



# OLR RESEARCH REPORT

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## **VIOLENT CRIMES AGAINST CHILDREN**

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You asked for information on violent crimes against children under age 12.

Most of the data we found about violent crimes against children grouped all crimes against individuals under age 18 together. The FBI's National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) appears to be the only national database to provide detailed information on the age of child violent crime victims. The most recent NIBRS data was compiled in 2008. In this report, we include information about child victims under age 18 as well as those age 12 and under.

### **SUMMARY**

According to NIBRS data analyses, (1) approximately 1.3 million crimes known to the police in 2008 were committed against children under age 18, representing 9% of all known crime victims and (2) approximately 25% of these victims were under age 12. These numbers include children who were direct victims of crimes as well as those who were indirectly victimized by witnessing criminal acts.

The University of New Hampshire's (UNH) Crimes Against Children Research Center has examined data states submitted to NIBRS and reported on characteristics of perpetrators and victims of crimes committed against children. While some of the analyses address children under age 12, they show that most victims were over age 12.

The only Connecticut-specific child victimization data we were able to find pertains to murders. It shows that in 2011, (1) the percentage of murder victims under age 18 was a little under 10% of the total number of murder victims for all age groups both in Connecticut and nationally, (2) there were fewer female murder victims under age 18 in Connecticut than nationally, and (3) Connecticut had a much higher percentage of murder victims under age 18 who were black.

In 2008, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) developed the Children's Exposure to Violence (NatSCEV), which measured both past year and lifetime exposure of children age 17 and younger in seven victimization categories, all of which had some direct or indirect connection to violent crime. The data and subsequent analyses revealed trends in victimization reporting and the types of victimizations that occurred at each developmental stage. These analyses reinforce the notion that (1) young children can be victims of violent crime simply by witnessing them and (2) it is difficult to get a complete and accurate assessment of the degree to which victimization occurs.

## **UNH CRIMES AGAINST CHILDREN RESEARCH CENTER DATA ANALYSIS**

### ***Crime and Victim Characteristics***

NIBRS compiled data in 2008 from jurisdictions in 24 states and the District of Columbia (representing 25% of the U.S. population). From this data, researchers from UNH's Crimes Against Children Research Center were able to extrapolate national statistics. Their research was published in a May 2012 article entitled "[Characteristics of Crimes Against Juveniles](#)." According to the article, in 2008:

1. approximately 187,100 sex offenses known to the police were committed against juveniles, representing 66% of all sex offense victims;
2. children under age 12 comprised approximately (a) 25% of all juvenile victims known to police, (b) 53% of juvenile kidnapping victims, and (c) 46% of juvenile forcible sex offense victims;
3. simple assaults were the most commonly reported crime against juveniles (46%), followed by larceny (18%), sex offenses (14%), aggravated assault (9%), vandalism (4%), robbery (3%), kidnapping (1%), motor vehicle theft (<1%) and homicide (<1%); and

4. juveniles were the victims of 18% of violent crimes and 4% of property crimes (when individuals instead of institutions are identified as victims).

Table 1 breaks down the types of crimes to which children were subjected by age and frequency. Most victims for all types were between the ages of 12 and 17.

**TABLE 1: JUVENILE VICTIMIZATION,  
BY TYPE OF CRIME AND VICTIM'S AGE GROUP (2008)**

	<i>Under Age 6</i>	<i>Age 6–11</i>	<i>Age 12–17</i>
Kidnapping	27%	26%	47%
Forcible Sex	19%	26%	54%
Aggravated Assault	13%	16%	71%
Simple Assault	8%	15%	77%
Nonforcible Sex	13%	12%	75%
Robbery	4%	7%	89%
Larceny	3%	9%	88%
Vandalism	7%	5%	88%
Motor Vehicle Theft	0%	3%	97%

Source: "[Characteristics of Crimes Against Juveniles](#)," p. 2.

### ***Crime Perpetrators***

According to the above-referenced article, (1) at least one adult was involved in 56% of juvenile victimizations known to police and (2) 48% of identified offenders against juveniles were adults. However, the article noted that "NIBRS data may exaggerate the percentage of adult offenders, because adult-perpetrated crimes are more likely than juvenile-perpetrated crimes to be reported to the police."

Table 2 depicts the frequency with which family members, acquaintances, strangers, and unidentified individuals perpetrated different crimes against children. Acquaintances were the most common perpetrators of violent crimes and sex offenses. Kidnappings were most commonly committed by family members, while robberies were most commonly committed by strangers.

**TABLE 2: JUVENILE VICTIMIZATION,  
BY TYPE OF CRIME AND OFFENDER'S RELATIONSHIP TO THE VICTIM (2008)**

	<i>Family</i>	<i>Acquaintance</i>	<i>Stranger</i>	<i>Unidentified</i>
Violent Crimes	25%	60%	10%	5%
Kidnapping	36%	34%	23%	7%
Sex Offenses	33%	58%	4%	5%
Simple Assault	24%	53%	15%	6%
Aggravated Assault	24%	53%	15%	6%
Robbery	0%	16%	59%	14%

Source: "[Characteristics of Crimes Against Juveniles](#)," p. 5.

The article also noted, as depicted in Table 3, that (1) the percentage of perpetrators who were strangers increased slightly as juvenile victims grew older and spent more time in public areas and (2) the ratio of adult perpetrators to juvenile perpetrators changed with the victim's age. Adults were the predominant perpetrators for children under age 9 and juvenile perpetrators were predominant from age 9 through age 15. Adult perpetrators once again outnumbered juvenile perpetrators for victims approximately age 16 and older.

**TABLE 3: PRETEEN AND TEENAGE CRIME VICTIMIZATION PATTERNS, BY RELATIONSHIP TO OFFENDER (2008)**

	<i>Preteens (Under age 12)</i>	<i>Teenagers (age 12-17)</i>
Family	48%	18%
Acquaintance	44%	70%
Stranger	7%	12%
All offenses	100%	100%

Source: "[Characteristics of Crimes Against Juveniles](#)," p. 7.

### **CONNECTICUT-SPECIFIC DATA — MURDER VICTIMS**

According to the Connecticut Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection's Crime Analysis Unit's 2011 Annual Report, 8.5% of the 129 murder victims in the state in 2011 were under the age of 18. This was close to the national average for that year (9.4%), as reported by the U.S. Department of Justice and depicted in Table 4.

Table 4 also shows that just over 80% of murder victims of all age groups and those under 18 were male. However, the percentage of female murder victims was significantly higher nationally (approximately 31%) than in Connecticut that year.

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, in 2011 the percentage of murder victims under age 18 nationally who were white was approximately 48%, while those who were black was approximately 47%. However, in Connecticut, as Table 4 shows, blacks made up a significantly higher percentage of the total murder victims who were under age 18, 63.6%.

**Table 4: 2011 Murder Victims**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Connecticut</b>				<b>United States</b>			
	<b>Under Age 18</b>		<b>Total</b>		<b>Under Age 18</b>		<b>Total</b>	
Male	9	81.8%	104	80.6%	813	68.5%	9,829	77.6%
Female	2	18.2%	25	19.4%	371	31.3%	2,813	22.2%
Unknown	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	3	0.3%	22	0.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>1,187</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>12,664</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
<b>Race</b>	<b>Connecticut</b>				<b>United States</b>			
	<b>Under Age 18</b>		<b>Total</b>		<b>Under Age 18</b>		<b>Total</b>	
White	3	27.3%	49	38.0%	572	48.2%	5,825	46.0%
Black	7	63.6%	74	57.4%	559	47.1%	6,329	50.0%
Other	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	36	3.0%	335	2.6%
Unknown	1	9.1%	6	4.7%	20	1.7%	175	1.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>1,187</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>12,664</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Sources: [2011 Annual Report of the Connecticut Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection, Crime Analysis Unit](#)

[2011 Uniform Crime Reports, U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Criminal Justice Information Services Division](#)

## **NATIONAL SURVEY OF CHILDREN’S EXPOSURE TO VIOLENCE**

In 2008, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) conducted a survey measuring both past year and lifetime exposure of children age 17 and younger to seven victimization categories (the National Survey of Children’s Exposure to Violence, or NatSCEV).

### ***Victimization Categories***

The survey asked questions about victimization in the following major categories:

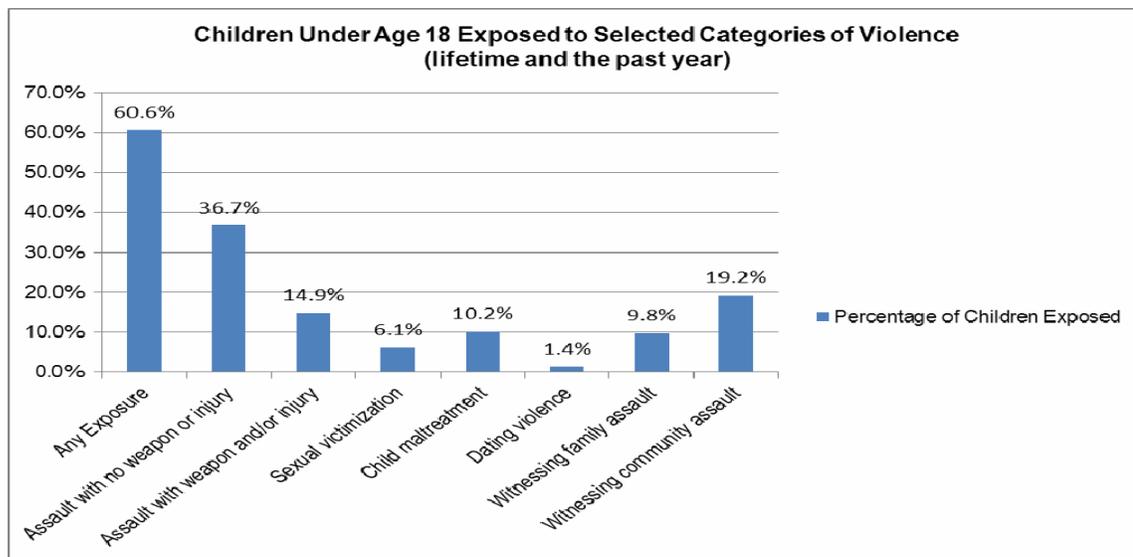
1. conventional crime,
2. child maltreatment,
3. peer and sibling victimization,
4. sexual victimization,
5. witnessing and indirect victimization,
6. school violence and threat, and

7. internet violence and victimization.

For definitions of these categories, refer to Appendix A.

Chart 1 shows the results of the survey and depicts the percentage of children who were exposed to each category of victimization.

**CHART 1: 2008 NATSCEV SURVEY RESULTS**



Source: [OJJDP Juvenile Justice Bulletin October 2009](#)

### **Survey Results**

According to the October 2009 [OJJDP Juvenile Justice Bulletin](#), the survey revealed:

1. in the previous year, (a) 46.3% of the children and adolescents surveyed were assaulted at least once; (b) 10.2% were injured in an assault; (c) 10.2% suffered from maltreatment including physical and emotional abuse, neglect, or a family abduction; and (d) 6.1% were victimized sexually;
2. 86.6% of children who reported being exposed to violence during their lifetimes also reported being exposed to it within the past year;
3. in the previous year, (a) 38.7% of the children and adolescents surveyed were victimized two or more times, (b) 10.9% were victimized five or more times, and (c) 1.4% were victimized 10 or more times;

4. boys were somewhat more likely to be assault victims than girls (e.g., 50.2% of boys had been assaulted during the previous year compared to 42.1% of girls); and
5. 6.1% of all children surveyed had been sexually victimized in the past year and 9.8% had been sexually victimized over their lifetimes. Girls were more likely to be sexually victimized than boys, and girls ages 14 to 17 had the highest rates of such victimization (7.9% during the previous year and 18.7% during their lifetimes) (Finkelhor et al., October 2009).

Table 5 represents the most common victimizations based on the child's age.

**TABLE 5: DEVELOPMENTAL PATTERNS IN VIOLENCE EXPOSURE**

<b>Age Range</b>	<b>Most Common Victimizations</b>
Infancy	(1) assault by a sibling and (2) assault with no weapon or injury
Ages 2–5	(1) assault by a sibling, (2) assault with no weapon or injury, and (3) physical bullying
Ages 6–9	(1) assault by a sibling, (2) assault with no weapon or injury, (3) physical bullying, and (4) emotional bullying or teasing
Ages 10–13	(1) assault with a weapon, (2) sexual harassment, and (3) kidnapping
Ages 14–17	(1) assault with injury, (2) assault by peer (nonsibling), (3) genital assault, (4) dating violence, (5) sexual victimizations of all types, (6) physical abuse, and (7) psychological or emotional abuse

Source: October 2009 [OJJDP Juvenile Justice Bulletin](#), p. 5

Researchers noted that the survey's methodology may have caused it to understate children's actual exposure to violence since (1) it required family cooperation, (2) parents and caregivers who answered for younger children may (a) not have been aware of the extent of the children's exposure to violence or (b) may have underreported it, (3) the questions may have missed some incidents and underreported others, and (4) children may not have recalled some exposure and may have misremembered the timing of the exposure.

### **VICTIMIZATION REPORTING (AND UNDERREPORTING)**

The NatSCEV also assessed whether authorities including school, police, and medical authorities, are identifying all child victimizations. According to an April 2012 [OJJDP Juvenile Justice Bulletin](#), the survey found:

1. of the child victimizations in the previous year, 13% were known to police and 46% were known to school, police, or medical authorities;

2. generally, school officials knew about victimization episodes more often than police or medical personnel, but police were most likely to know about kidnapping, neglect, and sexual abuse by an adult; and
3. authorities knew more about victimization and abuse incidents in 2008 than they did in 1992.

NatSCEV also suggested trends in the types of victims who were less likely to be reported to authorities. In the April 2012 OJJDP bulletin, the authors suggested possible explanations for those trends, including the following:

Authorities are less likely to know about victimizations of boys, probably reflecting male social norms, sometimes referred to as ‘the boy code,’ of self-sufficiency that stigmatizes help seeking...They are also less likely to know about Hispanic victims, perhaps reflecting specific Hispanic cultural concerns as well as issues about citizenship status and legitimacy. Authorities are less likely to know about higher [socioeconomic status] victims, perhaps reflecting suspicion among these families about the negative impact on their children, combined with having the resources and status to deflect the authorities’ involvement.

Dr. David Finkelhor, PhD., Director of the UNH’s Crimes Against Children Research Center, offered several factors that may contribute to the national underreporting of child victims to police in his book, [\*Childhood Victimization: Violence, Crime, and Abuse in the Lives of Young People\*](#). Such factors include:

1. Definitional – Child victimization may be seen as less criminal because (a) of an expectation that victimization is part of childhood or (b) children who fight with each other are often viewed as equally culpable instead of as victims and perpetrators.
2. Jurisdictional – The most common victimizations, assaults by siblings and peers, are often handled by parents or school staff without police referral.
3. Developmental – Young children access police through parents or caregivers rather than directly; adolescent culture may discourage police reporting.

4. Emotional – Parents may fear that police will not take a reported incident seriously, or that reporting an incident will embarrass and upset the child victim. If the offender is a spouse, child, relative, or family friend, the parent or caregiver may feel divided loyalties that make him or her more reluctant to report the crime.

## **HYPERLINKS**

University of New Hampshire Crimes against Children Research Center, “Characteristics of Crimes Against Juveniles,” <http://cola.unh.edu/ccrc/characteristics-crimes-against-juveniles>, last visited September 20, 2013.

Connecticut Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection, *2011 Annual Report of the Connecticut Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection, Crime Analysis Unit*, <http://www.dpsdata.ct.gov/dps/ucr/data/2011/Crime%20In%20Connecticut%20COMPLETE%202011.pdf>, last visited September 25, 2013.

U.S. Department of Justice, *2011 Uniform Crime Reports, U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Criminal Justice Information Services Division*, <http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/crime-in-the-u.s/2011/crime-in-the-u.s.-2011/tables/expanded-homicide-data-table-2>, last visited September 25, 2013.

OJJDP Juvenile Justice Bulletin, “Children’s Exposure to Violence: A Comprehensive National Survey,” <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/227744.pdf>, last visited September 18, 2013.

OJJDP Juvenile Justice Bulletin, “Child and Youth Victimization Known to Police, School, and Medical Authorities,” <http://www.ojjdp.gov/pubs/235394.pdf>, last visited September 20, 2013.

Finkelhor, David, *Childhood Victimization: Violence, Crime, and Abuse in the Lives of Young People*, <http://books.google.com/books?id=nXrCyT4J6o4C&printsec=frontcover&dq=childhood+victimization&hl=en&sa=X&ei=9rU4Uv24CYqEyAGEkIHw&ved=0CDoQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=childhood%20victimization&f=false>, last visited September 19, 2013.

## **APPENDIX A: NATSCEV VICTIMIZATION CATEGORY DEFINITIONS**

**Conventional Crime.** This category included robbery, theft, destruction of property, attack with an object or weapon, attack without an object or weapon, attempted attack, threatened attack, kidnapping, attempted kidnapping, and hate crime or bias attack.

**Child Maltreatment.** This category included being hit, kicked, or beaten by an adult (other than spanking on the bottom), psychological or emotional abuse, neglect, and abduction by a parent or caregiver.

**Peer and Sibling Victimization.** This category included being (1) attacked by a group of children; (2) hit or beaten by another child; (3) chased, grabbed, or forced to do something; (4) teased or emotionally bullied; or (5) a victim of dating violence.

**Sexual Victimization.** This category included sexual contact or fondling by (1) an adult the child knew, (2) an adult stranger, or (3) another child or teenager. Sexual victimization also included attempted or completed intercourse, exposure or flashing, sexual harassment, and consensual sexual conduct with an adult.

**Witnessing and Indirect Victimization.** This included exposure to (1) community violence and (2) family violence.

**School Violence and Threat.** This category of victimization included a credible bomb threat against the child's school. It also included property damage to the school.

**Internet Violence and Victimization.** This category included Internet threats or harassment and unwanted online sexual solicitation.

MK/KD:ts