



Indicators of Children's Well-Being

Behavior and Social Environment Indicators

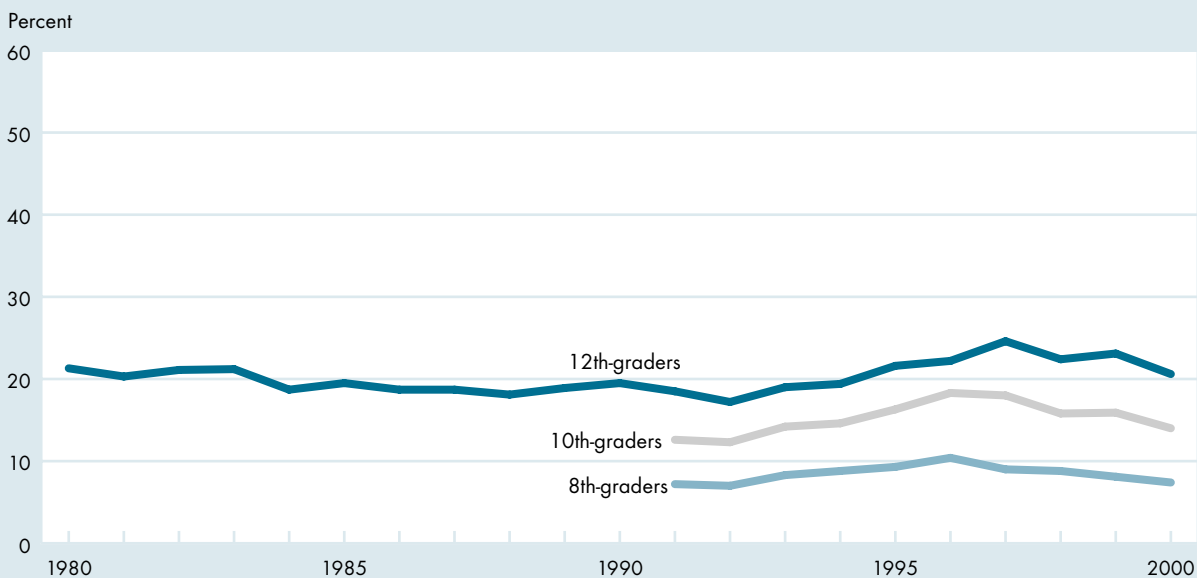
The indicators in this section present data on selected measures of young people's personal behavior and aspects of their social environment that may affect them. The indicators focus on illegal or high-risk behaviors, including smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol, using illicit drugs, and involvement in serious violent crimes, either as offender or victim. In addition to these indicators, readers should consider positive behaviors of children, aspects of neighborhood environment, and other aspects of risk and problem behaviors in evaluating this dimension. Sources for some of these indicators are being sought.

Regular Cigarette Smoking

Smoking has serious long-term consequences, including the risk of smoking-related diseases and the risk of premature death, as well as causing increased health care costs associated with treating the illnesses.⁵² Many adults who are addicted to tobacco today began smoking as adolescents, and it is estimated that more than 5 million of today's underage smokers will die of tobacco-related illnesses.⁵³ These consequences underscore the importance of studying patterns of smoking among adolescents.

Indicator BEH1

Percentage of students who reported smoking cigarettes daily in the previous 30 days by school grade, 1980-2000



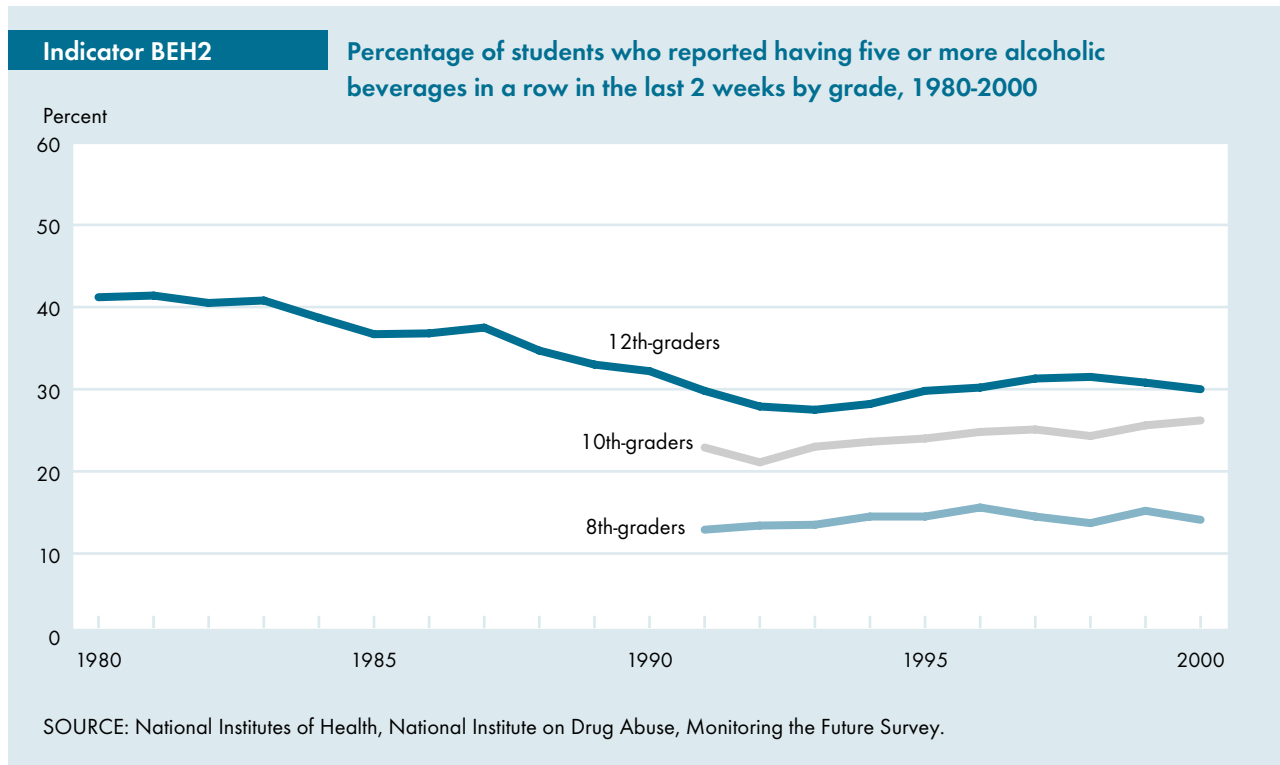
SOURCE: National Institutes of Health, National Institute on Drug Abuse, Monitoring the Future Survey.

- Between 1999 and 2000, the rate of daily smoking in the past 30 days decreased from 23 percent to 21 percent among 12th-graders and from 16 percent to 14 percent among 10th-graders. Recent peak levels in daily smoking occurred in 1997 for 12th-graders and 1996 for 10th- and 8th-graders. Since those years, rates have declined in all three grades. The 2000 rate of daily smoking is the lowest since 1992 for 8th- and 10th-graders and since 1994 for 12th-graders.
- Long-term trends for seniors show that daily smoking declined from 21 percent in 1980 to 17 percent in 1992 then increased to 25 percent in 1997 and declined to 21 percent in 2000.
- Males and females report similar rates of daily smoking. Among males, 7 percent of 8th-graders, 14 percent of 10th-graders, and 21 percent of 12th-graders reported daily smoking in the past 30 days in 2000; among females, the corresponding rates were 8 percent for 8th-graders, 14 percent for 10th-graders, and 20 percent for 12th-graders.
- Rates of smoking differ substantially between racial and ethnic groups. White students have the highest rate of smoking, followed by Hispanics and then blacks. In 2000, 26 percent of white 12th-graders reported daily smoking, compared to 16 percent of Hispanics and 8 percent of blacks.

Bullets contain references to data that can be found in Table BEH1 on page 97. Endnotes begin on page 58.

Alcohol Use

Alcohol is the most commonly used psychoactive substance during adolescence. Its use is associated with motor vehicle accidents, injuries, and deaths; with problems in school and in the workplace; and with fighting, crime, and other serious consequences.⁵⁴ Heavy drinking in adolescence may be especially problematic, potentially increasing the likelihood of negative outcomes.



- In 2000, rates of heavy drinking remained largely unchanged from 1999, with 30 percent of 12th-graders, 26 percent of 10th-graders, and 14 percent of 8th-graders reporting heavy drinking, i.e., having at least five drinks in a row at least once in the previous 2 weeks.
- Long-term trends for seniors indicate a peak in 1981, when 41 percent reported heavy drinking. Subsequently, the percentage of high school seniors reporting heavy drinking declined significantly to a low of 28 percent in 1993. Since that time, the prevalence of heavy drinking has held fairly steady, ranging from 30 to 32 percent. The rate in 2000 was 30 percent.
- Among 10th- and 12th-graders, males are more likely to drink heavily than are females. In 2000, 37 percent of 12th-grade males reported heavy drinking, compared with 24 percent of 12th-grade females. Among 10th-graders, 30 percent of males reported heavy drinking, compared with 23 percent of females. As adolescents get older, the differences between males and females in this

drinking behavior appear to become more pronounced.

- For the 8th-graders surveyed, the rate of heavy drinking among males declined from 16 percent in 1999 to 14 percent in 2000; the rate was also 14 percent for females in that grade in 2000.
- Heavy drinking is much more likely among Hispanic and white secondary school students than among their black counterparts. For example, among 12th-graders, 12 percent of blacks reported heavy drinking compared with 35 percent of whites and 31 percent of Hispanics. Similarly, among 10th-graders, 13 percent of blacks reported heavy drinking, compared with 28 percent of both whites and Hispanics.

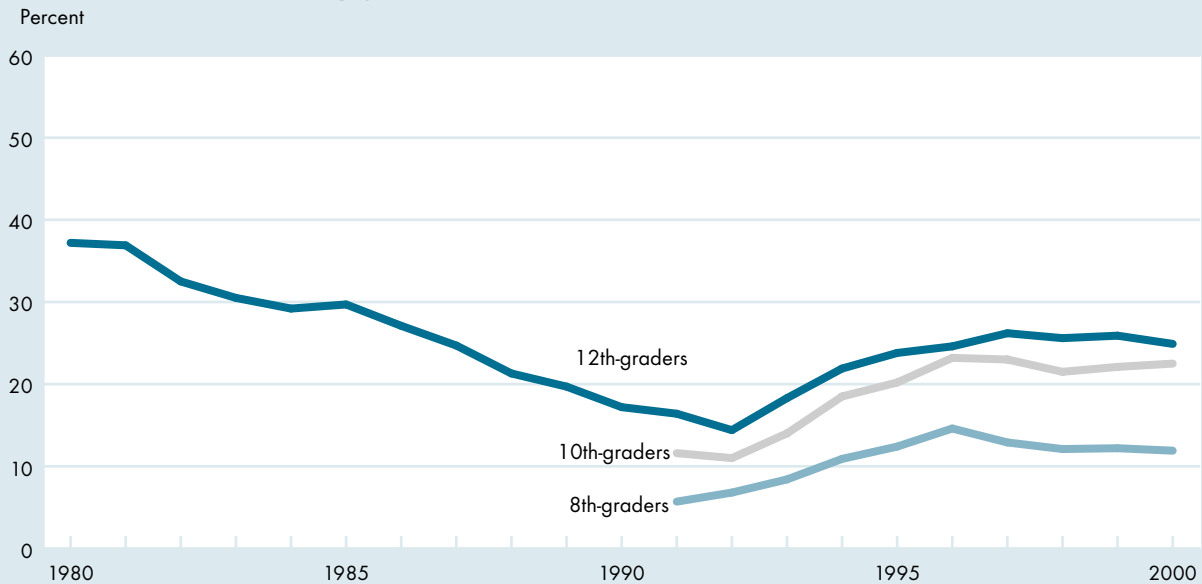
Bullets contain references to data that can be found in Table BEH2 on page 98. Endnotes begin on page 58.

Illicit Drug Use

Drug use by adolescents can have immediate as well as long-term health and social consequences. Cocaine use is linked with health problems that range from eating disorders to disability to death from heart attacks and strokes.⁵⁵ Marijuana use poses both health and cognitive risks, particularly for damage to pulmonary functions as a result of chronic use.^{56,57} Hallucinogens can affect brain chemistry and result in problems with learning new information and memory.⁵⁸ As is the case with alcohol use and smoking, drug use is a risk-taking behavior that has serious negative consequences.

Indicator BEH3

Percentage of students who reported using illicit drugs in the previous 30 days by grade, 1980-2000



NOTE: Illicit drugs include marijuana, cocaine (including crack), heroin, hallucinogens (including LSD, PCP, and ecstasy (MDMA)), amphetamines (including methamphetamine), and non-medical use of psychotherapeutics.

SOURCE: National Institutes of Health, National Institute on Drug Abuse, Monitoring the Future Survey.

- The percentage of 8th-, 10th-, and 12th-graders reporting illicit drug use in the past 30 days remained stable from 1999 to 2000. In 2000, 25 percent of 12th-graders reported using illicit drugs in the previous 30 days, as did 23 percent of 10th-graders and 12 percent of 8th-graders.
- The percentage of students reporting illicit drug use in the past 30 days increased substantially from 1992 to 1996 or 1997. For 12th-graders, it increased from 14 percent in 1992 to 26 percent in 1997. Between 1992 and 1996, rates of use increased from 11 to 23 percent among 10th-graders and from 7 to 15 percent among 8th-graders. Since these recent peaks, illicit drug use has remained stable or decreased.
- Long-term trends for 12th-graders indicate that illicit drug use declined from 37 percent in 1980 to 14 percent in 1992. After 1992, rates began to rise sharply, reaching 26 percent in 1997; since then, illicit drug use by 12th-graders has remained stable. (Data for 8th- and 10th-graders are not available before 1991.)
- Among 12th-graders, males are more likely to use illicit drugs than are females (28 percent versus 22 percent, respectively, in 2000). For 8th-graders, however, males and females are equally likely to report the use of illicit drugs, with 12 percent of males and 11 percent of females reporting use in the last 30 days.
- In 2000, 26 percent of white 12th-graders reported illicit drug use, as did 20 percent of black and 27 percent of Hispanic 12th-graders. Among 10th-graders, 23 percent of whites, 17 percent of blacks, and 24 percent of Hispanics reported illicit drug use in the past 30 days, while for 8th-graders, the rates were 11 percent for both whites and blacks and 15 percent for Hispanics.

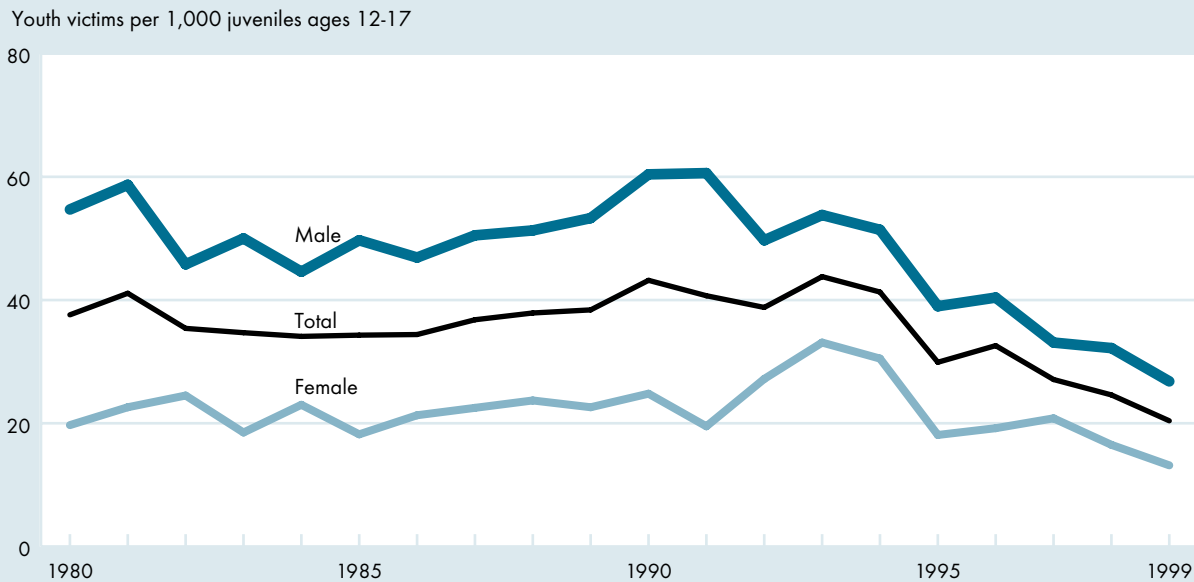
Bullets contain references to data that can be found in Table BEH3 on page 99. Endnotes begin on page 58.

Youth Victims and Perpetrators of Serious Violent Crimes

Violence affects the quality of life of young people who experience, witness, or feel threatened by it. In addition to the direct physical harm suffered by young victims of serious violence, such violence can adversely affect victims' mental health and development and increase the likelihood that they themselves will commit acts of serious violence.^{59,60} Youth ages 12 to 17 are twice as likely as adults to be victims of serious violent crimes,⁶¹ which include aggravated assault, rape, robbery (stealing by force or threat of violence), and homicide.

Indicator BEH4.A

Rate of serious violent crime victimization of youth ages 12 to 17 by gender, 1980-99



NOTE: Serious violent crimes include aggravated assault, rape, robbery (stealing by force or threat of violence), and homicide. Because of changes made in the victimization survey, data prior to 1992 are adjusted to make them comparable with data collected under the redesigned methodology.

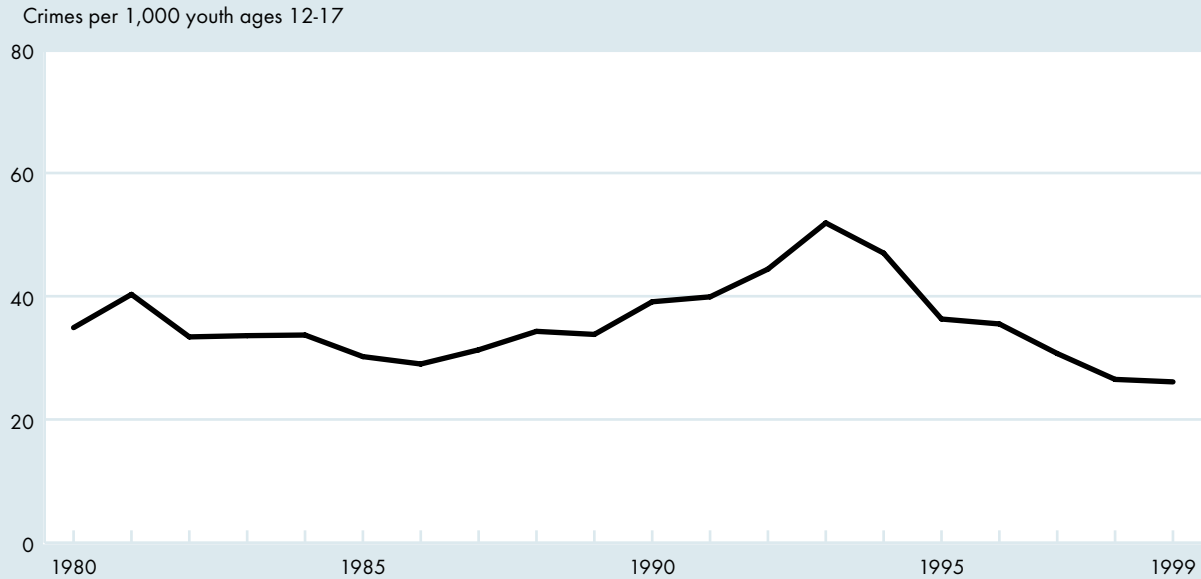
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey. Federal Bureau of Investigation, Uniform Crime Reporting Program, Supplementary Homicide Reports.

- In 1999, the rate at which youth were victims of serious violent crimes was 20 crimes per 1,000 juveniles ages 12 to 17, totaling about 480,000 such crimes.
- The serious violent crime victimization rate fluctuated between 34 and 43 per 1,000 from 1980 to 1990, and peaked at 44 per 1,000 in 1993. Since 1993, the rate of serious violent crime against youth has decreased by 53 percent, down to 20 per 1,000 in 1999.
- Males are nearly twice as likely as females to be victims of serious violent crimes. In 1999, the serious violent crime victimization rate was 27 per 1,000 male youth, compared with 14 per 1,000 female youth.
- Younger teens (ages 12 to 14) are as likely as older teens (ages 15 to 17) to be victims of serious violent crimes. In 1999, the serious violent crime victimization rate for older teens dropped to 20 per 1,000 from 29 per 1,000 in 1998.

The level of youth violence in society can be viewed as an indicator of youths' ability to control their behavior, as well as the adequacy of socializing agents such as families, peers, schools, and religious institutions to supervise or channel youth behavior to acceptable norms. One measure of the serious violent crime committed by juveniles is the incidence rate of serious violent juvenile crime.

Indicator BEH4.B

Serious violent crime offending rate by youth ages 12 to 17, 1980-99



NOTE: This rate is the ratio of the number of crimes (aggravated assault, rape, and robbery; i.e., stealing by force or threat of violence) reported to the National Crime Victimization Survey for which the age of the offenders was known, plus the number of homicides reported to police that involved at least one juvenile offender perceived by the victim (or by law enforcement in the case of homicide) to be 12 through 17 years of age, to the number of juveniles in the population. Because of changes made in the victimization survey, data prior to 1992 are adjusted to make them comparable with data collected under the redesigned methodology.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey. Federal Bureau of Investigation, Uniform Crime Reporting Program, Supplementary Homicide Reports.

- According to reports by victims, in 1999, the serious violent juvenile crime offending rate was 26 crimes per 1,000 juveniles ages 12 to 17 years old, totaling 610,000 such crimes involving juveniles—a 50 percent drop from the 1993 high and the lowest level recorded since the national victimization survey began in 1973.
- Reports by victims indicate that between 1980 and 1989, the serious violent juvenile crime offending rate fluctuated between 29 and 40 per 1,000, and then began to increase from 34 per 1,000 in 1989 to a high of 52 per 1,000 in 1993. Since then, the rate has steadily dropped to 26 per 1,000 in 1999.
- Based on victims' reports, since 1980, the percentage of all serious violent crime involving juveniles has ranged from 19 percent in 1982 to 26 percent in 1993, the peak year for youth violence. In 1999, 24 percent of all such victimizations reportedly involved a juvenile offender.

- In nearly half (47 percent) of all serious violent juvenile crimes reported by victims in 1999, more than one offender was involved in the incident. Because insufficient detail exists to determine the age of each individual offender when a crime is committed by more than one offender, the number of additional juvenile offenders cannot be determined. Therefore, this rate of serious violent crime offending does not represent the number of juvenile offenders in the population, but rather the number of crimes committed involving juveniles 12 to 17 years old in relation to the juvenile population.

Bullets contain references to data that can be found in Tables BEH4.A and BEH4.B on pages 100-101. Endnotes begin on page 58.

Indicators Needed

Behavior and Social Environment

A broader set of indicators than those presented in this section is needed to adequately monitor the social environment and behaviors of youth. This year's report includes a special feature on youth employment. Other behavior and social environment measures are needed on:

- *Indicators of positive behaviors.* The participation of youth in positive activities and the formation of close attachments to family, school, and community have been linked to positive outcomes in research studies. Additional research needs to be conducted to strengthen our understanding of positive activities and the aspects of those activities that protect youth from risk. Then, regular sources of data that can be used to monitor trends in these important areas over time need to be developed. Examples of positive activities might include participation in extracurricular activities such as school clubs and team sports, scouting, or involvement with religious organizations. One measure, youth participation in volunteer activities, was presented as a special feature in *America's Children, 2000*. Forum agencies are also examining the measurement and influence of young people's feelings of closeness with their parents.
- *Neighborhood environment.* Research shows that growing up in distressed neighborhoods has an effect over and above that of individual or family background characteristics on child well-being. A survey is being implemented that would, for the first time, enable the monitoring of America's communities and neighborhoods over time and identify distressed neighborhoods in which children are living.
- *Youth violence.* It is difficult to track youth participation in violent crime because crime data are reported by victims, not perpetrators. Therefore, the indicator on serious violent crime offending by youth in this report does not provide critical information on the number and characteristics of youthful offenders involved in serious crime. Additional work is needed to produce a more comprehensive and useful measure of the prevalence of violence among young people.