

Juvenile Crime As A Community Health Issue
-An Analysis of the 1998 Muskegon County
Juvenile Division Survey

**Muskegon County Health Department
Muskegon County Family Court**

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Foreword

Prevention of violence and abuse among our nation's youth is a priority in the national Healthy People 2010 agenda to improve health for all Americans. As we have seen all too often over the past few years, youth are involved as both perpetrators and victims of violence. Many factors that contribute to violent and abusive behavior are also associated with constellation of community health problems.

Sound data are essential to solving the problem of juvenile crime. The 1998 Muskegon County Juvenile Division Survey was our first study targeting the entire population of youth offenders of the criminal justice system. The data analyses of this report were solely based on the self-reported information by a total of 369 individuals who were clients of the Juvenile Division of the Muskegon County Family Court. Although it must be understood that youth crime is sometime under-reported by the self-reported method, the survey results provide valuable information representing youth offenders as a whole. Many findings from this survey mirror the profile of youth offenders reported by U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention in studies of teenage fatherhood and delinquent behavior (OJJDP Juvenile Justice Bulletin, January, 2000).

This Muskegon County survey provides valuable information about the extent and scope of the juvenile offenders' criminal behaviors, drug use and drug dealing, teen pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and characteristics and criminal involvement of gang and non-gang affiliated youth. Many community health problems are more highly represented among these juvenile offenders. The data supports the importance of a comprehensive community-wide approach to addressing the problems of our county's most troubled youth.

This report must be a call for action for all citizens to jointly and collectively address the numerous and often interacting risks associated with juvenile crime.

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Introduction

For years, the youth-related crime has become an important public policy issue, largely because of the growth of youth-related crime throughout the United States. In Muskegon County, youth crime and violence is an issue often discussed, yet rarely fully understood. What is the general profile of juvenile offenders? What proportion of juvenile offenders carry/use a gun in crime? What is the gender difference in types of crime among juvenile offenders? What is known about juvenile gangs? How does criminal behavior differ between gang and non-gang members? What is the incidence and prevalence of teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) among juvenile offenders? What is the incidence and prevalence of drug use and drug selling among juvenile offenders? In order to improve our understanding of youth-related crime and violence in our community, the Muskegon County Health Department jointly with Muskegon County Family Court conducted a comprehensive survey on juvenile offenders.

The major objectives of this study were: to identify characteristics and patterns of juvenile offenders; to determine the accessibility of firearms and the use of firearms by juveniles, to assess the extent and nature of crime committed by youth-gang members, to compare the criminal behavior of gang members and non-gang members among juvenile offenders, and to develop recommendations for prevention and reduction of juvenile crime.

This survey was a cohort type. It targeted close to 400 juvenile offenders who were either incarcerated or were on probation from June to September, 1998. The survey was given to three groups of offenders including (1) "consent probationers," who were on informal probation to the court; (2) "judicial probationers," who were adjudicated youth on program specific probation; and (3) "formal probationers," adjudicated youth who made up the majority of the court's caseload. Some of the formal probationers were in detention at the time of the survey. The refusal rates were lower than expected with only 5% in all the groups declining the survey. All together, 369 respondents participated in this survey.

The data analyses of this report were solely based on self-reported information regarding delinquent behavior or types of crimes, drug use and/or drug dealing, teen pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), gang involvement, weapon carrying/use, community/family experience, educational experience, attitudes and values, and demographic characteristics. In addition, participants were asked questions related to self-esteem, attitudes and beliefs, and their view of the future.

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

The rationale which drove this survey was based on the recognition that the overlapping populations affected by public health and criminal justice issues have had a significant impact on our community and are also those in greatest need of health and social service interventions.

Equally germane is the recognition that many of the social problems and greatest health concerns must be studied and understood from a communal as well as an individual level. For instance, those who use and abuse other drugs, are those who become involved with the criminal justice system:

- They are involved in committing, or are the victims of, violent crimes.
- They have multiple, severe, and chronic psychiatric and physical health problems that are ineffectively addressed by the current public health system.
- They lack the educational and vocational skills necessary to gain meaningful employment.
- They are at high risk of becoming infected with STDs and HIV.
- They live in eroded and unsafe communities where family and social structures have been compromised and fragmented; which are both the results of and the impetus for the entrenchment and continuation of the above set of problems.

The above issues from the joint perspectives of the criminal justice and public health systems have not been looked at substantively. Thus, this study can serve as a starting point providing meaningful information for public health officials, criminal justice officials, schools, community activities, legislators, and others.

Methodology

Muskegon County Family Court

This study was conducted at the Juvenile Division of Muskegon County Family Court Services which is located downtown in the County Building. The court receives approximately 1600 to 1800 complaints alleging delinquent behavior yearly. After a preliminary inquiry, the less serious complaints are diverted into alternative programs in lieu of official court action. The remaining 700 to 800 cases are placed on the court calendar and processed either on an informal or formal basis. Clients are placed on one of four levels of supervision - consent, judicial, formal or intensive supervision.

The court mission statement says that “the Juvenile Division is mandated to process delinquency and neglect and abuse cases with the focus on the best interests of the child, while protecting public safety and maintaining the integrity of its legal system.....” (see 1997 Annual Report, Muskegon County Probate Court). The division provides family-focused rehabilitative services through the efforts of using the community’s other resources. For instance, the majority of youth offenders who are under court supervision receive community-based treatment alternatives: substance abuse treatment, psychological consultation, parent participation program, education and vocational training, just to name a few.

Statistical Significance

Statistical significance was determined by the Chi-square and T-test results. Chi-square test was used to make a comparison in a cross-tabulation. T-test was conducted to test means of certain continuous variables such as age. The minimum level of significant was set up at .05. That means, if the relationship is significant at .05 level, there will be less than a 5% of probability that the event occurs by chance.

Limitation of this Study

Because many offenders are not arrested and also many juvenile offenders are not arrested for all the crime they committed, sometimes police official records may not reflect the whole picture of juvenile crime. Self-reported data, therefore, can capture information on behavior that may never come to the attention of the criminal justice system.

Despite the comprehensiveness of this survey and use of the cohort method to represent the whole population, there are some limitations. Since self-reported data relies on memory, it limits the information which can be captured. In addition, in most social surveys, people generally like to answer survey questions in a socially acceptable way, in that they try to put their best foot forward. Individuals who go through the criminal justice system are generally unwilling to disclose all their criminal behavior to criminal justice agencies. This, along with other problems associated with surveying juvenile offenders, was the reason that this survey was conducted by the Muskegon County Health Department, serving as an objective outsider to the criminal justice system.

Survey Instrument

The survey instrument was a modified version adapted from several other survey tools including “Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance” from the Center for Disease Control, “The Monitoring the Future Study,” from the Institute of Survey Research, University of Michigan, “Attitudes and Behaviors” from the Search Institute, “Anonymous Student Survey” from the National Gang Research Center, and “Risk Behavior Assessment” from the National Institute on Drug Abuse. Besides those core questions, certain questions related to criminal behaviors were also added to the survey. The survey contained a variety of questions related to criminal activities and delinquent behavior, which allowed one to assess which criminal behaviors cluster together. For instance, analysis of these items demonstrated the connection between drug use, drug sale, carrying a weapon, belonging to a gang, and other criminal behavior.

Before the survey instrument became finalized, a field test was given to 20 youth offenders who were at the younger end of the age group (age 15 and under). It was assumed that the general respondents in the planned survey would understand/administer the survey if this younger group could handle the questionnaire. With all 98 questions in the survey included, this group of teenagers did well in the pre-testing process. One class period gave enough time for completion of this survey.

Recruitment of Respondents

This study involved a non-random sample consisting of subjects who were current clients of the court. The criteria for inclusion was: 1) subjects must be current clients at the court; and 2) they must be willing to participate. So as estimated, there were about 400 clients who were taken by the court during the period of June to September, 1998. Among those who qualified for inclusion, 369 participated in the survey. The survey size is large and the study results are fully representative of the whole population of juvenile offenders in the system.

Prior to the survey, a consent form was sent to each parent to sign in compliance with the federal human subjects protection code. The survey was managed by the experienced survey manager and assistants who were non-employees of the court system. Respondents were informed of the nature of this survey. The survey manager assured the respondents the confidentiality and anonymity of this survey. The survey was a self-administered pencil and paper work. It was conducted within a small group in order to help respondents in case they needed assistance.

GENERAL FINDINGS

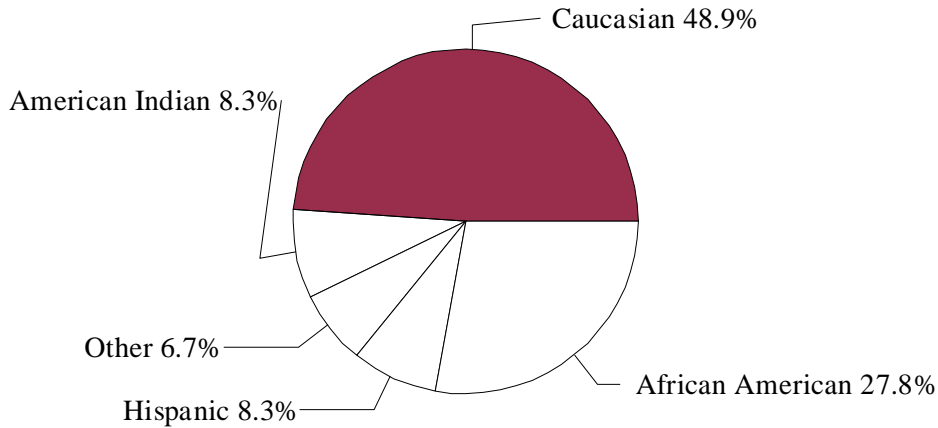
DEMOGRAPHICS

The demographic characteristics of juvenile offenders are discussed in this section which attempts to capture a county-wide picture of age, sex, and race/ethnicity of juvenile offenders.

Race/ethnicity:

Among the 369 youth offenders, about one-half were whites, about one-third were blacks while Mexican American/Chicano and American Indians made up less than 20%. The remaining proportion, or about 7%, identified themselves as “others” (see Figure 1). The percentage of the minorities in this study reflected the race/ethnicity composition of the total population of juvenile offenders in the Juvenile Division.

Figure 1: Race/Ethnicity of Youth Offenders (N=360)



There was found a close relationship between crime and race/ethnic background (Table 1):

- The percentage of drug offense cases for white youth was higher than the corresponding percentage for black and other ethnic youth (26.6% vs. 20.8% and 6.5%).
- The percentage of weapon offense was higher among black and other minorities than among the white juveniles (6.3% and 6.5% vs. 1.6%).
- Similarly, the proportion of driving offense was higher among black and other minorities than white youth (14.6% and 16.1% vs. 3.1%).
- The percentage of person offense was higher among black youth than the rest (31.3% vs. 19.5% white and 6.5% others).

Table 1. Offense Profile of Delinquency Cases, by Race/Ethnicity

	White %	Black %	All Others %
Person Offense	19.5%	31.3%	6.5%
Property Offense	35.9%	20.8%	54.8%
Driving Offense	3.1%	14.6%	16.1%
Drug Offense	26.6%	20.8%	6.5%
Weapon	1.6%	6.3%	6.5%
Other Offense	13.3%	6.3%	9.7%

Note: Chi-square statistics for comparisons of various groups. $P < .001$

Age:

The age distribution among the respondents ranged from age 11 to 17 with an average of age 15. Almost two-thirds of these youth offenders were younger than 15. Less than 10% were under age 12. There was no significant age difference between boys and girls. As far as racial/ethnic background, white and Hispanic respondents tended to be older than the rest. That is they were, in general, one year older than native American, a half year older than the blacks.

There was a correlation between age and crime types (Table 2).

- Compared with those of older juveniles (16 and above), the younger ones, age 15 and under, were more likely involved in property offense (40%), person offense (21.4%), driving offense (9.2%), and weapon offense (5%).
- The older group was involved heavily in selling drugs (28.4%), and other property offenses (32%).

Figure 2: Age Distribution Among Youth Offenders (N=361)

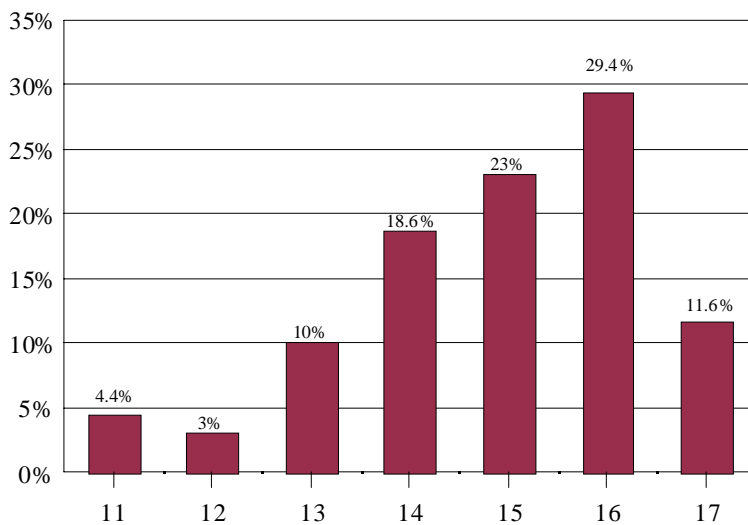


Table 2. Offense by Age

Offense Type	Age 15 or Under	Age 16 or Older
Person Offense	21.4%	17.9%
Property Offense	39.7%	31.6%
Driving Offense	9.2%	5.3%
Drug Offense	17.6%	28.4%
Weapon Carrying	4.6%	1.1%
Other Offense	7.6%	15.8%

Note: Chi-square statistics for comparisons of various groups. $P < .001$

Gender:

More than 70% of these respondents were boys while less than one-third were girls. The gender composition in this study was compatible with the general profile of youth offenders in the Juvenile Division of the County Family Court (Table 3).

- The majority of the girls in the cohort were white (57.4%).
- Most of the boys were either black and other minorities (55%).
- More girls reported that they were arrested for person offense, retail fraud, and drug possession.
- Boys, instead, were more involved in driving offense, property offense, and carrying a concealed weapon.

Figure 3: Gender of Youth Offenders (N=364)

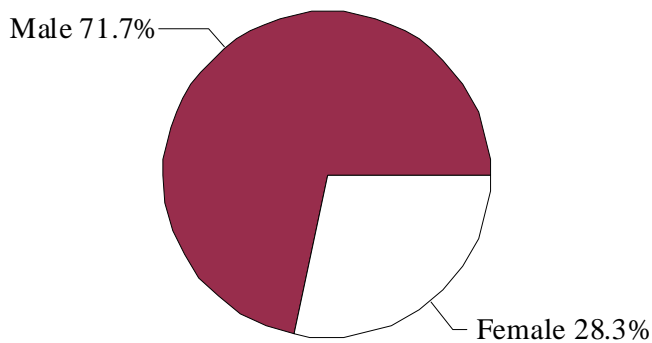


Table 3. Offense by Gender

Offense Type	Girls	Boys
Person Offense	25.0%	17.3%
Property Offense	36.1%	36.5%
Driving Offense	6.9%	8.3%
Drug Offense	26.4%	19.9%
Weapon Carrying	1.4%	3.8%
Other Offense	4.2%	14.1%

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

Self-Reported Reasons for the Current Arrest

The survey asked: “what were you found guilty of most recently?” Table 4 categorizes the responses into 6 general items: person offense, property offense, driving offense, drug offense, weapon carrying and using, and other offense. The key findings were as follows:

- 2 in 10 of these juvenile offenders were charged with person offense.
- About 4 in 10 were charged with property offense.
- 8 in 100 with driving offense.
- About 2 in 10 had violated drug laws including drug selling, drug possession, or “minor in possession.”
- About 4 in 100 were arrested for carrying or using concealed weapons.
- Other offenses captured about 11% of the responses including fleeing and eluding, probation violation, receiving and concealing, and other offenses which were not identified by the respondents.

Since the data came solely from arrested juveniles, its self-reported list of offenses could well deviate from the official police records. Nevertheless, this data is very useful as it is. Criminologists very commonly attempt to measure the level of crime beyond that revealed in government statistics through such questions of the general public as well as offenders. To be sure some people might report crimes as a boast or joke but others might fear even a confidential confession. Overall, it is assumed that a valuable part of the total level of crime is better approached this way.

Table 4. Self-Reported Reasons for Current Arrest

	N	%
Person Offense		
Attempted Murder	1	0.5%
Assault and Battery	29	13.4%
Aggravated Assault	1	1.4%
Attempted Assault with a Dangerous Weapon	1	0.5%
Felonious Assault	8	3.7%
Domestic Violence	5	2.3%
Total:	45	19.5%
Property Offense		
Breaking and Entering	25	11.5%
Retail Fraud	14	6.5%
Malicious Destruction of Property	10	4.6%
Arson	1	0.5%
Home Invasion	4	1.8%
Larceny	26	12.0%
Unlawful Entering	3	1.4%
Total:	83	35.9%
Driving Offense		
Unlawful Driving Away an Automobile	14	7.9%
Driving Under Influence	1	0.5%
Driving without License	3	1.4%
Total:	18	7.8%
Drug Law Violation		
Drug Dealing	13	6.0%
Drug Possession	11	5.1%
Minor in Possession	27	12.4%
Total:	51	22.1%
Carrying Concealed Weapons	Total:	8 3.7%
Other Offense		
Fleeing and Eluding	2	0.8%
Probation Violation	5	2.0%
Receiving and Concealing	4	1.7%
Other Offense	15	6.5%
Total:	26	11.0%

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

General Findings on Drug Use

About 16 different questions were used to assess the patterns of alcohol and drug use. Respondents were asked if they had ever used alcohol and/or other drugs, if they were binge drinkers*, and/or if they were current alcohol or drug users**. Here are the results (Table 5):

- 80% of these juvenile offenders reported that they had ever used alcohol.
- 76% were current drinkers.
- 60% were current binge drinkers.
- 74% had at least tried other drugs among which marijuana was by far the most commonly used.
- 70% were current marijuana users.
- 19% said they had ever tried cocaine in their lifetime.
- About 17% were current cocaine users.
- About 15% said they had ever tried crack, which is a free base form of cocaine.
- About 14% had ever used steroid pills/shorts without prescription.
- 36% had ever tried other drugs including LSD, PCP, heroin etc.

Table 5. Alcohol and Other Drug Use

	N	%
Ever Alcohol Use	295	80.0%
Alcohol Use in 30 Days	267	75.6%
Ever Marijuana Use	262	74.0%
Marijuana Use in 30 Days	229	65.8%
Ever Cocaine Use	67	19.1%
Cocaine Use in 30 Days	59	16.6%
Ever Crack Use	51	14.5%
Ever Steroid Pills or Shorts without Doctor's Prescription	48	13.5%
Other Drug Use (e.g., LSD, PCP, Heroin, Speed, Ice)	130	36.4%

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

** Binge drinker: 5+ drinks at least once in last 30 days.*

*** Current user: consumed any in last 30 days.*

Drug Use and Drug Selling

There is a close relationship found between drug use and drug selling among these juvenile offenders (Table 6). The difference in drug use was statistically significant between those who had ever sold drugs and those who had never sold drugs. For instance, among those who had ever been drug dealers:

- 9 in 10 were current drinkers.
- 8 in 10 were current binge drinkers.
- Almost all of the drug dealers had ever used marijuana.
- 9 in 10 were current marijuana users.
- 3 in 10 had ever used cocaine.
- 1 in 5 were current cocaine users.
- 1 in 5 had ever tried crack.
- 1 in 2 had ever tried other drugs including LSD, PCP, Mushrooms, Speed, Ice, or Heroin.

A close relationship between drug use and drug dealing has been found most consistently in the criminal population. Some research has documented that a large proportion of drug users had a drug conviction (Davidson, 1987). Still others found that many criminals were heavy drug users and even heavier drug sellers. It seems clear that drug use and drug dealing are two halves of the same phenomenon: those who use drugs the most are those who have been involved in drug dealing. This correlation may lead to a conclusion that individuals have been engaged in selling drugs, often to maintain personal drug habits, or to socialize with, share drugs with, or sell to peers.

Drug Dealing and Parenthood

Also, there was found a positive correlation between drug selling and fatherhood among the respondents. About 9% of the surveyed population were teen fathers. Among these teen fathers:

- 8 in 10 had ever sold illicit drugs (Figure 4). The percentage of drug selling among teen fathers almost doubled when compared with the boys who were not fathering a child.
- 6 in 10 of the respondents who had been pregnant or gotten someone pregnant reported ever selling drugs. The proportion of drug dealing among the non-pregnancy group is 44%.

- 4 in 10 female juvenile offenders had ever been involved in selling illicit drugs (Figure 5).
- However, the proportion of drug dealing differed very little between teen mothers and the childless teen girls.

The positive correlation between drug selling and fatherhood found in this study might reflect gender and culture as well as economics and community structure as it affected the character and development of juvenile offenders. Many teen fathers were in social-economic disadvantaged families, left school early, and had fewer job skills. Then they had become a father and wanted to find full-time jobs to support their families. Drugs, therefore, provided them with goals and economic realities. Those teen mothers, on other hand, appeared not to be significantly involved in drug dealing which might indicate that these young women pursued traditional roles raising their children while their men were in a “no man’s land” to make money. Factors such as poverty, criminal opportunity, family, and many others might interact and combine to create the basis for certain patterns of juvenile crime.

Table 6. Drug Use and Drug Selling

	Drug Dealers (147)	No-Drug Dealing (194)	Significance p(Chi-square)
Alcohol use in 30 Days	91.1%	62.0%	a
Binge Drinker in 30 Days	82.0%	42.9%	a
Ever Marijuana Use	97.3%	55.2%	a
Marijuana Use in 30 Days	91.7%	44.7%	a
Ever Cocaine Use	29.5%	10.4%	a
Cocaine Use in Last 30 Days	22.4%	10.3%	b
Ever Crack Use	20.7%	8.2%	a
Other Drugs (e.g., LSD, PCP, Mushrooms, Speed, Ice, or Heroin)	54.4%	21.5%	a

Note: Chi-square statistics for comparisons of drug dealers and non-dealers.

a. $p < .001$

b. $p < .01$

c. $p < .05$

Figure 4: % of Drug Dealers: Teen Fathers

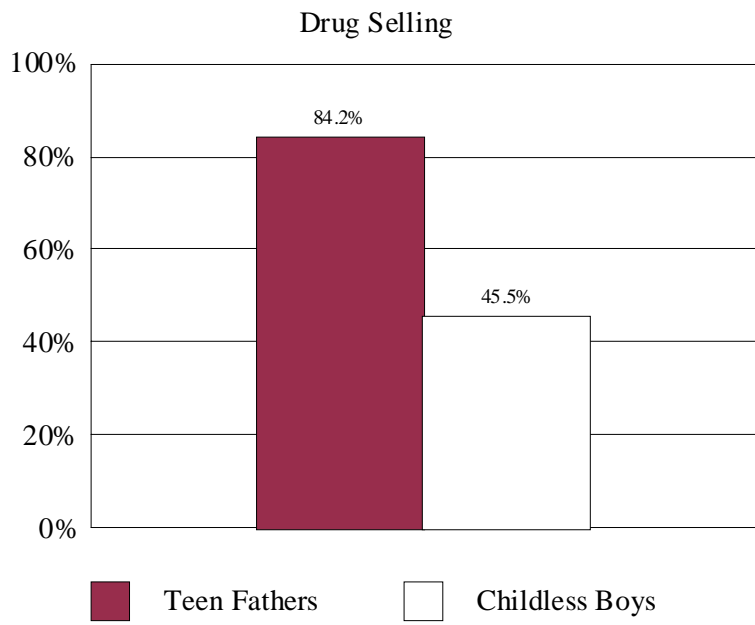
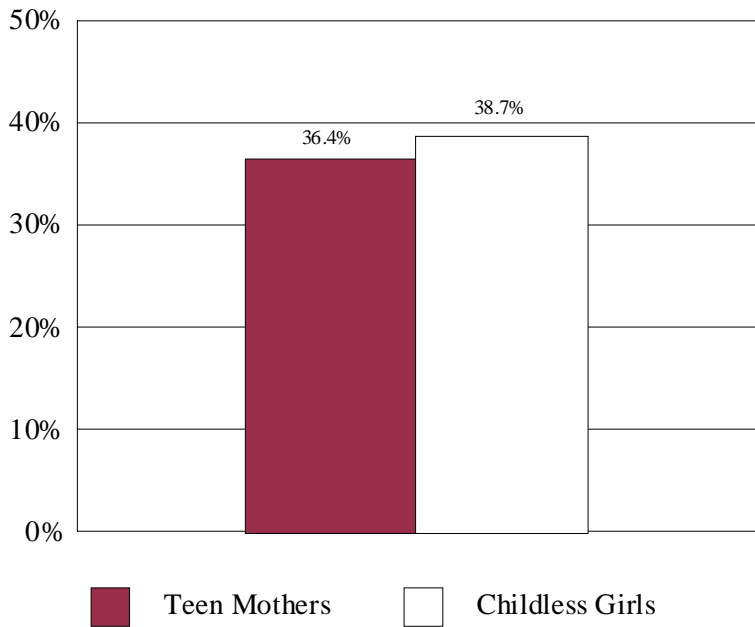


Figure 5: % of Drug Dealers: Teen Mothers



A Comparison Between Gang and Non-Gang Members

One of the key findings from this study is a high profile of criminal behavior or delinquency reported by youth gang members. Formal research and local observation revealed that crime committed by gang members extensively and significantly exceeds that committed by non-gang members. While youth gangs and related crimes have been a public issue for a long time, it is difficult to form a clear statistical picture of juvenile gangs and the extent and precise nature of juvenile gang-related crime.

The only available data was through the 1996-97 Muskegon County School Student Survey (Chang & Kraus, 1998), which was conducted among 8th, 10th, and 12th graders in the Muskegon County public and private schools. About 11% of the students surveyed reported that they had ever become a gang member. But, this general student survey data could not capture the detailed picture of gang activities, criminal behavior or offenses committed by gang members.

Until recently, there was no county-level data systematically collected on the number of gangs or gang members, the juvenile proportion of gang members, or gang-related crime. Hopefully, this survey can be used as baseline data to estimate the proportion of gang members among juvenile offenders, the scope of juvenile gang activity, and patterns of gang crime.

It is not possible to estimate the exact or even approximate number of youth gangs in the community, partly because there is no standard definition of a gang. Little agreement has been reached on what constitutes a gang, gang member, or gang incident (Office of Justice Programs, OJJDP, 1999). In light of these problems, the current survey did not seek to define gang terms narrowly. The survey simply accepted the respondents' own use of this terminology that a gang was a group of youths who ranged from age 11 to 17, who were willing to identify or classify themselves as a "gang."

In the survey, besides all the general questions which were asked of all the respondents, questions particularly designed for a gang study were applied to the respondents. Respondents were asked to exclude motorcycle gangs and adult gangs. There were no questions in the survey addressing the constitution of a gang or gang membership.

Demographic Background

- Less than 30% of the juvenile offenders or 97 individuals reported that they had ever been a gang member (Table 7).
- Average age of gang members: 15
- Females were fewer than 30%.

- There were slightly more minority individuals among gang members than non-gang members.
- More gang members than non-gang members came from a single parent home.
- There was no significant group difference regarding family economic situation.
- A big difference between gang and non-gang members existed in terms of their social psychological situation. For instance, there were more gang members than non-gang members who reported that they had been mentally abused (26% vs. 19%). More gang members than non-gang members reported that they had been sexually abused or raped (21% vs. 9%).
- More gang members than non-gang members indicated that they had attempted suicide in the last 12 months before the survey.
- Suicide attempts among gang members were more likely than among non-gang members to result in injury, or poisoning, or overdose that had to be treated by a doctor or nurse.
- About 94% of gang members compared to 69% of non-gang members had ever been suspended or expelled from a school for disciplinary problems.

Gun Violence between Gang and Non-Gang Members

Gun use/violence in this survey refers to carrying and/or misuse of firearms. It does not include the safe, lawful use of firearms for organized shooting sports, hunting or target practice. There were 4 questions in this study dealing with gun use. The survey asked if respondents had ever carried a gun, had ever used a gun, the reason for carrying a gun, access to a gun, and if they had used a gun for a crime in the last 12 months before their current arrest.

As one can see in the later section, the proportion of respondents who reported an official charge with a weapon offense for their current arrest was only 3.5% of the total. However, among all the juvenile arrestees who were interviewed, 28% had ever carried a gun. About 8% said they had carried a gun all the time.

- Carrying a gun was far more prevalent among gang-members than it was among non-gang members. Nearly 60% of gang members ever carried a gun for protection, and the proportion was almost 3 times higher than was the case among non-gang members. (Table 8.)
- More than one-half of gang members compared to only about 15% of non-gang members reported that they had used a gun in a crime in the last 12 months prior to the survey.

Table 7: Demographic Profile of Gang Members by Non-gang Members (N=369)

		Gang (97)	Non-Gang (254)	Significance p(Chi-square)
Age	Age 12 or Younger	1.0%	10.0%	b
	Age 13	8.3%	11.2%	
	Age 14	12.5%	21.2%	
	Age 15	35.4%	17.6%	
	Age 16	30.2%	28.4%	
	Age 17 or Older	2.5%	11.6%	
Gender	Male	73.7%	71.0%	n.s
	Female	26.3%	29.0%	
Race/Ethnicity	White	44.3%	50.4%	n.s
	Black	30.9%	26.0%	
	Hispanic	11.3%	7.2%	
	Native American	6.2%	9.6%	
	Other	7.2%	6.8%	
Living with	Both parents	35.8%	42.4%	n.s
	Mother	34.7%	34.8%	
	Father	8.4%	6.0%	
	Alternating between parents	7.4%	6.4%	
	Grandparents	2.1%	2.4%	
	Other relative	6.3%	3.2%	
	Someone else	5.3%	4.8%	
Family	Ever used food stamps	25.0%	18.6%	n.s
	Ever received welfare checks	13.5%	15.4%	
They had been	Physically abused	15.6%	13.4%	n.s
	Mentally abused	26.3%	19.3%	n.s
	Sexually abused/raped	20.8%	9.2%	b
They seriously considered suicide in last 12 months	27.4%	14.3%	b	
Their suicide attempt resulted in injury/poisoning	20.39%	12.0%	c	
They had ever been suspended/expelled from a school for disciplinary problems	93.8%	68.7%	a	

- One in five gang members indicated that they had carried a gun all the time.
- Nearly 50% of gang members acknowledged that they could access a gun from their friends or fellow gang members.
- Less than one-quarter of non-gang members stated that their peers owned a gun.

The gang and non-gang differences in carrying/using a gun were statistically significant across four of the six items. That means gang members were significantly more likely to carry a gun, use a gun in a crime, and more likely to own a gun.

Table 8. Gun Violence between Gang and Non-Gang Members

	Gang (97)	Non-Gang (254)	Significance p(Chi-square)
Ever carried a gun	58.8%	12.9%	a
Used a gun in crime in 12 months	54.7%	14.9%	a
Carried a gun all the time	20.2%	2.9%	a
Gun access: from home	12.4%	10.2%	n.s
Gun access: from grandparent/relative's home	6.2%	3.1%	n.s
Gun access: from friends	47.4%	22.8%	a

Note: Chi-square statistics for comparisons of gang and non-gang members.

- a. $p < .001$
- b. $p < .01$
- c. $p < .05$

Drug Selling

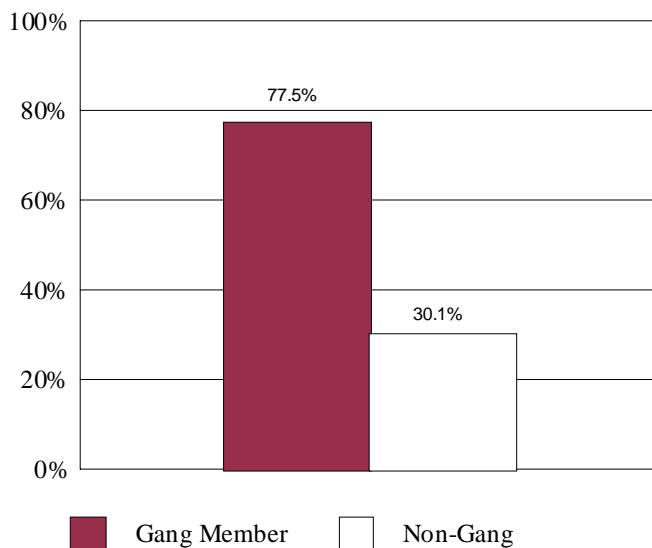
Gang members in this study were extensively involved in drug dealing (Figure 6).

- About 80% of gang members reported that they had ever sold drugs while the majority of non-gang members indicated that they had never been involved in drug selling.
- Those gang members who sold drugs, however, varied in terms of racial/ethnic background.
- 85% of white gang members had ever sold drugs.

- 74.1% of black gang members had ever sold drugs.
- 70% of Hispanic gang members and 50% of American Indian gang members had ever sold drugs.

The percentage of drug dealing among female gang members was even higher than among male gang members (83.3% vs. 76.2%). This study, therefore, generalizes other research that female gang members are heavily involved in drug operations, either with male counterparts or on their own.

Figure 6: Drug Selling among Gang and Non-Gang Members



Drug Use

The prevalence of self-reported alcohol and marijuana use was high among both gang members and non-gang members. But other drug use, such as cocaine or crack, was far greater for gang members compared to non-gang members. The details are given below:

- The gang and non-gang difference was little in alcohol and marijuana use. For instance, 9 in 10 of gang members compared to 7 in 10 non-gang members drank alcohol 30 days before their last arrest.
- About 9 in 10 gang members compared to 6 in 10 non-gang members used marijuana in the last 30 days before they were arrested.

The similarity of alcohol and marijuana use found in both groups may indicate that regular alcohol and marijuana use is common social behavior among many youths, especially found among criminal justice system population (Fagan, 1990).

Distinctions between gang and non-gang members were clearly marked when turning to cocaine, crack, and other drug use (Table 9).

- One-third of gang members had ever used cocaine while only about 15% of non-gang members had ever used this drug.
- About 1 in 4 of gang members had used cocaine in the last 30 days before their last arrest.
- Almost one-third of gang members had ever used crack which is a free based form of cocaine.
- At least one-half of gang members had used other drugs such as LSD, PCP, Speed, or Heroin.

Table 9. Drug Use Between Gang and Non-Gang Members

	Gang (97)	Non-Gang (254)	Significance p(Chi-square)
Drinking Alcohol in Last 30 Days	90.5%	70.0%	a
Binge Drinker	79.3%	52.8%	a
Ever Marijuana Use	91.7%	67.1%	a
Marijuana Use in Last 30 Days	86.2%	57.3%	a
Ever Cocaine Use	30.4%	14.4%	a
Cocaine Use in Last 30 Days	23.4%	13.4%	b
Ever Crack Use	26.9%	9.7%	a
Other Drugs (e.g., LSD, PCP, Mushrooms, Speed, Ice, or Heroin)	54.7%	29.1%	a

Note: Chi-square statistics for comparisons of gang and non-gang members.

a. $p < .001$

b. $p < .01$

c. $p < .05$

Sexual Activity, STDs, & Teen Pregnancy

Muskegon County, particularly in the last few years, has had one of the highest rates of STDs and teen pregnancy in the state. Since the early 1990s, many efforts in the community have been made to determine the rate of teen pregnancy and to discover which teens were at the highest risk of becoming pregnant. This study, therefore, is a continuation of that effort of assessing the severity of the addressed problems among these high risk kids.

Seven different questions were used to directly address issues related to teen sexual activities, teen pregnancy, and STDs. Here are general findings among all the respondents:

STDs: About 6% of all the juvenile offenders had ever had STDs.

Teen Pregnancy and Teen Parents: Twenty percent of all the boys and girls reported that they “had been pregnant or got someone else pregnant.” About 9% of each sex were teen parents.

Sexual Activities: About 76% of all the respondents reported that they “have ever had sexual intercourse.” Among those who had been sexually active, 40% indicated having 5 or more sexual partners during their lifetime. About 46% among them indicated that they “had never used or seldom used birth control” when they had sex.

A comparison between gang and non-gang is summarized in Table 10.

- Almost all the gang members, about 95% of them indicated that they had ever had sexual intercourse during their lifetime.
- More than one-half of the gang members had at least 5 sexual partners.
- More gang members than non-gang members had no birth control during their last sexual intercourse.
- Close to 40% of boys and girls in gangs reported that they had been pregnant or got someone else pregnant.
- About 20% of male gang members compared to 4% non-gang boys had “ever fathered a child.”
- Some 18 female gang members compared to 6% non-gang girls had “ever given birth to a child.”
- Although the difference is not significant, still more gang members than non-gang members had STDs (7.4% vs. 5.7%).

The gang/non-gang differences were statistically significant among 4 of the 7 items listed on Table 10. The percentages regarding the other 3 items: birth control on last sexual intercourse, teen-mothers, and STDs, were all higher among gang members, but were statistically non-significant between these two groups.

Self-Reported Criminal Behavior and Violent Crime

Self-reported crimes are summarized in Table 11 and Table 12. Table 11 displays self-reported delinquency between gang and non-gang members. Table 12 includes self-reported reasons for the current arrest.

A pattern of very strong differences emerged between the two groups in terms of self-reported delinquency in the last 12 months before their last arrest. Here is the profile of these aggregated findings. Among all the 7 questions, gang members compared to non-gang members were more likely to report that they had experienced stealing things from a store, damaging property just for fun, gambling, hitting or beating up someone, and threatening to physically hurt someone.

Only about 5% of gang members compared to 26% of non-gang members said they had not fought in the last 12 months. Among gang members who reported had a physical fight, about 30% of their fights had occurred to gang members themselves.

- The majority of gang members (about 82%) had been arrested at least twice before this survey (56% for non-gang members)
- Of those gang members who had been arrested more than once, a substantial proportion (about 40%) reported 5 or more arrests.
- One in two gang members who had been arrested, were first arrested by the age of 12.
- On the average, gang members were a half-year younger than non-gang members when they were arrested for the first time.

A pattern of weak differences emerged in comparing gang members and non-gang members in terms of their “.....found guilty of their last arrest” (Table 12). Of the 6 categories of crimes, almost equal proportions of gang and non-gang members were found guilty for person offense (22.9% vs. 19%), property offense (35.7% vs. 35.9%), and other offense. Relatively fewer gang members than non-gang members were charged with a driving offense which could be understood under the general notion that gang members were more likely to commit, therefore, to be charged for, serious crimes.

Surprisingly, proportion of drug offense for their current arrest was lower among gang members than non-gang members. This finding was quite inconsistent with self-reported criminal behavior in this study in which a substantial proportion of gang members reported drug selling/dealing in their lives. The possible explanation for this contradiction could be the possible difference between self-reported crime and official data on juvenile crime.

According to the National Center for Juvenile Justice (Snyder & Sicknund, 1999), official records under-represent juvenile criminal behavior. Many juvenile crimes are never reported to authorities. The fact is many juveniles who commit offenses are never arrested. Or, if they are arrested, they are not arrested for all of the crimes they have committed. As a result, official records may systematically underestimate the scope of juvenile crime. Self-reported studies, like this one, can capture valuable information on behavior that may never come to the attention of the criminal justice system. On the other hand, official records do measure certain levels of juvenile crime, monitor justice system activity, and provide information on criminal justice caseloads. Given the problems in both self-reported data and official records, the full understanding of the severity and scope of juvenile crime, thus, must rely on using and integrating both self-reported and official records. The combination of the two will provide greater insight into crime and victimization.

Table 10. Sexual Activity, Sexual Transmitted Diseases, & Teen Pregnancy

	Gang (97)	Non-Gang (254)	Significance p(Chi-square)
Never Sexual Intercourse	5.4%	29.9%	a
At least 5 or More Sexual Partners	58.1%	30.3%	a
No Birth control Last Sex	41.7%	25.5%	n.s
Been Pregnant or Got Someone Pregnant	38.0%	14.2%	a
Females: Given Birth to a Child	17.9%	6.3%	n.s
Males: Fathered a Child/Children	19.4%	4.0%	a
Had Sexually Transmitted Diseases	7.4%	5.7%	n.s

Table 11. Self-Reported Criminal Behaviors between Gang and Non-Gang

	Gang (97)	Non-Gang (254)	Significance p(Chi-square)
Stolen something from a store in 12 months	67.4%	53.8%	c
Damaged property just for fun in 12 months	70.2%	39.7%	a
Gambled in 12 months	82.6%	48.0%	a
Hit or beat up someone in 12 months	91.5%	62.6%	a
Threatened to physically hurt someone in 12 months	85.1%	52.8%	a
In physical fight in 12 months	88.4%	64.3%	a
Question: Who did you fight the last time you were in a physical fight?			a
I did not fight	4.9%	26.2%	
A total stranger	21.0%	11.2%	
A friend/someone I know	25.9%	30.5%	
A boyfriend/girlfriend/date	3.7%	3.4%	
Gang member	28.4%	5.6%	
A parent/sibling/other	9.9%	9.4%	
relative	6.2%	13.7%	
None of the above			
Number of times been arrested			a
Once	17.6%	44.0%	
2 or more	82.4%	56.0%	
Age when first arrested (mean age for each group)	Age: 12.5	Age: 13	

Note: Chi-square statistics for comparisons of gang and non-gang members.

- a. p<.001
- b. p<.01
- c. p<.05

Table 12. Self-Reported Reasons for the Last Arrest

	Gang (97)	Non-Gang (254)	Significance P(Chi-square)
Person Offense	22.9%	19.0%	n.s
Property Offense	35.7%	35.9%	
Driving Offense	4.3%	8.5%	
Drug Offense	15.7%	24.8%	
Weapon	8.6%	1.3%	
Other	12.9%	10.5%	

Note: Chi-square statistics for comparisons of gang and non-gang members.

a. $p < .001$

b. $p < .01$

c. $p < .05$

Summary and Conclusion

The 1998 Muskegon County Juvenile Division Survey was jointly conducted by the Muskegon County Health Department and the Muskegon County Family Court. This was a cohort study focused on the entire population of juvenile offenders during the summer of 1998. A total of 369 individuals were surveyed, with the response rate exceeding 95 percent. The survey was comprehensive and the size was so large that it allowed the data to be extrapolated for all juvenile offenders of the system. The survey result provides valuable information about the extent and scope of the juvenile offenders' criminal behaviors, drug use and drug dealing, and characteristics and criminal involvement of gang and non-gang members.

The following summarizes key findings from the survey:

- **Demographics:** The age distribution ranged from 11 to 17 with an average of age 15. One-half of the respondents were minorities. Two-thirds were boys.
- **Social economic/psychological situation:** About 20% of their families were on the "food stamp" program and 15% of the families received welfare checks. About 60% of the respondents came from single-parent families. Twenty-one percent reported being mentally abused, 14% being physically abused, 12% being sexually abused, or raped. About 18% reported attempting suicide in the last 12 months before their current arrest.
- **Types of offense:** Based on self-reported data, 20% of these juvenile offenders were charged with person offense, 36% with property offense, 8% with driving offense, 22% with drug law violation, 4% with carrying/using concealed weapons, and 11% were arrested with other offenses.
- **Drug use:** More than two-thirds of the respondents were current drinkers. About two-thirds were current marijuana users. About 20% reported ever using cocaine in their lifetime. About 17% were current cocaine users. About 15% had ever tried crack. Over one-third had ever tried other illicit drugs including LSD, PCP, and Heroin.
- **Drug use and drug selling:** There was a positive correlation between drug use and drug selling. That means those who used illicit drugs were more likely those who were involved in drug selling. For instance, almost all the drug dealers used marijuana. Nine in ten of those, who were involved in drug selling, were current marijuana users. One in five of the drug dealers were current cocaine users.
- **Drug dealing and teen-parenthood:** Drug dealing and fatherhood were positively correlated. Eight in 10 teen-fathers indicated that they were involved in drug selling. The proportion of drug selling among teen-fathers was double that of male respondents who were not fathering a child.

- **Sex, STDs, teen pregnancy, and teen parenthood:** About 76% of the total had “ever had sexual intercourse.” Among those who had been sexually active, 40% indicated having 5 or more sexual partners during their lifetime, and 40% had never used or seldom used birth control methods when they had sex. About 6% had ever had STDs. Twenty percent of the total “had been pregnant or got someone else pregnant.” About 9% of each sex were teen parents.

Gang and Non-gang Members

- **Gang and non-gang comparison:** Criminal behavior reported by gang members was extensive and significantly exceed that committed by non-gang members. About 27% or 97 of the respondents reported that they had ever been gang members. The key findings from this study are as followed.
- **Demographically speaking, gang members in this study shared many common traits with non-gang members:** both groups were similar in age, gender, racial/ethnic composition, family economic background, and living arrangement. The big difference between the two groups exists in certain social psychological conditions. Gang members were significantly more likely than non-gang members to have been sexually abused or raped (21% vs. 9%). Gang members were significantly more likely to report that they had attempted suicide in the last 12 months before the survey (27% vs. 14%). Among all individuals who reported suicide attempts, gang members were more likely to indicate that their suicide attempts resulted in injury, or poisoning, or overdose that had to be treated by a doctor or nurses (20% vs. 12%).
- **Carrying/Using gun:** Carrying a gun was far more prevalent among gang members than among non-gang (59% vs. 13%) members. One in two gang members had used a gun in a crime in the last 12 months before their current arrests (55% vs. 15%). One in five gang members carried a gun all the time (20% vs. 3%).
- **Drug dealing:** Gang members were more extensively involved in drug dealing (78% compared to 30% of non-gang members).
- **Drug use:** The gang and non-gang difference was little in alcohol and marijuana use. Other drugs, such as cocaine or crack use was far greater for gang members than non-gang members. For instance, lifetime cocaine use was 30% among gang members compared to 14% for non-gang members. Current cocaine use was 23% among gang members compared to 13% among non-gang members. More gang members had ever used crack than non-gang members (27% vs. 10%).
- **Sexual activity:** Overall, gang members were more likely than non-gang members to report that they had 5 or more sexual partners (58% vs. 30%).
- **Teen pregnancy/Teen parenthood:** More gang members than non-gang members used no birth control during their last sex (42% vs. 26%). More gang members than non-gang members had been pregnant or gotten someone pregnant (38% vs. 14%). More teen parents were found among gang members than among non-gang members.

- **The percentage of STDs** reported by gang members was slightly higher than by non-gang members (7.4% vs. 5.7%).
- **Self-reported criminal behavior:** The proportion of self-reported criminal behavior and violence in the last 12 months before current arrest among gang members was significantly higher than that among non-gang members. Included in the report were stealing (67% vs. 54%), damaging property just for fun (70% vs. 40%), gambling (83% vs. 48%), hitting or beating up someone (92% vs. 63%), threatening to physically hurt someone (85% vs. 53%), and physical fight (95% vs. 74%). About one-third of the gang members indicated that they fought with other gang members in their last physical fight.
- Most gang members had been arrested at least twice (82% vs. 56% of non-gang members). The average age for the first arrest among gang members was a half-year younger than non-gang members (age 12.5 vs. 13).
- Slightly more gang members than non-gang members were last arrested for carrying/using weapons (9% vs. 1%) and person offense (23% vs. 19%).

Analysis of this data by the Muskegon County Health Department and the Muskegon Family Court will continue and the related data such as police official records should be combined in the future data analysis. It is important to use these data to accurately identify, define, and understand the problem, in terms of the nature of youth crime, youths who are at risk, and youth crime context.

Youth crime is a community issue. So the real challenge is to develop appropriate community-orientated strategies and interventions for the reduction of youth crime. That means community-based agencies and local groups must collaborate with criminal justice agencies in surveillance and sharing information, under conditions that protect the community. These strategies need to be combined in appropriate ways depending on the specific crime context, the mission of the particular organization, and the kind of youths targeted for special attention.

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Appendix A: Juvenile Court Clients Profile (N=369)

	N	%
Age		
Age 12 or Younger	27	7.4%
Age 13	36	10.0%
Age 14	67	18.6%
Age 15	83	23.0%
Age 16	106	29.4%
Age 17 or Older	42	11.6%
Age Average: 15		
Gender		
Male	261	71.7%
Female	103	28.3%
Ethnic Background		
White	176	48.9%
Black	100	27.8%
Hispanic	30	8.3%
Native American	30	8.3%
Other	24	6.7%
Living Arrangement		
Living with both parents	144	40.2%
Living with mother	126	35.2%
Living with Father	24	6.7%
Alternating between parents	23	6.4%
Living with grandparents	10	2.8%
Living with other relative	14	3.9%
Living with non-relative	17	4.7%
Social Economic Situation		
Family using food stamps	73	20.4%
Family receiving welfare checks	52	14.6%
Social Psychological Situation		
Been physically abused	49	13.8%
Been mentally abused	73	20.7%
Been sexually abused/raped	44	12.4%
Attempted suicide in 12 months	63	17.6%
Ever Been Suspended/expelled from a School for Disciplinary Problems?	268	76.0%