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# Nature and Risk of Victimization

## FINDINGS FROM THE SURVEY OF YOUTH IN RESIDENTIAL PLACEMENT

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*The Survey of Youth in Residential Placement (SYRP) is the third component in the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's constellation of surveys providing updated statistics on youth in custody in the juvenile justice system. It joins the Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement and the Juvenile Residential Facility Census, which are biennial mail surveys of residential facility administrators conducted in alternating years. SYRP is a unique addition, gathering information directly from youth through anonymous interviews. This bulletin series reports on the first national SYRP, covering its development and design and providing detailed information on the youth's characteristics, backgrounds, and expectations; the conditions of their confinement; their needs and the services they received; and their experiences of victimization in placement.*

This bulletin covers key findings from the Survey of Youth in Residential Placement on youth's victimization in placement, including their experiences of theft, robbery, physical assault, and sexual assault. It presents the details of youth's reports about these victimization experiences, indicating the prevalence and frequency of victimization, the perpetrators involved, the use of weapons, and any injuries resulting from the victimization. Because SYRP provides substantial information about youth's characteristics, needs, and conditions of confinement (Sedlak and Bruce, 2010; Sedlak and McPherson, 2010a, 2010b), it also provides a rich basis for understanding the context of victimization.

The bulletin describes a variety of youth characteristics and facility conditions that correlate with victimization rates and identifies a core set of risk factors that predict the probability of a youth experiencing violence in custody.

SYRP findings are based on interviews with a nationally representative sample of 7,073 youth in custody during spring 2003, using an audio computer-assisted self-interview methodology. Facility administrators provided additional information about facility structure and operations by verifying the facility's answers on the most recent Juvenile Residential Facility Census (JRFC) survey and by completing



### A Message From OJJDP

The Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement, Juvenile Residential Facility Census, and Survey of Youth in Residential Placement (SYRP) comprise the nation's most comprehensive data collection program on youth in custody and the facilities that hold them. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) sponsors these surveys and disseminates the findings to provide a snapshot of the youth who comprise the nation's juvenile placement population, the facilities where they reside, and the conditions in which they live.

Conducted in 2003, SYRP is the first study to assess rates of victimization for youth in custody and the only study to do so across a range of domains: theft, robbery, physical assault, and sexual assault. As reported in this bulletin, the researchers found that 46 percent of youth had property taken in their absence, 10 percent were directly robbed, 29 percent were threatened or beaten, 9 percent were beaten and injured, and 4 percent were forced to engage in sexual activity. These findings signal the urgent need for policy and program initiatives that will reduce victimization and improve protections for confined youth.

One of OJJDP's primary mandates is to prevent the victimization of youth in custody. We hope that this bulletin will inform juvenile justice professionals and policymakers about how youth experience confinement and how they can improve facility structure and operations that often exacerbate those experiences.

the Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement (CJRP). For more information, see the sidebar "Surveying Youth in Residential Placement: Methodology."[1]

The research questions listed in table 1 guided the analyses reported here. To address the first general research question, the authors analyzed youth's answers to SYRP questions about their experiences of theft, robbery, physical assault, and sexual assault while in their current facility. To address the remaining research questions, the authors examined how a variety of youth and facility characteristics correlated with rates of self-reported victimization. To address the last research question, the authors also conducted a final series of multifactor analyses, which isolated a core set of risk factors, each of which independently predicts youth's risk of victimization. Each core risk factor is a unique contributor to a youth's overall level of victimization risk regardless of whether other core risk factors are also present. Findings from the study offer valuable guidance to the field because many strong risk factors for victimization are features that policy and/or practices can modify.

### Surveying Youth in Residential Placement: Methodology

The Survey of Youth in Residential Placement (SYRP) is the only national survey that gathers data directly from youth in custody, using anonymous interviews. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention designed the survey in 2000 and 2001. SYRP surveys offender youth between ages 10 and 20. It draws a nationally representative sample from state and local facilities that are identified by the Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement and Juvenile Residential Facility Census surveys.

SYRP interviewed youth from a representative selection of 205 eligible, responsive facilities listed on the census as of September 2002. The survey team interviewed 7,073 youth between the beginning of March and mid-June 2003. Surveys were electronic and used an audio computer-assisted self-interview system to ask questions and record answers.

When using this system, youth wear headphones and hear a prerecorded interviewer's voice read the words on the screen. Youth indicate their response choice by touching it on the screen. The computer program automatically navigates to the next appropriate question based on the youth's earlier answers, storing all the data anonymously and securely.

Statisticians assigned weights to reflect the sampling probabilities of the facility and the youth respondents and to adjust for nonresponse. In this way, the survey of 7,073 provided accurate estimates of the size and characteristics of the national youth offender population in custody (estimated as more than 100,000 youth).

## Victimization Experiences

SYRP asks youth about their victimization experiences while living in their current facility. Questions covered theft ("Have you had personal property stolen when you weren't around to protect it?"), robbery ("Have you had personal property taken directly by force or by threat?"), physical assault or threat ("Have you been beaten up or threatened with being beaten up?"), and sexual assault ("Has anyone forced you to engage in sexual activity?").

### Theft

Forty-six percent of youth claim their personal property was stolen when they were not present. Youth whose property was taken identify the thief or thieves as another resident they know (41 percent), another resident they do not know (35 percent), a staff member (19 percent), or someone else (8 percent). However, 39 percent of theft victims say they do not know who took their property.[2]

Overall, victims report an average of six episodes of theft during their stay in their current facility. Twenty-two percent of theft victims say theft occurred once, but the majority experienced multiple theft events, with 20 percent of theft victims saying that items were stolen from them more than five times during their residence in their current facility.

### Robbery

Ten percent of youth in custody say that during their time living in their current facility, someone used force or threat to steal their personal property. The majority of robbery victims (52 percent) identify the perpetrator as another resident they know; about one-fourth (26 percent) say it was another resident they do not know. Two-fifths (41 percent) of youth who claim they had property taken by force or threat say that a staff member did this.[3] Nine percent of robbery victims say someone else forced them to relinquish their property, whereas 8 percent say they do not know who robbed them.

Youth who say they were victims of robbery also reported whether a weapon was used in the robbery, what kind of weapon was used, whether they were injured in the robbery, what injuries they received, and whether they were treated for any injuries received during the robbery.

More than one-fourth of robbery victims (28 percent) say their assailant used a weapon to force or threaten them. Most of these youth (53 percent) identify the weapon as a sharp object other than a knife, such as scissors or a pencil. This would include any handcrafted makeshift weapons created within the facility.

About one-third of robbery victims (34 percent) say they were injured as a result of the robbery. Almost a third of those injured (31 percent) received medical care for their injuries. Youth identified the injuries they received when robbed in their facility. More than one-fourth of robbery victims (28 percent) report that they sustained bruises, a black eye, cuts, scratches, swelling, or chipped teeth.

About one-fourth of robbery victims (24 percent) report they were forced to relinquish their property only once while living in their current facility, but the majority experienced multiple episodes. One-fourth of robbery victims report that they were robbed more than five times while living in the facility. Robbery victims who were injured report significantly more robbery episodes (an average of 10 or more episodes) than uninjured robbery victims (an average of 5 episodes).

### Assault

Twenty-nine percent of youth in custody say they were beaten up or threatened with being beaten up since coming to their facility.[4] These assault victims identified their assailants as another resident they knew (70 percent), another resident they did not know (36 percent), a facility staff member (24 percent), or someone else (6 percent).

Nearly one-sixth (16 percent) of these assault victims say that a weapon was involved in their attack or threatened attack.

**Table 1: SYRP Research Questions Addressing the Nature and Risk of Victimization in Residential Placement**

| General Research Question | Specific Research Questions |
|---|---|
| How prevalent are victimization experiences and what are their characteristics? | ◆ What percentages of youth report that they were victims of theft, robbery, physical assault, or sexual assault? What percentages report having experienced any of these events? Any type of violence? Multiple forms of violence?<br>◆ Who are the perpetrators? What weapons were involved? What injuries did the youth experience? Were these treated?<br>◆ If youth were sexually assaulted, were any of the incidents reported? If so, was anything done to prevent a recurrence? |
| How do youth's individual characteristics relate to their risk of experiencing violence? | ◆ Do youth's sex, age, race, gang membership, offense history, length of stay, or prior victimization relate to their likelihood of experiencing violence? |
| Does a youth's relative standing in the program or living unit relate to his/her risk of experiencing violence? | ◆ Does it matter if a youth is notably younger than others, a relative newcomer, or if the youth's race/ethnicity is in the minority in the living unit or program?<br>◆ Does the relative severity of a youth's offense history relate to the risk of experiencing violence? |
| Does the social context in the program or living unit predict the risk of violent victimization? | ◆ Does the risk of violent victimization vary with the proportion of serious offenders in the unit?<br>◆ Does the proportion of gang members in the unit affect the risk of violence?<br>◆ Does the proportion of residents who experienced prior abuse relate to the risk of violence for youth in the unit?<br>◆ Are youth at greater (or lesser) risk in coeducational units? |
| Is the risk of violent victimization associated with features of the facility or placement context? | ◆ Does risk vary with facility size or organizational complexity?<br>◆ Does the nature of the program affect risk?<br>◆ How does risk relate to turnover in the facility or program?<br>◆ Does risk relate to the number of youth who sleep in the same room? |
| How does the facility climate affect risk of violent victimization? | ◆ What is the relationship between the risk of violent victimization and the presence of a contraband culture in the facility?<br>◆ Does the risk of experiencing personal violence vary with the presence of active gangs (gang fights)?<br>◆ Is risk of violence affected by the quality of the relations between staff and residents? |
| Is the accessibility of support, protection, and/or due process related to the risk of experiencing violence? | ◆ Are youth who know how to find support or help less likely to be victimized?<br>◆ Are youth who have more frequent contact with their family less likely to experience personal violence?<br>◆ How does a functional grievance process affect youth's risk of being victimized? |
| How do quality of facility conditions and programs relate to risk of violence for residents? | ◆ Are poorer physical conditions related to higher risk?<br>◆ Do the availability and quality of facility programs relate to risk of violence? |
| How do facility practices concerning rules, punishments, and methods of control relate to youth's risk of experiencing violence? | ◆ How do the communication of facility rules and their fair application affect risk of violence?<br>◆ How does use of harsh or unfair punishment relate to the likelihood of violent victimization?<br>◆ Are methods of physical control associated with risk of violent victimization? |
| How do the findings on factors that are individually related to the prevalence of violence translate into the real world, where many features are correlated with each other and where risk is affected simultaneously by multiple factors? | ◆ Which characteristics of youth and placement environments still predict risk of violence when the effects of other important risk factors are taken into account?<br>◆ What are the implications of these findings for placement policy and facility practices? |

Note: SYRP = Survey of Youth in Residential Placement.

Again, victims who reported weapons most commonly identified a sharp object other than a knife (49 percent), but some reported the use of blunt objects (33 percent) or other items.

Twenty-nine percent of assault victims claim they were injured, and 47 percent of these victims received medical care as a result of their injuries. One-fourth of assault victims (24 percent) say they suffered bruises, black eyes, cuts, scratches, swelling, or chipped teeth, while 14 percent report one or more other injuries.

Overall, youth who experienced threatened or actual attacks report an average of nine or more such episodes. Eighteen percent of these victims say they were assaulted or threatened once, but most experienced multiple threats or attacks. More than one-third of assault victims (36 percent) say they had more than five experiences of this type while living in their current facility. As with robbery victims, physical assault victims who were injured report significantly more occurrences (an average of 11 or more) than those who were not injured (an average of 9).

Although only 9 percent of assault victims say their assault experiences were reported to a staff member, counselor, teacher, or someone else who could help them, 33 percent say that something has been done to stop the kind of assault or threat they experienced from happening again.[5]

## Sexual Assault

Four percent of youth in custody say they were forced to engage in sexual activity while living in their current facility. The SYRP interview includes a single question about the nature of the sexual activity: "Did this person put any part of their body inside you?" Two-fifths of the sexual assault victims (41 percent) say this occurred during the coerced sexual activity they described. One-half (50 percent) of sexual assault victims identify facility staff as their assailants, 53 percent say the perpetrator was another resident they knew, 15 percent claim their attacker was another resident they did not know, and 5 percent say it was someone else.

At least one-sixth of sexual assault victims (17 percent)[6] indicate that their assailant used a weapon to threaten or force them to participate in sexual activity. Most of these youth (53 percent) identify the weapon as a sharp object other than a knife, 35 percent say the weapon was a knife, and 29 percent report it was a blunt object such as a rock or club.

At least one-fifth (20 percent) of sexual assault victims say they were injured during their assault experiences, and 21 percent of these victims report that they received medical care for their injuries. Among sexual assault victims, 17 percent claim they received bruises, black eyes, cuts, scratches, swelling, or chipped teeth, and 19 percent report one or more other kinds of injuries.

For the victims, these sexual assaults are not isolated occurrences. Youth who report any sexual assault experienced an average of six or more similar events during their time in residence. Only one-fourth of sexual assault victims say this type of assault happened only once, whereas one-third (33 percent) of sexual assault victims say they were forced into sexual activity more than five times while residing in their facility.

About two-fifths of sexual assault victims (39 percent) say their assault experiences were reported to a staff member, counselor, teacher, or someone else who could help them, and 27 percent of victimized youth say that something has been done to stop their sexual assaults from happening again.

## Overlap of Victimization Experiences

Fifty-six percent of youth in custody experienced one or more of the types of victimization described above. About one-sixth of youth in custody (17 percent) report one or more of the three types of violent victimization experiences, including being robbed, being injured in a physical assault,[7] or being sexually assaulted. Sixty-one percent of these victims report being injured during their experiences, and nearly one-half (47 percent) say they received medical care for injuries from these events.

The different forms of violence tend to occur to the same youth. Youth who report any one form of violent victimization are significantly more likely to report another type. Youth who say they were robbed are more likely to report being injured in a physical assault (36 percent) than those who were not robbed (6 percent). Youth who were robbed are also more likely to report being coerced into sexual activity (19 percent) than those who were not robbed (2 percent). Youth who report injurious physical assault (9 percent) are more likely to also report being robbed (40 percent) than youth who do not report injurious physical assault (7 percent). Youth injured in a physical assault are also more likely to report being sexually assaulted (17 percent) than youth who did not experience an injurious physical assault (3 percent). Sexually assaulted youth are more likely to say they were robbed (48 percent) than youth who were not sexually assaulted (8 percent) and are also more likely to experience injurious physical assault (36 percent) than other youth (7 percent).

## Factors Related to Risk of Victimization in Custody

To understand where youth are victimized and which youth are victimized, the authors identified the most important independent predictors of risk for victimization using a two-stage process. In the first stage, they identified a comprehensive set of youth and facility features that are correlated with victimization risk and determined which of these features were also related to each other and which were relatively independent of the others. In the second stage, they determined which of these independent features were the most important predictors of victimization risk while simultaneously considering the effects of other independent predictors of risk.[8]

### Developing a Comprehensive Set of Individual, Independent Correlates of Risk

The authors reviewed all the information available in SYRP and identified 51 characteristics of youth, their facilities, and their placement contexts that could potentially relate to their risk of experiencing violence in custody. They grouped these characteristics into five categories (table 2). Three categories comprise characteristics of the facility environment, and two categories relate to the youth's characteristics. The table indicates which characteristics correlate with youth's experiences of robbery, injurious physical assault, sexual assault, or any of these types of violence. Thirty of the characteristics correlate with all four measures of violence, whereas only three characteristics have no relationship to any measure of violence.

The first category, which includes 11 measures, describes the facility's structural and organizational characteristics. The next two categories describe youth's characteristics:

- Youth's personal demographics and background experiences (12 measures), such as age, prior sexual abuse, and gang membership.
- Youth's social context (11 measures), including characteristics of residents in the same living unit (such as the percentage of living unit residents with rape as an offense) and the youth's status compared with other residents (such as their age compared with the oldest youth in their program).

The last two categories of characteristics define the facility climate:

- Based on the individual youth's descriptions of the facility (11 measures), such as their views about living conditions.
- Based on the patterns of residents' answers in the youth's living unit (six measures), such as the percentage in the living unit who say they understand the facility rules.

(See table 2 for a list of all measures described above.)

Table 2 summarizes initial efforts to understand victimization risk. The authors computed the correlations for all pairs of the characteristics listed in table 2 to identify a subset of 18 relatively independent characteristics for further analysis:[9] the 11 characteristics listed in the first column of table 3 and 7 others—program type, sleeping arrangements (number of roommates), youth's gang membership, race/ethnicity, sex, prior placement in a foster or group home, and the percentage of youth in the living unit who know how to find help if assaulted or threatened. For further information about the characteristics listed in table 2, their individual correlations with rates of violence, and their correlations with each other, see the associated technical report (Sedlak and McPherson, forthcoming).

## Predictors of Risk

The next stage of analysis determined the most important independent predictors of victimization risk when the effects of other important predictors of victimization risk are taken into account.

The 18 characteristics all correlate with victimization rates. Although these characteristics, or factors, are moderately independent of each other, they are not entirely uncorrelated. For example, youth's age relates to their length of stay in their current facility (older youth have generally been in their facility longer); detention programs more often use makeshift beds (i.e., temporary sleeping locations to house youth beyond the facility's built capacity, such as cots, rollout beds, mattresses, and sofas) and their youth have shorter stays; and youth in correction programs have less frequent family contact, experience more forms of physical control, and are more likely to say that the rules are not applied fairly.[10] Single-factor analyses can lead to mistaken conclusions because of all of these underlying relationships. For instance, if older youth have higher rates of violent victimization, is this primarily related to their age or to their longer stays in the facility? A multivariate model simultaneously considers multiple predictors or variables (multi = multiple; variate = variables). This approach determines whether each factor relates to or predicts victimization risk when the effects of all other factors in the model are taken into account (or held constant). For

## Table 2: Characteristics Considered as Potential Correlates of Youth's Victimization Risk

**Facility structure and organization (11)**

*Significant correlations with all violence measures:*
- Median length of stay in living unit
- Living unit size (number of residents)

*Significant correlations with some violence measures:*
- Facility size (bed capacity)[1]
- Program type (detention, corrections, other)[2, 3]
- Facility complexity (number of living units)[1]
- Number of daytime locks[1]
- Sleeping arrangements (number of roommates)[1, 4, 5]
- Facility layout (one building or more)[3, 6]
- Facility uses makeshift beds[1, 5]
- Owner/operator (government vs. private)[1, 7, 8]

*No correlation with violence:*
- Crowding

**Youth's social context and relative status (11)**

*Significant correlations with all violence measures:*
- Youth is among most serious offenders in living unit
- Percentage in living unit with a violent offense
- Length of stay relative to average in the program
- Percentage in living unit with rape as an offense
- Percentage in living unit with murder as an offense[3, 10]

*Significant correlations with some violence measures:*
- Percentage in living unit who are members of a gang in the facility[1]
- Age compared to oldest youth in the program[1, 7]
- Percentage in living unit with prior sexual abuse[9]
- Percentage in living unit with prior physical abuse[4, 11]

*No correlation with violence:*
- Age range in living unit
- Youth is in racial minority in living unit

**Facility climate, based on living unit residents' answers (6)**

*Significant correlations with all violence measures:*
- Percentage in living unit who say rules are not applied fairly
- Average number of negative opinions of staff among living unit residents[3]
- Percentage in living unit who say they received solitary confinement
- Percentage in living unit who say they understand the facility rules
- Percentage in living unit who say they know how to find help if someone assaults or threatens them[3]

*Significant correlations with some violence measures:*
- Average number of positive opinions of staff among living unit residents[1]

**Youth's characteristics (12)**

*Significant correlations with all violence measures:*
- Length of stay in current facility
- Any prior abuse
- Prior sexual abuse
- Prior physical abuse
- Learning disability
- Most serious offense
- Gang membership
- Prior foster or group home

*Significant correlations with some violence measures:*
- Age[5, 6]
- Race/ethnicity[1, 9]
- Sex[8]
- Educational status (at appropriate grade level)[3, 7, 8, 9]

**Facility climate, based on youth's answers (11)**

*Significant correlations with all violence measures:*
- Gang fights in the facility
- Ineffective rules system
- Experiences of physical control methods
- Poor living conditions
- Negative views of staff
- Lack of support/protection
- Ineffective grievance process
- Access to contraband
- Unfair punishments
- Poor programs

*Significant correlations with some violence measures:*
- Frequency of family contact[2]

[1] Does not correlate with sexual assault.

[2] Correlation with sexual assault is statistically marginal.

[3] Correlation with sexual assault is lower (marginal or nonsignificant) when verified by excluding outliers (endnote 1).

[4] Correlation with "any violence" is lower (marginal or nonsignificant) when verified by excluding outliers (endnote 1).

[5] Correlation with physical assault is lower (marginal or nonsignificant) when verified by excluding outliers (endnote 1).

[6] Correlation with physical assault is statistically marginal.

[7] Does not correlate with physical assault.

[8] Does not correlate with the "any violence" measure.

[9] Does not correlate with robbery.

[10] Correlation with robbery is lower (marginal or nonsignificant) when verified by excluding outliers (endnote 1).

[11] Correlation with robbery is statistically marginal.

**Table 3: Independent Predictors of Victimization Rates**

| Predictor[1] | Odds Ratios[2] | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Any Violence | Robbery | Physical Assault | Sexual Assault |
| Ineffective grievance process (scores 0 to 2)[3] | 2.1 | 2.2 | 2.0 | 1.8 |
| Any prior abuse ("yes" versus "no") | 1.6 | 1.4 | 1.5 | 2.9 |
| Experiences of physical control methods (scores 0 to 6)[3] | 1.5 | 1.5 | 1.5 | 1.5 |
| Percentage in living unit who say rules are not applied fairly[3] | 1.01 | 1.01 | 1.01 | 1.01[4, 5] |
| Age (years)[3] | 0.86 | 0.90 | 0.87 | 0.87 |
| Use of makeshift beds ("yes" versus "no") | 0.6 | 0.5 | 0.6[4, 5] | NA |
| Learning disability ("yes" versus "no") | 1.5 | 1.5 | 1.6 | NA |
| Length of stay in current facility (months)[3] | 1.03 | NA | 1.03 | NA |
| Youth is among most serious offenders in living unit ("yes" versus "no") | 1.3[4] | NA | NA | 1.9 |
| Frequency of family contact (scores 1 to 5)[3] | NA | 0.9 | NA | NA |
| Poor programs (scores 0 to 4)[3] | NA | NA | 1.1[5] | NA |

NA = not applicable; predictor was not significant.

[1] The table lists only those predictors that were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) in the final model for one or more types of violence.

[2] The odds ratio is a measure of the proportional change in the odds of violent victimization associated with change in the predictor. For characteristics that are scored as "yes" versus "no," odds ratios greater than 1 indicate that "yes" answers relate to higher risk of experiencing violence. Odds ratios less than 1 indicate that "yes" answers relate to lower risk of experiencing violence. The greater the difference from 1, the greater the effect of the predictor variable.

[3] This predictor is treated as a continuous numeric scale, so the odds ratio indicates the proportional change in the odds of violent offending for every additional unit of the measure. In contrast, odds ratios for predictors that use a binary yes/no classification reflect the proportion of the odds in the "yes" condition to the odds in the "no" condition.

[4] This predictor becomes statistically marginal when the model is verified by excluding exaggerated offenders (endnote 1).

[5] This predictor becomes statistically marginal when the model is verified by excluding outliers (endnote 1).

example, a multivariate analysis can show whether youth's age is still related to their victimization risk when their length of stay in the facility is taken into account (or held constant). Thus, the multivariate model can essentially compare youth who are different ages but have similar lengths of stay to assess the independent effect of age on their victimization risk.

Using the 18 characteristics identified in the first stage, the authors developed separate models for robbery, injurious physical assault, sexual assault, and any violence.[11] Table 3 gives the odds ratios for significant characteristics in each final model. The odds ratios compare the chances of a youth experiencing violence when the risk factor is present compared with when it is absent. For risk factors measured on a numerical scale (in table 3, these are scores, percentages, and months), the odds ratios show the change in the odds of experiencing violence for each additional scale unit. The more an odds ratio differs from 1, the larger the effect the factor has on the risk of violent victimization. Odds ratios larger than 1 indicate that the factor raises youth's risk of experiencing violence; those smaller than 1 indicate that the factor lowers the risk of experiencing violence.[12]

The general pattern in table 3 indicates that the different forms of violence have many of the same risk factors. This section discusses the risk factors as listed in table 3. Because the multivariate analysis simultaneously considered the effects of all of these predictors, the percentages presented for each risk factor reflect victimization rates for youth with the same characteristics on other risk factors (i.e., youth who otherwise have equal risk).[13]

## Ineffective Grievance Process

The risk for all types of violence is considerably higher when youth indicate that the facility has an ineffective grievance process. This measure ranged from 0 to 2, reflecting the sum of a youth's scores on the following two items:

- Do you know how to file a complaint if you are being mistreated? (Score = 1 if "no")
- Something bad might happen to me if I file a grievance. (Score = 1 if "yes")

The odds ratios for this risk factor (table 3) are all quite high, showing that for each answer indicating an ineffective grievance process, the risk of violent victimization increases by a large amount. For youth with the same characteristics on other risk factors, 12 percent of those who do not indicate problems with the grievance process experience some form of violence, in contrast to 40 percent of youth who say they do not know how to file a complaint if they are mistreated and that they expect bad consequences if they do so. The pattern is similar across all three specific types of violence.

## Prior Abuse

Youth who say they experienced any physical or sexual abuse while they were living with their family or in another household have a significantly higher risk of experiencing violence while in custody. Among youth with the same characteristics on other risk factors, approximately one-fifth (21 percent) of youth with prior abuse experience some type of violence in custody, in contrast to 15 percent of youth who had no prior abuse. Prior victims have a higher risk of all types of violence while in custody.

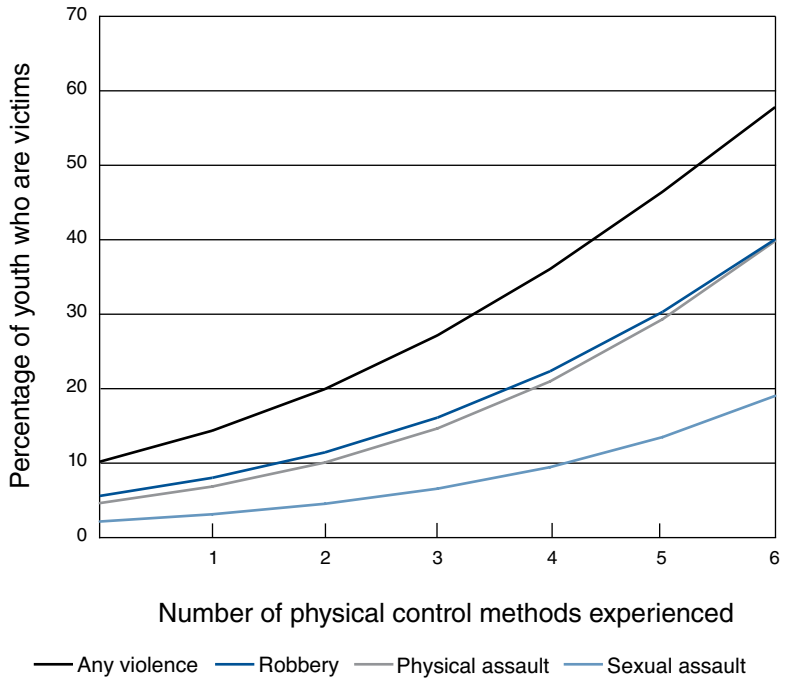
## Methods of Physical Control

Youth were asked about the different methods of physical control they had experienced and received a score (from 0 to 6) based on how many types of physical control staff had used on them since they arrived in the facility. These methods included being:

- Held down.
- Placed in handcuffs or wristlets.
- Placed in a security belt or chains.
- Strip searched.
- Sprayed with pepper spray.
- Put in a restraint chair.

Youth's scores on this measure relate to their risk of experiencing violence. Figure 1 shows these patterns for youth who do not differ on the other important risk factors. Ten percent of youth who did not receive any of these physical control methods reported experiencing some form of violence, compared with 58 percent of youth who experienced all six forms of physical control in their facility. The rates for robbery and injurious physical assault follow a similar pattern, ranging from 5 percent for youth who had no experience of these physical control methods to 40 percent for youth who experienced all six forms of physical control. Moreover, among youth with no physical control experiences, the rate of sexual assault is 2 percent, but for youth who experienced all six physical control methods, the sexual assault rate is 19 percent.

**Figure 1: Rates of Violent Victimization for Youth, as Related to the Number of Different Control Methods They Experienced**




Note: These rates assume that youth are equal on all other characteristics and experiences.

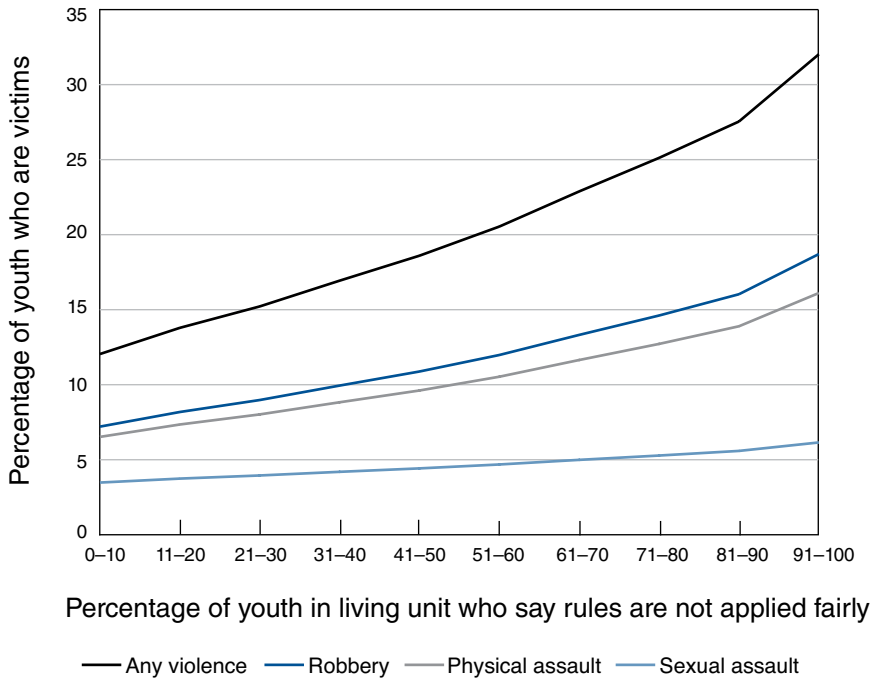
## Percentage of Residents in Youth's Living Unit Who Say Rules Are Not Applied Fairly

This risk factor reflects the views of all residents in a youth's living unit. Figure 2 shows the patterns for all types of violent victimization when youth do not differ on the other risk factors listed in table 3. The rate of any violence ranges from only 12 percent in living units where 10 percent or fewer residents think the rules are not applied fairly to 32 percent in units where more than 90 percent of residents think rules are not applied fairly. Significant differences in risk are also evident for specific types of violence. When comparing living units where less than 10 percent of residents feel the rules are not applied fairly with units where more than 90 percent of residents think they are not applied fairly, the risk ranges from 7 to 18 percent for robbery, from 6 to 16 percent for physical assault, and from 3 to 6 percent for sexual assault.

## Youth's Age

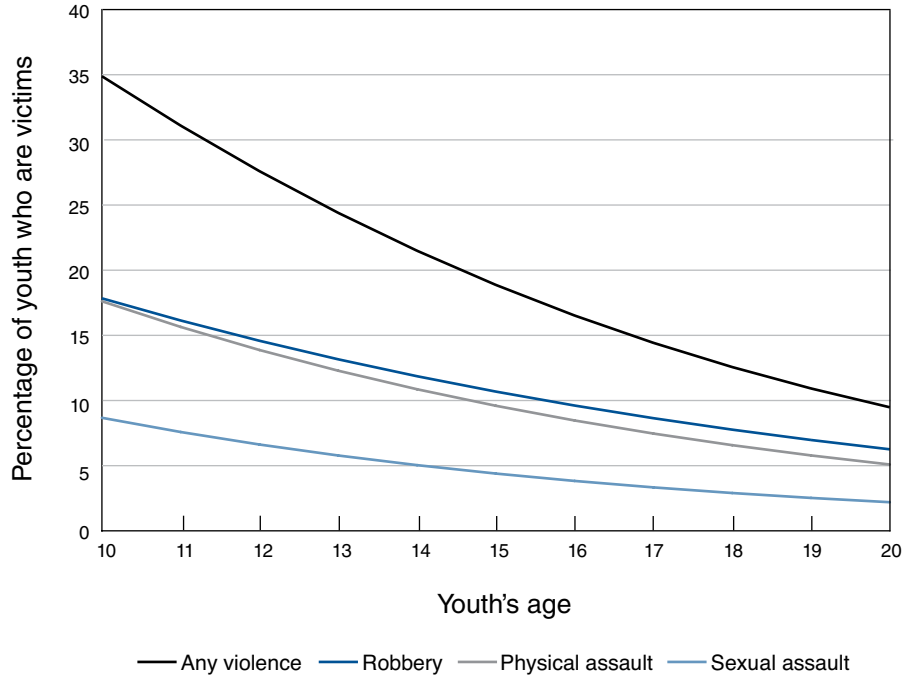
Figure 3 depicts the relationship between youth's age and the likelihood that they will experience violence when all other risk factors are taken into account. Younger youth have a higher risk for all types of violence. The model indicates that, among youth with equal risk of experiencing violence based on their other characteristics, more than one-fourth of youth younger than age 13 experience some type of violence in custody, compared with 9 percent of 20-year-old youth.[14]

**Figure 2: Rates of Violent Victimization of Youth, Related to the Percentage of Youth in the Living Unit Who Say Rules Are Not Applied Fairly**




Note: These rates assume that youth are equal on all other characteristics and experiences.

**Figure 3: Rates of Violent Victimization for Youth, as Related to Youth's Age**




Note: These rates assume that youth are equal on all other characteristics and experiences.

## Makeshift Beds

Only 8 percent of youth in custody reside in facilities that report using makeshift beds. Youth who reside in these facilities have a significantly lower risk of experiencing violence in three of the four violence categories.[15] Among youth with the same characteristics on other risk factors, 11 percent of youth in facilities that use makeshift beds experience some type of violence, compared with 17 percent of youth in other facilities. Facilities that use makeshift beds may have structural features or staffing arrangements that allow closer observation of the youth.

## Learning Disability

Youth who say they have a diagnosed learning disability have a significantly higher risk of experiencing all types of violence except sexual assault. When youth have the same characteristics on other risk factors, 21 percent of those with a learning disability experience some type of violence in custody, compared with 15 percent of other youth.

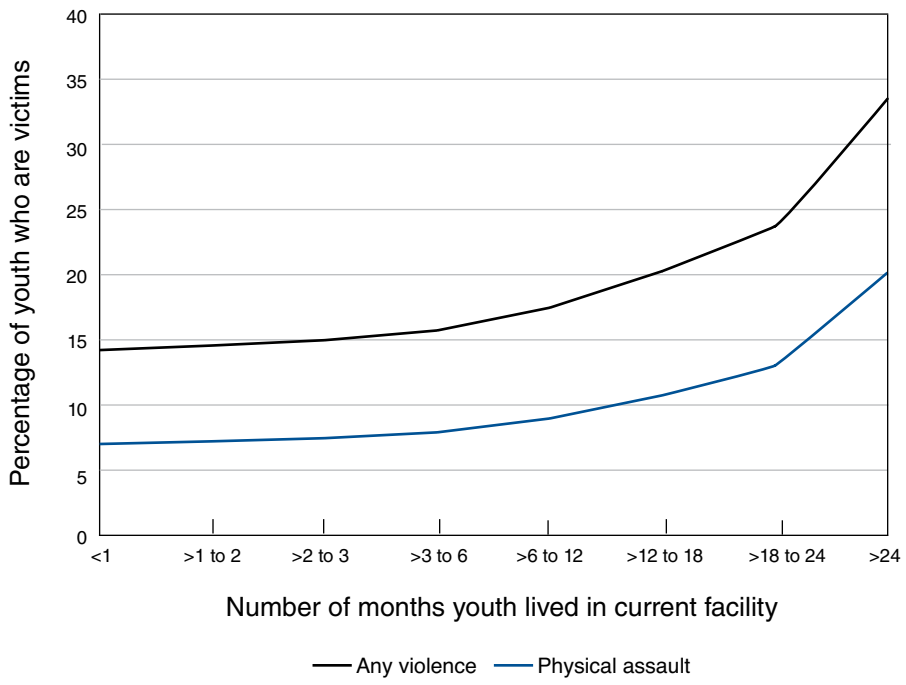
## Length of Stay

Figure 4 displays the relationship between youth's length of stay in their current facility and two categories of violence—any type of violence and physical assault. Youth who stay in their facility longer than 12 months have a notably higher risk of experiencing violence. When other risk factors are equal, less than 17 percent of youth in residence for a year or less experience some form of violence, compared with nearly one-fourth (24 percent) of youth in custody between 18 and 24 months and one-third (33 percent) of those who have been in their facility for more than 2 years. Between 7 and 9 percent of youth who are in their facility for 1 year or less experience injurious physical assault, compared with 20 percent of those who stay in the facility for more than 2 years.

## Most Serious Offenders in Living Unit

Youth who report offenses that are among the most serious in their living unit have significantly higher risk of victimization. Among youth who do not differ on the other risk factors, 20 percent of the most serious offenders experience some form of violent victimization, in contrast with 15 percent of other residents. The most serious offenders in their units also are

**Figure 4: Rates of Violent Victimization for Youth, as Related to Youth's Length of Stay (in Months) in Their Current Facility**




Note: These rates assume that youth are equal on all other characteristics and experiences.

sexually assaulted twice as frequently as other youth (6 percent versus 3 percent).

### Frequency of Family Contact

Youth who have more frequent telephone or face-to-face contact with their family have a lower risk of experiencing robbery. When youth have the same characteristics on other risk factors, 11 percent of those who see their family less than once a week have something taken from them by force or threat, compared with 8 percent of those who say they see their family three or more times a week.

### Poor Programs

Youth scores range from 0 to 4 on this measure, based on their answers to four questions about the facility's activities and programs: whether they attended school in the facility, spent any time watching television, thought the facility had a good school program, and thought the facility had a good recreational program. Among youth with the same characteristics on other risk factors, those with higher scores on this index are more likely to experience injurious physical assault: 7 percent of youth with scores of 0 (i.e., who answered "yes" to all four questions) report being physically assaulted and injured, compared with 11 percent of youth with maximum scores (i.e., who answered "no" to all four items).

## Discussion and Recommendations

SYRP is the first study to assess rates of victimization for youth in custody and the only study to do so across a range of domains: theft, robbery, physical assault, and sexual assault. The study determined that 46 percent of youth had their property stolen in their absence, 10 percent were directly robbed, 29 percent were threatened or beaten, 9 percent were beaten and injured, and 4 percent were forced to engage in sexual activity. The results signal the need for policy initiatives and programs that will reduce victimization risk and improve protections for youth held in juvenile justice custody.

### Predictors of Victimization

SYRP also indicates that different types of victimization experiences often occur to the same youth. The analyses show that this clustering of violent events can be explained by the fact that the different forms of violence have very similar risk factors, so all forms of violence are more prevalent among youth and in facility environments that possess these risk factors.

Factors that affect violent victimization risk for youth in custody have been found to affect the risk of victimization in other contexts as well:

- Youth who are among the most serious offenders in their living unit have a higher risk of being victims of some form of violence. Although others studying juveniles who were not in custody have also described the correlation between the severity of youth's offenses and their likelihood of being victimized (Huizinga and Jakob-Chien, 1998; Loeber, Kalb, and Huizinga, 2001), Shaffer's (2003) results are directly relevant to the SYRP finding because they documented the importance of the peer group dynamics underlying this relationship. Shaffer found that youth in more prominent positions within their offender peer groups[16] were more likely to be victimized.[17]
- Youth with prior physical or sexual abuse have a higher risk of experiencing all forms of violent victimization while in custody. This is consistent with the revictimization patterns commonly observed in the general population, where adults who were sexually or physically abused as children are more likely to be revictimized as adults (e.g., Classen, Palesh, and Aggarwal, 2005; Dietrich, 2000; Messman and Long, 1996; Messman-Moore and Long, 2000; Schaaf and McCanne, 1998). Clinicians and researchers have examined a variety of ways that normal coping or reactive responses to the earlier abuse could lead to maladaptive emotional, cognitive, or interpersonal dynamics that increase the likelihood of subsequent victimization (Chu, 1992; Cloitre, 1998; Dietrich, 2000, 2007; DePrince, 2005; Messman and Long, 1996).
- Youth in custody who have a learning disability are significantly more likely to experience nearly all forms of violence. There is a similar link between disability and victimization in the general population for both children and adults, although this varies with the nature of the disability and by type of victimization. Persons with intellectual disabilities are more likely to be

maltreated (Horner-Johnson and Drum, 2006) and to be victims of crime than those who do not have such disabilities (Rand and Harrell, 2009; Petersilia, 2001). Some have suggested that this is because they lack adequate social skills (Mayfield, 2005).

- Youth who say they experienced more methods of physical control are more likely to experience violence. These youth may exhibit more behavior problems (aggression and outbursts of anger) that facility staff respond to with physical control methods. Research has found that such youth are more likely to be victimized by their peers and more likely to become involved in high-conflict relationships where they experience more violence, both as perpetrator and victim (Maas et al., 2010; Shields and Cicchetti, 2001). In custody, these youth would pose a particular challenge in settings where staff lack training in how to subdue juveniles through communication and situational strategies before resorting to physical controls (Cellini, 1994).

## Implications for Juvenile Justice Policy and Practice

The results presented in this bulletin offer several insights into ways that juvenile facilities can prevent the victimization of youth in custody:

- The structural features of a facility are not important risk factors for violent victimization. The size and type of facility do not relate to victimization rates when characteristics of the youth, their social context, and the facility's climate are taken into account. (See examples of these characteristics in table 2.) Strategies for preventing violent victimization should focus on these youth, social context, and facility climate features.
- Certain youth have a higher risk of experiencing violence in custody, including those who are younger, those who have histories of prior abuse, and those who have a learning disability. Facilities should take special precautions to protect these more vulnerable youth, such as enhancing staff monitoring and structuring living arrangements to minimize the extent to which these vulnerable youth are exposed to older and more aggressive youth.
- Youth who are the most serious offenders in their living units and those who receive more methods of physical control also experience higher rates of violence in custody. Although these youth may seem capable of protecting themselves, SYRP results show that they also need protection. These youth may benefit from monitoring by staff who are aware of this higher risk and who are trained to use behavioral interventions, instead of relying on physical methods of control, to resolve conflicts and promote positive interactions.

- Rates of violent victimization are highest in places where youth lack faith in the just and fair operation of their facility. Facilities without an effective grievance process put youth at much higher risk of victimization, as do those where youth say the rules are not applied fairly. Facilities that ensure that youth know how to file a complaint and feel confident they will be protected from retaliation if they do so can substantially reduce the risk of violent victimization. Facilities that ensure that staff apply the rules fairly and consistently can further improve the safety of youth in their custody.

All of these recommended improvements focus on facility policies and practices that can be changed. Yet, changing traditional policies and longstanding practices always poses challenges. Administrators and staff must be convinced that changes will be beneficial and then become motivated to change. New approaches must have clear protocols and ways to verify that they are implemented.

A key implication of these findings is that facilities need not change physical structures or programs, but they should

### The Survey of Youth in Residential Placement

Further information about the Survey of Youth in Residential Placement (SYRP) can be found in the *Survey of Youth in Residential Placement: Technical Report* and other bulletins in this series, which include:

- *Introduction to the Survey of Youth in Residential Placement.*
- *Youth's Needs and Services: Findings From the Survey of Youth in Residential Placement.*
- *Conditions of Confinement: Findings From the Survey of Youth in Residential Placement.*
- *Youth's Characteristics and Backgrounds: Findings From the Survey of Youth in Residential Placement.*

Learn more about SYRP at www.syrp.org.

monitor the needs of youth who are at risk of experiencing violence and enhance staff training on the use of behavioral interventions. Extensive policy, procedural, and cultural changes are needed in facilities that have an inadequate grievance process and where staff treat youth unfairly. Because youth in these facilities are at the highest risk of experiencing violence, changes here can have the greatest impact.

## Endnotes

1. As Sedlak (2010) described, because of the policy importance of the SYRP victimization findings, the authors took special precautions to prevent suspicious answer patterns from distorting the results. First, they examined 18 markers of extreme answers and excluded youth with more than one extreme answer ("outliers") to verify the findings reported here on the incidence, characteristics, correlates, and predictors of victimization experiences. Second, the authors again verified the incidence of violent victimization experiences and the predictors of victimization risk by excluding youth whose survey answers identified them as more serious offenders than administrative records indicated ("exaggerated offenders," more than 26 percent of the study sample). The verified results differed only slightly from the overall patterns in a few instances, as noted.

2. Youth who were victims report all perpetrators, so the percentages of different types of perpetrators sum to more than 100 percent here and in subsequent sections. Multiple types of perpetrators could be involved in a single incident, and multiple incidents could involve different perpetrators.

3. This relatively high level of staff involvement suggests that the youth may have included incidents where staff confiscated contraband items or took away items temporarily as a punishment. SYRP data cannot clarify this because the survey did not ask details about what was taken or why it was taken.

4. Some facilities refused to allow the victimization questions about physical and sexual assault. This prevented researchers from obtaining answers on these items from 120 sample youth (representing 3 percent of the population of youth in custody). Throughout the SYRP bulletins, percentages are based on youth who provided substantive answers.

5. SYRP did not ask further questions about this issue, so the data do not indicate what was done or whether the facility administrators or staff intervened in any way.

6. Because sexual assault is the least frequent of the victimization events, its characteristics were more readily distorted by the responses of a few outlier youth. The verified percentages (excluding outliers) are reported here as minimum estimates when they differ from the overall findings.

7. Because the assault question asked whether youth were beaten up or threatened with being beaten up, not all youth who reported assaults were physically attacked—some were simply threatened. This group was narrowed to those youth who were injured as a result of the assault to focus on a subset of youth who experienced physical violence.

8. The authors followed these strategies to reflect how multiple factors simultaneously influence a youth's risk of victimization in the real world. Identifying the individual correlates of risk provides an oversimplified view of how the individual characteristics influence a youth's risk of victimization. Considering only how a single characteristic or feature relates to the risk of experiencing violence can even be misleading at times because the victimization patterns that appear for that single characteristic in isolation may be quite different from the patterns that appear when the effects of other important characteristics are considered. In fact, this occurred when analyzing the relationship between youth's age and risk of violence, as described in endnote 14.

9. Using the Pearson correlation coefficient, *r,* which indexes the strength of an association between two measures, the authors identified all pairs of moderately correlated features (correlated at $r = .25$ or higher). In each pair, they selected the characteristic most strongly associated with victimization rates for further analysis.

10. Although these correlations are less than $r = .25$, they are not trivial, with *r*'s around .20.

11. At each step, researchers removed the nonsignificant characteristics and reran the model. They repeated this process until no nonsignificant characteristics remained. Tests to determine whether any of the omitted characteristics could be significant in the reduced model did not lead to any additions.

12. Chances are not the same as odds, and odds ratios are different from simple odds. The chances of violent victimization may be 2 in 3 with the risk factor present, in which case the odds are 2:1—that is, 2 chances in 3 that the youth will be victimized to 1 chance in 3 that he or she will not be victimized. If a youth's chance of experiencing violence is only 1 in 3 when the risk factor is absent, his or her odds of being victimized are 1:2—or 1 chance of being victimized to 2 chances of not being victimized. The odds ratio is the odds of victimization with the risk factor divided by the odds without it. In this example, the odds ratio is 2/(1 divided by ½), which is equal to 4. Footnote 2 in table 3 also provides an explanation.

13. Because these percentages are for youth with equal risk on all the other important risk factors, they are not the same as the percentages that users of the SYRP data would see if they ignored the other risk factors and simply calculated the victimization rates for each individual risk factor separately.

14. The results in figure 3 demonstrate the importance of the multivariate analyses. The initial analyses, which examined victimization rates for different ages without considering any other risk factors, found a very different relationship between age and victimization rates, with higher rates of victimization for both older and younger youth. Older youth have additional other risk factors, such as longer stays in custody, and these other risk factors confound the single-characteristic results. The multivariate model indicates that the underlying relationship between age and risk of violent experiences is simpler: figure 3 shows a continuous decrease in risk of violent victimization with increasing age when the other important predictors of victimization risk (listed in table 3 and shown in the other figures in this report) are held constant.

15. SYRP obtained information about facilities' use of makeshift beds from their most recent Juvenile Residential Facility Census. The facility administrators verified that the responses still applied at the time of the SYRP interviews.

16. These are youth who are nominated as a friend by many others; that is, other youth know and want to be known by the youth in central positions.

17. Shaffer (2003) suggested that a perpetrator of violence may expect that a successful attack on the more prominent group member offers a potential gain in status or prestige that outweighs the potential risks.

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