



OJJDP FACT SHEET

Shay Bilchik, Administrator February 2000 #03

Self-Reported Delinquency by 12-Year-Olds, 1997

by Charles M. Puzzanchera

Survey of youth documents delinquent and other deviant behaviors

Amid concern about juvenile violence, particularly the availability of guns, it is important to develop an accurate picture of the delinquent and other deviant behaviors of the Nation's youth. Findings from self-report surveys, such as the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 (NLSY97), include information about behavior that often does not come to the attention of juvenile justice agencies. As such, NLSY97 data can provide policymakers with unique insights into delinquency and other deviant behaviors by youth in America.

The first wave of NLSY97 interviewed a nationally representative sample of nearly 9,000 youth who were between the ages of 12 and 16 at the end of 1996. The interviews were conducted in 1997 and early 1998. The survey asked youth to report whether they had engaged in a variety of delinquent or other behaviors that may lead to future delinquency. These youth will be interviewed annually to track changes in delinquent and other deviant behaviors. This Fact Sheet presents estimates of these self-reported behaviors by the youngest age group—youth who were age 12 at the end of 1996.

One in seven 12-year-olds has engaged in assaultive behaviors

More than one-fifth of 12-year-olds reported that they had smoked cigarettes (22%) or drunk alcohol (21%). Delinquent behaviors reported included purposely destroying property (24%) and engaging in assaultive behaviors (14%). A smaller proportion of these youth reported carrying a handgun (7%), belonging to a gang (3%), being arrested (2%), or selling any drugs (1%).

Prevalence of deviant behaviors varied little by sex, race, or where the youth lived

Males and females, whites and nonwhites, and rural and urban 12-year-olds were equally likely to report that they had engaged in most deviant activities. The following exceptions were noted:

- ◆ Males were significantly more likely than their female peers to report that they had drunk alcohol (24% vs. 19%), carried a

handgun (13% vs. 2%), purposely destroyed property (31% vs. 16%), and engaged in assaultive behaviors (18% vs. 10%).

- ◆ White youth were significantly more likely than nonwhite youth to report that they had smoked cigarettes (25% vs. 18%) and carried a handgun (9% vs. 5%). Nonwhite youth were significantly more likely to report that they had stolen something worth more than \$50 (6% vs. 2%) or had been arrested (4% vs. 2%).
- ◆ Youth living in rural areas were significantly more likely than their urban counterparts to report that they had drunk alcohol (24% vs. 19%).

Prevalence of delinquent and other deviant behaviors reported by 12-year-olds, 1997

Behavior	Total	Male	Female	White	Nonwhite ¹
Smoked cigarettes*	22%	23%	22%	25%	18%
Drunk alcohol*	21	24	19	23	18
Used marijuana	5	6	4	5	6
Run away from home*	6	7	5	6	5
Carried a handgun	7	13	2	9	5
Belonged to a gang*	3	3	3	3	3
Destroyed property	24	31	16	25	22
Stolen something worth more than \$50 ²	4	4	3	2	6
Sold any drugs	1	1	1	1	1
Sold hard drugs ³	1	<0.5	1	1	1
Sold marijuana	1	1	<0.5	1	1
Committed assault	14	18	10	14	15
Been arrested ⁴	2	3	2	2	4
Once	68	68	69	76	61
Two or more times	32	32	31	24	39

¹Includes youth of Hispanic origin.

²Includes stealing a vehicle for use or sale.

³Hard drugs include cocaine, heroin, and LSD.

⁴Proportion of those who had ever been arrested.

*These behaviors generally are not considered delinquent (a crime if committed by an adult). However, they are often considered predictive of future delinquency.

Source: Author's analysis of the Bureau of Labor Statistics' *The national longitudinal survey of youth 1997*, release 1.1 [machine-readable data file].

One in twenty 12-year-olds carried a handgun in the past 12 months

Although knowledge of lifetime participation in delinquent or other deviant activities is helpful for planning and decisionmaking, it is more important for those working with young juveniles to know if the juveniles are currently engaging in such behaviors. The data collected by NLSY97 provide a distinction between lifetime participation and recent involvement in various behaviors. In general, more than half of the 12-year-olds who reported ever committing a specific delinquent act said they had committed the act within the past year. For example, while 24% of youth reported ever purposely destroying property, more than half (57%) had done so in the past year. This represents 13% of all 12-year-olds. In addition:

- ◆ A small proportion of 12-year-olds reported that they had stolen something worth more than \$50 (2%), belonged to a gang (2%), or sold any drugs (1%) in the past 12 months.
- ◆ Five percent of all 12-year-olds reported that they had carried a handgun in the past year and 2% said they had carried a handgun in the past 30 days.
- ◆ Nine percent of all 12-year-olds reported that they had engaged in assaultive behaviors in the past year.

Recent delinquent behaviors by 12-year-olds did not vary significantly by sex or race

Similar proportions of males and females reported recent participation in many problem or delinquent behaviors. The same was true for white and nonwhite youth. Exceptions are as follows:

- ◆ In the past year, males were significantly more likely than their female counterparts to report that they had carried a handgun (9% vs. 1%), purposely destroyed property (17% vs. 10%), and engaged in assaultive behaviors (12% vs. 6%).

- ◆ In the past year, white youth were significantly more likely than their nonwhite peers to report that they had carried a handgun (6% vs. 2%).
- ◆ In the past year, nonwhite youth were more likely than white youth to report having stolen something worth more than \$50 (4% vs. 2%).

For further information

This Fact Sheet was prepared by the National Juvenile Justice Data Analysis Project, a program of the National Center for Juvenile Justice (NCJJ). It is the first release in a planned series of reports analyzing data from NLSY97. A more comprehensive report is currently in development; it will present detailed analyses of self-reported delinquency and other deviant behaviors for the entire NLSY97 cohort. Copies will be available from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's (OJJDP's) Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse, 800-638-8736.

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The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention is a component of the Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Assistance, the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, and the Office for Victims of Crime.

FS-200003

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