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JUVENILE JUSTICE BULLETIN

OJJDP NATIONAL SURVEY OF Children's Exposure to Violence CDC

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Considerable efforts have been made during the last generation to encourage children and their families to report victimization to authorities. Nonetheless, concern persists that most childhood victimization remains hidden. The 2008 inventory of childhood victimization—the National Study of Children's Exposure to Violence (NatSCEV) (see "History of the National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence," p. 4)—allowed an assessment of whether authorities, including police, school, and medical authorities, are identifying victimizations. The victim, the victim's family, or a bystander may have disclosed the victimization to those authorities, or the authorities may have directly observed the victimization or evidence of that victimization. Among the survey findings:

- Thirteen percent of children victimized in the previous year had at least one of their victimizations known to police, and 46 percent had one known to school, police, or medical authorities.
- Authorities knew about a majority of serious victimizations, including incidents of sexual abuse by an adult, gang assaults, and kidnappings, but they were mostly unaware of other kinds of serious victimizations, such as dating violence and completed and attempted rape.
- In general, school officials knew about victimization episodes considerably more often (42 percent) than police (13 percent) or medical personnel (2 percent). However, police were the most likely to know about kidnapping, neglect, and sexual abuse by an adult.
- More victimization and abuse appears to be known to authorities currently than was the case in a comparable 1992 survey.

Efforts To Increase Reporting of Child Abuse and Victimization

The National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) finds that violent crimes against juveniles are less likely to be known to authorities than are crimes against adults, and they are particularly unlikely

DEFENDING CHILDHOOD
PROTECT HEAL THRIVE

A Message From OJJDP

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

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

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

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

SAFE START Working Together to Help Children Exposed to Violence

Access OJJDP publications online at *ojjdp.gov.*

Learn more about the Attorney General's Defending Childhood Initiative at *justice.gov/ag/defendingchildhood.*

Find out more about OJJDP's Safe Start Initiative at *safestartcenter.org.*

to be known to the police (Finkelhor and Ormrod, 1999). Authorities are less likely to know about childhood victimizations for a number of reasons (Finkelhor and Wolak, 2003; Finkelhor, Wolak, and Berliner, 2001). Clearly children, both victims and bystanders, are easily intimidated by offenders and fear retaliation. In addition, children and their families often wish to deal with crime and victimization informally. They sometimes fear the consequences of disclosure to authorities, including interviews with child protection authorities and involvement with the police, courts, and child welfare agencies. In other cases, victims, families, and bystanders do not perceive the victimizations as something that would interest authorities.

One of the major public policy efforts of the past generation has been to increase the proportion of abuse and victimization cases known to authorities. The mandatory reporting statutes enacted in the wake of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) of 1974[1] had this as a goal (O'Neill Murray and Gesiriech, 2010; Stoltsfus, 2009). The message of virtually all education programs dealing with child maltreatment, bullying, dating violence, and a host of other problems has been to "tell someone and get help" (Finkelhor, 2009). In addition, criminal justice and child protection agencies have instituted various reforms to try to increase victim and family confidence in those agencies as a way to promote disclosure (Cheung, 2008; Jones et al., 2005).

Despite these policy initiatives, limited research on authorities' knowledge of child victimization has hampered efforts to promote disclosure and track its patterns. Cited research frequently refers to studies completed decades ago or is based on adult retrospective recollection (London et al., 2005).[2] It is not at all clear that such data reflect current experience after a generation of mobilization and increased awareness about child victimization in its many forms.

NatSCEV is the first comprehensive national survey to report on children's exposure to violence and its effects for both past-year and lifetime victimizations from age 1 month to age 17. As part of the study, the researchers examined past-year victimizations that were known to authorities. This bulletin looks first at what and how much authorities know about child victimization; and then, at what the implications of the study findings are for increasing disclosure of child victimizations and for effective prevention and treatment.

Methodology

The National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence (NatSCEV) was designed to obtain past-year and lifetime prevalence estimates of a wide range of childhood victimizations and was conducted between January and May 2008. The survey recorded the experiences of a nationally representative sample of 4,549 children from ages 1 month to 17 years living in the contiguous United States.

Sampling Techniques

The interviews with parents and youth were conducted over the phone. Sample households were drawn from a nationwide sampling frame of residential telephone numbers through random digit dialing. To ensure that the study included an adequate number of minority and low-income respondents for more accurate subgroup analyses, the researchers oversampled telephone exchanges that had high concentrations of African American, Hispanic, or low-income households. Sampling methods and procedures have been described in greater detail elsewhere (Finkelhor, Turner, Ormrod, and Hamby, 2009; Finkelhor, Turner, Ormrod, Hamby, and Kracke, 2009).

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

Questions Regarding Authorities' Knowledge of Victimization

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

Followup questions for each victimization item gathered additional information about each event, including whether, to the respondent's knowledge, school officials or police knew about the event. Authorities could learn about a victimization event from reports by the victim, the family, or another participant or bystander or by witnessing the incident or seeing evidence of the incident.

Victimizations Analyzed for Authorities' Knowledge of Events

The analysis for this bulletin examined past-year victimizations. The researchers aggregated two categories of victimizations known to authorities: physical assaults and sexual victimizations. Physical assaults included assault with a weapon, assault without a weapon, attempted assault, threatened assault, kidnapping, bias-motivated attack, physical abuse, gang/group assault, peer/sibling assault, nonsexual genital assault, and dating violence. Sexual victimizations included sexual assault by a known adult, sexual assault by a nonspecified adult, sexual assault by a peer, completed or attempted rape, sexual exposure/flashing, and sexual harassment.

Authorities' Knowledge of Child Victimization

According to the NatSCEV survey, 46 percent of the victimized youth had at least one victimization in the past year that was known to school, police, or medical authorities. Being known to an authority could mean that victims, family members, or other bystanders disclosed the victimization or an authority like a teacher or police officer directly observed it. The study looked at authorities' knowledge of victimization from three perspectives:

- Which types of victimizations were authorities most likely to know about?
- Which authorities were more likely to know of various types of child victimizations?

- What factors were associated with authorities' knowledge of child victimizations?

Types of Victimizations Known to Authorities

Direct victimization. The degree to which authorities knew about victimizations varied according to victimization type (table 1). Typically, authorities were most likely to know about more serious victimizations like sexual assault by a known (69 percent) or nonspecific adult (76 percent), kidnapping (74 percent), and gang or group assault (70 percent). Authorities also often knew about types of nonphysical victimization that are likely to occur in school, such as relational aggression (52 percent) and property theft (47 percent), or that leave signs that a teacher in the classroom or a doctor in the course of a medical examination might see, such as neglect (48 percent). Authorities were least likely to know about victimizations that peers were most likely to commit, including peer and sibling assault (17 percent), dating violence (15 percent), being flashed (17 percent), and completed and attempted rape (14 percent).

Indirect victimization. Authorities' knowledge of indirect victimization also varied considerably. Obviously, murders that children were exposed to and other very public offenses, such as threats or vandalism against schools, were widely known. Also, authorities knew about approximately one-half (49 percent) of the episodes of children witnessing domestic violence.

Knowledge of Victimization by Police, School, and Medical Authorities

School authorities were the officials most likely to know about past-year victimization events (42 percent of victims had a victimization known to school authorities). Police knew about 13 percent of children who had been victimized in the past year. Medical authorities were the least likely to know about victimizations (2 percent of victims reported that medical authorities knew of past-year victimizations).

Although police were generally less likely to know about victimization events than school authorities, they were more likely to know about incidents of several types, including kidnapping (71 percent police versus 46 percent school), neglect (37 percent police versus 29 percent school),

Table 1: Past-Year Victimizations Known to Police, School, and Medical Authorities

	Percent Known by—			
Victimization screener	**Any authority***	**Police***	**School***	**Medical***
Any victimization	**45.7**	**12.7**	**42.3**	**1.8**
Direct victimizations				
Sexual abuse—nonspecific adult	76.1	76.1	28.5	19.1
Kidnapping	73.5	71.1	46.0	5.5
Gang/group assault	70.1	34.4	53.3	8.7
Sexual abuse—known adult	69.0	64.9	30.2	7.4
Custodial interference	54.0	35.5	36.9	
Bias attack	52.5	17.0	52.5	1.8
Relational aggression	51.5	3.8	51.5	
Attempted assault	51.1	15.8	45.0	
Neglect	47.8	36.9	29.2	
Personal theft	46.8	17.9	37.7	
Threatened assault	46.5	19.1	42.8	
Assault—no weapon	43.6	8.6	41.7	2.5
Assault with weapon	43.5	14.2	38.1	7.7
Sexual abuse—peer	42.4	13.1	37.8	0.0
Sexual harassment	38.0	9.3	37.8	
Physical abuse by caregiver	33.0	19.1	28.8	10.0
Robbery	31.9	3.4	31.4	0.3
Vandalism	24.2	3.4	22.3	
Psychological/emotional abuse by caregiver	23.1	9.0	19.6	0.0
Bullying	22.2	0.8	22.2	0.3
Nonsexual genital assault	19.1	4.3	16.0	1.3
Peer/sibling assault	16.9	1.5	16.4	0.6
Flashing/exposure	16.6	7.1	15.0	
Dating violence	15.2	3.6	14.0	0.8
Rape (completed/attempted)	14.0	10.0	12.4	3.5
Indirect victimizations				
School threat	95.7	89.0	95.1	
School vandalism	94.4	66.9	92.3	
Close person murdered	87.2	86.5	39.8	
Witness to assault with no weapon	66.5	40.7	54.9	
Know about robbery of close person	62.3	61.1	18.3	
Witness to assault with weapon	59.6	41.2	38.1	
Exposure to shooting of another	59.2	57.7	16.3	
Know about threat to close person with weapon	57.4	52.9	13.7	
Parent beat parent	53.6	51.5	29.5	
Household theft	53.0	48.0	14.3	
Parent hit parent	49.1	44.8	22.0	
Witness to domestic violence	48.9	42.3	22.9	
Know about sexual victimization of close person	47.4	44.2	18.5	
Parent threatened parent	40.8	35.3	24.4	
Witness to physical abuse	38.8	29.8	31.7	
Parent pushed parent	36.2	28.3	19.1	
Parents argued and broke something	33.0	25.2	21.3	
Household teen or adult hit family member	29.1	24.3	16.9	

*Based on weighted data; victim counts rounded to nearest whole number.
Source: Adapted from Finkelhor et al., 2011.

sexual abuse by a known (65 percent police versus 30 percent school) or nonspecific adult (76 percent police versus 29 percent school), and witnessing of domestic violence (42 percent police versus 23 percent school).

Although few episodes were known to medical authorities, the most common were sexual abuse by a known (7 percent) or nonspecific adult (19 percent), gang assault (9 percent), physical abuse by a caretaker (10 percent), and assault with a weapon (8 percent).

The finding that schools are more likely to find out about child victimization than other authorities is consistent with several earlier studies (Finkelhor and Dziuba-Leatherman, 1994; Sedlak and Broadhurst, 1996). This is understandable, given how much time children spend in school and interact with school professionals.

Factors Associated With Authorities' Knowledge of Victimization

The researchers used multivariable analyses to identify the characteristics of child victims and victimization episodes that made it more likely for authorities to know of those incidents.

Police. Police were more likely to know about physical assaults (see "Methodology" for specific types of victimization that were defined as physical assaults) that had the following characteristics compared to those without those characteristics: ones that occurred outside the home or school, involved a serious injury or nonfamily or adult perpetrator, had a bias motivation, or made the child very scared. They were also more likely to know about crimes against victims who were female, of lower socioeconomic status (SES), or living in a rural area. Police were more likely to know of sexual victimizations (see "Methodology" for a list of sexual victimizations) when an adult committed the offense; when the child was afraid; or when the victim was black, mixed race, or other race (including Asian American, American Indian, and Pacific Islander).

School officials. School officials were more likely to know about physical assaults that had the following characteristics compared to those without those characteristics: ones that occurred in school, involved a serious injury or a nonfamily or an adult perpetrator, had a bias motivation, or made the victim afraid or feel bad. They were more likely to know about attempts and threats than actual assaults. School authorities were also more likely to know about physical assaults on girls, children younger than 13, children who were victims of other assaults in the past year, and lower SES youth. They were less likely to know about physical assaults on Hispanic victims.

School officials were more likely to know of sexual victimizations that occurred in school, were committed by an unidentified perpetrator, occurred to a child victim between 2 and 9 years old, or occurred to a child who lived with a stepparent or an unmarried partner of a parent.

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

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

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

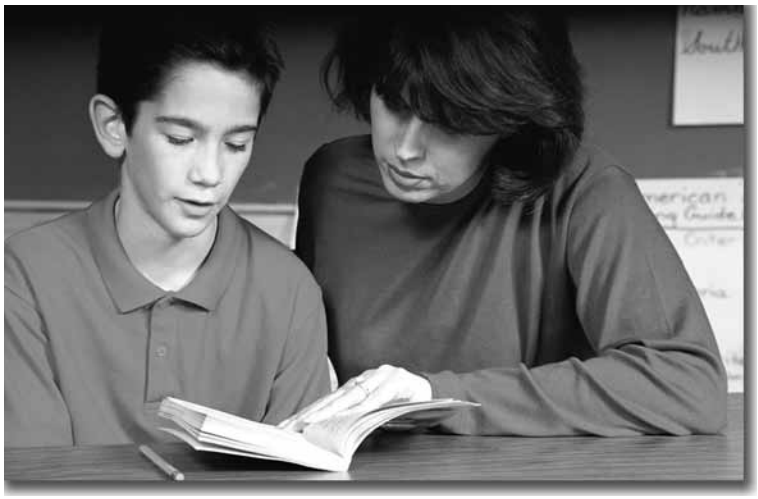
The study was developed under the direction of OJJDP and was designed and conducted by the Crimes against Children Research Center of the University of New Hampshire. It provides data on the full extent of violence in the daily lives of children. The primary purpose of NatSCEV is to document the incidence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

Disclosure of Child Victimization to Authorities

Looking at the NatSCEV data from the perspective of disclosure of child victimization, some patterns emerge:

- The proportion of child victimizations that are disclosed to authorities appears to be increasing as compared with two decades ago.
- Victims of multiple victimizations may be more likely to come to authorities' notice.

- Authorities were less likely to learn of victimization episodes that involved certain groups of victims (boys, Hispanic youth, and higher SES youth) or peer or family perpetrators.



Increases in Victimizations Known to Authorities During the Past Two Decades

Comparing the NatSCEV study findings with another national survey of victimization completed in 1992 (Finkelhor and Dziuba-Leatherman, 1994) suggests that victimizations known to authorities have increased over time. In the 1992 telephone survey of youth ages 10 to 16 only 25 percent of all victimizations of 10- to 16-year-olds were known to police or school authorities (versus 51 percent in the NatSCEV study for that age group), only 29 percent of kidnappings (versus 73 percent in the NatSCEV study), and only 6 percent of incidents of sexual assault or sexual abuse (versus 11 percent in the NatSCEV study). These changes may reflect efforts by authorities and advocates to promote disclosure. Because early disclosure is believed to facilitate prevention, increased disclosure rates are consistent with the findings that childhood victimization rates have fallen considerably since the early 1990s (Finkelhor, 2008; Finkelhor, Turner, Ormrod, and Hamby, 2010).

Knowledge of Multiple Child Victimizations

According to the youth and caregivers interviewed in the NatSCEV study, a considerable proportion of child victims are known to authorities. However, the figure given earlier—that school officials, police, or medical authorities knew about 46 percent of children who were victimized in the previous year—overstates the level of knowledge somewhat in that some of these victims had multiple victimizations, not all of which were disclosed. Moreover, the variable used in this study, "known to authorities," does not necessarily mean that the victim disclosed the victimization. A bystander may have reported it, or an authority, such as a teacher, may have witnessed it. Nonetheless, properly trained officials who know about at least one victimization have the opportunity to identify a child and ask about other victimizations. Moreover, the finding that school officials were more likely to know about victims of more than one episode of physical abuse within the past year indicates that youth with multiple victimizations were some of those most likely to be known to authorities in general.

Factors That Impede Disclosure of Child Victimization

Victim characteristics. Authorities are less likely to know about victimizations of boys, probably reflecting male social norms, sometimes referred to as "the boy code," of self-sufficiency that stigmatizes help seeking, norms that some educational programs are now trying to counteract (Pollack and Pipher, 1999). They are also less likely to know about Hispanic victims, perhaps reflecting specific Hispanic cultural concerns as well as issues about citizenship status and legitimacy. Authorities are less likely to know about higher SES victims, perhaps reflecting suspicion among these families about the negative impact on their children, combined with having the resources and status to deflect authorities' involvement. Efforts to emphasize the helpful rather than stigmatizing features of professional intervention might be useful to counteract some of the concerns in these groups.

Perpetrator characteristics. In general, the study shows that authorities are less likely to know about victimizations involving peer and family perpetrators than those involving adult and nonfamily perpetrators. As noted earlier, authorities were least likely to know about peer or sibling assault, dating assault, and attempted or completed rape, all of which peers are more likely to commit. In particular, authorities are far more likely to know about sexual offenses that adults commit than those that youth commit. This may be because adult sexual offenses are seen as more criminal, whereas peer allegiances may inhibit reporting of sexual crimes by younger perpetrators.

Implications for Authorities and Practitioners

The findings suggest both progress and challenges in the effort to identify abused and victimized children. The higher rates of victimizations known to authorities found in the NatSCEV study may mean that past efforts to promote disclosure have been working and need to be sustained. But the study also shows that a considerable portion of childhood exposure to victimization is still unknown to authorities. It suggests that more outreach is needed to boys, Hispanic youth, and higher SES groups in particular. It also suggests that disclosure promotion needs to be directed toward episodes that involve family members and peer perpetrators. Educators have long recognized the need to promote disclosures about such family and peer episodes. An important task for authorities is to persuade children and families that they have resources available to help in these situations and that they can protect victims against retaliation.

A benefit of increased disclosure of victimization to authorities is greater access to effective prevention and treatment. More interventions that are truly helpful in preventing future victimizations and treating the negative effects of victimization on development are being developed, tested, and deemed effective. These include conflict resolution programs (Grossman et al., 1997), parenting education (Chaffin et al., 2004), and cognitive-behavioral treatments for victimization trauma (Cohen, Mannarino, and Deblinger, 2006; Kolko and Swenson, 2002; Stein et al., 2003). Therefore, in addition to more education and awareness to encourage disclosure, communities need also to ensure that they have professionals trained in such evidence-based programs to work with children and families once victimization is disclosed. Not all communities have such resources, and when they do not, it may undermine the value of gaining disclosures and reports. To improve access to services, more collaboration is needed among agencies that work with children. In particular, because so many victimizations come to the attention of school authorities, it is crucial that schools be connected to multidisciplinary resources, including mental health, social service, medical, and law enforcement resources (Asnes and Leventhal, 2011)

Endnotes

1. Public Law 93–247, 88 Stat. 5, as amended (codified at 42 U.S.C. 5101–5119c). For information about the Act, see U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2004). For an overview of federal and state child welfare programs under the Act, see Stoltsfus (2009).

2. For an overview of research on childhood exposure to violence and its aftermath, see Kracke and Hahn (2008).

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