Homicide is the second leading cause of death for adolescents and young adults.

In 1999, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that 5,244 adolescents and young adults ages 10-24 were victims of homicide. The homicide death rate was 9.2 deaths per 100,000, or 15% of all deaths for this age group. Homicide was the second leading cause of death for adolescents and young adults after motor vehicle accidents (NCIPC, 2002; Anderson, 2001).
Homicide rates increase dramatically throughout adolescence and young adulthood.

Homicide is primarily a youth-centered problem. Death rates due to homicide climb rapidly in adolescence (ages 15-19) and peak during early adulthood (ages 20-24). Rates then decline throughout the lifespan (Anderson, 2001).

Adolescent/young adult males are 5 times more likely than females to be homicide victims.

Adolescent and young adult males have a higher rate of homicide victimization than their female peers. In 1998, the homicide rate for males ages 10-24 was five times the rate for same-age females (16.7 per 100,000 vs. 3.3 per 100,000). This is a long-standing trend: from 1981-1998, 82% of all homicide victims among 10-24 year olds were males (NCIPC, 2002).

Homicide is the leading cause of death for adolescent and young adult Black males.

Homicide accounts for half of all deaths among Black, non-Hispanic males ages 10-24. In 1998, the homicide death rate for Black, non-Hispanic males in this age group (65.5/100,000) was four times the average rate of 16.7/100,000 for all males ages 10-24 (data not shown). Similarly, the homicide rate for Black, non-Hispanic females was three times the average rate for females in this age group (NCIPC, 2002).
Since peaking in the early 1990s, adolescent/young adult homicide rates have fallen steadily.

Adolescent homicide rates have fallen dramatically since peaking in the early 1990s. Rates for Black males fell from a 1993 peak of 114.8/100,000 to 65.5/100,000 in 1998, while rates for Hispanic males fell from 46.7/100,000 in 1992 to 28.1/100,000 in 1998. Among Whites, rates for males peaked at 5.8/100,000 in 1991, and fell to 4.1/100,000 in 1998. Overall, rates for females have declined from the 1993 peak of 5.2 to 3.3/100,000 in 1998 (NCIPC, 2002).

Four out of five adolescent and young adult homicide deaths involve firearm use.

The use of firearms in homicide peaks during adolescence and young adulthood. Firearms are used in more than 80% of cases where the victim is 15-24 years of age. This pattern was fairly constant from 1990 to 1999 (NCIPC, 2002).

Male adolescents engage in violence-related behaviors more often than females.

In 1999, 29% of male high school students reported carrying some type of weapon (knife, club or gun) within the past 30 days. Almost 1 in 10 reported carrying a gun. In addition, more than 4 in 10 male students reported having been in a physical fight during the same period. However, males and females were almost equally likely to report partner violence: 8.3% of males and 9.3% of females were physically hurt by their partner in the past year (data not shown) (Kann et al., 2000).
Schools with gangs are 3 times more likely to report violent behavior than schools without gangs.

A study comparing schools with and without gangs suggests that gang presence contributes to higher levels of violent behaviors. In schools where students reported the presence of gangs, weapon carrying was 3.5 times more likely and students were about 3 times more likely to be the victim of violence within the past 6 months (Chandler et al., 1998). The National Youth Gang Survey reports that there were 780,200 gang members in 1998, an 8% decrease from 1996 (OJJDP, 2000).

More than two-thirds of violent crimes committed by adolescents have adolescent victims.

In 1999, adolescents ages 12-20 were responsible for 32.3% of all violent crimes committed by a single offender and 40.7% of violent crimes involving multiple offenders. In both cases, adolescents who committed violence were most likely to target other adolescents; two-thirds of such crimes had victims ages 12-19. This accounts for the majority of violent crime against youth: 71.8% of all single-offender (and 65.4% of multiple-offender) violent crimes involving victims ages 12-19 were committed by adolescents ages 12-20 (BJS, 2001).

In 1998, 1.4 million adolescents/young adults were victims of a non-fatal, serious violent crime.

While clearly the most severe form of violence, homicide accounts for a very small percentage of all violent crimes committed each year. Serious violent crimes (including rape/sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated assault) outnumber homicides by about 250 to 1. Simple assaults, which tend to be underreported, outnumber homicides by 437 to 1. As with homicide, the rate of non-lethal violence peaks during adolescence and young adulthood (NCIPC, 2002; BJS, 2000).
The majority of reported rapes occur during adolescence and young adulthood. The vast majority (84%) of rape victims are first victimized by age 24, with 58.9% of victims reporting having been raped between ages 12-24. Sexual victimization at an early age, including child sexual abuse, can have serious negative health consequences, such as increased risk of post-traumatic stress disorder, mental health disorders like depression, substance abuse, and repeat rape (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000; Saywitz et al., 2000).

Female adolescents are 2 times more likely than males to be the victim of rape. Females are much more likely than males to be the victims of rape at all ages, but this disparity is greatest during adolescence and young adulthood. Male rape victims tend to be younger than females, with 48.0% of male rape victims reporting having been raped before age 12, compared to 21.6% for females (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Among female high school students, Hispanics (15.1%) and Blacks (13.5%) were more likely than Whites (10.1%) to report being forced to have sexual intercourse within the past year (Kann et al., 2000).

The perpetrator is known by the victim in 86% of rape cases among children and adolescents. Relatively few (13.7%) rapes are committed by a stranger. This pattern holds true for both male and female victims. The vast majority of these victims, both female (99.2%) and male (89.0%) were raped by a male (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). In addition, perpetrators of sexual violence tend to be older than their victims. In cases with victims ages 12-17, 75% of the attackers were ages 18 and older, while 42% were ages 25 and older (Snyder & Sickmund, 1999).
Background on NAHIC

The National Adolescent Health Information Center (NAHIC) was established with funding from the Maternal and Child Health Bureau in 1993 (4H06 MC00002) to serve as a national resource for adolescent health research and information to assure the integration, synthesis, coordination and dissemination of adolescent health-related information.

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Special thanks to Scott Burg for his assistance with the development of this fact sheet.

Cite as: National Adolescent Health Information Center. (2002). Fact Sheet on Violence: Adolescents & Young Adults. San Francisco, CA: National Adolescent Health Information Center, University of California, San Francisco.

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Data Sources:


* Includes assault, robbery, and rape/sexual assault (including verbal threats).
** The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) defines rape as forced sexual intercourse, which is vaginal, anal, or oral penetration by the offender(s), and includes attempted rape and verbal threats of rape. Sexual assault is separate from rape, and includes unwanted sexual contact and verbal threats. The definition of rape used by the National Violence Against Women Survey does not include verbal threats of rape, which differs slightly from the BJS definition.

NOTES: In all cases, only the most recent final data were used. No preliminary data were used. Some final data are released 1-3 years after collection. For questions regarding data sources, please contact NAHIC. For racial/ethnic data, the category names presented are those used by the data collection agency or survey sponsor. Every attempt was made to standardize age ranges. When this was not possible, age ranges were those provided by the data collection agency or survey sponsor.

NAHIC Adolescent Fact Sheets

Fact Sheet on Adolescent Health Care Utilization
Fact Sheet on Demographics: Children & Adolescents
Fact Sheet on Mental Health: Adolescents & Young Adults
Fact Sheet on Mortality: Adolescents & Young Adults
Fact Sheet on Preventive Health Services for Adolescents
Fact Sheet on Reproductive Health: Adolescents & Young Adults
Fact Sheet on Substance Use: Adolescents & Young Adults
Fact Sheet on Suicide: Adolescents & Young Adults
Fact Sheet on Unintentional Injury: Adolescents & Young Adults
Fact Sheet on Violence: Adolescents & Young Adults

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