



## JUVENILE JUSTICE BULLETIN



# NATIONAL SURVEY OF Children's Exposure to Violence



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# Children's Exposure to Violence, Crime, and Abuse: An Update

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This bulletin discusses the second National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence (NatSCEV II), which was conducted in 2011 as a followup to the original NatSCEV I survey. The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) sponsored both surveys. The Crimes against Children Research Center of the University of New Hampshire conducted the NatSCEV I survey between January and May 2008. NatSCEV I represented the first comprehensive national survey of children's past-year and lifetime exposure to violence, crime, and abuse in the home, school, and community across children and youth from ages 1 month to 17 years. (For more information on NatSCEV I, see "History of the National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence").

As in the first NatSCEV survey, NatSCEV II researchers interviewed a nationally representative sample of children and their caregivers regarding the children's exposure to violence, crime, and abuse across several major categories:

conventional crime, child maltreatment, victimization by peers and siblings, sexual victimization, witnessing and indirect victimization (including exposure to community violence, family violence, and school violence and threats), and Internet victimization. (For more detailed information on the types of violence that children were questioned about in NatSCEV I, see Finkelhor, Turner, Ormrod, Hamby, and Kracke, 2009). In addition to the types of exposure to violence, crime, and abuse covered in the original survey, NatSCEV II asked participants about several new types of exposure in the categories of conventional crime, child maltreatment, peer and sibling victimization, and Internet victimization (see "Methodology").

In general, NatSCEV II confirms the earlier survey's findings regarding the extent of children's past-year and lifetime exposure to violence, crime, and abuse, with few significant changes in reported exposures between the two surveys. In the NatSCEV II sample, approximately three in five children (57.7 percent) experienced

## 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. 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.



Access OJJDP publications online at [ojjdp.gov](http://ojjdp.gov).

Learn more about the Attorney General's Defending Childhood Initiative at [justice.gov/ag/defendingchildhood](http://justice.gov/ag/defendingchildhood).

Find out more about OJJDP's Safe Start Initiative on the Safe Start program summary page at [ojjdp.gov](http://ojjdp.gov).

at least one exposure to five aggregate types of violence in the past year (physical assault, sexual victimization, maltreatment, property victimization, and witnessing violence). Among the individual categories of exposure, declines somewhat outnumbered increases; however, NatSCEV II recorded significant changes from 2008 (all declines) in exposure to only 6 of 54 types of exposure to violence covered in the survey (see “Methodology”): property victimization and robbery (past year), being flashed by a peer (past year and lifetime), statutory sex offenses (past year and lifetime), school bomb threats (past year and lifetime), and assault by juvenile siblings (lifetime).

NatSCEV II recorded high levels of past-year exposure to various individual categories of direct victimization. In 2011, approximately 2 in 5 children and youth surveyed (41.2 percent) were victims of at least one assault in the past year, and approximately 1 in 10 (10.1 percent) were injured in an assault. Approximately 1 in 20 children and youth (5.6 percent) were sexually victimized in the past year. Approximately one in four children and youth (24.1 percent) were victims of property crimes (including robbery, vandalism, and theft) in the past year. The reported rate of child maltreatment (including physical, sexual, and emotional abuse; neglect; and custodial interference or family abduction) in the past year was 13.8 percent.

Approximately 1 in 4 study participants witnessed a violent act in the past year (22.4 percent), and approximately 1 in 12 witnessed family violence in the past year (8.2 percent). Approximately 1 in 30 children and youth (3.7 percent) experienced bomb or attack threats against their schools. The rate of indirect exposure to household theft was 7.9 percent in the past year.

Multiple exposures to violence among children and youth continued to be a concern, with nearly one-half (48.4 percent) of NatSCEV II participants reporting more than one type of direct or witnessed victimization in the past year—nearly 1 in 6 (15.1 percent) reported 6 or more types of direct or witnessed victimization and 1 in 20 (4.9 percent) reported 10 or more types of direct or witnessed victimization over the same period.

In 2011, reported rates of lifetime exposure to violence continued to be high, especially for the oldest youth (ages 14–17), showing how exposure to violence accumulates as a child grows. For example, approximately 7 in 10 of these youth (69.7 percent) had been assaulted during their lifetimes, and a similar proportion (71.5 percent) witnessed violence during their lifetimes. In addition, more than half of these youth (56.6 percent) were victims of property crimes during their lifetimes. Lifetime exposure to major categories of violence for all youth surveyed in 2011 ranged from approximately 1 in 10 (9.5 percent) for sexual victimization to more than half (54.5 percent) for any assault. During their lifetimes, one in four (25.6 percent) were victims of maltreatment, two in five (40.2 percent) were victims of property crimes, and two in five (39.2 percent) witnessed violence.

## Background

Childhood exposure to violence, crime, and abuse can lead to serious consequences for the health and well-being of those exposed, both during childhood and throughout adulthood (Shonkoff, Boyce, and McEwen, 2009; Fang et al., 2012). Child maltreatment, peer victimization, and exposure to family and community violence have all been shown to be connected to developmental difficulties, problem behavior, and physical and mental health effects extending throughout the lifespan (Danese et al., 2009; Sachs-Ericsson et al., 2005; Widom, DuMont, and Czaja, 2007; Bensley, Van Eenwyk, and Wynkoop Simmons, 2003). Children exposed to violence, crime, and abuse are more likely to abuse drugs and alcohol; suffer from depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress disorder; fail or have difficulties in school; and become delinquent and engage in criminal behavior. (For a more detailed discussion of the problem of child victimization, see Finkelhor, Turner, Ormrod, Hamby, and Kracke, 2009, and the sources cited therein.) Measuring child victimization accurately and comprehensively is crucial to reducing child victimization because those assessments help child welfare professionals identify and provide services to child victims of violence and their families and provide programs to educate children, their families, and those who work with children at risk for violence (including educators, social workers,

medical professionals, and juvenile justice professionals). Unfortunately, earlier studies that measured children’s exposure to violence often were limited in the age ranges and types of exposure to violence studied as well as where the exposure to violence took place (i.e., they were limited to violent incidents in the home, the school, or the community instead of studying incidents in all of these locations) (Shonkoff, Boyce, and McEwen, 2009; Finkelhor, 2008; Nansel et al., 2003). Most of these studies tended to concentrate on specific forms of violence, such as child maltreatment, domestic violence, bullying, or community violence. This meant that data could not be combined to provide an accurate assessment of the total level of violence, crime, and abuse in a child’s environment. These studies also tended to look at specific characteristics of violent events (e.g., location, victim, or perpetrator) rather than viewing them from the perspective of the totality of the child’s experience. As a result, controversies persist about the most common forms of victimization, the age of greatest exposure to various types of victimization, and trends across time as children grow (Almeida et al., 2008; Mulford and Giordano, 2008; Pepler et al., 2008). In addition, few earlier studies analyzed the effect of polyvictimization—the cumulative effect over time of repeated exposures to multiple forms of violence, including a greater risk of exposure to other forms of violence and accumulation of multiple adversities and trauma symptoms (Dong et al., 2004; Finkelhor, Ormrod, and Turner, 2007).

To support a more regular and systematic nationwide assessment of children’s exposure to violence, crime, and abuse, DOJ supported the collection of critical nationwide data to assess the full range and scope of children’s exposure to violence (both direct and indirect) in the home, school, and community. CDC joined with DOJ to support the collection of data on variables for safe, stable, and nurturing relationships as protective factors for vulnerable youth. NatSCEV I, conducted in 2008, was the first such assessment (Finkelhor, Turner, Ormrod, and Hamby, 2009); the bulletin presenting survey findings was published in 2009 (Finkelhor, Turner, Ormrod, Hamby, and Kracke, 2009). NatSCEV I represented the first nationwide attempt to measure children’s past-year and lifetime exposure to violence across a number of categories, from relatively minor and common forms

## 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). CDC partnered with OJJDP to support the assessment of safe, stable, and nurturing relationships and environments as protective factors for vulnerable youth.

NatSCEV I was 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 marked 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 the incidents of violence that children suffered and witnessed themselves and also about 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. OJJDP directed the development of the study, and the Crimes against Children Research Center at the University of New Hampshire designed and conducted the research. It provided data on the full extent of violence in the daily lives of children. NatSCEV documented 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 documented differences in exposure to violence across gender, race, socioeconomic status, family structure, region, urban/rural residence, and developmental stage of the child; specified how different forms of violent victimization "cluster" or co-occur; identified individual-, family-, and community-level predictors of violence exposure among children; examined associations between levels/types of exposure to violence and children's mental and emotional health; and assessed the extent to which children disclose incidents of violence to various individuals and the nature and source of assistance or treatment provided (if any).

of violence (such as siblings hitting one another) to more serious forms of violence (such as sexual victimization, including attempted and completed rape and statutory sex offenses, assaults with a weapon, and assaults that resulted in injury). It also represented the first comprehensive attempt to capture the full range of childhood exposure to violence, crime, and abuse in the home, school, and community in a single survey, collecting data on 48 types of exposure across 7 domains: conventional crime, child maltreatment, peer and sibling victimization, sexual victimization,

witnessing and indirect victimization, school violence and threats, and Internet violence and victimization (Finkelhor, Turner, Ormrod, Hamby, and Kracke, 2009). It further represented the first attempt to systematically measure witnessing violence and indirect violence in the home, school, and community, including children's witnessing of intimate partner violence and other violence within the family, and witnessing and other exposure to shootings, assaults, and murder in the community. The NatSCEV I survey was the most detailed survey to that date and the first national survey

to examine children's witnessing and exposure to intimate partner violence and other family violence (Hamby et al., 2011). The rates of exposure to intimate partner violence and other family violence were considerably higher than in previous surveys that captured more limited data on these exposures. NatSCEV II confirms these magnitudes, indicating that exposure to violence within the family remains a matter of grave concern for those who work with our nation's youth (see "History of the National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence").

The second survey in this assessment, NatSCEV II (conducted in 2011), gathered information about the past-year and lifetime exposure to violence among a new group of 4,503 children ages 1 month to 17 years. The updated survey asked participants about children's exposure to the same general categories of violence, crime, and abuse as in NatSCEV I. To monitor this nationwide problem over time, NatSCEV II generally replicated the first survey in terms of sample size, sampling procedures, and the questions asked of participants, although it asked some new questions that went into greater depth about exposure to assaults by adults, child maltreatment and neglect, peer and sibling victimization, and cell phone harassment (see "Methodology" for more information on the NatSCEV II survey procedures and the new screening questions). Beyond the measures of violence exposure, the survey also has information about mental health status, delinquency, family environment, and other childhood adversities.

The addition of questions about cell phone harassment helps to increase understanding of whether the greater use of electronic communication media by youth increases or moderates violence between peers. As youth socialize and communicate electronically, they may be spending less time in face-to-face contact situations where assaults and physical violence can occur (Common Sense Media, 2012; Vahlberg, 2010). They may also be doing more of their risk taking and independence testing online, which may provide some safeguards against immediate physical exposure to violence. The engrossing quality of the Internet may also have undercut some of the boredom and alienation among youth that has in the past been associated with delinquency and criminal pursuits (Common Sense Media, 2012; Rideout, Foehr, and Roberts, 2010). At the same time, when children



## Methodology

The National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence II (NatSCEV II) was designed to obtain up-to-date incidence and prevalence estimates of a wide range of childhood victimizations. The sample size, sampling and interview procedures, and questions asked generally followed those of the original NatSCEV survey, but some changes were made to account for households' greater cell phone use and to provide more details on certain types of victimization.

Telephone interviews were conducted with a nationwide sample of 4,503 children and youth ages 1 month to 17 years (or their caregivers for children younger than age 10) in 2011 (as compared with 4,549 interviewees in 2008). The sample of telephone households was determined by random-digit dialing. In addition, to represent the growing number of households that rely entirely or mostly on cell phones, the researchers contacted a national sample of 31 cell phone numbers and an address-based sample of 750 households that responded to a one-page mail questionnaire. Approximately one-half of the households in the address-based sample used cell phones only. The average cooperation rate was 60 percent and the average response rate was 40 percent across all means of collection.

As in 2008, a short interview was conducted with an adult caregiver (usually a parent) to obtain family demographic information. The child with the most recent birthday was then selected from all eligible children living in a household. If the selected child was 10 to 17 years old, the main telephone interview was conducted with the child. If the child was younger than age 10, the interview was conducted with the caregiver who "is most familiar with the child's daily routine and experiences."

Respondents were promised complete confidentiality and were paid \$20 for their participation. The interviews, averaging 55 minutes in length, were conducted in either English or Spanish. Respondents who disclosed a situation of serious threat or ongoing victimization were contacted again by a clinical member of the research team, trained in telephone crisis counseling, whose responsibility was to stay in contact with the respondent until the situation was appropriately addressed locally. All procedures were authorized by the Institutional Review Board of the University of New Hampshire.

To correct for study design and demographic variations in nonresponse, weights were applied to adjust for (1) differing probabilities of household selection based on sampling frames; (2) variations in within-household selection resulting from different numbers of eligible children across households; and (3) differences in sample proportions according to gender, age, race/ethnicity, income, census region, number of adults and children in the household, and phone status (cell only, mostly cell, other) relative to the 2010 American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Sample.

## Types of Victimization Surveyed

This survey used an enhanced version of the Juvenile Victimization Questionnaire (JVQ), an inventory of childhood victimization (Finkelhor, Hamby et al., 2005; Finkelhor, Ormrod et al., 2005; Hamby et al., 2004). The test-retest reliability and construct validity of the JVQ were established in a previous national sample that used the JVQ, the Developmental Victimization Survey, conducted in 2002 and 2003 (Finkelhor, Hamby et al., 2005; Hamby, Finkelhor, and Turner, 2012).

This enhanced version of the JVQ obtained reports on 54 forms of offenses against youth that cover the following general areas of concern: conventional crime, child maltreatment, peer and sibling victimization, sexual assault, exposure to family violence and abuse, witnessing and indirect victimization, Internet and cell phone victimization, and school violence and bomb threats. The NatSCEV II survey instrument included several new questions that were not included in NatSCEV I in 2008: conventional crime, child maltreatment and neglect, peer and sibling victimization, and Internet/cell phone victimization, as described below:

- **Conventional crime:** Hitting or an attack on a child by any adult, and hitting or an attack that resulted in injury.
- **Child maltreatment/neglect:** A parent's inability to look after a child because of drug or alcohol abuse or psychological problems, parent abandonment of a child, the presence in the home of persons who made the child fearful, unsafe or unsanitary conditions in the home, and failure to attend to the child's cleanliness or grooming.

and youth get into threatening situations, cell phone technology now affords them a way of summoning help or recording misbehavior, which may act as a deterrent (Crime in America.net, 2011; Klick, MacDonald, and Stratmann, 2012).

The new questions in NatSCEV II regarding child maltreatment, neglect, or abandonment solicited additional details about conditions in the child's

household related to that maltreatment and neglect and gathered information about possible unsanitary, unsafe, or threatening conditions that the child might be subjected to that would require immediate intervention. Similarly, the additional questions about peer and sibling victimization solicited additional information about the types of relational aggression that a child or youth might be subjected to from classmates or

acquaintances, including ostracism and the spreading of hurtful lies and rumors, and made it clear that those behaviors are components of relational aggression. In addition, the new questions about assaults by adults captured general information relating to assaults by adults against children that NatSCEV I did not capture, allowing more exact measurement of all forms of violence by adults against children.

## Methodology (continued)

- **Peer and sibling victimization:** Types of emotional bullying or relational aggression, including peers spreading lies or rumors about a child or otherwise trying to make a child be disliked; and peers excluding, ostracizing, or ignoring a child.
- **Internet/cell phone victimization:** Use of cell phone/texting to harass a child or spread harmful words and pictures about or of the child.

Followup questions for each screener item gathered additional information, including perpetrator characteristics, the use of a weapon, whether injury resulted, and whether the event occurred in conjunction with another screener event. Because different types of victimizations can occur together and can overlap by definition (e.g., physical abuse by a caretaker can also be an assault with or without injury), the rates reported for victimizations reflect considerable rescoring of the data provided by the screener items and their followup questions. Rates shown for NatSCEV II reflect the incorporation of the new information; however, statistical comparisons of rates with 2008 were based on data only from screeners that were used in both surveys. The rates determined reflect 44 types of victimization in the following categories:

- **Assaults and bullying:** Any physical assault (excludes threats, bullying, and teasing/emotional bullying), assault with a weapon, assault with injury, assault without a weapon or injury, attempted assault, attempted or completed kidnapping, assault by an adult, assault by a juvenile sibling, assault by a nonsibling peer, assault by a gang or group, nonsexual genital assault, dating violence, bias attack, credible threat of attack, physical intimidation (formerly physical bullying), relational aggression (formerly emotional bullying), or Internet/cell phone harassment.
- **Sexual victimization:** Any sexual victimization (includes statutory sex offenses), sexual assault, completed rape, attempted or completed rape, sexual assault by a known adult, sexual assault by an adult stranger, sexual assault by a peer, flashing or sexual exposure by a peer, flashing or sexual exposure by an adult, sexual harassment, or Internet sex talk.
- **Child maltreatment:** Any maltreatment, physical abuse, psychological or emotional abuse, neglect, custodial interference, or family abduction.
- **Property victimization:** Any property victimization, including robbery, vandalism, or theft by a nonsibling.
- **Witnessed and indirect victimization:** Any witnessed violence (if the child saw or heard the assault); witnessed family assault; witnessed partner assault; witnessed physical abuse; witnessed other family assault; witnessed assault in the community; or exposure to shooting, bombs, or riots.

## Limitations

The study has a variety of limitations that make it difficult to capture the full extent of children's exposure to violence. The families that could not be found at home or that refused to cooperate for themselves or their children may be the families where children have discrepant levels of exposure compared to the cooperating families. For many reasons, children may fail to disclose all their exposures, and parents may not know about all of a child's exposure to violence or may underreport or minimize certain types of victimizations. The screening questions for exposures needed to be brief and may not have included enough examples and details to trigger the memory of qualifying experiences. Some exposures, especially over a long timespan, may be forgotten or may have occurred before the memory capacity of some victims was well formed. Some important types of victimization, such as witnessing parental homicide, occur too infrequently in the population to be adequately counted in a survey methodology of this sort. In spite of these limitations, the approach taken by NatSCEV II is more detailed and comprehensive than previous violence exposure studies.

## Major Findings From the NatSCEV II Survey

Like NatSCEV I, NatSCEV II estimates both past-year and lifetime exposure to violence across a number of categories, including physical assault, bullying, sexual victimization, child maltreatment and neglect, property victimization, and witnessed and indirect victimization (see "Methodology" above for more detailed definitions of these terms). Exhibit 1 illustrates the past-year and lifetime exposure to selected categories of violence for all youth studied and for the

oldest youth surveyed (those ages 14–17). Some of the more notable findings are outlined below (see Finkelhor et al., 2013, for more details).

The NatSCEV II survey confirmed NatSCEV I's finding that children's exposure to violence is common; nearly 60 percent of the sample (57.7 percent) had been exposed to violence in the past year, and more than 1 in 10 reported 5 or more exposures. This exposure occurs across all age ranges of childhood and for both genders (see exhibit 2 for a comparison of past-year and lifetime exposure to

selected categories of victimization among boys and girls).

### Assaults and Bullying

Two in five children (41.2 percent) were physically assaulted during the past year, and 1 in 10 (10.1 percent) was injured. Siblings and nonsibling peers were both common perpetrators, and assaults from both groups were most common during middle childhood. Assaults by siblings were most common among 6- to 9-year-olds, with 28.0 percent being victims in the past year, and assaults by nonsibling peers were most common among 10- to

**Exhibit 1. Exposure to Selected Categories of Violence for All Youth in Sample and for 14- to 17-Year-Olds: NatSCEV II**

	All Youth		14- to 17-Year-Olds	
	Past Year	Lifetime	Past Year	Lifetime
Any physical assault	<b>41.2%</b>	<b>54.5%</b>	<b>39.5%</b>	<b>69.7%</b>
Assault with no weapon or injury	29.8	44.2	23.6	56.2
Assault with a weapon	6.2	10.3	6.8	16.9
Assault with injury	10.1	16.6	16.6	31.9
<b>Assault by juvenile sibling</b>	<b>20.7</b>	<b>28.6</b>	13.6	32.6
Physical intimidation <sup>a</sup>	13.7	24.6	9.6	33.7
Relational aggression <sup>a</sup>	36.5	51.8	39.6	72.3
Dating violence	3.2 <sup>b</sup>	3.4 <sup>b</sup>	4.2	6.3
Internet/cell phone harassment	6.0 <sup>c</sup>	8.5 <sup>c</sup>	13.9	20.3
Any sexual victimization	5.6	9.5	16.4	27.4
Sexual assault	2.2	4.1	6.1	10.6
<b>Statutory sex offense</b>	<b>0.1</b>	<b>0.2</b>	0.1	0.3
<b>Peer flashing</b>	<b>1.6</b>	<b>3.1</b>	3.8	8.3
Any child maltreatment	13.8	25.6	20.6	41.2
Physical abuse	3.7	9.6	5.5	18.2
Emotional abuse	8.0 <sup>d</sup>	14.9 <sup>d</sup>	13.9	25.7
Neglect	6.5	14.6	8.6	22.3
<b>Any property victimization</b>	<b>24.1</b>	<b>40.2</b>	28.5	56.6
<b>Robbery</b>	<b>4.3</b>	<b>8.7</b>	3.0	8.9
Vandalism	6.8	13.4	6.5	17.9
Theft	6.7	14.8	9.5	26.8
Witnessing violence <sup>e</sup>	22.4	39.2	42.6	71.5
Witnessing partner assault	6.1	17.3	7.6	28.3
Witnessing family assault	8.2	20.8	10.2	34.5
Witnessing community assault	16.9	27.5	36.4	58.9
Indirect exposure to violence	3.4	10.1	6.4	21.8
Indirect exposure to family assault	1.0	3.0	1.5	6.3
Indirect exposure to community violence	2.5	7.9	5.0	17.3
Household theft	7.9	20.3	9.1	32.7
<b>School bomb or attack threat</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>9.6</b>	8.4	21.7

Note: Values in bold are significantly different from those in the NatSCEV I survey in 2008.

<sup>a</sup> Bullying includes both physical intimidation and relational aggression.

<sup>b</sup> For adolescents age 12 and older.

<sup>c</sup> For children and youth age 5 and older.

<sup>d</sup> For children and youth age 2 and older.

<sup>e</sup> Excludes indirect exposure to violence.

13-year-olds, with 23.5 percent being victims in the past year. However, both sibling and nonsibling peer assaults were common throughout childhood and adolescence: Among 2- to 5-year-olds, 26.3 percent were assaulted by siblings and 16.4 percent

were assaulted by nonsibling peers in the past year; among 14- to 17-year-olds, 13.6 percent were assaulted by siblings and 18.4 percent were assaulted by nonsibling peers in the past year. NatSCEV II was the first survey to report in general on

assaults on children by adults; these were less common than assaults by peers and siblings, with a past-year rate of 5.0 percent and a lifetime rate of 10.2 percent for all children and youth. Both past-year and lifetime rates of assault by adults were similar for boys and girls; past-year rates of assault by adults were highest for 14- to 17-year-olds, but the difference across the age range from 6 to 17 years was not significant.

Some specific types of assaults occurred to smaller groups of youth in the previous year: dating violence to 3.2 percent of youth who were age 12 or older, bias attacks to 1.8 percent, gang or group assault to 1.7 percent, and attempted or completed kidnapping to 0.6 percent. Boys experienced more assaults overall (45.2 percent vs. 37.1 percent for girls) and had particularly disproportionate levels of assault with injury (13.0 percent vs. 7.1 percent), gang/group assault (2.5 percent vs. 0.9 percent), and nonsexual assault to the genitals (9.3 percent vs. 1.0 percent). Girls were targets of more dating violence (4.7 percent vs. 1.9 percent). Assault with injury, dating violence, and nonsexual assault to the genitals were higher among the oldest youth.

Bullying-type victimizations were also common, with 13.7 percent of children and youth being physically intimidated within the past year and 36.5 percent being victims of relational aggression within the past year. (The terms “physical intimidation” and “relational aggression” were used instead of the more common terms of physical and emotional bullying, which in their technical definition require a “power imbalance” in the relationship between victim and perpetrator.) Past-year rates of exposure to relational aggression and Internet/cell phone harassment were higher for girls (NatSCEV II, unlike the first survey, asked specifically about cell phone harassment). Past-year rates of physical intimidation for boys and girls were comparable but did differ by age, with the highest rate experienced by children younger than 10. Among other victimization types occurring in the past year, relational aggression was highest for 6- to 9-year-olds, and Internet/cell phone harassment was highest for 14- to 17-year-olds.

The overall estimate for assault in 2011 was down 2.2 percentage points compared to 2008, and most specific forms of assault also showed declines. However, except for the decline in lifetime exposure to

**Exhibit 2. Exposure to Selected Categories of Violence, Crime, and Abuse by Gender: NatSCEV II**

	Past Year		Lifetime	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
Any physical assault	<b>45.2%</b>	<b>37.1%</b>	<b>58.5%</b>	<b>50.3%</b>
Assault with no weapon or injury	<b>33.0</b>	<b>26.4</b>	<b>48.0</b>	<b>40.3</b>
Assault with a weapon	<b>7.4</b>	<b>5.1</b>	<b>12.8</b>	<b>7.7</b>
Assault with injury	<b>13.0</b>	<b>7.1</b>	<b>21.3</b>	<b>11.6</b>
Assault by juvenile sibling	22.2	19.2	<b>30.7</b>	<b>26.6</b>
Physical intimidation <sup>a</sup>	14.1	13.3	24.3	25.0
Relational aggression <sup>a</sup>	<b>31.9</b>	<b>41.4</b>	<b>48.4</b>	<b>55.5</b>
Dating violence <sup>b</sup>	<b>1.9</b>	<b>4.7</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>6.4</b>
Internet/cell phone harassment <sup>c</sup>	<b>3.8</b>	<b>8.3</b>	<b>5.8</b>	<b>11.3</b>
Any sexual victimization	<b>3.8</b>	<b>7.5</b>	<b>7.8</b>	<b>11.4</b>
Sexual assault	<b>1.0</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>2.5</b>	<b>5.9</b>
Statutory sex offense	0.1	0.1	0.3	0.3
Peer flashing	1.8	1.4	3.0	3.2
Any child maltreatment	13.4	14.2	25.2	26.1
Physical abuse	<b>4.5</b>	<b>2.9</b>	<b>11.0</b>	<b>8.1</b>
Emotional abuse <sup>d</sup>	6.9	9.2	<b>12.5</b>	<b>17.5</b>
Neglect	6.9	6.0	15.2	14.0
Any property victimization	24.9	23.2	<b>42.5</b>	<b>37.8</b>
Robbery	4.7	3.9	9.1	8.3
Vandalism	<b>8.7</b>	<b>4.8</b>	<b>16.6</b>	<b>10.1</b>
Theft	6.4	6.9	15.5	14.1
Witnessing violence <sup>e</sup>	<b>24.2</b>	<b>20.5</b>	40.9	37.4
Witnessing partner assault	6.0	17.6	6.1	17.1
Witnessing family assault	8.5	7.8	20.9	20.7
Witnessing community assault	<b>18.5</b>	<b>15.2</b>	<b>30.0</b>	<b>24.9</b>
Indirect exposure to violence	3.7	3.1	10.1	10.2
Indirect exposure to family assault	0.9	1.0	2.9	3.1
Indirect exposure to community violence	2.9	2.1	7.7	8.2
Household theft	<b>9.2</b>	<b>6.6</b>	22.2	18.3
School bomb or attack threat	<b>2.3</b>	<b>5.2</b>	<b>7.9</b>	<b>11.5</b>

Note: Values in bold are significantly different for males and females at  $p < 05$ .

<sup>a</sup> Bullying includes both physical intimidation and relational aggression.

<sup>b</sup> For adolescents age 12 and older.

<sup>c</sup> For children and youth age 5 and older.

<sup>d</sup> For children and youth age 2 and older.

<sup>e</sup> Excludes indirect exposure to violence.

sibling assault, none of the changes in assault from 2008 to 2011 were statistically significant.

**Sexual Victimization**

Nearly 6 percent (5.6 percent) of the total sample experienced a sexual

victimization in the past year, and 2.2 percent experienced a sexual assault in the past year. (Sexual assault includes attempted and completed rape and contact sex offenses by adults and peers but excludes sexual harassment.) Girls ages 14–17 represented the highest risk

group, with 22.8 percent experiencing a sexual victimization and 10.7 percent experiencing a sexual assault in the past year. Among this group, 8.1 percent reported an attempted or completed rape, 13.6 percent were sexually harassed, and 12.9 percent were exposed to an unwanted Internet sexual solicitation in the past year.

NatSCEV II shows lifetime estimates for sexual victimization for 14- to 17-year-olds by gender: during their lifetimes, 17.4 percent of the older girls and 4.2 percent of the older boys said they had experienced a sexual assault. Completed rape occurred for 3.6 percent of girls and 0.4 percent of boys. Sexual assault by a known adult occurred for 5.9 percent of girls and 0.3 percent of boys. Sexual assault by an unknown adult occurred for 3.8 percent of girls and 0.1 percent of boys. One category of sexual victimization, peer flashing, saw a significant decline from 2008 in both past-year and lifetime rates.

**Child Maltreatment and Neglect**

Child maltreatment includes physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, sexual abuse by a known adult, and custodial interference or family abduction (defined as one parent taking, keeping, or hiding a child to prevent the child from being with the other parent; Finkelhor, Turner, Ormrod, and Hamby, 2009). Altogether, 13.8 percent of the sample experienced such maltreatment in the past year, and 25.6 percent experienced it during their lifetimes. The lifetime rate of child maltreatment for the oldest subgroup, 14- to 17-year-olds, was 41.2 percent. Emotional abuse by a caregiver was the most frequent; the past-year rate was 8.0 percent for the total sample and the lifetime rate was 25.7 percent for 14- to 17-year-olds. The rate for physical abuse by a caregiver was 3.7 percent for the full sample in the past year and 18.2 percent for 14- to 17-year-olds in their lifetimes. The rate for neglect was 6.5 percent for the full sample in the past year and 22.3 percent for 14- to 17-year-olds in their lifetimes. Gender differences were evident for physical abuse only, with boys experiencing somewhat higher rates in the past year (4.5 percent vs. 2.9 percent for girls). Rates of both physical and emotional abuse were significantly higher for older children. There were no significant changes in the rate of child maltreatment from 2008 to 2011.



## Property Victimization

Property victimization, consisting of robbery, vandalism, and theft by nonsiblings, occurred to 24.1 percent of children and youth during the past year. Vandalism was more common for boys (8.7 percent vs. 4.8 percent for girls), and theft was more common among older youth. Property victimization as a whole and robbery specifically declined significantly from 2008.

## Witnessing and Indirect Victimization

Almost a quarter of the sample (22.4 percent) had witnessed violence in the past year, either in the family or in the community. In addition, 8.2 percent had witnessed a family assault, and 6.1 percent had witnessed a parent assault another parent (or parental partner) in the past year. Over their lifetimes, more than one in five children surveyed (20.8 percent) witnessed a family assault, and more than one in six (17.3 percent) witnessed one parent assault another parent or a parental partner. Among the oldest youth (ages 14–17), the lifetime rate of witnessing any family assault was 34.5 percent, and 28.3 percent of these youth had witnessed one parent assaulting another. There were few significant gender or age differences in the witnessing of family assaults.

In the case of witnessing a community assault, the rate for all children and youth was 16.9 percent in the past year and 58.9 percent over the lifetime of the oldest youth. The rate for lifetime exposure to shootings (including hearing gunshots as well as seeing someone shot) was 16.8 percent for the oldest group of youth (ages 14–17), but the rate for exposure to warfare was only 2.0 percent. Among all children and youth, 7.9 percent had been exposed to household theft in the past year and 3.7 percent had been exposed to a bomb threat or other attack threat in their school in the past year. Past-year and lifetime exposure to school bomb and attack threats significantly declined since 2008.

## Multiple Exposures

Altogether, 57.7 percent of the children had experienced at least one of five aggregate types of direct or witnessed victimization in the year prior to this survey (physical assault, sexual victimization, maltreatment, property victimization, or witnessing family/



community violence). Exposures to multiple types of violence were also common. Among all children and youth surveyed, nearly half (48.4 percent) had experienced more than one specific victimization type involving direct or witnessed victimization (out of 50 possible types), nearly 1 in 6 (15.1 percent) experienced 6 or more types, and nearly 1 in 20 (4.9 percent) had been exposed to 10 or more different forms of victimization.

Exposure to one type of violence, crime, or abuse increased the likelihood that a child had exposures to other types as well. Exhibit 3 presents the odds ratios that a child or youth who is exposed to one type of victimization will be exposed to a victimization of another type. An odds ratio greater than 1.0 means that a youth who suffers one type of victimization is at increased risk of exposure to another type of victimization. In most cases, the risk of an additional type of exposure was increased by a factor of two or three for a past-year exposure and somewhat more for a lifetime exposure. For example, having a past-year assault was associated with a 2.7 times greater likelihood of sexual victimization and a 2.9 times greater likelihood of caregiver maltreatment. This increase in risk of exposure to other forms of violence occurred for all combinations of exposure.

## Victimization and Delinquency

Among children age 6 and older, violent delinquency dropped by 30 percent from 2008 to 2011, and property delinquency decreased by 40 percent. In 2011, 16.5 percent of the youth engaged in an act of violent delinquency, and 12.1 percent

engaged in an act of property delinquency. (For a comprehensive discussion of the relationship between victimization and delinquency, with reference to the NatSCEV I findings, see Cuevas et al., 2013.)

## Comparison of Selected NatSCEV I and NatSCEV II Survey Results

The rates reported here for 2011 have been compared to rates from the 2008 NatSCEV I survey, which was also based on a nationally representative sample of children and youth ages 1 month to 17 years (Finkelhor, Turner, Ormrod, and Hamby, 2009; Finkelhor, Turner, Ormrod, Hamby, and Kracke, 2009).

Comparing the exposure rates between the two surveys suggests a mixture of stability and change. The percentage experiencing any of the five direct and witnessed aggregate types of exposure to violence, crime, and abuse (assaults and bullying, sexual victimization, child maltreatment, property victimization, and witnessing and indirect victimization) in the past year fell by 2.3 percentage points, but that change was not significant. Declines outnumbered increases somewhat among the specific types of exposures, but there were only 6 types out of 54 whose changes were significant for either the past year or lifetime. Assault by juvenile siblings (lifetime) declined, being flashed by a peer and statutory sex offenses (past year and lifetime) declined, property victimization (past year) and robbery (past year) declined, and school bomb threats (past year and lifetime) declined.



These trends are consistent with other evidence: the National Crime Victimization Survey showed post-2008 declines in violent crime and property crime exposure among youth (Finkelhor, 2013; Robers et al., 2012; White and Lauritsen, 2012) and, according to Federal Bureau of Investigation statistics, the overall trend in crime as tracked by reports to the police was down 4, 6, and 5 percent, respectively, for each successive year from 2008 to 2011 (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013). Rates for substantiated child maltreatment fell during the period 2008 to 2011, including declines in sexual abuse within the family (Finkelhor, Jones, and Shattuck, 2013), and police reports of crime and homicide dropped.

### Implications for Researchers, Practitioners, and Policymakers

This section discusses implications for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers in a number of areas. This study reinforces numerous previous reports showing that children and youth are frequently exposed to violence, abuse, and crime both annually

and over the course of their childhoods (Baum, 2005; Kilpatrick, Saunders, and Smith, 2003; Straus et al., 1998). The NatSCEV surveys measure this exposure in greater detail than prior research, breaking it down by a variety of distinct and sometimes related types by age and by both past-year and lifetime rates. The NatSCEV I and NatSCEV II surveys allow researchers and policymakers to track trends over time and to monitor the possible effects of social changes and public policies. The survey findings also enable public health officials to educate the public about the harms to children from exposure to violence, crime, and abuse. Moreover, they provide practitioners with risk and protective factor data on which to base evidence-based approaches to reducing children’s exposure to violence, crime, and abuse and to craft interventions to prevent and treat the harms resulting from that exposure. Overall, from 2008 to 2011 there were more decreases than increases in rates of children’s exposure to specific types of violence, crime, and abuse, but few of the changes were large enough to be detectable as significant with the sample sizes available. There were significant downward trends in both past-year and lifetime peer flashing and

statutory sex crimes. Also significant were declines in past-year robbery and property victimization, lifetime exposure to juvenile sibling assault, and past-year and lifetime school bomb threats.

These surveys are the first to comprehensively document children’s exposure to incidents of violence, crime, and abuse from the child’s perspective as both victim and witness. The comprehensiveness of these surveys documents the degree to which some youth experience multiple exposures that appear to be highly correlated within types. It also provides a perspective on the degree to which exposure to multiple types of violence across a range of domains has an exponential impact on both the risk of further victimization and the level of trauma and adversity a child experiences. Eleven percent of the youth in the sample had experienced six or more types of direct victimization in a single year; this highly vulnerable segment of the youth with “polyvictimizations” suffers from many adversities at rates significantly higher than those youth who experience victimizations within single categories of violence, crime, and abuse, even those who experience serious,

**Exhibit 3. Past-Year and Lifetime Risk of Multiple Exposures, Matching Each Victimization Type With Other Victimization Types**

Victimization Type	Odds Ratio					
	Assaults and Bullying	Sexual Victimization	Maltreatment by a Caregiver	Property Victimization	Witnessing Violence	Other Indirect Exposure
<b>Past-Year Victimization</b>						
Assaults and Bullying	1.0	2.7	2.9	2.9	2.0	2.5
Sexual Victimization	1.5	1.0	2.9	2.3	2.1	1.9
Maltreatment by a Caregiver	1.8	3.6	1.0	2.0	2.3	1.5
Property Victimization	1.9	3.4	2.3	1.0	1.9	2.2
Witnessing Violence	1.6	2.7	2.7	2.0	1.0	5.6
Other Indirect Exposure	2.5	1.8	1.4	1.8	2.9	1.0
<b>Lifetime Victimization</b>						
Assaults and Bullying	1.0	3.7	3.4	2.7	2.5	2.3
Sexual Victimization	1.5	1.0	2.6	1.7	1.9	2.3
Maltreatment by a Caregiver	1.8	4.0	1.0	2.0	2.5	2.4
Property Victimization	1.8	2.5	2.6	1.0	2.1	2.3
Witnessing Violence	1.8	3.4	4.1	2.2	1.0	4.5
Other Indirect Exposure	1.4	2.3	1.9	1.6	2.0	1.0

N = 4,503 (ages 0–17)

Odds ratios converted to approximate the risk ratio to adjust for outcome incidence (Zhang and Yu, 1998).

All odds ratios are statistically significant at  $p < .05$ . Analyses control for age.

Values equal to 1.0 are reference values.

chronic victimizations, such as repeated sexual abuse. The characteristics of these polyvictimized youth differ significantly from those of other youth in that their exposures to violence, crime, and abuse are far more serious and chronic, accounting for a disproportionate share of the most serious victimizations, including sexual abuse and child maltreatment, and reach across multiple domains. These youth have relatively few areas of safety, which may explain their added distress and vulnerability (Finkelhor et al., 2011; Finkelhor, Ormrod, and Turner, 2007; Turner, Finkelhor, and Ormrod, 2010).

The exponential nature of the harms caused by polyvictimization has serious and far-ranging implications for research, policy, and practice. Researchers should broaden their focus, away from studying individual categories of violence, crime, and abuse, and move toward looking at the totality of a child's experience. Research that focuses on single types or domains of violence, crime, and abuse may inaccurately attribute adverse outcomes to single types of victimizations without investigating whether multiple types of victimizations are co-occurring and exacerbating those outcomes. In addition, as part of the concentration on the child's experience, researchers and practitioners need to look at how experiences in the home, school, and community reinforce each other. Children do not experience individual incidents of violence, crime, and abuse in isolation from other events. Therefore, teachers, school counselors, medical and mental health professionals, child welfare professionals, domestic violence advocates, law enforcement officers, juvenile justice system professionals, and other practitioners who work with children at risk need to identify the full range of victimizations a child may be experiencing, not limiting themselves to the problem or incident that was the reason for the initial contact with the child. For example, when a child is referred to a child welfare agency because of violence within the home, the caseworker should assess possible child maltreatment as well as the child's possible exposure to violent incidents in the home, school, and community. Expanding the use of screening tools and protocols will enable practitioners to assess child victims more broadly to understand and identify the full scope of their risks and adversities as well as the resiliency and protective factors that mitigate some of the harms that exposure



to violence, crime, and abuse cause (see Turner et al., forthcoming).

In treating child victims of violence, crime, and abuse, medical and mental health professionals need to do more to identify and treat victims with multiple domains of exposure. Treatment needs to address all victimizations and the resulting adversities that a child may be experiencing, not only the presenting problem for which a child is referred. As part of treating victims of violence, crime, and abuse in multiple domains, treatment professionals need to provide them with support to help them decrease their vulnerability to further victimization and disrupt the pathways that lead to future adversities. For children exposed to intimate partner violence and other family violence, better screening protocols that can be used in many settings are needed. These children need more and better evidence-based prevention programs and interventions to reduce the harms that exposure to family violence cause, and greater efforts are needed to coordinate services for adult and child victims to keep both the children and the adults in the household safe (Hamby et al., 2011).

In general, perhaps the most important implication of these studies for understanding, preventing, and responding to children's exposure to violence, crime, and abuse is the need to reach across disciplines and coordinate across sectors in a way that responds to all of a child's needs. Just as the NatSCEV surveys examine children's total and cumulative experience of violence, crime, and abuse in the home, school, and community, addressing the consequences of that exposure will require the efforts

of researchers, practitioners, educators, law enforcement officers, child welfare professionals, juvenile justice system personnel, medical and mental health providers, and parents and families working together to protect children and help them heal and grow into healthy, productive adults.

### **Implications of More Comprehensive Measurement of Victimization**

Public health has clearly demonstrated the value of comprehensive, frequent, and ongoing measurement for the management and reduction of a wide variety of health problems. Unfortunately, systematic measurement has been less available outside the public health field. The high rate of children's exposure to violence, crime, and abuse and the complexity and interrelationships among the types of exposure argue for much more systematic, frequent, and intensive efforts to measure this exposure. Some categories of victimization that are covered in the NatSCEV survey that warrant more comprehensive and regular measurement include multiple types of sexual victimization (including sexual assaults by known adults, adult strangers, and peers), bullying, and dating violence. Although NatSCEV does not measure certain types of exposures to violence, crime, and abuse, and the sample size has some limitations for detecting changes in the rarest exposures to violence among children, the NatSCEV surveys point to the feasibility of more coordinated and frequent measurement of specific types of exposures. More work is needed to refine

measurement and determine how many and what proportion of child victims are and are not coming to the attention of practitioners. In addition, there is a need to collect surveillance data at the state and local levels from multiple sources to better inform prevention programs and policies and tailor them to local conditions. Coordinating the collection of these data would also help standardize the definitions of the various types of children's exposure to violence, crime, and abuse across the multiple systems—including mental and physical health care, child welfare, education, and law enforcement—that come into contact with at-risk children and provide services on their behalf (Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, 2014).

### Implications for Interventions With Children and Families

One factor that holds promise for reducing children's exposure to violence may be the growth and dissemination of prevention and intervention strategies aimed at reducing youth violence and victimization. Anecdotal information suggests that a wide variety of programs were disseminated prior to and during the 2008 to 2011 period. These include school-based prevention programs targeting bullying, interpersonal conflict, sexual violence, and dating violence—some of which have been shown to be effective in rigorous evaluation studies (Foshee et al., 1998, 2004; Grossman et al., 1997; Tfofi and Farrington, 2011). These programs also include family prevention and intervention strategies (including parenting education programs) that have shown effectiveness in reducing child maltreatment and delinquent behavior (Borduin et al., 1995; Chaffin et al., 2011, 2012; Eckenrode et al., 2010; Olds et al., 1998; Prinz et al., 2009). Some programs that mobilize law enforcement (including school resource officers) to reduce youth violence and victimization have also been shown to be effective (Braga, 2005; Braga, Papachristos, and Hureau, 2012, 2014; Johnson, 1999; Na and Gottfredson, 2013).

Continuing to focus attention on the prevalence and incidence of children's exposure to violence may help those who work with children and their families better understand what may be effective in preventing violence and extending improvements in safety. Although evaluations of specific prevention programs are the most conclusive for guiding prevention strategies, studies

comparing local policy environments and their association with violence trends could be helpful in providing feedback about the value of various policy mixes. Studies that address specific hypotheses may help guide the development of more specific violence prevention programs that employ these strategies.

### For More Information

This bulletin was adapted from Finkelhor, D., Turner, H.A., Shattuck, A.M., and Hamby, S.L. 2013. Violence, crime, and abuse exposure in a national sample of children and youth: An update. *JAMA Pediatrics* 167(7):614–621.

To learn more about the Safe Start Initiative, visit the Safe Start program summary page on OJJDP's website at [ojjdp.gov](http://ojjdp.gov). For more information about the National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence, visit the Crimes against Children Research Center website at [www.unh.edu/ccrc](http://www.unh.edu/ccrc).

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