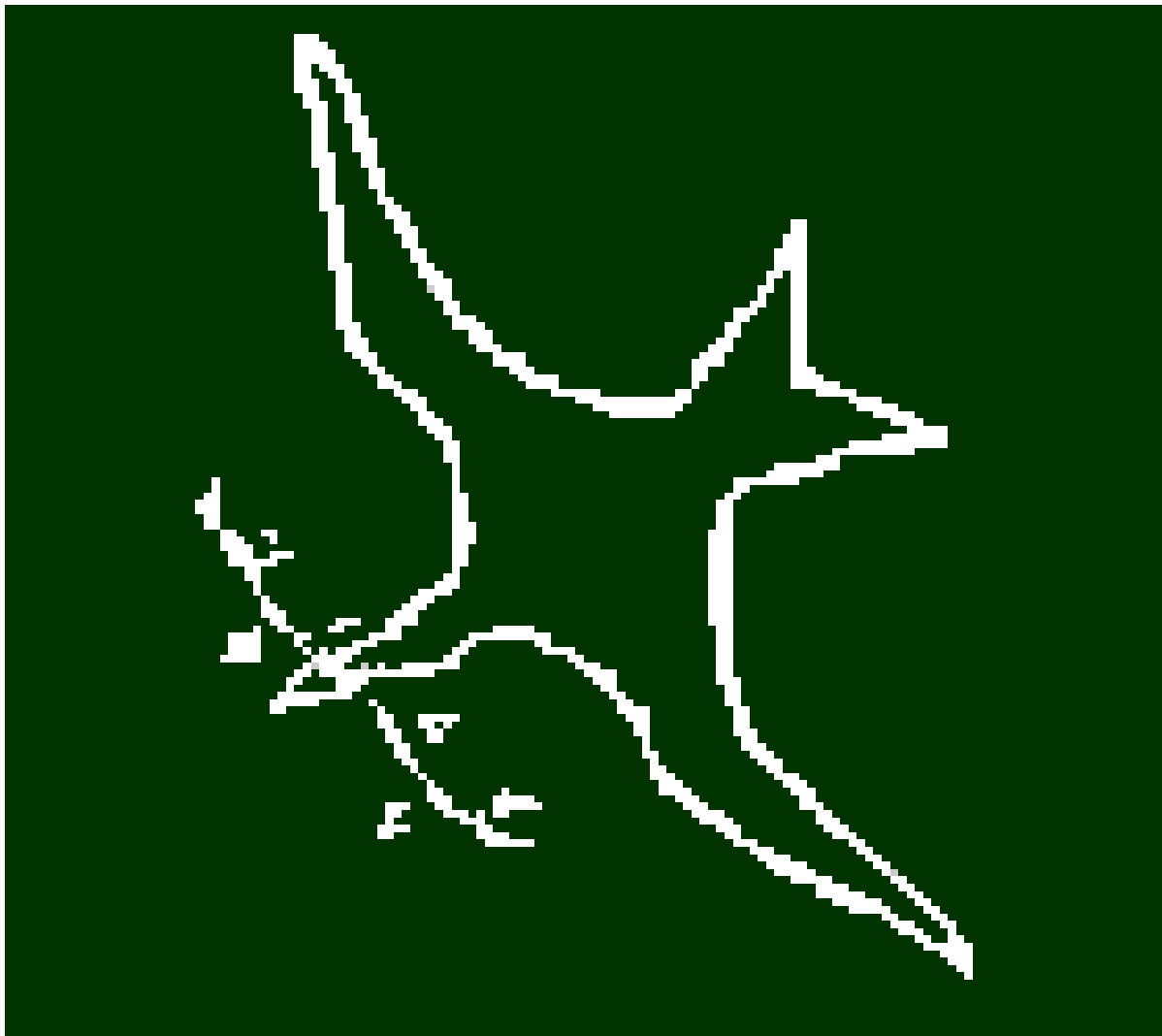


# Human Development and Violence Prevention: A Focus on Youth

Kirk R. Williams, Nancy G. Guerra, and Delbert S. Elliott



Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence

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Nancy G. Guerra  
Delbert S. Elliott

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Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence

Institute of Behavioral Science

University of Colorado, Boulder

1877 Broadway, Suite 601

Boulder, CO 80802

Phone: (303) 492-1032 Fax: (303) 443-3297

E-mail: [cspv@colorado.edu](mailto:cspv@colorado.edu)

[www.colorado.edu/cspv](http://www.colorado.edu/cspv)

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Research findings on patterns and trends of violence in America suggest that it is a pressing social problem, especially for the nation's youth. Accordingly, youth violence has received enormous attention through new funding initiatives, documentaries, feature films, special legislative sessions, and media coverage. However, prevention and intervention efforts have often been implemented in a piecemeal fashion, with little guiding theory or systematic organization of efforts. In response to this concern, "Human Development and Violence Prevention: A Focus on Youth," delineates a theoretical framework to guide research, policy, and action plans, ranging from individual level programming to system reform.

### Patterns and Trends of Violence in America

Data from various sources show that the *onset*, *desistance*, *continuity*, and *types of violence* vary by age and are influenced by the setting in which it occurs. For example:

- The onset of violence peaks between ages 14-16
- Prevalence of violence is highest between ages 15-19
- Involvement with violence is usually short-lived, lasting from 1-3 years
- For some individuals violence continues, although this is influenced by whether successful transitions are complete, for example, entry into the work force

These findings suggest that analyzing violence in connection with human development will provide a greater understanding of this destructive problem. Such an analysis should trace the multiple pathways to violence in order to infuse prevention strategies into the dynamics of human development at different stages of the life course. These strategies must be crafted to remove *barriers* and buttress *supports* to prosocial and health enhancing behavior, regardless of whether they emphasize direct services to individuals through programs and activities or indirect services through contextual change and system reform. An *Ecological Model of Life Course Development* is proposed.

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## An Ecological Model of Life Course Development and Violence Prevention

The ecological model emphasizes three key concepts to guide thinking about human development and violence prevention:

- *Developmental Stages* represent age groupings marked by changes in biology, social identity, and social settings, with five distinct stages spanning the period of infancy through adolescence.
- *Transitions* and *Pathways* represent changes over the life course. Transitions refer to entry into new developmental stages, and *pathways* refer to the sequencing of transitions and experiences within stages over the life course.
- *Nested Social Contexts* refer to the multiple and interconnected social contexts of development, including family, friends, school, community, and workplace.

As people move through different **developmental stages**, their adaptations can be either **health enhancing** or **health compromising** responses, such as violence. The issue is to determine the individual, contextual, and system attributes that influence positive or negative adaptations, that is, provide *supports* or act as *barriers* for meeting developmental needs at each stage and across multiple **contexts**.

Not only must prevention strategies address needs at each stage, they must also address how people make **transitions** to the next stages and the specific **pathways** they pursue. Meeting the needs of each new stage through positive involvement is important, but it is equally important that these needs be met at the appropriate time. Age-graded transitions that are **off time** can have negative consequences. For example, early entry into the work force (before age 18) has been associated with delinquent behavior and lower future earnings, although after age 18, the failure to make this transition increases later problem behavior.

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## A Framework for Prevention Strategies

The focus here is on the direction of human adaptations over time as people move through different developmental stages in various social settings. This issue is connected to the process of integrating and implementing services to supplement *healthy human development*.

**Three questions** are crucial when thinking about the types of services that can help people meet developmental needs, and they should be posed for each developmental stage:

- Do individuals have the required **skills** to meet developmental needs and perform socially appropriate developmental tasks?
- Do social contexts and systems afford the **opportunity** for doing so?
- Are human experiences within contexts sufficiently **sanctioned** (positively and/or negatively) to promote healthy human development?

These three questions can be incorporated into a model for action emphasizing *Skills, Opportunities, and Sanctions (SOS)*. These actions must be relevant for the population. In other words, they must be available within specific settings and must be appropriate or meaningful for persons in those settings.

### Successful Adaptation through SOS

**Skills** are characteristics individuals need for successful participation in meeting developmental needs

**Opportunities** are contextual or systemic characteristics that allow or facilitate healthy participation

**Sanctions** are positive and negative consequences that can shape health enhancing behavior

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## Implications for Existing Resources and Activities

The *Ecological Model of Life Course Development* can be used to assess the violence prevention potential of services currently provided for youth. A set of charts has been provided that outline developmental needs across contexts from infancy through late adolescence. Drawing on these charts, the following five questions guide their application to these services:

- Are **goals** developmentally appropriate, that is, clearly compatible with developmental needs and tasks for populations served, or what additional needs and tasks should be addressed?
- Are the specific **approaches, resources, and activities** implemented in appropriate **contexts** for this population and this stage of development, or what contextual influences should be included?
- Are the specific **approaches, resources, and activities** clearly aligned with meeting developmental needs and promoting the successful performance of developmental tasks for this stage? In other words, are they potential **developmental supports** and/or are they targeted to **reduce barriers to development**, and how could this be enhanced?
- Are **supports available/ barriers reduced** for enhancement of personal **skills**, increased **opportunities** for participation and **sanctions** for behavior?
- Are these actions and services **available** and are they perceived by the population served as **appropriate** for their lives and social settings?

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A **step-by-step approach** can be followed to apply this model to existing services. The following steps are suggested:

- **Step 1: Developmental needs** of the age group served and relevant social **contexts** should be specified, drawing on charts provided.
- **Step 2:** The **overall goal** and **core assumptions** should be specified in order to assess compatibility with developmental needs.
- **Step 3:** Services can then be evaluated in terms of the **five key questions**, highlighting identification of components that are directly related to violence prevention, have violence prevention potential, or need further modification to improve efficacy.
- **Step 4:** New **approaches, resources** or **activities** to enhance the violence prevention potential and/or measure impact can be suggested. These responses should be assessed in terms of increasing **developmental supports** and **reducing barriers** by providing **opportunities** for participation, **skill** enhancement, and **sanctions**, as well as how they are perceived by the population served.



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## **HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND VIOLENCE PREVENTION: A FOCUS ON YOUTH**

The tragedy of violence is beyond dispute. Surely the anguish of parents seeing their children's blood in the streets of American cities is enough to warrant this claim. Violence is symptomatic of social disarray and in itself shreds the social fabric. The need for collaborative efforts to prevent violence is also beyond dispute and should be fully supported. However, such efforts should be informed by a careful assessment of what we know about this problem and the implied guidelines for strategic action.

This paper provides such an assessment, including an analysis of the nature and extent of violence in America, the multiple pathways to violence, and the potential segues to divert or block these pathways. The intent is to avoid distorted images and well-intended but misguided efforts that waste scarce resources, or even worse, actually aggravate the violence problem.

Furthermore, the paper is written from the perspective that violence is a complex problem requiring a complex solution. No singular focus will suffice, and the search for a "magic pill" is illusory. Promising prevention strategies should be guided by an interdisciplinary framework, sensitive to the dynamics of human development in multiple and changing social settings over the life course. Moreover, rather than assuming "new" programs are necessary, existing resources and activities may have considerable violence prevention potential. Identifying and carefully integrating them into a comprehensive plan is an efficient and effective prevention strategy.

Information on violence and a conceptual model for understanding its causation and prevention are provided. Available data are analyzed to document trends and patterns in America. The focus is on lethal and non-lethal forms of serious interpersonal violence, such as homicide, physical and sexual assault, and robbery. The findings are linked to the theoretical model, which emphasizes the changing conditions of living as people go through various stages of life course development. The utility of the model for crafting comprehensive prevention strategies is discussed, and this approach is illustrated by applying the model to a system reform effort, supported by The Annie E. Casey Foundation, that seeks to change the way youth are processed by the juvenile justice system.

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## Trends and Patterns in America

Data for this analysis are national in scope and derived from two primary methods of gathering information on violence: Surveys and official records. Two types of survey data are used—one based on self-reports of victimization experiences and the other self-reports of perpetration. The victimization data are drawn from the ongoing National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), conducted annually by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (see Chart 1). Self-reported data on perpetration come from two sources: the Monitoring the Future Study (MFS) and the National Youth Survey (NYS). These surveys are outlined in Charts 2 and 3, respectively (see p. 10).

### CHART 1

#### NATIONAL CRIME VICTIMIZATION SURVEY

DESIGN:	Longitudinal 3year Sample Cohorts
SAMPLE:	Stratified, Multi-Stage Cluster Sample; Persons in Household over age 12.
WAVES:	1972-1993 (Annual, 1993 most recent available)
ATTRITION:	4% (1992 wave)
DATA:	▶ Annual Data ▶ Completed and attempted criminal offenses ▶ Violent Crime: rape, robbery, and assault ▶ Crimes are measured by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• frequency</li><li>• impact of crimes</li><li>• characteristics of victims and offenders</li><li>• circumstances surrounding crimes</li><li>• patterns of reporting to police</li></ul>

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**CHART 2**

**MONITORING THE FUTURE STUDY**

DESIGN:	Longitudinal, panel design Birth cohorts for follow-up surveys 1-10 years after high school graduation.
SAMPLE:	High School Seniors from 125-135 high schools throughout the nation. Three stage cluster sample: 1) geographic area, 2) school, 3) students within each school.
WAVES:	Annual, beginning 1975
ATTRITION:	11% first year follow-up to 3-% for the oldest classes (1980-1983)
DATA:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Drugs:</b> use, beliefs, attitudes &amp; exposure to</li><li>• <b>Education:</b> values, experiences and environment</li><li>• <b>Work and leisure</b> values and attitudes</li><li>• <b>Sex roles and family</b> values, attitudes and expectations</li><li>• <b>Population</b> concerns</li><li>• <b>Conservation, materialism,</b> pollution, etc.</li><li>• <b>Religion:</b> affiliation, views</li><li>• <b>Politics:</b> affiliation, activity, views</li><li>• <b>Deviant Behavior &amp; Victimization</b></li><li>• <b>Social Problems &amp; Social Change</b></li><li>• <b>Major social institutions:</b> attitudes, confidence</li><li>• <b>Interpersonal Relationships</b></li><li>• <b>Race Relations</b></li><li>• <b>Concern for others</b></li><li>• <b>Happiness</b> and other <b>personality variables</b> (self-esteem, etc.)</li><li>• <b>Demographic</b> characteristics and family background</li><li>• <b>Health Habits and Symptoms</b></li></ul>

**CHART 3**

**NATIONAL YOUTH SURVEY**

DESIGN:	Projected Longitudinal Multiple Birth Cohort
SAMPLE:	National Probability Sample of Households Youth 11-17 in 1976 N=1725
WAVES:	1976-1980 Annual
ATTRITION:	5-13% Waves 1-8
DATA:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Annual Data</li><li>• Delinquent Behavior</li><li>• Drug Use</li><li>• Sexual Activity</li><li>• Violence</li><li>• Theoretical Predictors from Strain, Social Control, and Social Learning Theories</li></ul>

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The survey data estimate non-lethal forms of interpersonal violence. Data on the lethality of violence (i.e., homicide) are obtained from the Supplementary Homicide Report (SHR), which is collected as a part of the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting Program. These are official statistics assembled by local police agencies and reported to the FBI (see Chart 4).

<b>CHART 4</b>	
<b>SUPPLEMENTARY HOMICIDE REPORTS (SHR)</b>	
<b>DESIGN:</b>	Longitudinal
<b>SAMPLE:</b>	Geographical Areas Law Enforcement Reports (Uniform Crime Reports)
<b>WAVES:</b>	Annual, beginning 1976 (for victim and offender information)
<b>ATTRITION:</b>	Voluntary Reporting
<b>DATA:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Annual Homicide Data</li><li>• Month and year homicide occurred</li><li>• Geographic location of crime</li><li>• Number of victims and offenders per event</li><li>• Nature, means used, and precipitating events resulting in death</li><li>• Information on victim/offender relationships</li><li>• Age, sex, race, ethnic origin of victims and offenders (since 1976)</li></ul>

Two caveats should be mentioned before presenting findings. First, no data are flawless; that is, all methods of collecting violence data are subject to some degree of error. To illustrate, surveys often suffer sample bias, as in the case of the MFS, which is based on graduating high school seniors. Some of the most violent youth may have dropped out of school or not be in attendance when the survey is conducted. Additionally, valid and reliable self-reports of victimization or perpetration experiences require accurate recall, clarity in the meaning of what happened at a given point in time as well as the individual's involvement in the incident, and truthful responses. Self-reported data can be flawed by problems with any of these issues.

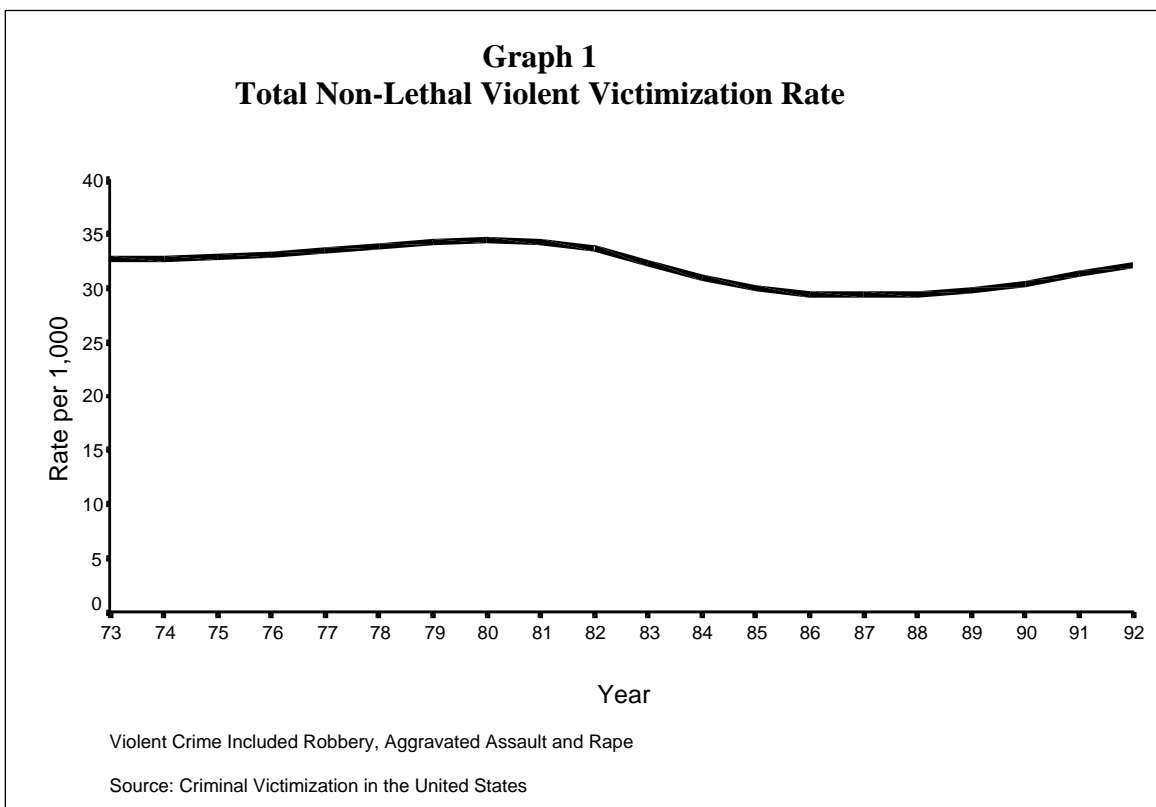
Concerning official data, non-reporting by police agencies, missing information on reported incidents, or misclassification of deaths (e.g., homicide, suicide, etc.) can undermine the validity and reliability of official statistics on homicide. These sources of error do not discredit the utility of survey or official data on violence. They merely alert us to potential problems in doing descriptive research on violence in America.

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Second, documenting national trends and patterns is important for stimulating our thinking about the violence problem, why it is occurring, and what can be done about it. However, violence appears in many forms and varies significantly in seriousness and frequency over time and across geographic areas and population groups. Consequently, local sites must determine the characteristics of their own violence problem using similar or other sources of information (e.g., focus groups, ethnographies, or additional observational methods). Such work is a critical step in building community capacity, developing comprehensive prevention strategies, and informing the (re)allocation of resources.

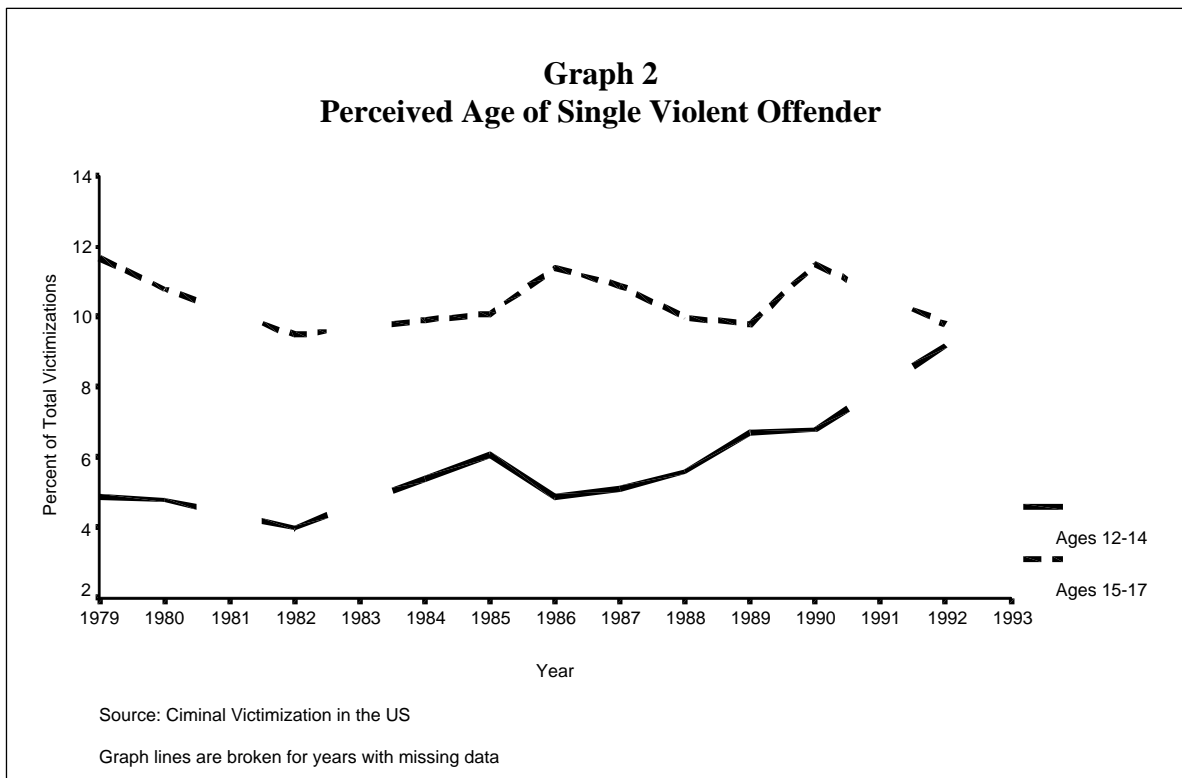
What do these national data sources tell us about violence in America? This question is addressed by summarizing findings on the following issues: Trends in non-lethal violence for the nation, particularly youth; trends in lethal violence, with a focus on age, gender, race, guns, drugs and alcohol, and gangs; and patterns of non-lethal violence, with the emphasis on prevalence, onset, continuity, and desistance by age.

### Trends in Non-Lethal Violence: NCVS and MFS Data



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Contrary to the popular image typically presented in the mass media, serious forms of non-lethal violent victimization have not increased dramatically in this country, at least from the early 1970s to the early 1990s (see Graph 1, p. 12). The trend based on NCVS data has remained relatively constant during this period. However, the overall level of serious non-lethal violence is high, with 30 to 35 victimizations for every 1,000 persons occurring annually in this nation.



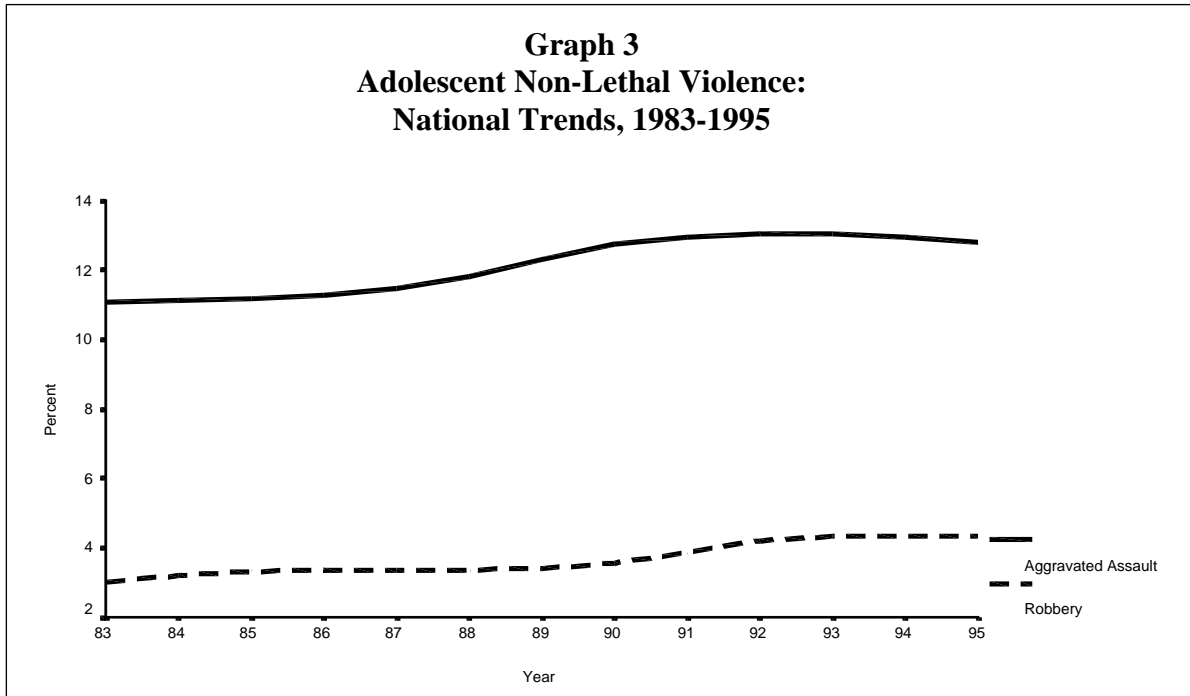
NCVS data also suggest an increasing involvement of younger and younger perpetrators. Graph 2 shows the trends for 12-14 and 15-17 year olds, as perceived by the victims of violence (i.e., their best guess of the perpetrator's age). The trend for 15-17 year olds has remained relatively constant, but that for 12-14 year olds has increased about 80%, from approximately 5% to almost 9% of all victimizations.

The MFS data also show an increasing trend in the youthful perpetration of aggravated assault and robbery (see Graph 3, p. 14). From the early 1980s to the mid-1990s, an increasingly greater percentage of graduating high school seniors report committing these forms of violence. Yet notice that the increasing trend is not particularly dramatic, that is, not enough to warrant the flurry of recent activity

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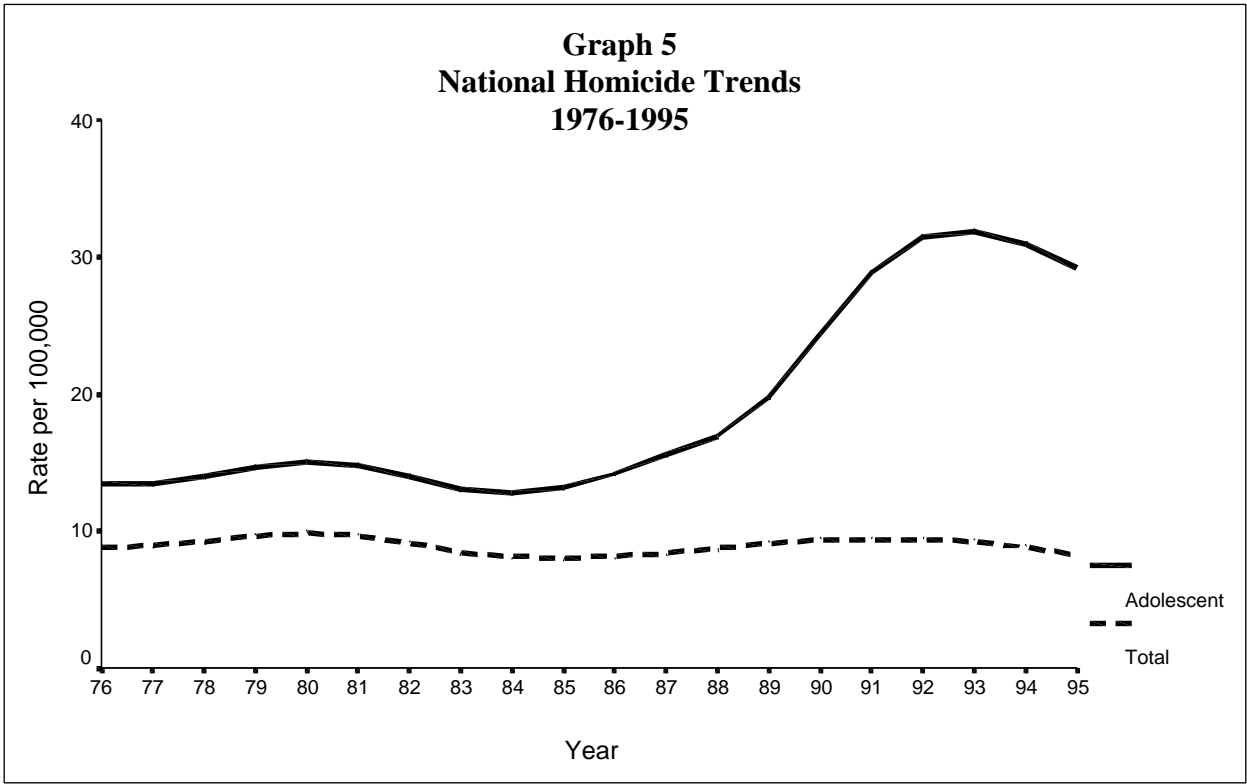
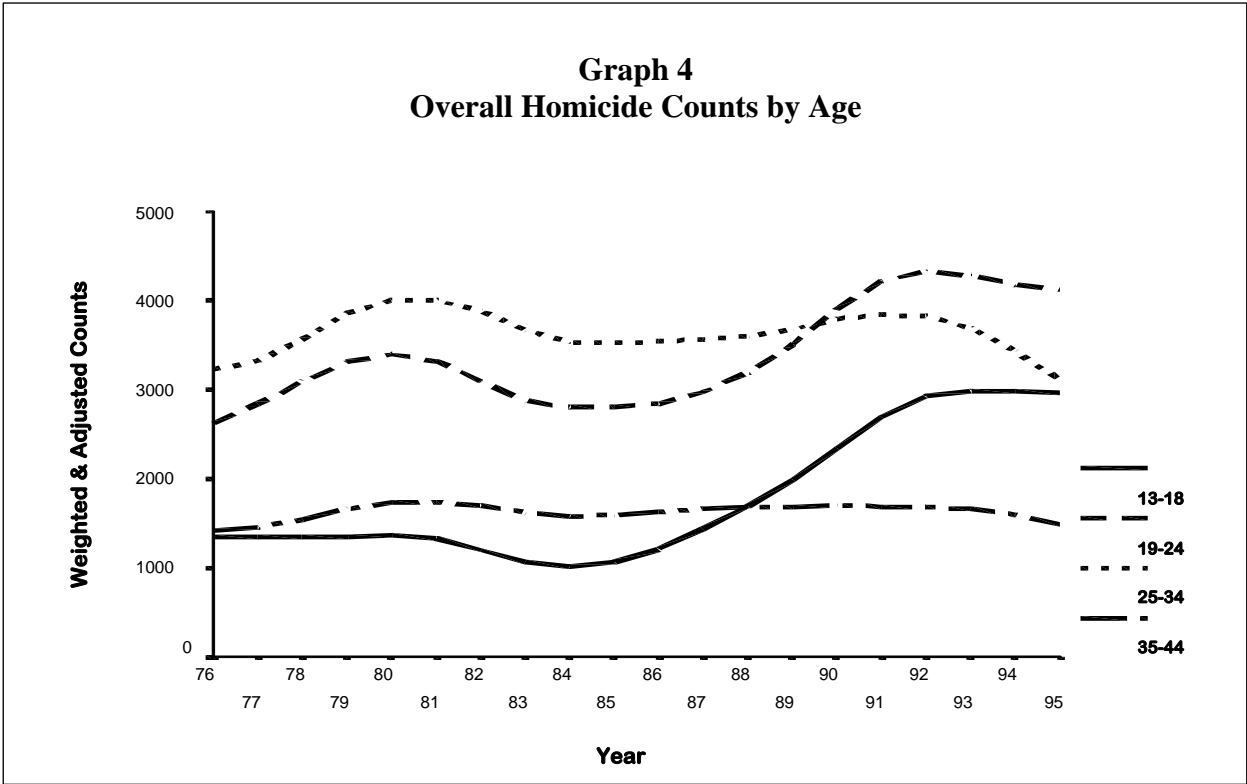
concerning youth violence. What promotes this concern? At least a partial answer can be found by examining the age trends in lethal violence in America (i.e., homicide).



### Trends in Lethal Violence: SHR Data

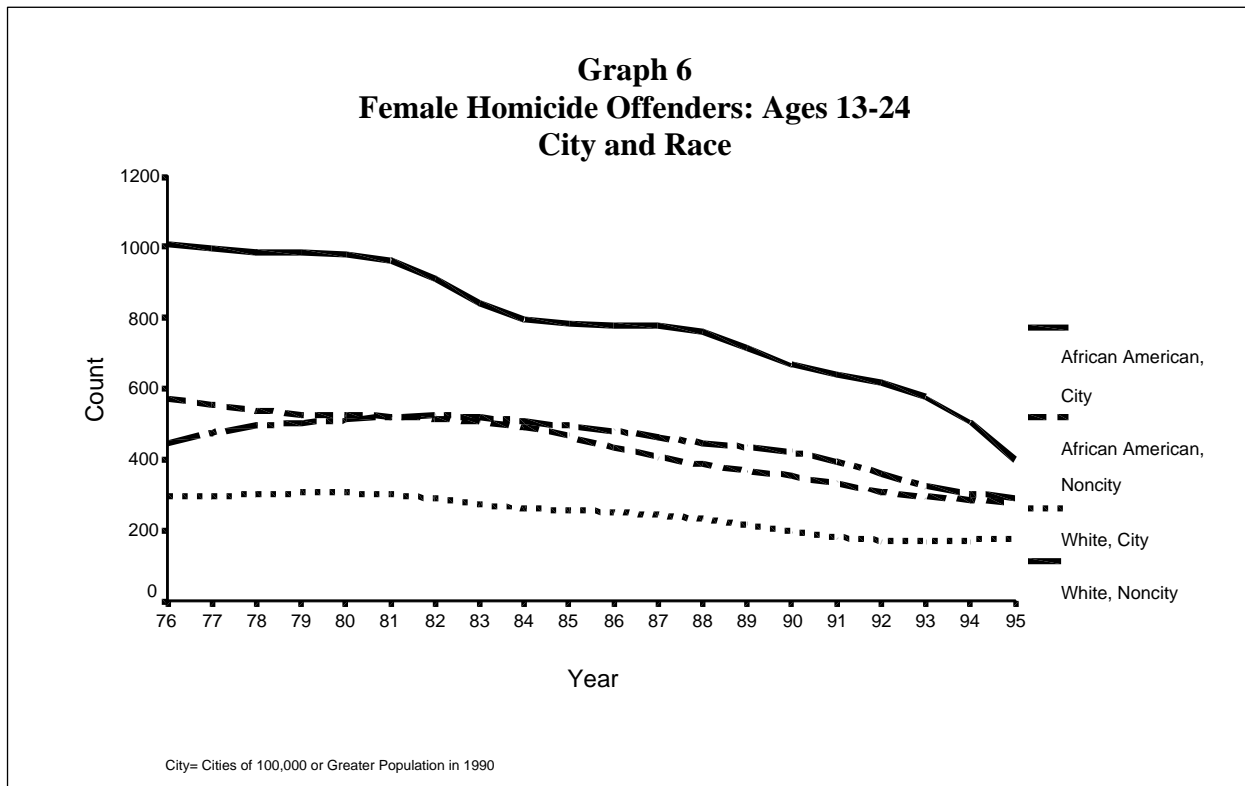
Findings on homicide trends are reported for large cities in the United States (i.e., 100,000 population or more). Homicide is not confined to urban centers, with smaller and more rural areas having their own problems with both lethal and non-lethal violence. However, most of the incidents involving youth as perpetrators (almost two-thirds) occur in these centers, so the focus is on trends in urban America.

Graph 4 (see p. 15) shows trends in the incidence of homicide from 1976 to 1995 by age. It indicates that the trends for older age categories are actually declining during this period, but the trends for the younger age groups are increasing sharply. Those trends will surpass all other age categories in the future if they continue in their current direction. This point is underscored by the trends in Graph 5 (see p. 15), which show the dramatic increase in adolescent homicide compared to the incidence of total homicide. The escalating lethality of violence perpetrated by the youth of this nation is striking, while that for other age groups is remaining relatively constant or declining.





Does this trend hold for adolescent males and females? Differences in lethal violence by gender are well-known, with males having greater involvement than females. In fact, the male incidence of adolescent urban homicide in 1995 was almost 13 times greater than that for females. Moreover, the sharp increase in youth homicide is driven by male involvement, since the trend for adolescent females is actually declining from 1976 to 1995 (see Graph 6). As a result, we decided to present subsequent findings only for adolescent males.



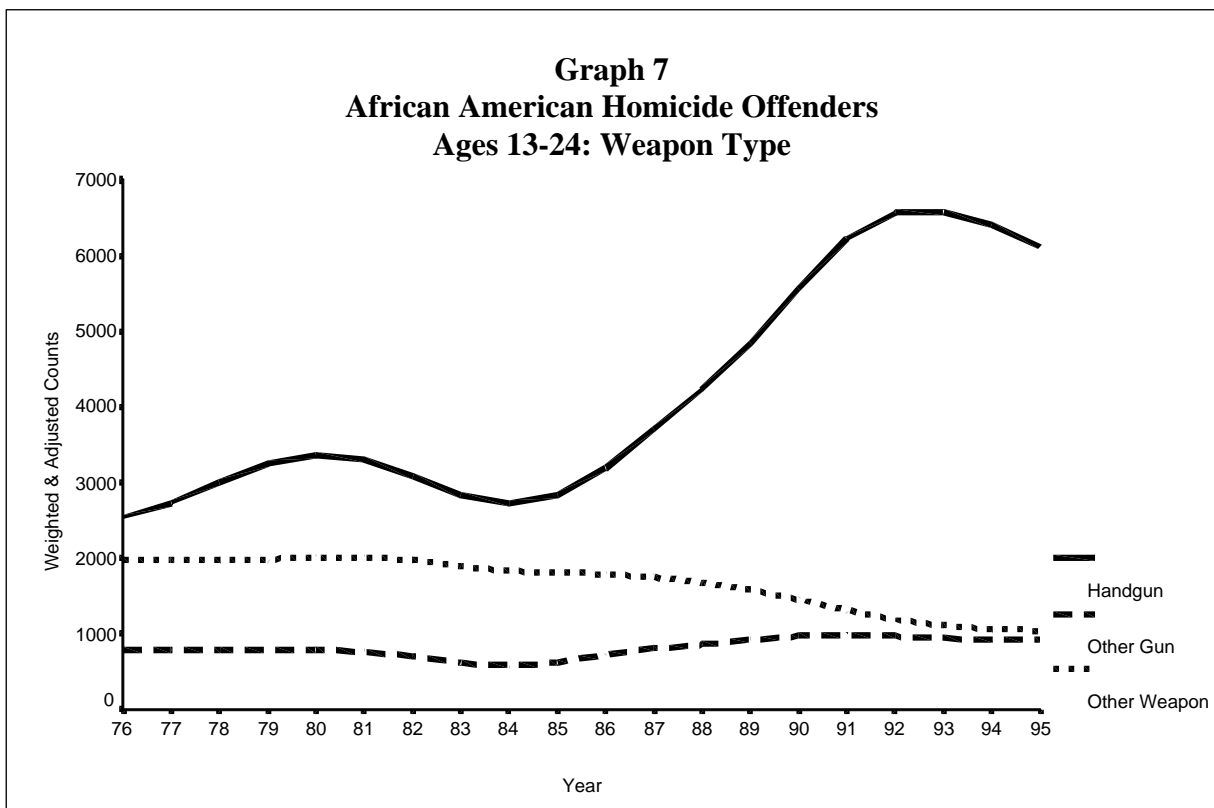
Does the trend in homicide involving young males in urban America hold for different racial groups? Again, racial differences are well-known, with the incidence of urban homicide perpetrated by young African-American males being about three times greater than that for whites, even though they have a much smaller representation in the overall urban population of this country. The issue of race, however, is highly controversial. The fundamental problem is that race, like ethnicity and gender, is closely correlated with many other aspects of social life that interfere with healthy human development. For example, these characteristics of people are often associated with resource deprivation, meaning insufficient resources to maintain a healthy life.

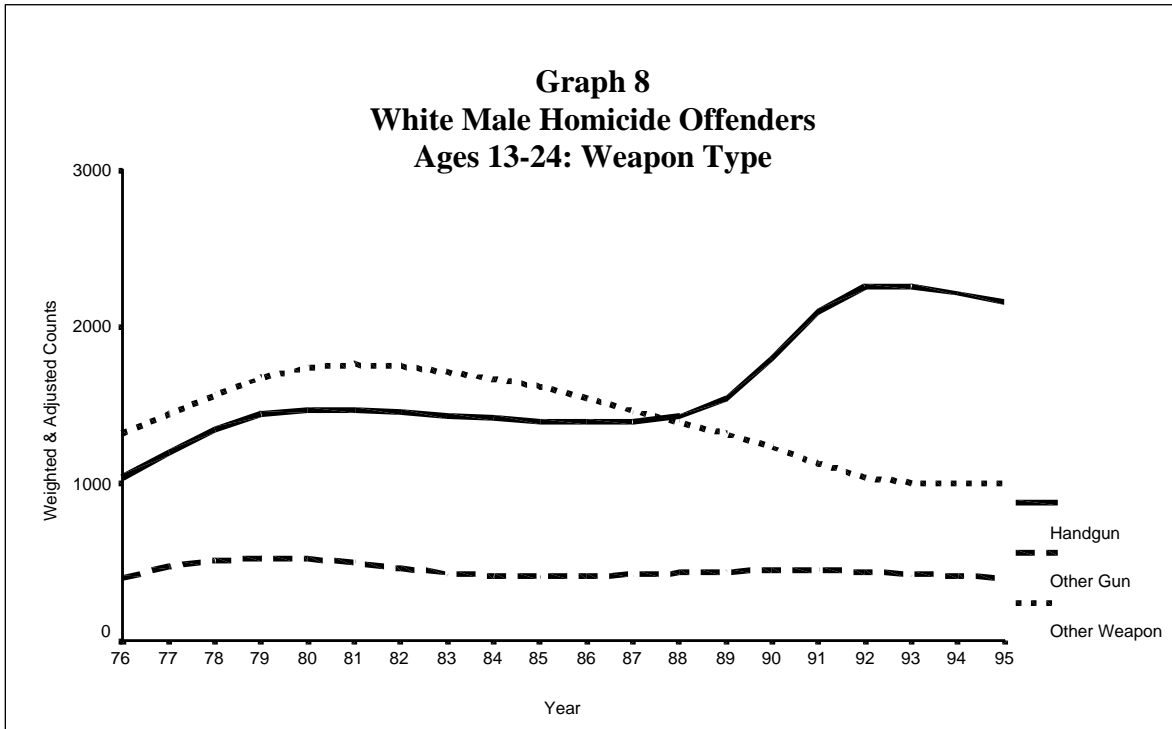
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This includes differential educational and employment opportunities, access to health care and other human services, as well as income poverty and other outcomes of overt and institutionalized discrimination.

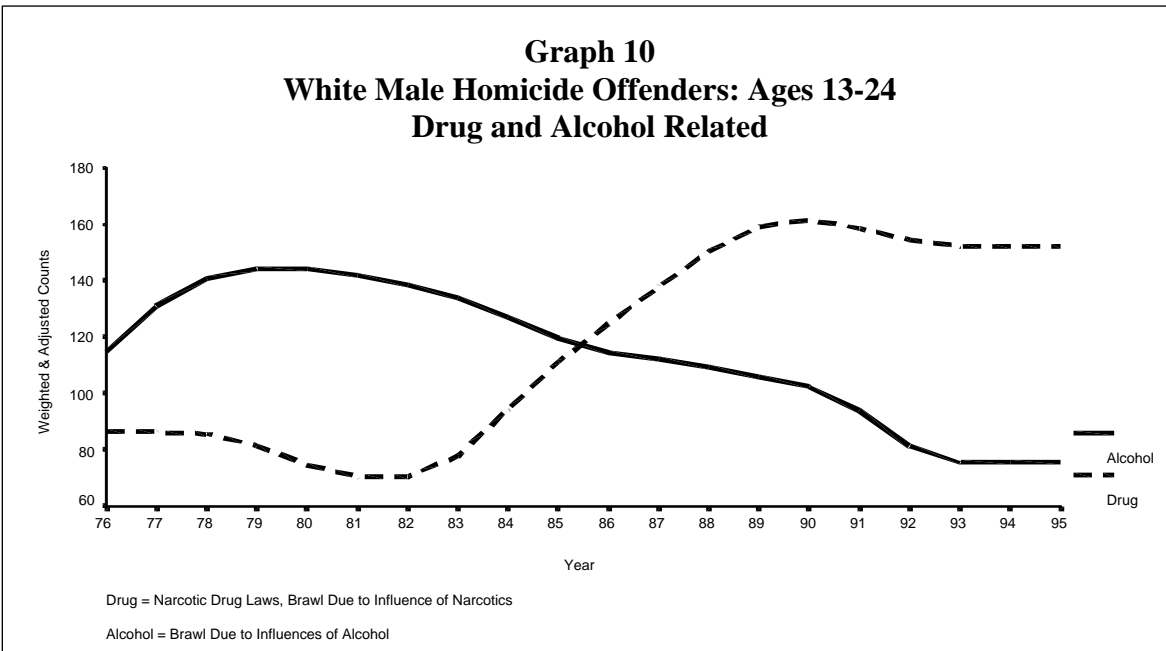
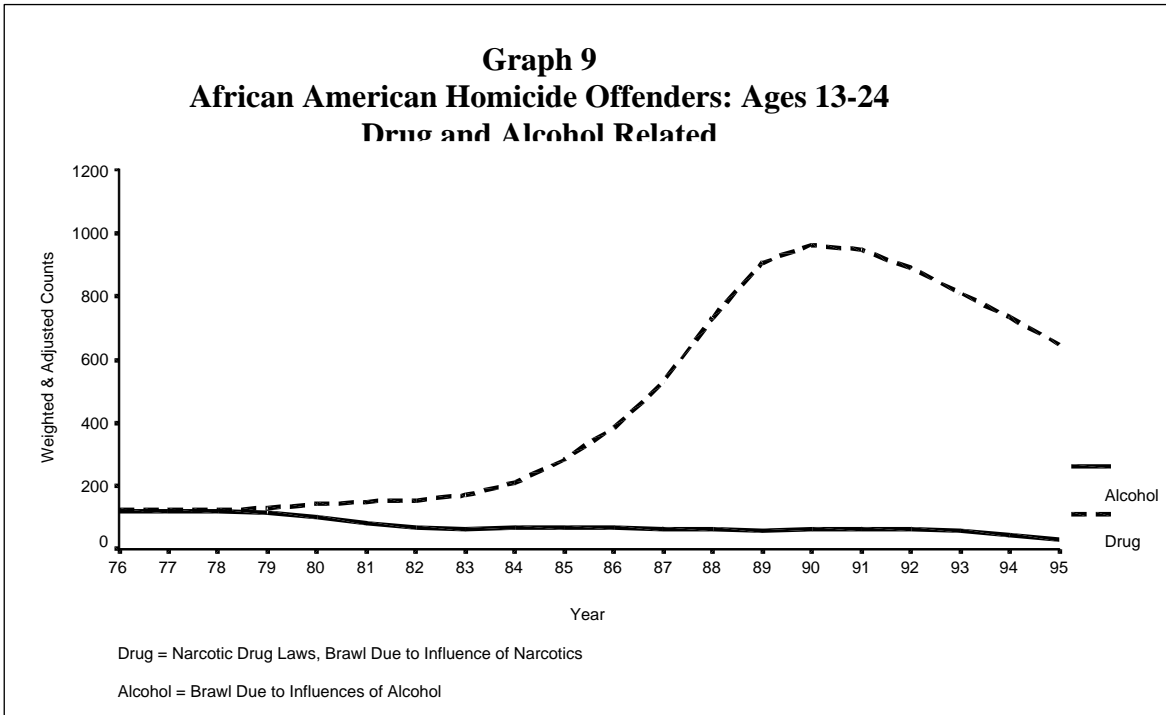
Nonetheless, an extremely important point about subsequent graphs is that regardless of the **absolute difference** in the incidence of homicide by race, the **trends** presented are similar for young urban males, irrespective of their race. For example, consider the trends for weapon use.

Urban homicides involving the use of weapons other than handguns have remained relatively constant or declined for young urban males. However, since the mid-1980s, handguns have clearly become their weapon of choice. Urban homicides involving the use of handguns have increased sharply in recent years for young African-American as well as white males (see Graphs 7 and 8, p. 18, respectively).





Similar trends by race concerning drug and alcohol related homicides are also apparent. Specifically, young African-American males have been increasingly involved in drug related homicides since the early 1980s, with the sharpest increase occurring between 1984 and the early 1990s (see Graph 9, p. 19). Drug related homicides for young white males have followed the same trend (see Graph 10, p. 19), and for both racial groups, the incidence of alcohol related homicides has remained relatively constant and much lower than drug-related homicides in recent years.

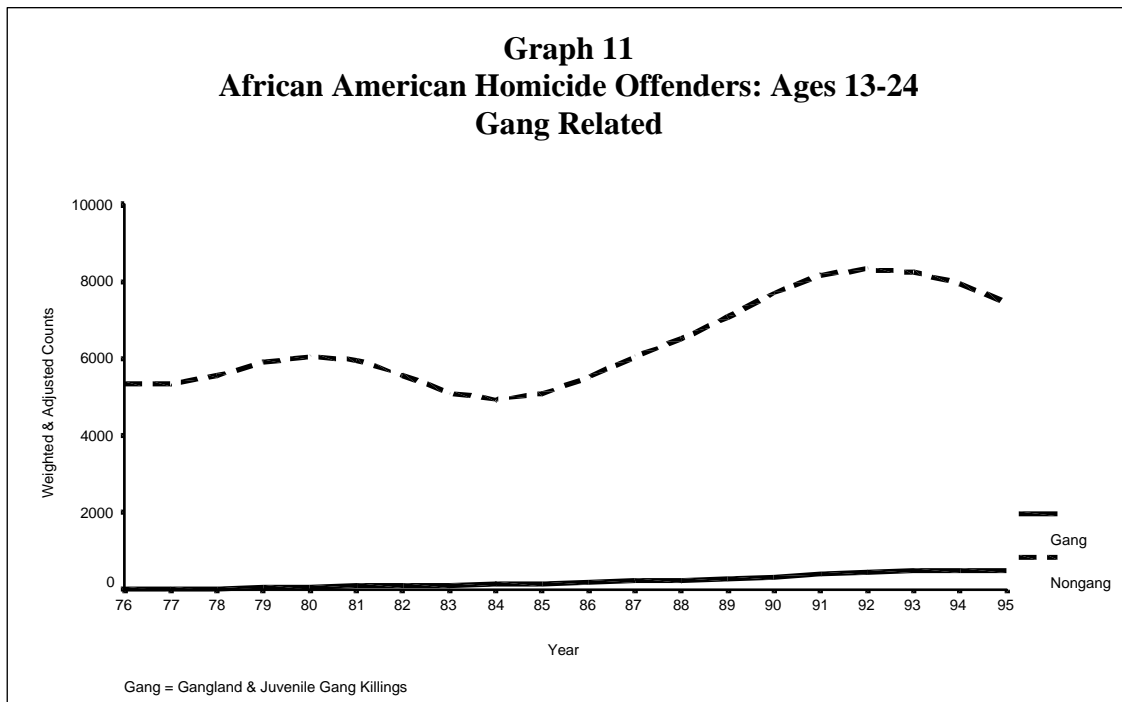


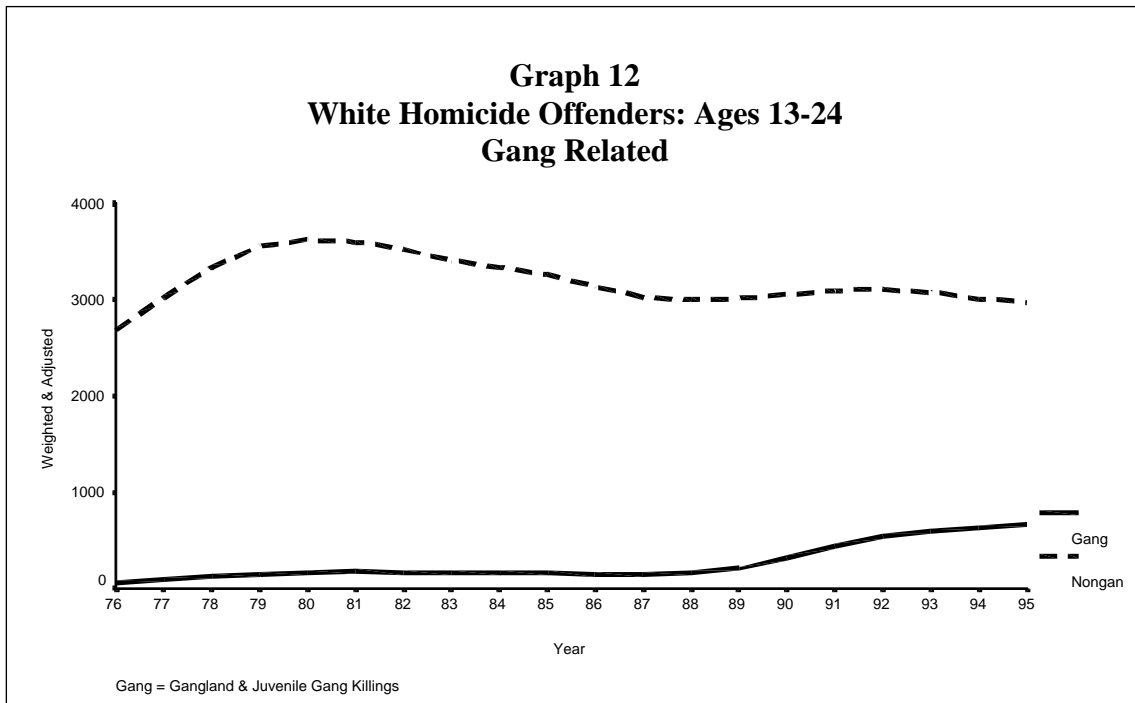
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Perhaps this difference is a result, in part, of the classification procedures of local police. They are instructed by the FBI to code the most serious incident. Hence, if killings occur in connection with drug distribution, they are likely to be classified as drug related, even if alcohol is also present in the situation. Regardless, the sharp increase in drug related urban homicides involving young males, regardless of race, is undeniable.

To what extent can the increase in urban homicides be attributed to gang involvement? This is an important question, given the considerable focus in the mass media to the gang problem. For both African-American (see Graph 11) and white males (see Graph 12, p. 21), only a small percentage of urban homicides involving youth is directly classified as gang related. Granted, local police may vary in their classification of gang involvement, and the indirect influence of gangs on the popular culture of youth in American cities may be substantial (e.g., language, music, dress, and behavioral styles). Nonetheless, these SHR data on urban homicide do not support the assumption that it is a predominantly a gang problem.



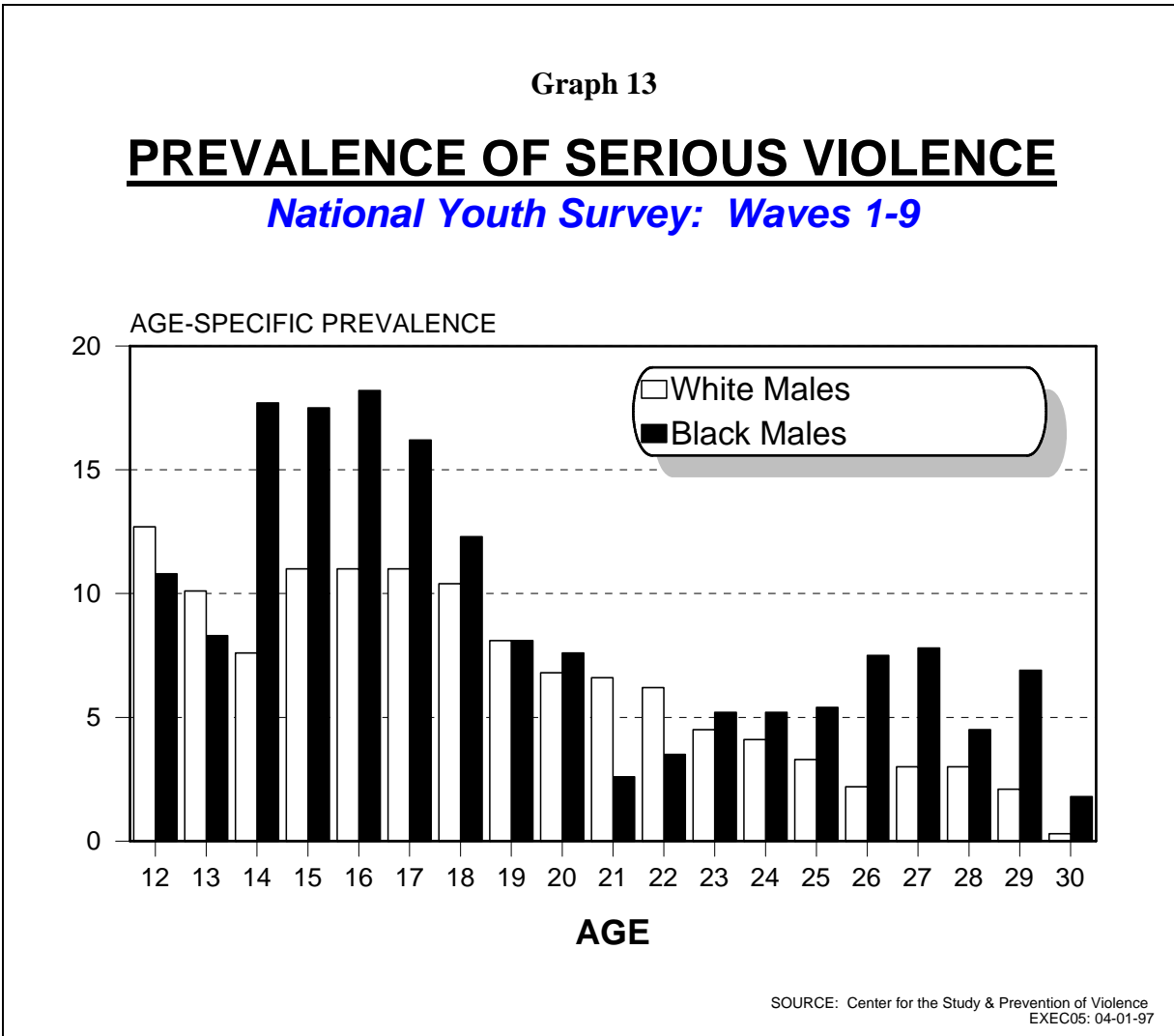


In sum, urban violence in America is increasingly more lethal and more youthful, with the increase being driven primarily by African-American and white males. It involves the use of handguns to a greater extent, is more drug related, and while the SHR data suggest an increasing involvement of gangs, it is a larger youth violence problem, not just a gang problem.

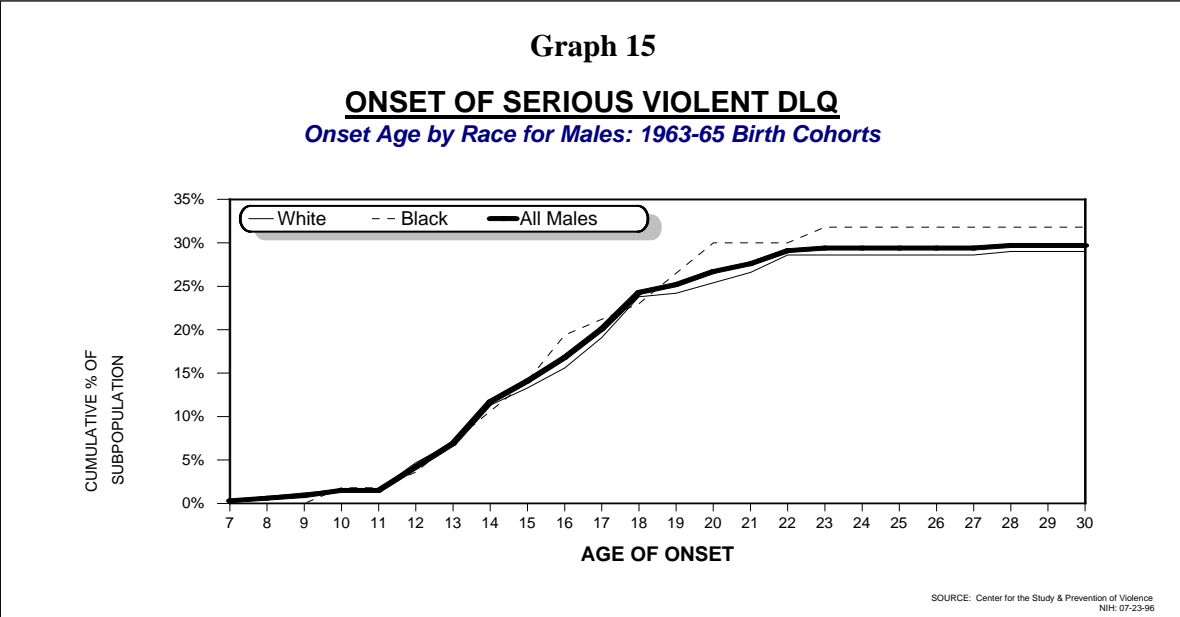
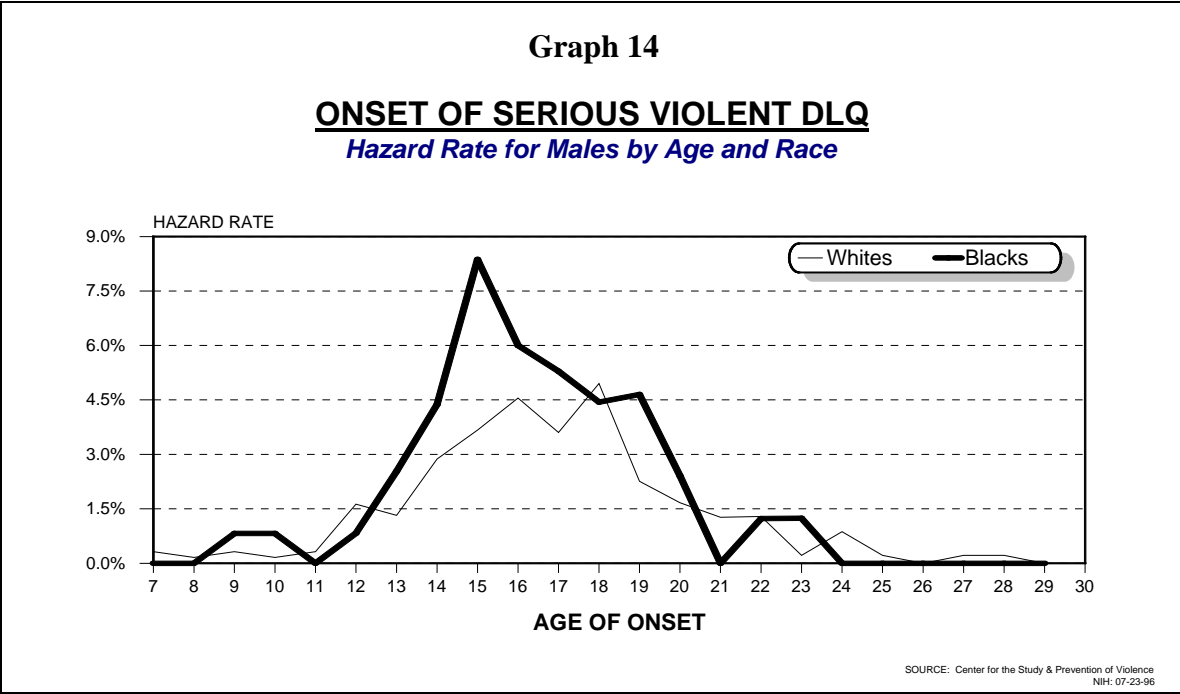
### **Patterns of Non-Lethal Violence in America: NYS Data**

As with trends of homicide in America, NYS data also demonstrate a close connection between involvement in violent behavior and age of perpetrators. Specifically, the prevalence, onset, continuity, and desistance of violence are highly associated with the movement into and out of the adolescent years.

Graph 13 presents the prevalence of serious violence for African-American and white males. Notice that while the rates are somewhat higher for African-Americans, the overall pattern for both racial groups is similar. It suggests that prevalence gradually increases from age 12 and peaks at 17 years of age, generally declining from that point on to age 30. However, prevalence is somewhat higher for African-American males ages 25 to 30.

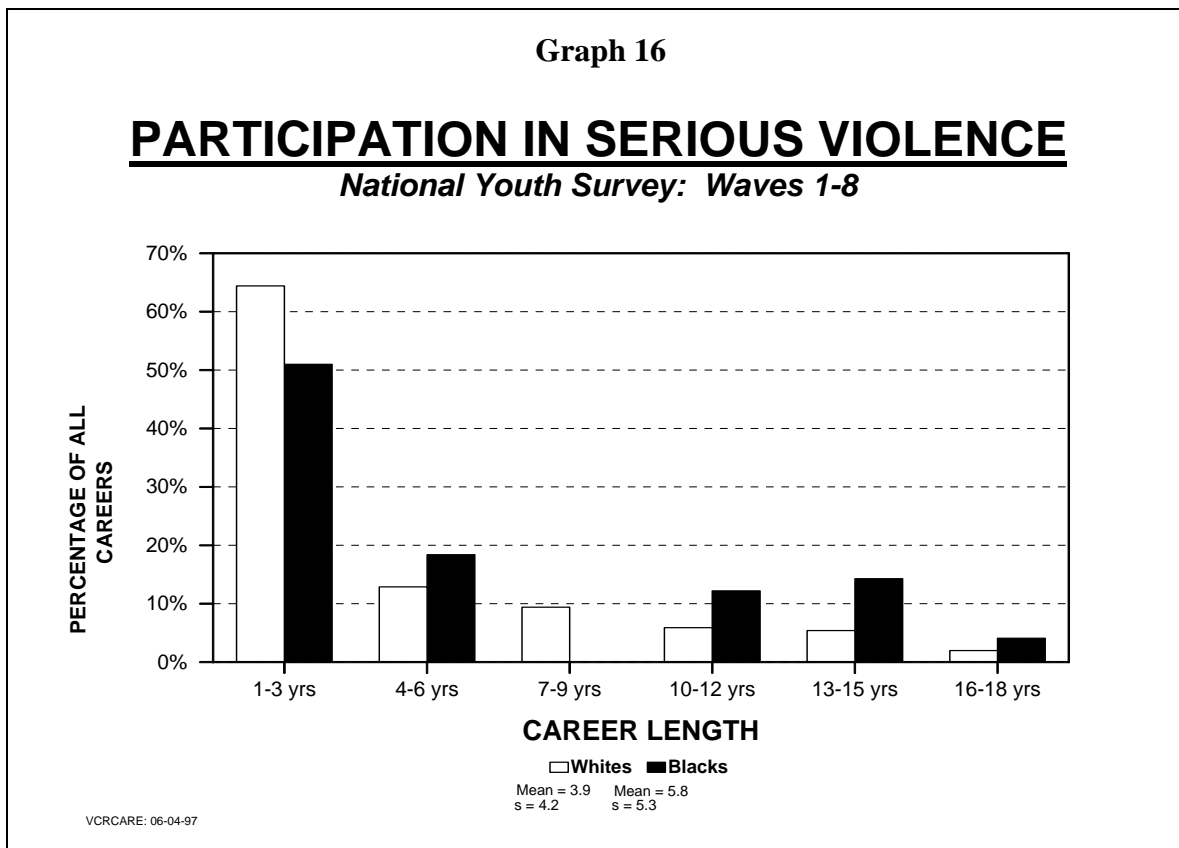


The onset of violence (i.e., the age at which it begins for the first time) also gradually increases with age, peaking at about 15-16 and generally declining thereafter (see Graph 14, p. 23). Furthermore, males who do not initiate violence in the adolescent years rarely begin such behavior after this period (see Graph 15, p. 23). Again, these patterns are similar for African-American and white males.





NYS data in Graph 16 bear on continuity and desistance. They show that most “careers” in violence are short-lived, typically lasting 1-3 years and infrequently more than 4-6 years. This pattern suggests that youth tend to desist from violence as they move out of adolescence, given that such behavior tends to begin during this portion of the life course. Moreover, continuity of violence into and through adulthood occurs for a small percentage of males in the NYS sample.



In sum, the prevalence, onset, continuity, and desistance of serious violence are closely associated with the age of perpetrators. Moreover, age marks important periods of human development as people move through the life course (i.e., birth to death). This implies that violence is connected to experiences in human development over the life course. Thus, a framework that analyzes human development has considerable promise for providing an understanding of this behavior and clues to its prevention.

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## **BUILDING ON PAST RESPONSES TO VIOLENCE**

The findings on violence in America suggest that the rate at which it goes up or down, as well as its incidence and prevalence, varies across different age groups. However, the problem is most pressing for the nation's youth. Accordingly, youth violence has received enormous attention through funding initiatives, documentaries, feature films, special legislative sessions, and media coverage. Pleas also have been made for collaborative prevention efforts involving criminal justice officials, public health professionals, educational institutions, human service agencies, political and business leaders, in addition to other community organizations and concerned people.

Yet, prevention efforts have frequently been uncoordinated and poorly informed by theory and research. Surely they have been well-intended and driven by an urgency to stem the tide of violence. Nonetheless, the results have often been ineffective programming, needless duplication, and squandered scarce resources. These results undermine sustainable solutions to the pressing problem of violence in America.

Recognizing the need to do something about serious violence, people have sought a framework that can effectively organize and guide prevention activities. Such a framework was found in the field of public health, which had demonstrated successful campaigns to prevent other health compromising behaviors (e.g., smoking tobacco, substance abuse, traffic accidents, etc.). Moreover, operational guidelines were developed within the public health framework specifically for violence prevention. They emphasized community-based organization and the infusion of theory and research to inform decision-making.

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The general framework, often referred to as the risk-focused approach, has several core elements:

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- **Public health surveillance**—an epidemiological analysis of the nature and extent of specific violence problems.
  - **Risk and protective factor identification**—an empirical determination of individual or environmental characteristics that elevate (risk factors) or reduce (protective factors) the likelihood of violence for individuals, groups, or communities.
  - **Prevention or intervention design**—an identification and assembling of resources and prevention activities into a comprehensive plan to prevent or reduce violence.
  - **Implementation**—an operationalization of the plan, including placement in strategic settings and targeting the population to be reached by service delivery.
  - **Evaluation**—a monitoring of implementation and an assessment of short and long term outcomes, with short term outcomes typically measured by the impact on targeted risk and/or protective factors, and long term outcomes measured by the impact on the targeted violent behavior.
  - **Dissemination**—a public outreach campaign sharing information about what works and what does not to inform public policy and promote effective prevention efforts.
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The use of this framework has advanced the science and practice of violence prevention. It explicitly emphasizes the importance of empirical findings for prevention planning and thus conducting research for policy formation and program development, not just for building knowledge in the social science community. The

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emphasis on surveillance, risk and protective factor identification, and targeting elevated risks provides procedural steps for prevention planning. Moreover, evaluating program implementation and outcomes can yield an understanding of how and why prevention strategies do or do not work. Since the framework is fielded in community settings with collaboration among diverse stakeholders, the process itself can enhance community capacity to sustain prevention efforts. Finally, dissemination can assist other communities in learning about the violence prevention experiences of others, in addition to informing prevention policy and practice.

Although making many contributions, the public health framework has limitations that should be overcome to further advance prevention science and practice. First, community collaboratives typically do not have the expertise to conduct the surveillance and risk assessments needed. They often become mired in data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Consequently, they often use lists of risk and protective factors based on research in other locations, involving groups, circumstances, and violence problems that may not match local community needs.

Second, presenting lists of risk and protective factors conveys the idea that they are independent of each other and that they are of equal value (i.e., have the same potential impact on the targeted outcome—violence). Thus, selecting any two is always better than one. To the extent that risks are associated, which is highly probable, impacting one is likely to have an impact on others. Moreover, it is unlikely that they have identical effectiveness. Successfully addressing a single strong “cause” may be more effective than three or four that have weak or “spurious” influences, and some risk factors are more amenable to change than others. We know very little about these dynamics. Consequently, prevention efforts may have unintended, negative outcomes.

Similarly, we also know little about the “side effects” of preventive interventions, unlike the practice of medicine where assessments are conducted to determine negative but unintended effects of medications for specific conditions prior to their approval and distribution. For example, young girls may affiliate with gangs because they lack other meaningful relationships in their lives. Yet such affiliation may increase their involvement with violence. Prevention efforts to disrupt these affiliations may reduce gang-related violence by these young girls, but they may substitute another form of bonding to replace the lost connections—having babies. So targeting gang affiliation as a “risk” factor may reduce violence but might also increase teenage pregnancy.

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Third, good evidence of risk and protective factors in a community does not necessarily lead to operational guidelines for violence prevention programming. Given the state-of-the-art in violence prevention research, determining “what’s wrong” is easier than knowing “what works.” There is no basis of selecting resources and activities that have prevention potential independent of identified risks. As a result, community groups tend to gravitate toward high visibility programs, independent of any defensible evidence of their effectiveness. Such programs are often “plugged in” without careful consideration of their appropriateness for implementation settings or targeted individuals.

Fourth, while the public health framework is sensitive to risk factors varying from individual to community level characteristics, it leads to an emphasis on programs rather than systems. The focus on violence as an isolated problem leads to an accompanying focus on the selected factors associated with that problem. Prevention plans then become strategies to impact the selected factors. Specifically, once factors have been identified, the next step is to assemble resources and activities targeted to reduce elevated risks. The emphasis is more on interventions for individuals within their social contexts (e.g., programs that enhance personal competency, such as anger management or conflict resolution in family or school settings), rather than addressing the dynamics of how individuals navigate multiple and diverse contexts. The framework is useful for developing specific *programs* related to identified risk factors (e.g., low self-control), but it does not lead directly to *contextual change* (e.g., neighborhood revitalization or improving access to job opportunities) or *system reform* (e.g., foster care, juvenile detention, delivery of mental health services).

Fifth, as previously discussed, the onset, desistance, continuity, and types of violence vary by age and are influenced by context. These findings show that violence takes many shapes and forms over the life course. It seems clear, therefore, that any violence prevention strategy must attend to issues about human development. Doing so increases the chances of effectiveness and that prevention will endure throughout the life course. Applications of the public health framework have successfully identified risk and protective factors in various social contexts (e.g., family, peer groups, school, community, etc.), but they have not clearly described how these influences are connected to human development, that is, how they operate (or do not operate) at various periods of life course development. An alternative model is needed that builds on the contributions of the public health framework but goes beyond its limitations.

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The model proposed below situates violence in a broader, dynamic framework of human development. Violence is seen as a negative developmental outcome—one of many tragic consequences resulting from unmet developmental needs. The emphasis is on supporting individuals in meeting those needs so that healthy human development is promoted. This can be done by providing direct services to individuals (e.g., for skill enhancement or attitude change), as with the public health framework, but also by reforming the systems that deliver those services as well as the social settings that often block opportunities for individuals to meet developmental needs and/or fail to reward them for healthy adaptations.

## **LIFE COURSE DEVELOPMENT AND VIOLENCE PREVENTION**

Once again, patterns and trends of violence are closely connected to periods of human development over the life course. A better understanding of violence should be achieved, therefore, through a conceptual model sensitive to factors that support or impede healthy human development. Such a model should trace the multiple routes to violence and thus illuminate strategies of blocking or at least redirecting destructive developmental pathways. A unifying theme of the model proposed is that prevention strategies will be more effective if they are intricately infused into the dynamics of human development at different stages of the life course. They must be crafted to remove barriers and buttress supports to prosocial and health enhancing behavior, regardless of whether they emphasize direct services to individuals through program resources and activities or indirect services through contextual change or system reform efforts. The discussion below will use the term “services” generically to denote both types, that is, direct and indirect services.

An ecological model of life course development is described below, and its utility for crafting comprehensive violence prevention strategies is illustrated.

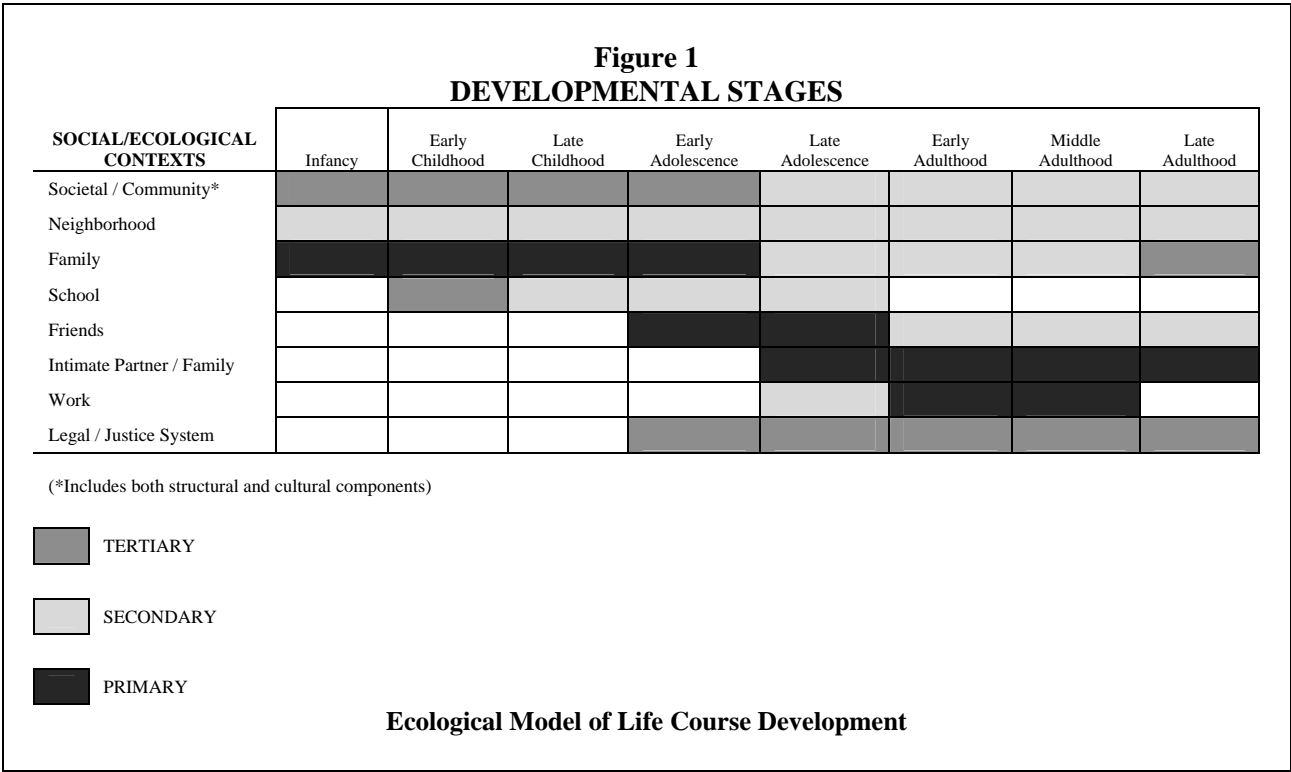
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The discussion is organized in four sections:

- An Ecological Model of Life Course Development delineates key components of the model
- A Framework for Prevention Strategies describes the analytical tools of this model for crafting violence prevention strategies
- Implications for Existing Services Provided for Youth includes a set of questions that can be used to apply this model to various current services
- Illustration of the Ecological Model uses these questions as a basis for reviewing a reform effort addressing juvenile detention

### **An Ecological Model of Life Course Development**

The ecological model of life course development includes several key components that guide thinking about human development and violence prevention: **Developmental stages, transitions and pathways; and nested social contexts.** A graph of the model is presented in Figure 1 (see p. 30). It shows contexts of social life by stages of human development. The discussion below will refer to Figure 1 as needed to illustrate basic points.



**Developmental Stages**

The life course can be subdivided into age groupings called **developmental stages**, marked by changes in biology (e.g., puberty), social identity (e.g., children to adolescents), and social settings (e.g., elementary to middle school). The stages presented in Figure 1 range from infancy to late adulthood. Healthy human development is achieved by individuals meeting the needs of each developmental stage. Several major developmental needs are indicated in Charts 5-9, which cover the first five developmental stages, infancy to late adolescence (see pp. 32, 39, 40, 41, and 42, respectively). Prevention strategies must clearly specify the developmental stage of the people targeted for services, and those services must be tailored for the respective developmental needs of those people.



The focus here is on the direction of human adaptations over time as people move through different developmental stages in various social settings. These adaptations can be either health enhancing or health compromising (e.g., violence). The issue is to determine the individual, contextual, and system attributes that influence positive or negative adaptations, that is, provide **supports** or act as **barriers** for meeting developmental needs within context at each stage. This issue is connected to the process of integrating and implementing services to supplement healthy human development.

“Risk factors” take on a different meaning within the ecological model. Specifically, they are barriers to successful development. For example, violence in the family may be a barrier to the development of secure parent-child attachments, a nurturing family system, and healthy child management and parenting skills, all of which are necessary for healthy development in infancy (for example, see Chart 5).

**CHART 5**

**DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS AND DEVELOPMENTAL SUPPORTS  
ACROSS CONTEXTS AS VIOLENCE PREVENTION STRATEGIES**

**KEY DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS OF INFANCY**

1. Minimization of birth trauma; adequate nutrition; well-baby
2. Stimulation of early neural development
3. Establishment of strong infant-care giver bond
4. Embeddedness in a family system that promotes emotional closeness and provides positive reinforcement
5. Minimal exposure to environmental toxins including lead

**DEVELOPMENTAL SUPPORTS**

**NEEDS MET**

	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>
<b><u>Family</u></b>					
• Healthy Start and home visitation services to strengthen families	X	X	X	X	
• Parenting centers and classes to provide resources and help parents acquire proactive child management and parenting skills	X	X	X	X	
• Responsive sanctions and support systems including foster care	X	X	X	X	
<b><u>Community</u></b>					
• Prenatal/postnatal care including strategies to foster access and increase utilization	X				
• Enrichment opportunities through playgrounds, drop-in centers, toy sharing, and educational television		X			
• Community programs to promote parent participation and development of support networks	X	X	X	X	
• Lead monitoring and toxin removal					X

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Furthermore, an understanding of developmental barriers can better inform the crafting of prevention strategies. Such strategies involve identifying and integrating factors that can promote healthy human development. Within the ecological model, these factors are referred to as developmental supports, meaning resources, system or contextual changes, and activities that help meet needs and/or reduce barriers.

Developmental supports are similar to “protective” factors, meaning characteristics of individuals, systems, or social settings that reduce or minimize the influence of risk factors. In other words, within a context of elevated risk, protective factors increase the chances of positive outcomes (or reduce the chances of negative ones like violence). Like protective factors, developmental supports can be identified on the basis of whether they remove barriers to healthy human development. However, they can also be identified by whether they directly help people meet development needs.

Reconsider the example of family violence. Supports to promote healthy development of infants might include home visitation services, parenting centers, on-the-job day care, education and responsive sanctions to violence, etc. (again, see Chart 5, p. 32). Targeting such activities and resources for young families might not only assist them in performing appropriate child-rearing practices but also minimize the destructive effects of family violence. These outcomes could strengthen family bonds that facilitate the transition from infancy to early childhood and prepare the child for meeting new developmental needs, that is, reinforce a healthy developmental pathway.

Some developmental supports may be targeted specifically for meeting the needs of a designated developmental stage, as in the illustration above where home visitation, for example, could strengthen parent-child attachments in infancy. Supports and needs are stage-specific in this case. Other supports may be *remedial* in that they help meet unmet needs of earlier developmental stages, which create problems of adjustment in subsequent developmental periods. For example, poor family attachments and inconsistent and abusive parenting practices in childhood may impair an adolescent’s ability to establish healthy relationships with prosocial peers or an adult’s ability to maintain a stable relationship with an intimate partner. At these subsequent stages, strategies to strengthen infant-parent attachments in the family of origin would be too late, that is, unsuitable for people in late adolescence or early adulthood. Instead, family problem-solving therapy or skill enhancement in conflict resolution or social perspective taking to promote more stable and healthy relationships characteristic of these developmental stages would be more promising. These supports would facilitate bonding and development of trusting relationships in the new/present social settings.

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## Transitions and Pathways

Developmental **transitions** are shifts into new developmental stages. They typically involve changes in social identities, along with changes in the primary social settings in which people live. These changes are usually distinct, such as starting school, graduating from college, acquiring a first job, or getting married. Developmental **pathways** refer to the sequencing of transitions and human experiences within the developmental stages of the life course. Pathways constitute individual and social history, linking early psychobiological and social experiences in infancy and childhood to later experiences in adulthood. The developmental literature uses the concept of trajectories, but we prefer pathways because they imply a less mechanical imagery of human experiences throughout the life course.

In discussing the role of transitions and pathways, it is important to understand the significance of timing. Age-graded transitions that are “*off time*” have important consequences for behavior in immediate and future developmental stages. Being off time (early or late) can change the direction of subsequent pathways. For example, entry into work prior to age 18 (or completion of high school) is often associated with delinquent behavior and substance use at that time and to lower future earnings. After age 18, the failure to make this transition, for those not continuing their formal education, increases problem behavior in the adult years.

Being “off time” can also reflect a disparity between biological and social timing. For example, the early onset of pregnancy and parenthood, particularly prior to a stable intimate relationship capable of supporting and nurturing children, puts both the parent and child at considerable risk of violence and other negative consequences in their adult years. An early transition to marriage for females also has the potential to change the direction of their developmental pathway, as early marriage is linked to economic disadvantage in the adult years.

Not all transitions are routine or uniquely related to a particular stage of development (e.g., arrest and entry into the justice system; the sudden death of a parent, or a major physical illness). Such shifts require individual adjustment and have the potential of changing pathways to healthy development. Apart from being off-time, a general principle of timing is that the consequences of events are contingent on where people are located in the life course, on their cumulative experiences to that point in time, and the particular contexts in which they live. For example, the impact of an arrest is likely to be different if people are young or old, members of a gang or a prosocial peer group, or employed or unemployed.

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Being off-time is not purely a matter of personal choice or disposition. The timing of age-graded events also reflects differences in opportunity, cultural norms, and other features of social settings, such as the isolation of African-American urban neighborhoods. Such isolation can increase rates of unemployment and impede the passage into work in the early adult years, having negative developmental outcomes, like continued involvement in violence. Such isolation is a true developmental barrier—deficits in community organization block opportunities for some African-Americans in large urban centers to meet developmental needs (i.e., legitimate work as a means to sustain a healthy life).

Pathways reflect the timing and sequencing of transitions into developmental stages, as well as experiences within different contexts at each stage. However, pathways also reflect *continuity and change* in the sequence of these experiences. Since the interaction of individual attributes, cumulative experiences, and changing social contexts influences developmental outcomes, behavioral change is possible. Although continuity frequently occurs, people are not necessarily locked into unmodifiable and unhealthy pathways. Adjustments can be made that promote healthy human development—in other words, prevention strategies can focus on changing developmental pathways. This is the “good news” of the ecological model.

### **Nested Social Contexts**

Human development occurs in social settings. Figure 1 lists **contexts** of social life (see p. 31). They are not exhaustive but represent the primary settings in which people live at different stages of development. Some contexts are more important to people in some developmental stages than in others. The relative importance of contexts at each stage is indicated by the shading of colors in Figure 1. For example, the dominant context in infancy is the family, with community and neighborhood being less important. However, all contexts become important in adulthood, although work and relationships with intimate partners are especially important.

Social contexts are interrelated and overlapping (e.g., individuals are members of families living in neighborhoods within communities). Moreover, they are nested in that individuals are born into primary groups which are linked to increasingly larger and more distant social settings. From an individual’s perspective, some settings are more immediate and others more removed. The closest contexts involve families and friends, with schools, workplaces, and the larger community being more distant. People experience them as interconnected settings of life. For example, a child directly experiences parent-child relationships. However, events taking place in the parents’

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workplace can have a direct impact on parent-child interactions. So children are affected by contexts in which they have no direct participation. Finally, all of these levels are influenced by societal events and culture. The nested linkages among social contexts constitute the reason why the model is referred to as *ecological*.

The ecological organization of social contexts is relevant for violence prevention strategies. Specifically, prevention strategies can be targeted for various *entry points*, meaning social contexts ranging from immediate primary groups like the family to larger systems (e.g., juvenile justice) or societal interventions (e.g., media regulations to address the effects of violent content in feature films or television programming on popular culture). It is also important to understand the simultaneous impact of multiple contexts on violence and potential inconsistencies, for example, if different messages about violence are delivered by peers, teachers, and families.

The ecological model assumes that behavior is influenced by social contexts and the individual attributes (from the inherent to the acquired) brought to those settings. However, a deeper understanding of developmental outcomes requires a simultaneous focus on the person **and** the context in which development and action occurs. The *person-in-context* approach leads to an understanding in terms of the dynamic interaction between individuals and the settings in which they live, not just in terms of individual, context, or systemic characteristics.

For example, deficits in brain functioning (e.g., neurotransmission), a biological characteristic, may impair the ability of individuals to process stimuli and thus complete performance tasks successfully in a given social setting (e.g., success in school). Compounded failures across settings and stages of development may be important developmental barriers leading to unhealthy pathways through life. Hence, it is not just an individual characteristic or the performance standards of the setting taken separately that produce this negative developmental outcome; rather, it is the person-in-context interactions that significantly shape the course of behavior.

The emphasis on person-in-context interactions is important when developing and implementing violence prevention strategies. Developmental barriers may be found in the interaction dynamics between individuals and their social settings, not solely in identified personal or contextual factors, as in the example above. Furthermore, those dynamics can be shaped in more positive directions by reinforcing supports as people move through stages of life course development.

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## Summary

Developmental stages, transitions and pathways, and nested social contexts are the organizing concepts of the ecological model of life course development. This model provides a holistic, dynamic, and positive approach that can be applied to the study and prevention of violence. Moreover, it yields analytical tools that are useful for conducting research and crafting comprehensive prevention strategies that are context and developmentally appropriate.

## A Framework for Prevention Strategies

Three questions are crucial when thinking about the kinds of services that can help people meet developmental needs, and they should be posed for each developmental stage:

- Do individuals have the required **skills** to meet developmental needs and perform socially appropriate developmental tasks?
- Do social contexts and systems afford the **opportunity** for doing so?
- Are interactions within contexts sufficiently **sanctioned (positively and/or negatively)** to promote healthy development?

These three questions can provide guidelines for support services emphasizing **Skills, Opportunities, and Sanctions (SOS)**. **Skills** are the characteristics individuals need for participation to be successful, while **opportunity** refers to context or system characteristics that allow or facilitate healthy participation. Positive and negative **sanctions** shape the direction of developmental pathways. They are reinforcements for health enhancing behavior (or for health compromising behavior).

A further distinction in discussing the **SOS** approach addresses the **availability** and **appropriateness** of resources and activities targeted for individuals, contextual change, or system reform. **Availability** pertains to the tangible presence of

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developmental supports within settings of reform or intervention. **Appropriateness** reflects whether those supports are meaningful to the persons in those settings. For example, providing youth with an opportunity to acquire conflict resolution skills makes a personal resource available. However, if they lack confidence in using these skills or perceive them as irrelevant to the context (e.g., resolving differences between rival gang members), they are not likely to take advantage of the program. The skills are simply not appropriate for these youth in their context.

The ecological model is a promising framework for crafting *comprehensive* prevention strategies. The model directs us to developmental barriers—those factors that interfere with the process of meeting developmental needs and successfully performing developmental tasks. The model also directs us to developmental supports—those factors that buttress the process and promote successful pathways through the life course. Moreover, the model gives meaning to the notion of comprehensiveness: Prevention strategies must integrate resources and activities that support personal competency and provide ample opportunity and sanctioning to promote successful development in multiple social contexts. Availability of developmental supports is necessary for the effectiveness of comprehensive prevention strategies, but they must also be appropriate for the individuals, settings, and violence problems for which they are crafted.

Using the ecological model for crafting prevention strategies is illustrated in Charts 5-9 (see pp. 32, 39, 40, 41, and 42, respectively). They list developmental needs and supports for individuals and social contexts, ranging from the family to the community. The charts correspond to the first five developmental stages presented in Figure 1 (see p. 31).

These charts show how the model can organize prevention strategies in a comprehensive and systematic fashion, one that is grounded in theory and sensitive to the developmental needs and settings of social life. Moreover, the charts imply that the entry points (e.g., individual, family system, school, community) may vary, but ultimately, the impact of intervention or reform efforts can ripple through the nested social contexts in which people live. In short, prevention strategies may be crafted specifically for individuals, but they can also be forged for system reform. Such reform strategies can directly alter the larger contexts of people’s lives, and the primary objectives of some prevention strategies may be to reshape those settings. Nonetheless, these efforts can have the additional impact of supporting the healthy development of individuals over the life course, including the reduction of violence.

**CHART 6**

**DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS AND DEVELOPMENTAL SUPPORTS  
ACROSS CONTEXTS AS VIOLENCE PREVENTION STRATEGIES**

**KEY DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS OF THE PRESCHOOL YEARS (3-5)**

1. Acquisition of early academic skills including language
2. Learning to regulate and control emotions and develop social skills
3. Embeddedness in a family system that promotes emotional closeness and provides positive reinforcement
4. Minimal exposure to environmental toxins including lead

**DEVELOPMENTAL SUPPORTS**

**NEEDS MET**

	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>
<b><u>Family</u></b>				
• Parenting centers and classes to provide resources and help parents acquire proactive child management and parenting skills	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	
• Responsive sanctions and support systems including foster care	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>		
<b><u>Community</u></b>				
• Preschool enrichment programs including Head Start	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>		
• Social development training and opportunities for social interaction including drop-in programs		<b>X</b>		
• Community programs to promote parent participation and development of support networks			<b>X</b>	
• Lead monitoring and toxin removal				<b>X</b>



**CHART 7**

**DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS AND DEVELOPMENTAL SUPPORTS  
ACROSS CONTEXTS AS VIOLENCE PREVENTION STRATEGIES**

**KEY DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS OF EARLY/MIDDLE CHILDHOOD (6-11)**

1. Acquisition of early academic skills and knowledge
2. Learning to regulate and control emotions, develop social skills, and build friendships
3. Involvement in prosocial activities that promote positive attachments and prosocial norms
4. Embeddedness in a family system that promotes emotional closeness and provides positive reinforcement
5. Strengthening of family systems and parental involvement in children's education

**DEVELOPMENTAL SUPPORTS**

**NEEDS MET**

	<b><u>1</u></b>	<b><u>2</u></b>	<b><u>3</u></b>	<b><u>4</u></b>	<b><u>5</u></b>
<b><u>Family</u></b>					
• Parenting classes in community centers, through on-line programs			<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	
• Responsive sanctions and support systems including foster care		<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	
<b><u>School</u></b>					
• Home-school partnership programs that encourage involvement					<b>X</b>
• Responsive classrooms/schools that encourage cooperation	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>		
• Effective instructional programs including tutoring and enrichment	<b>X</b>				
<b><u>Community</u></b>					
• Programs including sports, recreation, arts and mentoring during non-school hours	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>		
• Public information campaigns to promote prosocial norms				<b>X</b>	

**CHART 8**

**DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS AND DEVELOPMENTAL SUPPORTS  
ACROSS CONTEXTS AS VIOLENCE PREVENTION STRATEGIES**

**KEY DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS OF EARLY ADOLESCENCE (12-14)**

1. Acquisition of specific academic skills and knowledge
2. Learning to regulate and control emotions, develop social skills, and build friendships
3. Involvement with prosocial peers and engagement in activities that promote prosocial norms
4. Embeddedness in a family system that promotes emotional closeness and provides positive reinforcement
5. Strengthening of family systems and parental involvement in children's education

**DEVELOPMENTAL SUPPORTS**

**NEEDS MET**

	<b><u>1</u></b>	<b><u>2</u></b>	<b><u>3</u></b>	<b><u>4</u></b>	<b><u>5</u></b>
<b><u>Family</u></b>					
• Parenting classes in community centers, through on-line programs			<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	
• Responsive sanctions and support systems including foster care			<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	
<b><u>School</u></b>					
• Home-school partnership programs that encourage involvement					<b>X</b>
• Responsive classrooms and schools that encourage promote cooperation with peers and adults		<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	
• Effective instructional programs that include tutoring and enrichment opportunities	<b>X</b>				
<b><u>Community</u></b>					
• Programs including sports, recreation, arts and mentoring during non-school hours	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>		
• Public information campaigns to promote prosocial norms				<b>X</b>	
• Multi-component gang prevention programs	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>



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## Implications for Existing Services

The ecological model can be used to assess the potential violence prevention potential of current services provided for youth. Procedurally, this involves systematically analyzing specific initiatives using the tools of the model to link developmental stage of the population served, specific contexts impacted, and the particular thrust of system reform efforts, particularly as this related to increasing skills, opportunities, and sanctions appropriate to violence prevention.

Relevant components of the ecological model (e.g., developmental stage, social contexts, needs, barriers and supports) as they relate to the approaches, resources, and activities of each initiative must be specified to accomplish this task. Charts 5-9 provide a more detailed description of relevant concepts at each major developmental stage from infancy to adolescence (see pp. 32, 39, 40, 41, and 42, respectively). Drawing from these charts, the following five questions guide their application to determining the violence prevention potential of existing resources and activities for youth.

- Are **goals** developmentally appropriate, that is, clearly compatible with developmental needs and tasks for populations served, or what additional needs and tasks should be addressed?
- Are the specific **approaches, resources, and activities** implemented in the appropriate contexts for this population and this stage of development, or what contextual influences should be included?
- Are the specific **approaches, resources, and activities** clearly aligned with meeting developmental needs and promoting the successful performance of developmental tasks for this stage (i.e., are they potential **developmental supports** and/or are they targeted to **reduce the barriers to development**), and how could this be enhanced?
- Are **supports available / barriers reduced** for enhancement of personal **skills**, increased **opportunities** for participation and **sanctions** for behavior?
- Are these available and perceived by the population served as appropriate to their lives and social settings?

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A step-by-step approach can be followed to apply this model to existing services. The following steps are suggested:

- **Step 1: Developmental needs** of the age group served and relevant social **contexts** should be specified, drawing on charts provided.
- **Step 2:** The **overall goal** and **core assumptions** should be specified in order to assess compatibility with developmental needs.
- **Step 3:** Services can then be evaluated in terms of the **five key questions**, highlighting identification of components that are directly related to violence prevention, have violence prevention potential, or need further modification to improve efficacy.
- **Step 4:** New **approaches, resources** or **activities** to enhance the violence prevention potential and/or measure impact can be suggested. These responses should be assessed in terms of increasing **developmental supports** and **reducing barriers** by providing **opportunities** for participation, **skill** enhancement, and **sanctions**, as well as how they are perceived by the population served.

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## Applying the Ecological Model to Juvenile Detention Reform

Based on a successful reform experience in Broward County, Florida and consultation with national juvenile justice experts, The Annie E. Casey Foundation developed a Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiative (JDAI). The relevant data on detention and core assumptions of the initiative are presented in a “Framework Paper on Juvenile Detention.” That paper, other materials from the Casey Foundation and conversation with Foundation staff provide the basis for the discussion presented in this paper. Consider the step-by-step approach as applied to JDAI.

### **Step 1: Developmental Needs and Relevant Social Contexts**

Because juvenile detention reform primarily impacts services for 12-18 year olds, we focus on two developmental stages, **early adolescence** and **late adolescence**. Both stages share developmental needs across diverse contexts that include School, Peers, Family and Community:

- Acquisition of specific academic skills and knowledge
- Learning to regulate and control emotions, increase social skills, build friendships, and develop a sense of self and personal identity
- Involvement with prosocial peers and engagement in activities that promote prosocial norms
- Embeddedness in a family system that promotes emotional closeness and provides positive reinforcement and problem solving
- Strengthening of family systems and parental involvement in children’s education (12-14 year olds)
- Preparation for transition into adult roles including work and relationships (15-19 years old)

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## Step 2: Core Assumptions Guiding System Reform Efforts

Several core assumptions about the purposes and limitations of secure confinement comprise distinctive features of this effort. A central assumption is that the purpose of detention is to assure appearance in court and avoidance of reoffending while cases are adjudicated. However, common practices that involve over-utilization of detention result in negative outcomes including: disproportionate detention of minorities; stigmatization and disruption of personal circumstances; low probability of referral to needed services; lengthier stays in confinement; exposure to overcrowding and a negative peer culture; and a higher likelihood of post-adjudicatory placement.

## Step 3: Key Questions

- Are the goals of the juvenile detention reform developmentally appropriate, that is, clearly compatible with developmental needs and tasks for the population served?

The goals of juvenile detention reform reflect the assumption that incarcerating juvenile unnecessarily does not serve as a developmental support but may impair development or become a barrier to meeting developmental needs. In other words, incarceration is likely to **interfere with** and **disrupt** involvement at school, in jobs or community, and with friends and family. This is particularly problematic for youth who have at least some positive involvement, such as participation in school or work-related programs. Rather than enhancing positive involvements, incarceration is likely to affect this involvement negatively, creating obstacles such as difficulty keeping up with school work or inability to show up for work.

These goals are based on keeping youth out of non-supportive settings. Parallel to this, it is also important to use the arrest/referral event as an opportunity for referral to needed services in order to increase developmental supports available. Youth who are arrested for delinquent offenses will be more likely to be at-risk based on absence of developmental supports in different contexts or presence of specific barriers to development. Screening for appropriate referrals should focus on assessment of developmental needs to identify key areas where developmental supports can be enhanced and/or barriers reduced.

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For example, some youth may have difficulty with academic skills but come from stable and supportive families. Thus, academic assistance or other supports to facilitate passage into the next developmental stage (e.g., job training) may be much more relevant than parent training or family counseling. **Some type of “checklist” of developmental needs, barriers, and potential supports would be extremely useful for this screening and should be developed.**

- Are the specific approaches, resources, and activities implemented in the appropriate contexts for this population and this stage of development, or what contextual influences should be included?

By definition, juvenile detention reform is implemented in a selected context—juvenile institutions and related juvenile services. However, the ecological model suggests that it is also important to incorporate mechanisms to meet needs in diverse developmental contexts where feasible. Reform efforts should seek to enhance supports and remove barriers in the school and community, and with peers and families—both in terms of services with juvenile detention and for referred youth.

For instance, most detention facilities are not designed to foster development of prosocial peer networks. In fact, this may be one of the most negative aspects of incarceration vis-à-vis antisocial and violent behavior. Efforts to improve treatment of incarcerated youth should thus focus on increasing exposure to more prosocial youth, perhaps through mentoring or volunteer programs. Of course, these programs would also be useful for referred youth, particularly those who are influenced most heavily by other delinquent or antisocial peers.

The most typical point of program failure is the community reintegration transition. We must be preparing youth to make this transition focusing on those skills and opportunities that will be received/available in the contexts to which they will return or enter after leaving detention. The most critical and difficult issues are those involving opportunities in these new contexts; they are typically quite limited and unavailable.



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- Are the specific approaches, resources, and activities clearly aligned with meeting developmental needs and promoting the successful performance of developmental tasks for this stage (i.e., are they potential developmental supports and/or targeted to reduce the barriers to development), and how could these supports be enhanced?

This question addresses the specific objectives and strategies for implementation related to overall reform goals. These strategies are implemented both in terms of changing juvenile institutions and promoting availability of needed alternative services. Each developmental need can be assessed in terms of how these systems and services provide developmental supports and reduce barriers and what additional strategies might be implemented. The following discussion represents a general review of supports, barriers, and potential modifications.

Six primary **developmental needs** of adolescence have been identified and discussed previously:

❑ Acquisition of specific academic skills and knowledge

Both academic skills and a high school diploma are important prerequisites for entry into the adult work force. If youth are already enrolled in school, services within detention facilities should focus on keeping up with school course work, which would require coordination with the individual's regular school. For youth in group homes and day treatment programs who are not enrolled in school, specialized educational programming should be offered targeting basic skills.

❑ Learning to regulate and control emotions, increase social skills, build friendships, and develop a sense of self/identity

Opportunities for development of social skills based on cooperation and democratic decision-making generally are limited in detention facilities. Furthermore, the disproportionate representation of minorities, stigmatization, and negative peer culture might increase the likelihood of youth developing a personal identity grounded in a sense of inequality with mainstream culture, as well as identifying with antisocial

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youth, particularly youth of similar ethnicity (since allegiances in institutions tend to be along ethnic lines). The inconsistencies in detention decisions may interfere with the development of beliefs that sanctions are contingent on specific behaviors (rather than “being at the wrong place at the wrong time”).

A number of specific program models and curricula are available to build basic skills. Such programs can be offered in a variety of settings, including juvenile detention facilities and alternative placements. Additionally, these settings can be structured to maximize cooperative social interaction and mediation of conflicts and to provide a range of reinforcements and sanctions for appropriate behaviors. Issues related to identity development and self awareness can be addressed through targeted counseling programs.

❑ Involvement with prosocial peers and engagement in activities that promote prosocial norms

One of the more consistent effects in the research literature on violence prevention is that bringing antisocial peers of gang members together for counseling and other related services can often result in increased aggressive and antisocial behavior. Most probably, this is due to the increased cohesiveness of the peer group and increased endorsement of antisocial norms. Thus, detention facilities and alternatives must find ways to expose youth to prosocial role models and prosocial norms for behavior. Programs such as mentoring and other youth involvement opportunities can be effective, with recent evaluations of mentoring with the justice system finding documented improvements in behavior for participants.

❑ Embeddedness in a family system that promotes emotional closeness and provides positive reinforcement and problem solving

Availability and referral to a family intervention for youth in need of family supports can be a critical step for violence prevention. A number of effective family intervention programs have been developed. Parent training programs emphasize building specific child-parent interaction skills and changing reinforcement contingencies for prosocial and antisocial behavior in the home. They are conducted for parents only. These programs have been found to be more effective during early adolescence. Family therapy interventions are conducted within the context of the family system and emphasize changing interaction patterns. A variation of family therapy that involves family mobilization of resources, Multisystemic Family Therapy

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(MST), has demonstrated some success with delinquent youth in preventing further antisocial and violent behavior. It also has been effective with older adolescents. A range of programmatic options can assure the best match between participants.

❑ Strengthening of family systems and parental involvement in children's education (12-14 year olds)

Strengthening parental involvement is particularly relevant during early adolescence, when the family is still a significant social context and increased parental involvement is desirable. Because parental involvement is required following an arrest, this can provide an opportunity to promote positive parental involvement in a youth's education and community activities. Such involvement can be promoted both at the detention facilities and within alternative placements.

❑ Preparation for transition into adult roles including work and relationships (15-19 year olds)

Job training and employment opportunities are critical for older adolescents as they transition into the work force. A number of research and evaluation studies attest to the importance of work in preventing antisocial and violent behavior, particularly for minority youth. The most effective counseling and treatment programs for predelinquent or delinquent youth have included a vocational training and/or jobs component.

- Are supports available/barriers reduced for (a) opportunities for participation; (b) enhancement of personal competency (e.g., skills, efficacy, etc.); and reinforcements/sanctions related to participation?

Approaches, resources, and specific activities can be assessed in terms of **SOS**—whether they increase skills, provide opportunities, and include sanctions. For each developmental need it is possible to delineate responses and evaluate their impact in each area. For example, within the domain of social skills, strategies for targeted youth should include skill training programs as well as system reorganizations to provide opportunities and sanctions for cooperative participation and problem solving. Each activity can be evaluated along these lines.

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- Are these perceived by the population served as appropriate to their lives and social setting?

As discussed previously, the ecological model distinguishes between **availability** of supports and the **appropriateness** in terms of perceived need and relevance to participants. Approaches, resources, and activities should also be assessed in terms of how they are perceived by participants. This strategy addresses issues of cultural and community sensitivity, that is, making responses relevant for targeted population. For example, a number of studies have found that many youth, particularly minority youth, hold negative attitudes and beliefs about achievement that interfere with learning. When possible, programmatic alternatives should address these beliefs and provide instruction that is relevant to participant’s daily lives.

**Step 4: New Approaches, Resources, and Activities to Enhance the Violence Prevention Impact of Juvenile Detention Reform**

Specific recommendations within each initiative will need to be tailored to each site and will require in-depth assessment through site visits and contacts with local participants. The following grid could be used as a template for application at site visits.

<b>Key devel. Needs by context (List)</b>	<b>Supports provided (note SOS)</b>	<b>Supports recommended (note SOS)</b>	<b>Existing barriers</b>	<b>Actions to reduce barriers</b>	<b>Issues of population density</b>

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## CONCLUSION

This application of the ecological model to the JDAI serves as a blueprint for assessing and infusing violence prevention into the existing services for youth. The substance of services and the form of implementation is likely to vary significantly from one location to another. Moreover, the characteristics of those sites are likely to vary as well. Hence, any violence prevention strategy should be informed by intimate knowledge of local conditions and culture. Rich, in-depth knowledge is needed to customize the application of the ecological model to the local conditions and culture. Much could be learned from this process, including the strengths and limitations of the model for each site as well as the general validity of the model for guiding the development, implementation, and evaluation of violence prevention strategies.