know.

Social support score is a sum score of eight items rated on a four-point scale asking about the child's perception of support available from family and friends, with higher scores indicating higher levels of perceived support. Examples of items: "I can talk about my problems with my family" and "I can count on my friends when things go wrong."

greater percentages of sexual victimization (which includes sexual harassment) (40 percent for delinquent-victim boys versus 13 percent for primarily victim boys), witnessing family violence (26 percent for delinquent-victim boys versus 12 percent for primarily victim boys), and Internet victimization (14 percent for delinquent-victim boys versus 1 percent for primarily victim boys). The primarily victim group of boys had a greater percentage of victims than the delinquent-victim group in only one victimization category—bullying victimization (58 percent versus 40 percent).

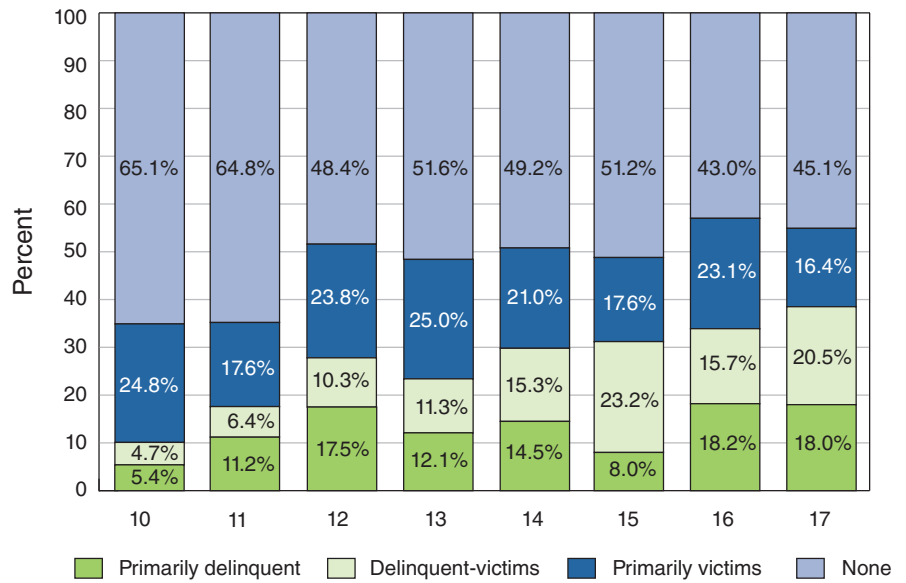
The boys in the delinquent-victim group were also more delinquent than the primarily delinquent group (3.9 and 2.7 delinquent activities in the past year, respectively) (see table 2), which may be in part a function of the definitional criteria that set a higher threshold of delinquent activities for delinquent-victim boys than for primarily delinquent boys. The elevation of their drugs/minor delinquency score was particularly large (1.4 for delinquent-victims versus 0.8 for the primarily delinquent group).

### Victimization and Delinquency Patterns Among Girls

Girls had different patterns in both typology groups and age of changes in victimization and delinquency. Except for the group of girls who were neither victims nor delinquents (52.5 percent), the largest group of girls was the primarily victim group (21.2 percent). The primarily delinquent group (13 percent) and delinquent-victim group (13.3 percent) were smaller than the comparable groups among boys, reflecting that girls tend to engage in less delinquency than boys. A rise in both delinquency and victimization for girls appeared particularly notable between ages 11 and 12 (figure 3); as girls got older, the victimization component remained stable and then rose, while the delinquency component rose and then fell.

The patterns of victimization and delinquency for girls are generally similar to those for boys in terms of both the number and types of victimizations and delinquent acts. The delinquent-victim girls were more victimized than the primarily victim girls, disclosing 6.4 and 4.2 different victimizations in the past year, respectively (table 2). (This is not a function of the definitional criteria that set a higher threshold of victimizations for

**Figure 3: Victimization-Delinquency Co-occurrence by Females Ages 10 to 17**



delinquent-victim girls than for primarily victim girls.) The delinquent-victim girls had greater percentages of victimization in every category of victimization except bullying victimization. Their victimization rates were particularly higher for sexual victimization, for which the rate among delinquent-victim girls (58 percent) was more than twice that among the primarily victim girls (27 percent); and Internet victimization, for which the rate among delinquent-victim girls was more than four times higher than among the primarily victim girls (33 percent versus 7 percent) and much higher than the equivalent rate among delinquent-victim boys (14 percent).

Delinquent-victim girls were also more delinquent than the primarily delinquent girls (3.3 and 2.0 delinquent activities in the past year, respectively). As with the boys, their drugs/minor delinquency scores were particularly elevated (1.7 for delinquent-victim girls versus 0.6 for primarily delinquent girls).

### Findings Regarding Other Dimensions of Adversity

As table 2 shows, the groups differ on some additional dimensions as well. Among both boys and girls, delinquent-victims tended to experience more life

adversities and mental health symptoms than other groups. They also received less social support. Delinquent-victim girls experienced higher rates of inconsistent/harsh parenting. There were few significant differences among the primarily delinquent, primarily victim, and delinquent-victim groups on features such as socioeconomic status, ethnicity, family structure, disability status, school performance, or physical features.

### Implications for Adolescent Development and for Intervention by Practitioners

#### Age Onset of Increasing Risk for Victimization and Delinquency

Delinquency and victimization are widespread among youth ages 10 to 17, and they are statistically associated. However, in addition to those who experience both, it is possible to identify large groups within this age range who are victimized but not delinquent as well as those who are delinquent but experienced few types of victimization.

## Methodology

The National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence (NatSCEV) was designed to obtain past-year and lifetime prevalence estimates of a wide range of childhood victimizations and was conducted between January and May 2008. NatSCEV documented the experiences of a nationally representative sample of 4,549 children ages 1 month to 17 years living in the contiguous United States. This study focuses on the 2,090 children (1,039 male and 1,051 female) who were 10 to 17 years old at the time of the survey. These children were surveyed on both their victimization experiences and their participation in 15 different kinds of delinquent behavior.

### Sampling Techniques

The interviews with parents and youth were conducted over the phone. Sample households were drawn from a nationwide sampling frame of residential telephone numbers through random-digit dialing. To ensure that the study included an adequate number of minority and low-income respondents for more accurate subgroup analyses, the researchers oversampled telephone exchanges that had high concentrations of African American, Hispanic, or low-income households. Sample weights were applied to adjust for differential probability of selection due to (1) study design, (2) demographic variations in nonresponse, and (3) variations in eligibility within households. Additional information on sampling methods and procedures has been provided elsewhere (Finkelhor, Turner, Ormrod, and Hamby, 2009; Finkelhor, Turner, Ormrod, Hamby, and Kracke, 2009).

Interviewers first spoke with an adult caregiver in each household to obtain family demographic information. They then randomly selected the child with the most recent birthday to be interviewed. Interviewers spoke directly with children ages 10 to 17. For children younger than age 10, they interviewed the caregiver who "is most familiar with the child's daily routine and experiences."

### Sources and Analysis of Information Regarding Victimization

Researchers obtained reports of victimization using the Juvenile Victimization Questionnaire (JVQ), an inventory of childhood victimization (Finkelhor, Hamby et al., 2005; Finkelhor, Ormrod et al., 2005a; Hamby et al., 2004). The JVQ obtains reports on 48 forms of youth victimization covering 5 general areas of interest: conventional crime, maltreatment, victimization by peers and siblings, sexual victimization, and witnessing and exposure to violence (Finkelhor, Ormrod et al., 2005b).

Followup questions for each victimization item gathered additional information about each event, including perpetrator characteristics, weapon use (use of a knife, gun, or other object that could cause physical harm), injury, whether the event occurred in the past year, and whether it was known to school officials or police.

The analysis for this bulletin examined victimizations that occurred in the past year. The researchers constructed 8 aggregate types of victimization from 32 of the JVQ's 48 victimization screeners: physical assault, sexual victimization, maltreatment, property victimization, witnessing family violence, exposure to community violence, bullying, and Internet victimization.

### Sources and Analysis of Information Regarding Delinquency

Researchers used the Frequency of Delinquency Behavior (FDB) that Loeber and Dishion (1983) originally developed to measure self-reported delinquency. For this study, the researchers adapted the FDB scale from its most recently published format (Dahlberg, Toal, and Behrens, 1998; Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber, 1987).<sup>\*</sup> The adapted form asked participants only whether they had committed the listed delinquency in the past year rather than how often they had committed each delinquent behavior. Researchers asked all NatSCEV participants between the ages of 5 and 17 about a total of 15 delinquency items. This study focuses on the 2,090 respondents aged 10 to 17.

<sup>\*</sup>For a sample of the Frequency of Delinquent Behavior survey and scoring instrument, see [www.djj.state.fl.us/docs/jjdp-performance-measurement/frequency\\_of\\_delinquent\\_behavior.pdf?sfvrsn=0](http://www.djj.state.fl.us/docs/jjdp-performance-measurement/frequency_of_delinquent_behavior.pdf?sfvrsn=0).

The relative sizes of these various groups appear to change as children age; they also differ by gender. The delinquent-victim group among boys is larger overall and increases substantially between ages 13 and 14. This may reflect an increase in delinquent activities around the time they enter high school among those who had previously been primarily victims. The high school environment may expose them to older delinquent role models and present them with conditions of more independence and less supervision than middle school.

For girls, the pattern change appears to occur earlier (between ages 11 and 12) and is associated with an increase in both victimization and delinquency, but particularly victimization. This is likely related to the onset of pubertal changes in girls and shows up in the data as a particularly marked increase in sexual harassment.

### Increased Risk of Both Delinquency and Victimization for Delinquent-Victims

For both genders, the data reveal worrying facts about the group who are

both victimized and delinquent. This group manifests higher levels of both victimization and delinquency than either the primarily victim or primarily delinquent group. This group also has more additional adversities, lower levels of social support, and higher rates of mental health symptoms (see table 2). This is consistent with observations from the bullying literature that the so-called "bully-victims" are often the most distressed children (Cuevas et al., 2007; Haynie et al., 2001; Olweus, 1978, 2000; Schwartz, Proctor, and Chien, 2001). Improving strategies for identifying and helping this group of children is an obvious priority.

## Timing of Interventions To Reduce Victimization and Delinquency

The current study is not longitudinal, and so it is limited in the inferences that can be made about how to identify children who are on track to become distressed delinquent-victims. This group does not appear to be discernible on the basis of demographic, family, or school variables collected in this study. The age comparisons suggest that victims who have additional adversities and higher levels of victimization and mental health symptoms may also be those at greatest risk of moving into delinquent activities. Targeting prevention at highly victimized youth with mental health symptoms may be important.

The study points clearly to the importance of early intervention. For girls, a large jump in victimization and delinquency occurs between ages 11 and 12; for boys, the delinquent-victim group increases between ages 13 and 14. This strongly suggests that delinquency and victimization prevention efforts need to be marshaled around or before the fifth grade, and they need to include components that minimize sexual aggression and harassment.

The transition to high school may also be a crucial juncture, especially for boys. Further study may better determine how children at this juncture both are targeted as victims and initiate multiple delinquent activities. Better early-warning systems may identify students who need special guidance and education from early in their high school careers.

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