

Is Crime Victimization Less Serious for Juveniles than Adults?

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Children suffer from a great deal of violence and crime. But while there has been a special field within criminology devoted to juvenile criminal behavior, juvenile delinquency, there has not been an equivalent field devoted to juvenile victimization. This does not mean that there has been little interest in children's victimization, only that most of it has arisen outside the field of criminology. Large literatures exist on such topics as child abuse, sexual abuse and bullying, but these have drawn attention primarily from the fields of psychology and child development.

Within criminology, there has been some interest in the victimization of adolescents (Lauritsen, Sampson & Laub, 1991), but little in the victimization of children. Even what interest there has been has mostly concerned the relationship between victimization and delinquency, not just victimization itself. One of the reasons for the neglect of juvenile victimization is simply that good statistics -- the staple of those criminologists who work on crime victimization -- have not been available (Finkelhor & Dziuba-Leatherman, 1994b). But another problem has been a persistent belief that the victimization of juveniles, particularly their criminal victimization, is not as serious as the criminal victimization of adults, and is different in other ways that put it outside the traditional realm of criminology. For example in an influential article on adolescent victimization, Garofalo, Siegel and Laub (1987) concluded, "Generally, victimization of juveniles tend to be less serious than victimizations of adults..."(p. 336). Juvenile victimizations tend to get stereotyped as fighting and petty larcenies and experiences with bullies that do not qualify as serious crime.

The seriousness of youth victimization is a complex issue. Children's victimizations do differ from adults in some ways and the differences can be

interpreted to suggest less seriousness, in some cases, but they can also be interpreted to suggest more. However, there are also a great many stereotypes about youth victimization that may make it more difficult to approach this issue dispassionately and that strongly color its discussion.

In this paper, I would like to consider some of the issues in evaluating the seriousness of children's victimization. First, I will look at some of the available evidence that may reflect on the issue of the seriousness of youth victimization versus the rest of the population. Second, I identify and critique some of the stereotypes and conventional images that bias discussions of youth victimization and make the diversity and seriousness more difficult to perceive.

Statistical Evidence

In trying to look at the question of seriousness, one of the big problems is inadequate data. Statistics are not available that clearly identify the nature of crime victimization for all ages of children. The National Crime Survey only provides statistics on persons age 12 and older and the Uniform Crime report does not report crimes by age with the exception of homicide. Unfortunately, other studies of children's victimization that have data on children, and even young children, do not have comparison samples of adults (Elliot & Huizinga, 1983; Finkelhor, Hotaling & Sedlak, 1990). The NCS is one of few sources that interviews both youth and adults about their crime victimizations and can be used to compare seriousness, but it has some major limitations. Children younger than age 12, those excluded in the NCS, are among those thought to have the least serious kinds of victimization. But on the other hand, the NCS itself may undercount some of the most serious youth

victimizations, like child abuse, that do not tend to get reported because it is not clearly asked about and because of the general context of the survey, which is about conventional crime. Moreover, a well-known criticism of the NCS is that it does not interview children alone and thus may inhibit disclosure of family victimizations, which occur more often to children, and other experiences children may not want their family to know about. Even police statistics probably differentially undercount serious crimes like rape and homicides occurring to juveniles (Ewigman, Kivlahan & Land, 1993).

Rates of Victimization

Available data from the NCS and other sources do show that youth suffer from absolute rates of victimization that are substantially higher than for the population in general. The overall violent crime rate for youth 12-17 in 1992 was 2.3 higher than the average rate (Moone, 1994). It was higher for rape, robbery and assault. Unfortunately, however, the picture for children younger than 12 is not so clear. Studies do suggest that assaults and sexual assaults are common for children younger than age 12 (Finkelhor, 1994; Kilpatrick, 1992), but comparison to adult rates are not available. There is evidence that children of all ages suffer from more intrafamily assaults than adults (Straus, Gelles & Steinmetz, 1980).

Although rates for youth are high, not all crimes are equal to others in actual and perceived severity. So the question remains whether children and youth are more vulnerable to the most high profile and stereotypically serious kinds of crime.

The homicide rate, the most serious crime, provides a mixed picture. Two groups of young people have relatively high rates of homicide (Figure 1).

Older teens have a homicide rate that clearly exceeds the overall rate. Sixteen and seventeen year olds are murdered at a rate of 15.2 per hundred thousand, about 50% higher than overall rate for all persons. Infants under the age of 1 also have rates that are high, although somewhat lower than the rate for all persons according the FBI statistics. But detailed studies of the fatality statistics for young children suggest that police statistics may undercount infant homicides by as much as 50% since they are hard to distinguish from deaths due to SIDS or accidents (Ewigman, et al., 1993). Aside from such infants and older teens, though, children along the rest of the age spectrum, from 1 to 15, actually have very low homicide rates, a fraction of national average.

In contrast to homicide, juveniles (that is, juvenile women) suffer from disproportionately high rates of sexual assault over a broad spectrum of their age range. NCS statistics show that women 12-17 suffer over three times more rape than older women. An analysis of reported forcible rapes (that is excluding sex crimes based solely on age of consent) based on police statistics found that half of all victims in 1992 were under 18 (Langan & Harlow, 1994), although that age group makes up only one quarter of the population. In retrospective self-reporting, Kilpatrick (1992) found 62% of forcible rapes over the course of a lifetime occurred to women under 18.

Moreover, this heightened vulnerability to sexual assault extends even below age 12. Kilpatrick (1992) found that 29% of forcible rapes occurred to women under age 11, although this age group makes up only 17% of the population. Rates of sexual assault, at least from retrospective reports, start to increase for girls around age seven and eight (Finkelhor & Baron, 1986), so it is not clear if rates are elevated for girls under seven. But

overall, in this serious crime, children down to around age seven appear to have a substantially greater vulnerability than their adult counterparts.

Aside from sexual assault, the most common kinds of crimes, and those that dominate in the NCS data, are assault, robbery and theft. The image associated with these assaults is that they are of a generally less serious nature when they occur to youth. However, the NCS data actually portray a more complex picture.

In terms of robbery and assault, teenage youth clearly suffer more such crime than adults. Twelve to seventeen year olds suffer twice as much aggravated and three times as much simple assault as the population as a whole. Robbery rates are almost double for teenage youth (Table 1). For younger children, the picture is less clear because comparative data are not available. Other studies show stable assault rates for youth down to age 10 (Finkelhor & Dziuba-Leatherman, 1994a), and school observation studies show a great deal of assault throughout grade school (Olweus, 1978). But are these victimizations as serious as the ones suffered by adults?

Perhaps the most direct indicator of crime seriousness is whether it causes injury. According to the NCS, percentage of youth victims sustaining injury is little different from other victims: the percentage of injuries for 12-15 year olds for assault was a little higher and the percentage of injuries for robbery a little lower than average (Table 2). But taking into account that the underlying rate for assault and robbery is higher for youth, this means considerably more crime related injury occurs to youth overall.

However, the NCS considers as injuries things that are of a rather minor nature, including cuts and bruises. As an indicator of more serious injuries, they also gather information on the percent of injured victims who actually

receive hospital care. Younger victims, 12-19 year olds (the breakdown is not available for 12-15), are somewhat less likely when injured to receive hospital care (18.3% of injured vs an overall rate of 24.6%). This may be a sign of that youth victimization on average is less likely to result in truly serious injuries. But not seeking medical care could also be a matter of youth bravado, youth not having as easy access to medical facilities (i.e. needing to be driven by someone) or fear of incrimination. It also needs to be remembered that since the underlying rate of victimization is higher for youth, even though a lower percentage of the injured receive hospital care, the rate of youth receiving hospital care for crime related injuries is higher than the rate for the population as a whole.

Even when violent crimes do not involve injury, the psychological seriousness may be reflected in the degree of threat involved. Thus crimes involving weapons or multiple offenders may be more frightening. Here again the data present a complex picture. Guns are less used in crimes against youth, but knives and the presence of multiple offenders are about as common. For example, guns were used in only 5% of the crimes of violence against 12-15 year olds vs 13% of the crimes against those 20 and older (this data is for 1985-89, and firearm use in crimes against youth may have increased). Knives were used in 7% of the crimes against 12-15 year olds vs 9% of crimes against those 20 and older. In terms of multiple perpetrators, younger victims face a small edge. Thirty-one percent of the crimes against 12-19 year olds involve multiple perpetrators, a little higher than the average rate of 29%. With the exception of less gun use, youth do not face crimes that seem systematically less threatening.

When we move from violence to theft, however, we do see larger differences. For crimes of theft, the usual measure of seriousness is the value of the object being stolen. Crimes of theft against youth do not involve so many valuable objects (Table 3). The rate for larceny of items worth more than \$50 is 24 per thousand for youth compared to an average rate of 28 per thousand. This is undoubtedly because youth do not own so many objects of high value. But it is worth noting that the rates of petty larceny are extremely high for the youth population, almost three times the average rate.

Another possible indicator of seriousness is whether the crimes were reported to the police. Overall, less of youth victimization is reported (Table 4). The reporting rates are particularly low for rape and theft. However, the non-reporting to police is a reflection of a variety of things, only one of which is crime seriousness. The lower reporting rate for theft against youth may be related to low value of property stolen. But other factors besides seriousness play an important role in lowering police reports of youth victimizations. 1) For example, parents may not want their child involved in legal system -- this may be a particular factor in rape. 2) Crimes against youth are often reported to other authorities instead of the police like school principals, who are expected to handle the adjudication. 3) Youth more than adults may fear further retaliation if they report to police. 4) Youth and their parents may not want to get other children in trouble with the law for fear of the stigma involved. 5) Youth, more than adults, may feel culpable for their own victimization, and be trying to avoid getting in trouble themselves. 6) Youth more than adults (and like women in

regard to sexual assault) may fear being disbelieved or not being taken seriously.

In summary, although we do not have a complete statistical picture regarding its seriousness, youth victimization has aspects that appear at the same time more serious, less serious and also just as serious as that of the adult population. Children and youth clearly seem to suffer a great deal of violence and crime overall. For the serious crime of homicide, older teens and possibly very young children are at higher risk than the general population, but between these ages children are at much lower risk. For rape, probably all girls above age 8 are at substantially higher risk. For the crimes of assault, robbery and theft, the rates for teens (and perhaps pre-teens as well) are substantially higher than the general population. But the overall seriousness of these crimes on at least three key measures may be somewhat lower. Teenage victims may be less vulnerable to the serious injuries that require hospitalization; they may face fewer crimes being committed with firearms; and in case of theft, fewer of the objects stolen from them are worth more than \$50. But teenage youth face about average amounts of general injuries, crimes involving knives and crimes committed by multiple perpetrators.

Overall the generalization that youth victimization is less violent, less injurious or less criminal does not seem to be true given the available evidence.

Stereotypes of Youth Victimization

Unfortunately the issue of seriousness of crimes against children is not just a matter of evidence. Particularly in regard to victimizations like

youth-on-youth assault, robbery and theft, the dominant image is of relatively trivial kinds of episodes. There is a whole set of terminology used to describe violence among youth that tends to minimize its seriousness, words like scuffles, school-yard fighting, bullying, and horseplay. This language erects a large connotational divide between violence going on among children and what is thought of as real "crime". Hidden in this language appears to some assumptions and stereotypes about violence in the lives of young people.

Assumption 1: Violence against children is not the same as crime.

Unless it involves a weapon, an unrelated adult, a stranger or very injurious acts, ordinary violence among children is not thought of as a crime or even a very serious normative violation, even though the acts themselves generally meet statutory definitions of a crime and would be considered crimes and serious normative violations in equivalent acts involving adults. So an adult who was standing in a restaurant who was deliberately and belligerently knocked down by a another patron would certainly consider pressing charges and few would question counting such an act as an assault in a victimization survey. By contrast, it is easy to imagine people questioning whether to call it "an assault" if a seven year old waiting in a school cafeteria is knocked down by a school mate. To count it as an assault in a victimization survey might well elicit objections. For a similar exercise, try this contrast: 1) a group of neighborhood toughs force an adult out of his car under threat of harm, drive it around and leave it back on the block the next morning, vs. 2) a group of older youths who force a child off his/her bicycle drive it around and leave in the yard the next day. The criminal element of the act involving

the adult is much clearer than the act involving the child, but not necessarily because the content of the behaviors is different.

Some of the discounting of violence against children is part of the general principle that crime perceptions tend to discount acts that occur among acquaintances and family members, which is what most violence among children is. Indeed assaults against children by their siblings, which are widespread, are so discounted that they have hardly been studied, while assaults against children by strangers do seem to have a more serious connotation. But a large part of the discounting of victimization among children is a function of age. The younger the children involved, the less easy it is to consider the violence an assault or the taking a robbery, even if the behaviors and motives are almost identical.

When people review the kinds of victimizations reported by youth in the National Crime Survey, frequently they are struck by how many seem minor or non-criminal in nature (Garofalo, et al., 1987). This sometimes makes observers question whether the NCS is a good basis for comparing youth and adult crime seriousness. But actually most of the victimization episodes occurring to adults as reported in the NCS also appear to be relatively minor (Sparks, 1982). This is a consequence of the NCS definitions, which count as victimizations all incidents that minimally fit the legal definition of crimes like assault and robbery, not just the stereotype that people have. Because of this, the NCS is actually a very good basis for comparing juvenile and adult crime, because it overcomes biased views of youth victimization by using uniform behavioral definitions of victimization across age groups, not just what people view as a crime.

Assumption 2: Most youth violence occurs in the context of fights and mutual combat, and thus is not really victimization.

One of the predominant images of violence among young people is that it occurs in fights, scuffles, or hostilities, in which the responsibility is mutually shared, and therefore there is no victim. Although it is not uncommon for two children to mutually instigate a fight, this is far from the predominant scenario. Research on school children suggests that much of the violence is initiated by bullies, that is chronically aggressive and domineering children, who pick fights with other children. About 10% of all children are considered chronic victims, who are continually picked on. These encounters often mistakenly appear to adults as mutual, because by the time adults notice the conflict, both parties may be trading blows and both sides airing grievances. This should not, however, obscure the fact that in these episodes one child may have attacked the other.

Ironically, mutual combat scenarios are widespread in adult victimization as well, but the stereotype is not nearly so readily invoked to dismiss the victimizing nature of the event. Thus in many adult homicides, two friends are fighting and one pulls out a knife or gun. Many assaults involve brawls at parties and in drinking establishments. Even in spousal violence, very often blows are traded between parties. But with adults, more attention is paid to labeling someone as victim and another as the aggressor. In the case of children, there is a tendency to ignore the differences created by size and age and numbers and see it as mutual.

Assumption 3: Thefts and robberies involving children are less serious because the objects taken are not very valuable.

Thefts and robberies against children tend to involve articles of clothing, sports equipment, bicycles, food and small amounts of money. Because these seem readily replaceable, there is a tendency to dismiss them and not see them as serious in comparison to crimes against adults. Thus, the theft of a pair of sneakers from a locker would not be considered as serious as the theft of a car stereo.

This assumption ignores two important considerations, however. Children, because they do not have adult financial resources, needs and values, may view their possessions in a very different way. Relatively inexpensive material objects may have tremendous importance. A pair of sneakers may be as valuable as a pearl necklace. A bicycle, a child's only mode of independent transportation, may be as valuable as an automobile. In terms of psychological impact, the impact of these victimizations may be very serious even though the monetary value of the object is small.

But perhaps more importantly, the main psychological impact of a theft or a robbery is the personal violation, the experiencing of malicious intent or callous disregard on the part of others, the compromised sense of security for oneself or one's possessions. Being relatively naive and inexperienced, children may be even more vulnerable to this shattering of assumptions than adults. Thus, for adults to tell a child that the stolen sneakers are not that important and can be replaced may be equivalent to the police dismissing the theft of a VCR with the comment that insurance will take care of it. Both victims might well feel discounted. From the point of view of the personal violation, the theft of inexpensive objects from children should not be viewed

as intrinsically less victimizing and serious than more expensive items stolen from adults.

Assumption 4: Getting hit or having something stolen is just part of being a child and is quickly overcome.

Adults take violence against and among children less seriously in part because they tend to believe that the effects are transient and children are intrinsically resilient to it. If an adult were slugged by an office colleague, no one would be surprised by grievance actions, claims and litigation that might take months as years to settle, including psychiatric affidavits about the victim's PTSD. For a child or his or her family to be pursuing a grievance about being struck by another child months or years after the incident would be regarded as completely out of proportion.

Children don't tend to pursue grievances about violence for a great length of time, but that is not necessarily because they are less affected. Rather it is probably because the normative expectations are different. There is no evidence that children are less sensitive to the impact of violence and victimization than are adults. Recent research (Boney-McCoy & Finkelhor, in press) has suggested that children may acquire PTSD type symptoms even in response to simple assaults.

In fact, in the context of childhood, violence might be expected to have even greater impact. For one thing, children have much less control over their environments and their exposure to assailants. Most adults, having been assaulted by someone, tend to take pains to avoid their assailant. In the one instance where this is most difficult, wife assault, great public effort is being made to help encourage victimized women to leave and get help. For the

most part, children are victimized by schoolmates and other youth in their neighborhoods. It is very difficult for them to take steps to protect themselves from these assailants, because they are usually required to continue to attend school and use the streets and areas which their assailants also frequent. Thus victimization among children creates a sense of powerlessness that it is very hard for them to counteract.

Children are also seen as somehow more resilient to violence because it happens to them more often. For an adult to be pushed over by a colleague is an unusual event, for a child much less so. But it is not at all clear that commonality of violence in the lives of children inures them to its impact. Some research suggests in fact that children with prior victimizations are more affected by subsequent violence than those experiencing it for the first time.

Assumption 5: Being victimized can be character building for children, and teaches them how to defend and stand up for themselves.

A factor in the discounting of child victimization is the belief that children need to learn how to defend themselves and this can only happen by having to confront bullies and other violent children. If viewed as a salutary and educational experience, it is hard to simultaneously treat such experiences as victimizing and crime-like. While this ideology is more prominent in regard to boys, it has some spillover in the view about girls and their encounters with aggressive peers as well.

There is a kernel of truth in this belief. The research on bullying does suggest that repeatedly bullied children are afraid to be aggressive, while nonbullied children are less reluctant to stand up to bullies (Olweus, 1993)

(Coie & Dodge ??? #???). This does not prove, though, that being bullied teaches children healthy self-defense or enhances their well-being. Healthy children may avoid bullying for other reasons than from the experience of having to confront it. It may be that having to confront bullies has negative consequences for most children, in spite of how they react or what they learn.

This situation does have analogies in the adult world, where, however, it is not taken as a rationale to discount victimization. People in households that have been robbed generally take steps to avoid future robberies, like installing alarm systems and more secure locks. This does not promote an ideology that being robbed is a salutary experience. Rather a community in which every household has been robbed is a better protected but probably more suspicious and fearful, and would certainly bridle at the idea that their experience had been positive.

It also needs to be considered what the effect of this ideology is on children. The expectation that children will defend themselves can certainly exacerbate children's sense of powerlessness, based on a perception that adults are not willing to protect them. It can also contribute to self-blame in the wake of victimization, as children feel that it was only their inadequacy that allowed the victimization to occur. Some of the fact that boys are less likely to disclose even serious victimizations, like sexual abuse, to adults (Finkelhor, 1994) may be explained by their internalization of the ideology that it is their fault if they were unable to deter or fend off an attack.

Moreover, far from establishing that victimization has salutary effects, there is increasing evidence that peer victimization in childhood is associated with later delinquency and commission of violent offenses (ref).

It makes sense that many children who are victimized learn the message that violence is the way to settle conflicts.

Assumption 6: Youthful offenders are less malicious in intent.

A traditional assumption about criminal-type acts among youth is that the offenders are less criminally inclined in their motives, and that therefore it is inappropriate to treat violence and theft as serious offenses. A corollary assumption is that youth are insufficiently socialized and that serious sanctions do more harm than good by stigmatizing youth. Since we do not want to treat the offender as criminals, we have to correspondingly demote the seriousness of the harm they inflict on their victims.

However, an increasing body of opinion and research is undercutting these traditional benign assumptions about the nature of youthful aggressors. Research on the origins of violent and sexually deviant behavior reveals that for an important fraction of serious offenders the aggression and deviance start relatively early (ref). This suggests that the behavior is reflective of serious criminal and anti-social proclivities. Bullies appear to be children who enjoy and take pleasure out of dominating and causing pain. The maliciousness is quite apparent. Moreover, the toleration of the patterns seems to reinforce rather than extinguish them. Patterson and colleagues (19??) argue that many anti-social behaviors take root because they are not consistently enough sanctioned when they first appear. This suggests that the ideology that tends to minimize the seriousness of youth violence may in fact be contributing to the problem itself.

Biases such as these about children's victimizations flourish in the professional criminology field as well as in the popular culture. They can color even the interpretations given to hard data, such as the National Crime Survey. A particularly clear illustration is available in an article by some leading academic criminologists that may have strongly affected how criminology regards the NCS's data on youth. In an effort to understand more about school-related victimizations, Garofalo, Siegel and Laub (1987) obtained and read the narrative descriptions of the episodes occurring to youth 12-17 recorded by National Crime Survey interviewers, information that is not usually available for analysis. The descriptions of many of the episodes sounded to these authors less serious than what is usually thought of as crime and they concluded that the victimizations of juveniles tended to be less serious than victimizations of adults.

They made a variety of comments on the narratives they had read. For example: "... the average person might not view the incidents as 'real crimes.' Scuffles, threats, arguments can end up being designated as assaults. A student who is coerced into surrendering the Twinkies in his/her lunchbox to a school bully is, by strict definition, a victim of robbery. These events, although unpleasant and perhaps frightening, are not as alarming as suggested by the labels 'assault' and 'robbery'" (p 331).

They are certainly correct that many NCS episodes do not sound like real crime, but as other others have noted (Sparks, 1982), this a problem with the NCS in general and all victimization surveys, not something necessarily specific to youth episodes. Most assaults involving adults do not sound like stereotypical crimes. Since the authors had not comparatively reviewed episodes involving adults, their judgement was at best premature.

It is not clear whether the Twinkie episode was actually one of the transcribed incidents from the NCS, but it seems likely that the authors chose this for effect, picking a particularly discountable episode, since it is unlikely to have been typical of accounts given to NCS interviews, and is not typical of other episodes quoted by the authors. Their comment is a good illustration, though, of assumption 4, that the minor value of objects diminishes the seriousness of children's victimizations. An adult who was coerced into surrendering their groceries outside a supermarket would very likely be considered the victim of a robbery. It is possible to imagine the Twinkie episode as a very disturbing one for the child.

Another example: "72% of the narratives contained additional information about injury and most served to confirm its minor nature. For example, 'while on school grounds respondent accidentally spilled milk on another student who turned on the respondent with great anger and hit her on the head with clenched fist. Offender's ring caused pain and a lump to form' (p. 332). It is interesting how the fact that these were children and that the issue was spilled milk can contribute to the diminution of the sense of seriousness of an act of violence. I think it unlikely that reviewing a scenario of an adult customer accidentally spilling beer on another customer in a bar, which was responded to by a clenched fist punch on the head resulting in a lump to form that observers would ordinarily be moved to comment on the minor nature of the injury. One problem is that Garofalo et al (1987) do not have the benefit of adult episodes for comparison. The NCS counts as an injury such things as cuts, scratches or swelling, so it seems probable, given the earlier noted similarity in overall injury rates between youth and adults, that adult

narratives have just as many such minor injuries. Nonetheless, they somehow seem even more minor when applied to children.

A further quote: "The emerging picture is not one of the offender stalking an innocent prey, but of teasing, bullying and horseplay that gets out of hand. The following excerpts are not unusual: 'While walking down stairs in school, two boys threatened to throw respondent down stairs unless she walked faster. Respondent ran down stairs to get away'" (p. 333). It is interesting how easily in instances of child victimization, one can apply terms like teasing and horseplay. It is true that in some contexts, say a crowded school hallway coming from friends that one knew were joking, the threat to throw someone down stairs might seem like teasing. But when we transpose this scenario to a description of an adult encounter, one can readily imagine an isolated woman being terrorized by two men in an empty stairwell. It is not at all clear from the quoted information that the episode did not contain serious and terrifying components. It is curious that the authors contrast the teasing to an offender stalking innocent prey (an unusually vicious and terrifying crime scenario), because the cited episode could easily have had elements of stalking, if the girl had been threatened and followed by the boys on other occasions.

The researchers conclude: "Victimizations of juveniles tend to be less serious than victimizations of adults in terms of physical injury and property loss... (They) appear to grow out of factors such as bullying, injured pride, and misguided mischief rather than calculated intentions to injure and steal (p 336). This is a good example about how the identical evidence about motives can be framed in radically different ways depending the connotations of labels, something that frequently happens in discussions of child

victimization. Aside from the fact that the phrase "calculated intentions to injure" is not an accurate description of the context of most violent crime (which tends to be impulsive anger not calculated), it is nonetheless not at all clear that such an element is absent from bullying or acts engendered by "injured pride". In fact, researchers have described bullies as children who seem to get enjoyment out of inflicting pain on other children, which they can do with some calculation (Smith, Bowers, Binney & Cowie, 1993). Injured pride, as well, has motivated all kinds of intentional crimes including homicides. Misguided mischief can describe all kinds of quite calculated thefts, if the observer is inclined to take a benign and sympathetic view of the offender.

The assumptions that minimize the seriousness of youth victimization, like those in Garofalo et al (1987) are not malicious minimizations. They come from individuals who are fully sympathetic with the plight of crime victims and are concerned about children and youth. Nor are they the full picture of the norms and expectations through which youth victimization is perceived. They co-exist with attitudes of alarm and outrage with crimes that are perpetrated against children. But they are a set of beliefs that are readily available when incidents involving youth arise and that can unconsciously make it harder to analyze the nature of youth victimization. As was the case when people were trying to become aware of sexist biases, it may make sense to systematically try to transpose instances involving children with those involving adults to see where assumptions may be present.

There are some domains where these assumptions have been confronted in recent years. Even after the awakening of awareness about child sexual abuse

in the early 1980s, there was still for a considerable period of time a reluctance to take quite so seriously sexual offenses that were perpetrated by one child against another. Practitioners soon discovered that large numbers of such episodes were being dismissed because they did not meet the image of real abuse or out of fear of stigmatizing the offending child. After accumulating more research and clinical experience in this area, practitioners in the sexual abuse field began to try to change public and professional attitudes about these victimizations, with some success.

But one of the interesting questions that remains about these assumptions is why they persist. It cannot be argued that the adult world simply wishes to minimize the seriousness of all crimes against children, because there has certainly been a great deal of advocacy and public outcry, and perhaps even some paranoid overreaction in recent years, about certain kinds of crimes against children. The newspapers are full of stories about gang shootings, and incestuous abuse, and kidnappings that all highlight the dire plight of youth.

One factor, though, that may explain some of the minimization is the continued popularity of corporal punishment. If adults wish to continue to justify hitting children to discipline them, they need to be able to see such violence as benign and easily sloughed off. The level of violence administered in corporal punishment is not that different from much of the moderate violence that youth inflict on one another. To see the effects of such moderate violence as seriousness might make corporal punishment less easy to justify.

Another reason why adults may minimize the seriousness of child-to-child violence is that so many adults feel so powerless and inadequate to stop it in any way. Most parents have had on many occasions to try to intervene in sibling or peer violence. If such episodes were deemed more serious, adults might have to invest much more time and energy in monitoring and intervening and feeling disappointed and discouraged when they failed.

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Table 1. Rate of Robbery and Assault by Age, NCS, 1992

	Rate per 1000	
	12-17	All Ages
Assault Total	61.8	25.5
Aggravated	20.1	9.0
Simple	41.8	16.5
Robbery Total	10.9	5.9
Completed	6.4	3.9
Attempted	4.5	2.0

Table 2. Rates of Injury for Assault and Robbery by Age, NCS, 1992

	% Injured		
	12-15	16-19	All Ages
Assault	33%	31%	30%
Robbery	28%	33%	36%
Both	32%	31%	31%

Table 3. Rates of Larceny by Value of Item by Age, NCS, 1992

	Rate per 1000		
	12-15	16-19	All Ages
Larceny of Item Worth \$50 or More	24.0	43.1	28.8
Larceny of Item Worth Under \$50	59.2	40.1	21.3

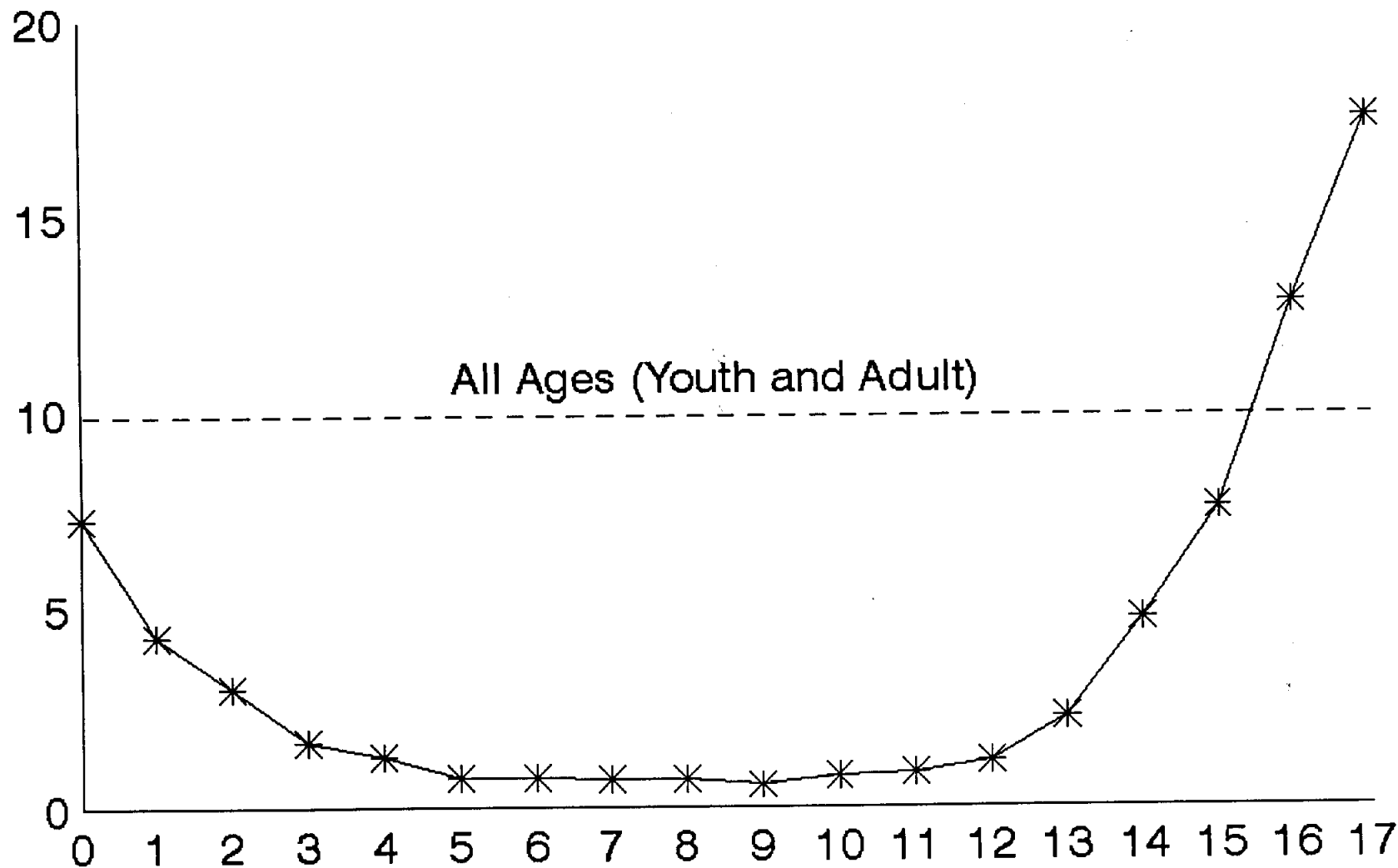
Table 4. Percent of Crimes Reported to Police, NCS, 1992

	% Reported	
	12-19	All
All Crimes of Violence	37%	50%
Rape	22%	53%
Robbery	43%	51%
Aggravated Assault	50%	62%
Simple Assault	29%	43%
Theft	14%	29%

Figure 1.

Homicide Rates for Youth Aged 0 to 17

Rate* per 100,000 U.S. Children



*Average rate for 1991-1992