

AN EMPIRICAL PORTRAIT OF THE YOUTH REENTRY POPULATION

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Nearly 100,000 juvenile offenders are released annually from custody facilities following adjudication or conviction, arguably all candidates for reentry programs. Their numbers increased substantially over the 1990s. These youth have spent a great proportion of their teenage years in custody. Most are male, minority, and nonviolent offenders. About half lived primarily in a single-parent family while growing up. About one fourth has a sibling, and about one fourth has a father who has been incarcerated. Most have not completed 8th grade, compared to one fourth of similarly aged youth in the U.S. population. Excluding alcohol, two thirds report regular drug use. Two thirds of committed males have a mental health disorder and the rate is higher for females. The article concludes that the justice system cannot rely on others to provide the needed services if it ever hopes to control its own workload and reduce the problems caused by these youth.

Keywords: *reentry; juvenile corrections; juvenile justice system; aftercare; juveniles in custody*

Reentry is all the rage these days, but no one has the foggiest idea about the number and characteristics of youth who could benefit from reentry programs. This article attempts to add an empirical foundation to the discussion by highlighting some basic conceptual issues involved in defining the youth reentry population and presenting from available data estimates of the magnitude and characteristics of those youth who reenter society from some type of secure confinement. The article also discusses the need to provide reentry services to more youth than those released from secure confinement (e.g., foster care).

The primary focus of this work is on juveniles returning to the community from placements within the juvenile justice system. An argument could be made for a more expansive definition of youth that would include all young adults released from adult institutions in the definition of the youth reentry population. The volume of these potential youth reentry candidates from adult facilities is high: Approximately 445,600 persons entered state parole in 1999 and about 73,000 (or 16.4% of all new paroles in 1999) were

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younger than age 25 (Hughes & Wilson, 2003). These young adults may share many of the same problems of older juveniles and may have many of their same needs. However, this article limits its focus to the reentry population that is the primary responsibility of the juvenile justice system. An investigation into the characteristics of the young adult entry population will have to wait.

Conceptual Issues

Before developing an empirical portrait of the youth reentry population, one must first consider who should be the candidates for these programs. Most would agree that the prototypic juvenile candidate is a youth adjudicated (or convicted) of a violent crime who is being released from a commitment (or incarceration) facility after a relatively long stay. These youth are unambiguous targets of reentry efforts for two reasons. As a result of their actions (or more directly as an inference from the decision to commit), they have been judged a threat to public safety and they are likely to be unable (or unwilling) to thrive when they return to their home communities. It is also assumed that their inability to function successfully in their home communities may have been aggravated by their relatively long stays in a commitment environment. So the question before us is, "Beyond the prototypic candidate, should juvenile reentry programs cast a wider net—or, more specifically, should other youth leaving long-term facilities be given reentry services?"

Consider the two criteria noted above (i.e., public safety and reentry deficits). Youth other than officially recognized violent offenders are a threat to public safety. It is well documented that juvenile offending behavior is a little specialization overlaid on a great deal of offense versatility (Farrington, Snyder, & Finnegan, 1988; Klein, 1984; Snyder, 1988). Therefore, most nonviolent chronic juvenile offenders have the potential to commit a violent act given sufficient time and the proper situation. Most youth in long-term commitment facilities have gradually stepped their way through the dispositional options available in the juvenile justice system; it can, therefore, be assumed that most committed youth are chronic offenders and pose a threat to public safety. But what about the nonchronic, nonviolent offenders leaving commitment facilities? These youth were committed because their problems were judged to be so great or their threat to public safety (or their own safety) so high that less restrictive options were considered to be inadequate. So it is fair to consider these nonchronic, nonviolent committed offenders also to be juvenile reentry candidates. In all, then, an argument can be made that all youth for whom the justice system has determined there to be a need for a relatively long period of confinement are candidates for reentry services.

The exact period of confinement needed to elevate a youth to reentry candidacy is hard to operationalize. Many youth in the juvenile justice system experience some form of short-term incarceration that on its own is not normally viewed as indicating and/or increasing a youth's need for reentry services: a few hours in a police lockup; a few days in a local detention center awaiting an adjudicatory hearing; or a few weeks in a diagnostic and evaluation center following an adjudication and disposition ordering commitment to a state juvenile justice agency (which may or may not lead to long-term commitment). Also, the actual place of confinement seems irrelevant when determining reentry needs; in many ways, 6 months in the state's juvenile training school is indistinguishable from 6 months in an urban detention center awaiting trial. Although the reentry criterion is generally linked with time (e.g., 1 year), conceptually the criterion should not be simply time in placement

but the effect of the placement on the youth. Some younger juveniles experience a 3-month summer vacation as a long break from school, whereas for others, the time flies by. Given the right confluence of actors and situations, even a relatively short period in confinement could dramatically affect a youth's ability to thrive outside of the facility. For example, in a relatively short period, a committed youth could connect with a gang in the facility and membership in this criminal organization could dramatically affect their behavior after release. Consequently, an objective time criterion should not be a primary concern when determining the need for reentry services. What is critical (along with the youth's general ability to thrive in the community) is the influence of the confinement on the youth. This is hard to measure, so we use time in confinement as a surrogate measure of the relative effect of confinement of the youth.

If we choose to consider time in placement as a reentry criterion, we must then ask if the criterion has to be continuous time in custody. Many juveniles move in and out of placements as they interact with the justice system. A youth serving a 6-month term in the state juvenile correctional facility may have accrued 6 other months of confinement in pretrial detention and in the state's diagnostic and evaluation center before entering the current placement during the processing of this case—even ignoring the youth's other stays in detention centers and commitment facilities during the processing of previous cases. For example, a 1987 survey of committed youth found that these youth had served on average 6 months in their current placement and around 10 months in commitment facilities during prior commitment experiences (Beck, Kline, & Greenfeld, 1988). Given that the average age of the committed youth in this 1987 survey was 15.7 years, this means that these youth (on average) had spent more than 8% of their lives since birth in a correctional facility. More specifically, given that their average age at first arrest was 12.8 years, this means that committed juveniles have spent a far greater proportion (possibly more than one third) of their teenage years in custody. So the time spent in his or her last confinement is a somewhat poor measure of the effect that commitment has had on youth, because it obviously underestimates by a substantial fraction the time the youth has spent in commitment facilities over his or her life. Most committed youth have spent a great deal of time away from their families and communities, so the mere fact that they are leaving a commitment experience could be a strong signal for the need for reentry services.

With these considerations in mind, this article will attempt to describe the population of violent and nonviolent juvenile offenders released from custody facilities following adjudication in juvenile court or conviction in criminal court, regardless of the type of facility in which the youth was housed.

Volume of Youth Released From Juvenile Commitment

Rarely do available data or research studies meet one's information needs exactly. This is true for the task at hand. Ideally for this work, the United States would have a national information resource that describes the number, personal backgrounds, and criminal histories of youth released each year from juvenile commitment facilities, jails, and prisons. Some information exists in the Bureau of Justice Statistics's (BJS) National Corrections Reporting System on releases from prisons. Some limited information on juveniles in custody can be found in BJS's Annual Survey of Jails. There are no current data on releases from juvenile facilities. The best assessment of the characteristics of committed

juveniles in the United States comes from a relatively new national data resource, the Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement (CJRP).

The U.S. Bureau of the Census, under contract to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), inaugurated the first wave of the CJRP in October 1997. Designed as the successor to the Children in Custody Census (CIC), CJRP asks each facility holding juvenile offenders on the census date to complete a record on each juvenile in custody.¹ For each youth, CJRP collects the date of birth, sex, race, offense, date of admission, admitting authority, and the public/private character of the facility. CJRP also collects each youth's legal status on the date of the census, including detained, committed, awaiting adult trial, and incarcerated as an adult.

The CJRP data provide a view of time in custody that is unfamiliar to most policy makers. The CJRP data provide a detailed description of the juveniles in custody on the biannual census date (i.e., the stock population) of committed juveniles. However, they do not clearly provide an assessment of the population of committed juveniles that leave custody each year (i.e., the flow population). The 1-day census provides for each committed youth the number of days he or she has been in that facility on the census date. When most juvenile justice policy makers think of time and custody together, they think of total length of stay (i.e., the time between admission and release)—the metric used by many to determine if an individual is a candidate for reentry. This metric is not available directly from CJRP, although it can be roughly inferred. Important for this work, CJRP can detail the relative lengths of stay in commitment facilities for many subpopulations of juvenile offenders.

The second wave of the CJRP, collected in October 1999, furnishes the most current profile of the stock population of committed juvenile offenders. On the 1999 census date, there was a total of 80,400 committed youth in the facilities monitored by the CJRP effort. About 4,300 of these youth had been in the facility for 7 days or less, about 29,000 had been there for 6 months or more, and about 13,000 had been in the facility for at least 1 year.

Under the simplest of all commitment scenarios—that is, when the flow of youth into commitment is constant for a sufficient period of time (i.e., in equilibrium), when a youth spends all of his or her commitment in a single facility, and when the length of stay in the facility is identical for all youth—the distribution of time in the system on any single day would be flat (i.e., equal numbers of youth with 4, 6, 8, etc. weeks in the system) until the fixed length of stay point, at which the distribution would drop to zero and no youth would have that or a longer length of stay. However, the actual distribution of time in the system for committed youth in 1999 looks very different from this simple model (see Figure 1). In general, the number of youth with $N+1$ weeks in the facility is less than the number of youth with N weeks in a facility. If all youth were in a single facility for their entire commitment period, this would imply that youth have very different lengths of stay (i.e., that some youth are leaving custody at each time period after admission). But the shape of the time-in-facility distribution implies that a substantial percentage of youth have a period of commitment spanning admissions and releases for more than one facility. For example, the decline between the number of committed youth with 1 week in custody and those with 2 weeks in custody may be related in part to the number of youth on the census date who were spending their 1st week of commitment in a local detention facility awaiting placement in a state facility and those with the same placement scenario who had moved the week prior from the detention center to the state facility and were spending their 2nd week of commitment in their 1st week in the state facility. Similarly, the differences between weeks 4 and 5 may also be related to the number of committed youth who spent the initial portion

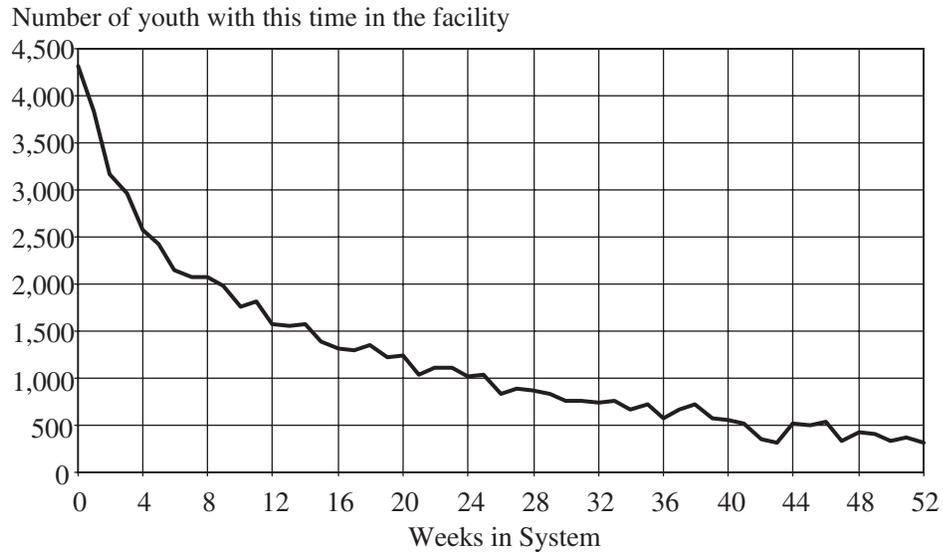


Figure 1. Time Committed Youth Had Spent in Facility on the Census Date in 1999

of the commitment in a short-term diagnostic and evaluation facility to assess the appropriate placement among available alternatives. Beyond these initial movements from facility to facility, it is likely that a portion of the declining population across the time range in the distribution reflects the differing lengths of stay.

If the initial deviations from a simple model time-in-facility distribution are disregarded and it is assumed that the distribution reaches a point of stability after about 4 months, then it is possible to estimate roughly from the stock distribution the number of youth who flowed into (and, under an assumption of equilibrium, out of) commitment facilities in 1999. From such analyses of CJRP data, it is estimated that about 88,000 youth were released from juvenile commitment facilities in 1999.

It is also possible to develop a rough estimate of the demographic characteristics of this 1999 release cohort. Merely describing the characteristics of all youth in the census would overrepresent the characteristics of youth with longer lengths of stay. However, if we limit the analyses to only those youth who were in custody for 4 to 6 months on the census date, we can develop a less biased assessment. Following this logic, it is estimated that of all youth released from commitment facilities in 1999 who had more than a very short length of stay in a commitment facility (and, therefore, potential candidates for reentry programs),

- 88% were male;
- 19% were age 14 or younger and 36% were age 17 or older;
- 39% were White non-Hispanic, 39% were Black non-Hispanic, and 17% were Hispanic; and
- 38% were committed for a violent offense, 33% for a property offense, 14% for a public order offense, 11% for a drug offense, and 5% for a status offense.

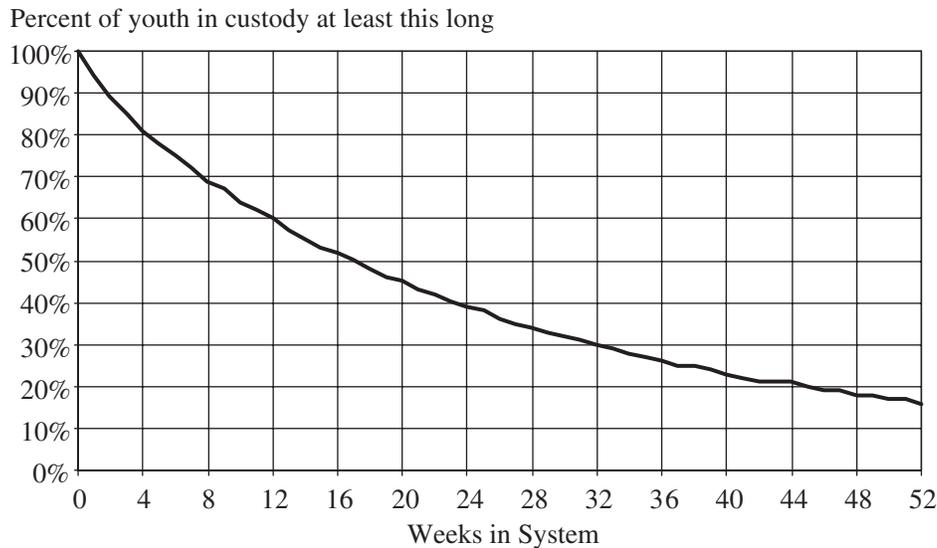


Figure 2. Proportion of Committed Youth Experiencing Various Times in Placement on the Census Date

Trends in the Volume of Youth Released From Juvenile Commitment

The number of youth in juvenile commitment facilities increased substantially after 1991. Sickmund (forthcoming) studied the 1991, 1993, and 1995 CIC data and the 1997 and 1999 CJRP data to document the growth in the stock populations. She reports that the 1-day counts of committed youth in juvenile facilities increased 42% between 1991 and 1999. If we can assume there were no changes in the distribution of lengths of stay between 1991 and 1999, then we can assume that the number of youth released from facilities also increased by 42% between 1991 and 1999. Sickmund's analyses also found that the growth between 1991 and 1999 in the standing population was greater in private facilities (48%) than in publicly operated facilities (40%), reflecting the growing use of private vendors to service the juvenile commitment population.

Relative Time in Facility of Subpopulations of Committed Youth

On the census date in 1999, the average time a committed youth had spent in the reporting facility (i.e., the average number of days between the date of admission to the facility and the census date) was 201 days—nearly 29 weeks, more than 6 months. The median time in the facility was 17 weeks, with 10% of all committed youth spending at least 70 weeks in the facility as of the day of the census (see Figure 2 and Table 1).² (The average time in the placement facility is much greater than the median because a small portion of the committed population has spent a relatively long time in custody.)

TABLE 1
 Profile of Committed Youth in Custody on the Census of Juveniles
 in Residential Placement (CJRP) Census Date in 1999

<i>Population Characteristic</i>	<i>% in Population</i>	<i>Median Time in Facility (in weeks)</i>	<i>Time in Facility at 90th Percentile (in weeks)</i>
Total	100	17	70
Committed as a juvenile	94	17	69
Committed as an adult	6	18	92
Youth charged with a			
Violent offense	40	22	93
Property offense	31	15	56
Drug offense	9	15	53
Public order offense	15	11	52
Status offense	4	16	56
Age 16 or older	63	20	85
Age 15 or younger	37	12	47
Male	88	17	72
Female	12	14	60
White, non-Hispanic	38	15	62
Black, non-Hispanic	39	18	73
Hispanic	18	18	82

Although there is no direct conversion between these average times in the facility on the census date and the resulting total length of stay of youth in commitment, a rough estimate would be that the average median time youth will spend in commitment is about double their median time in the facility on the census date. Therefore, with a median time in the facility of 17 weeks on the census date, it would be estimated that the median time served at the point of release was about 34 weeks, or about 8 months. Viewed from another perspective, and applying the rule of thumb noted above, the mean of all lengths of stay for committed youth equaled more than 1 year (i.e., double the 29-week mean), with many youth serving more than 2 years (doubling the 70-week value, or the 10% tail of the distribution).

It is also likely that variations in overall time in commitment for various subpopulations are proportionate to their medians and/or means (e.g., a subpopulation with a higher median time in a facility are likely to have a longer average overall length of stay in commitment). For example, on the census date in 1999, there were 76,000 youth ages 7 through 20 committed to a juvenile facility following adjudication in a juvenile court and another 4,400 youth in these juvenile facilities after conviction in adult criminal court. That is, 94% of committed youth who were housed in a juvenile facility in October 1999 were placed there following a juvenile court adjudication and 6% were in these facilities following a criminal court sentence. (Later, we will discuss juveniles sentenced to adult facilities.) The median time in a facility for youth under juvenile court commitment (17 weeks) was roughly equal to the median time youth had spent in juvenile facilities under order of a criminal court (18 weeks) (see Figure 3). The major difference between these two populations was that 10% of the youth committed by a juvenile court (the 90th percentile and above) had spent 69 weeks or more in the facility as of the census date, whereas the top 10% of juveniles placed by criminal court had spent at least 92 weeks in the facility. Therefore, the major difference between these two populations is the longer time spent in

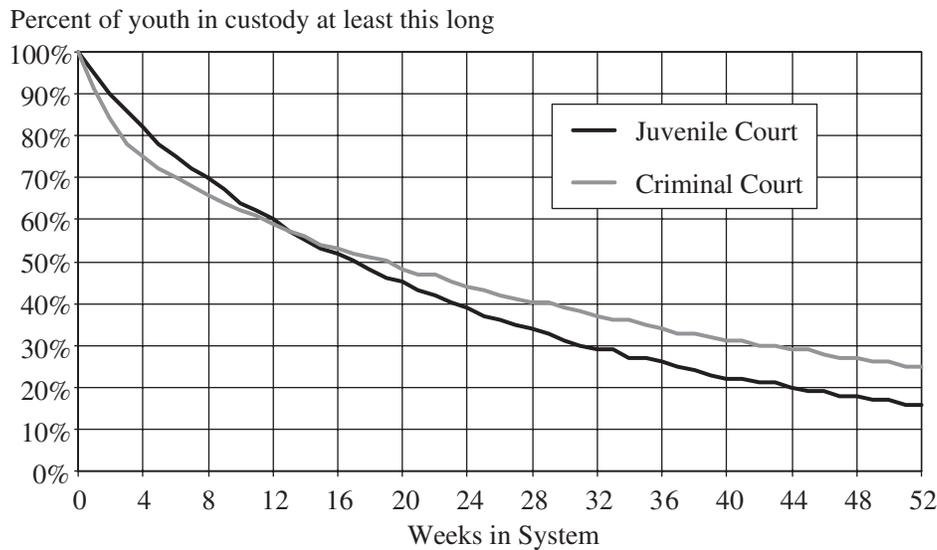


Figure 3. Proportion of Committed Youth Experiencing Various Times in Placement by Committing Authority on the Census Date

custody by a small percentage of committed youth. This is reflected in the differences in their estimated mean lengths of stay (i.e., double the mean of time in a facility): youth committed by a juvenile court (58 weeks) and youth in juvenile facilities placed by a criminal court (68 weeks).

The time in a facility for other subpopulations also reflects their similarities and differences in overall time in commitment facilities on the census date. The median time in a facility on the 1999 CJRP census date was similar for youth charged with property (15 weeks), drug (15 weeks), and status offenses (16 weeks), less for those youth charged with a public order offense (11 weeks), and most for those charged with a violent offense (22 weeks) (see Figure 4). Therefore, it may be inferred that (on average) the commitment periods of property, drug, and status offenders are about two thirds as long as those of youth committed for a violent offense. The median time in a facility was somewhat greater for males (17 weeks) than females (14 weeks) (see Figure 5). The median time in a facility was somewhat less for White non-Hispanic youth (15 weeks) than for Black (18 weeks) and Hispanic (18 weeks) youth (see Figure 6). The median time in a facility was substantially greater for committed youth ages 16 and older (20 weeks) than youth ages 15 and younger (12 weeks) (see Figure 7). In all, it can be inferred that older youth, male youth, minority youth, youth committed for violent acts, and youth committed to a juvenile facility by a criminal court spent more time in custody in 1999 than their comparison groups; however, except for older versus younger youth, the differences are relatively small, implying that the need for reentry services is shared by these subgroups. And considering the differential perception of time by younger compared with older youth, the need for reentry services is also present in the younger commitment population.

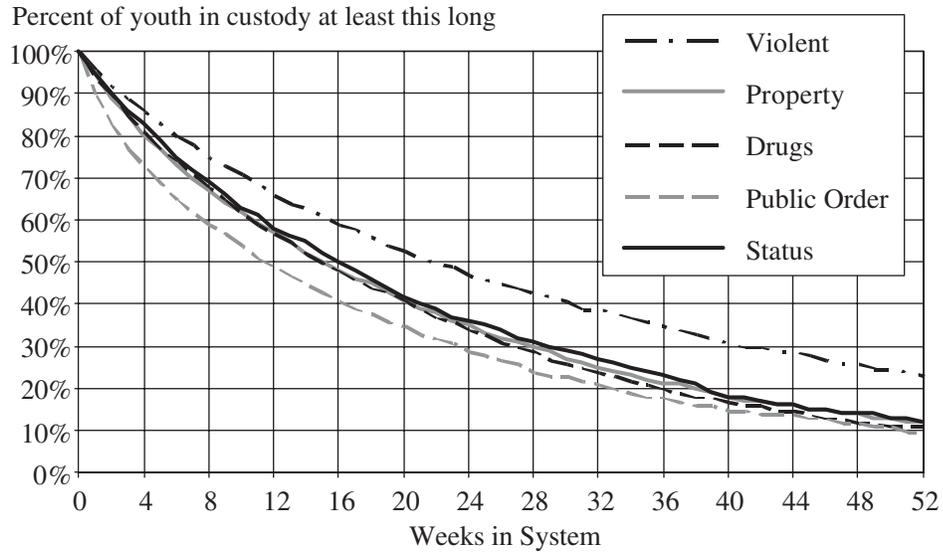


Figure 4. Proportion of Committed Youth Experiencing Various Times in Placement by Offense on the Census Date

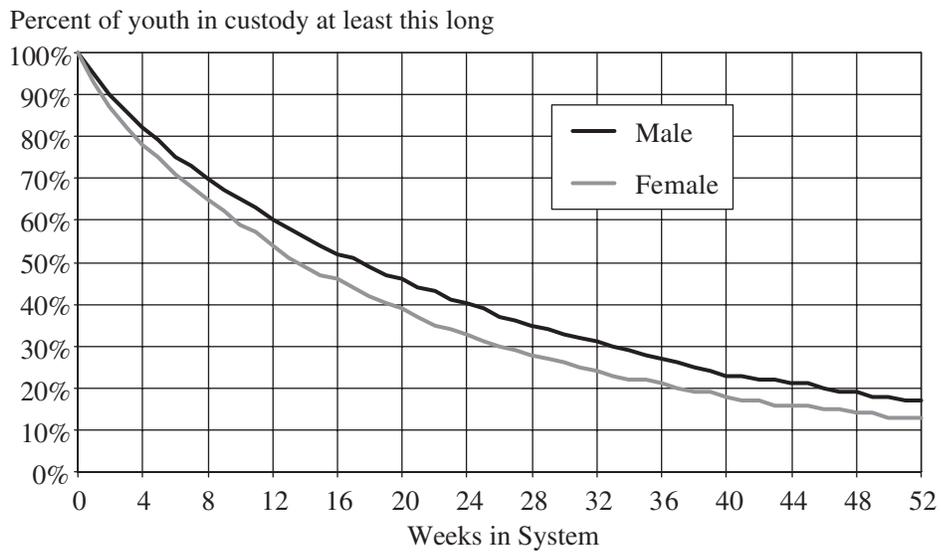


Figure 5. Proportion of Committed Youth Experiencing Various Times in Placement by Gender on the Census Date

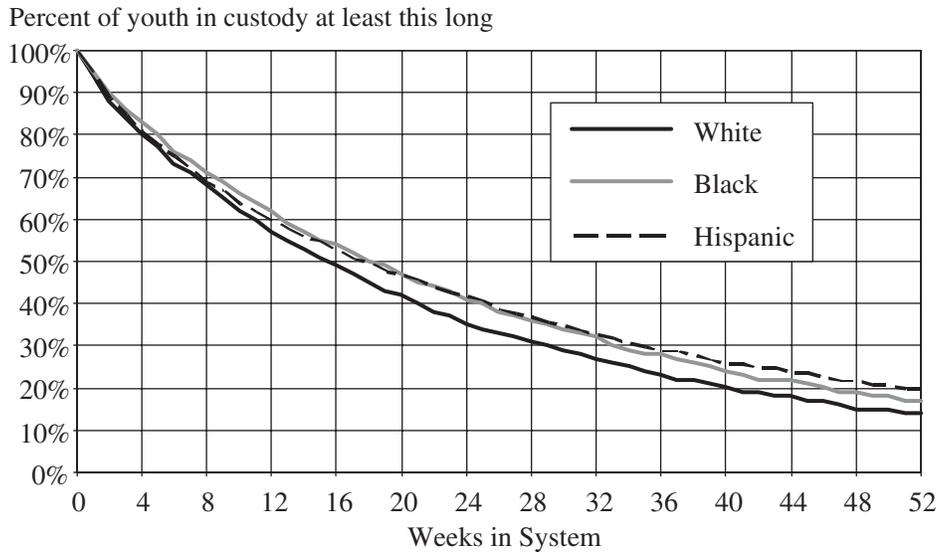


Figure 6. Proportion of Committed Youth Experiencing Various Times in Placement by Race/Ethnicity on the Census Date

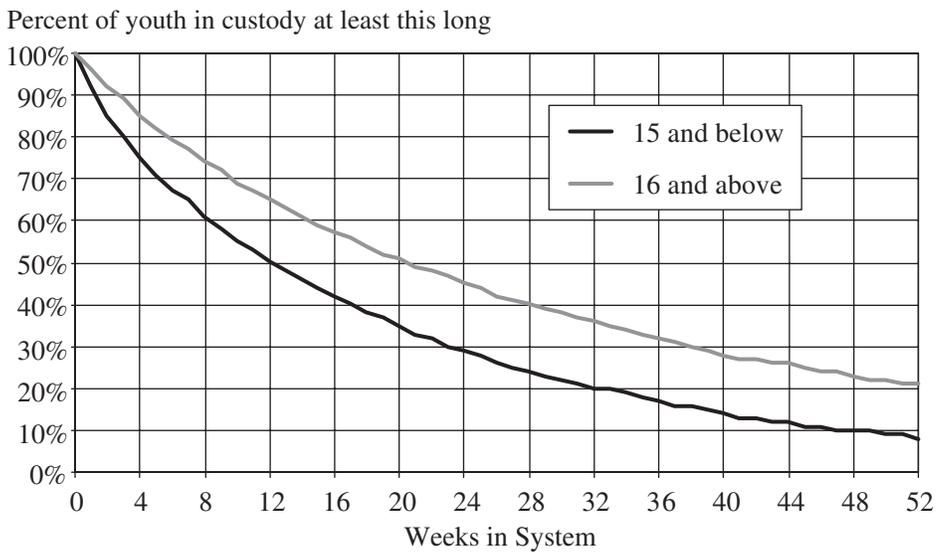


Figure 7. Proportion of Committed Youth Experiencing Various Times in Placement by Age on the Census Date

TABLE 2
 Offense Profile of Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement (CJRP) Youth in 1999:
 Comparing Youth in Facilities Similar to Those Captured by the 1987
 Survey of Youth in Custody (SYC) With Other Committed Youth (in percentages)

<i>Offense</i>	<i>Total CJRP</i>	<i>SYC-Like Youth</i>	<i>Other Youth</i>
Total	100	100	100
Violent	41	49	34
Property	31	31	31
Drugs	9	18	11
Public order	15	12	18
Status	4	1	7

The Social Characteristics of Youth in Confinement

In 1987, the Bureau of Justice Statistics interviewed a nationally representative sample of juveniles and young adults housed in long-term, state-operated juvenile training schools, known as the Survey of Youth in Custody 1987 (SYC). The SYC design excluded other committed youth, including those living in locally run facilities and in private facilities. About 40% of committed youth in the 1999 Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement were housed in similar facilities to those in the sampling frame of the 1987 Survey of Youth in Custody. The 1999 CJRP data show there to be some differences in the “SYC-like” youth and the others in the broader CJRP sample (see Table 2). For example, youth in state training schools in 1999 (i.e., the SYC-like youth) had a different offense profile than did the other committed youth. So there is reason to believe that the characteristics of youth in the Survey of Youth in Custody are somewhat different than the entire committed population in 1987. They probably have more serious criminal careers and may be more likely to be drug-involved. However, the SYC 1987 findings represent the most recent comprehensive assessment available of the background characteristics of committed youth. (A new large-scale interview effort—the Survey of Youth in Residential Placement—is currently in the field.)

Living Arrangements

Committed youth are likely to come from single-parent homes and to have relatives who have also been incarcerated. From the 1987 interviews it was learned that just 30% of committed youth lived in households with both parents, in contrast to 74% of the nation’s resident youth population in 1986 (Beck et al., 1988). Fifty-four percent (54%) of committed youth lived primarily in a single-parent family while growing up, mostly with their mother (48%). Another 10% lived with their grandparents. More than half (52%) had at least one family member who had served time in jail or prison. Of these committed youth, 25% had a brother and/or a sister who had been incarcerated, 24% had a father who had been incarcerated, 9% a mother, and 13% had another relative who had served time in a jail or prison. Nearly 20% reported that two or more family members had served time.

Educational Attainment

Committed youth lag behind other youth in their levels of educational attainment. In the 1987 survey, 58% of committed youth ages 15 to 17 reported that they had not completed 8th grade, compared with 24% of youth in the general U.S. population in this age group. In addition, less than 10% of committed youth age 18 or older were high school graduates and 23% had never entered high school. Clearly, the educational needs are far greater for committed juveniles than for youth in the general population.

One reason for the educational deficiencies found in the juvenile custody population is highlighted in a recent report by the National Council on Disability (NCD, 2003). Consistent with research that finds that learning-disabled youth are twice as likely to commit a delinquent act as nondisabled youth (Brier, 1989), the NCD report finds the prevalence of special educational disabilities among incarcerated juveniles at between three and five times that of the general population of U.S. juveniles. More specifically, research indicates that between 20% and 50% of incarcerated youth have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). In fact, the report finds that about one of every eight incarcerated youth are labeled as mentally retarded.

Drug Involvement

Most committed youth were alcohol-involved. Fifty-seven percent (57%) reported that they drank alcohol at least once a week for at least the past month (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1989). Regular alcohol use varied somewhat with the nature of the committing offense. Those committed for a drug offense were less likely to report regular drinking (50%) than were those committed for a public order (55%), violent (58%), or property (58%) offense. Overall, 32% of committed juveniles in 1987 reported that they were under the influence of alcohol at the time of their offense.

Most committed youth were also using drugs other than alcohol. Excluding alcohol, 83% of the respondents in the 1987 Survey of Youth in Custody reported that they had used other drugs and 63% reported they used other drugs regularly. In comparison, whereas 81% of committed youth reported ever using marijuana, a National Institute on Drug Abuse survey in 1986 found that 51% of high school seniors had used marijuana (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 1987). Similarly, committed youth reported use of other major drugs at far higher levels than the typical U.S. high school student: cocaine (46% vs. 17%), amphetamines (36% vs. 23%), LSD (29% vs. 7%), PCP (23% vs. 9%), and heroin (13% vs. 1%). Overall, a major drug (i.e., cocaine, heroin, LSD, or PCP, not marijuana) had been used regularly in the past by 31% of committed youth in 1987.

Committed youth reported that they began regular drug use (excluding alcohol) early. More than one third (35%) of committed juveniles who used drugs reported their regular use of drugs began between ages 12 and 13, whereas 17% reported that their regular drug use began between ages 10 and 11, and 11% said they began using drugs on a regular basis before the age of 10. Thirty-nine percent (39%) reported that they were under the influence of drugs at the time of the offense that landed them in the commitment facility.³ Youth committed for a drug offense were more likely to report being under the influence of drugs at the time of their offense, but the rates of drug involvement were high for all offending groups: 59% of drug offenders, 40% of property offenders, 37% of public order offenders, 36% of violent offenders, and 33% of status offenders reported using drugs during the commission of the commitment offense.

Criminal History

Most committed youth had a prior adjudication that led to at least probation. When the committed youth were asked about their criminal histories, 17% said they had never been previously sentenced to probation or incarceration. The other 83% had an official placement history (i.e., had been adjudicated and either placed on probation or admitted to a commitment facility). More specifically, 33% had a prior violent offense in their official careers. Twenty-two percent (22%) had a drug offense and 70% had a prior record for a property crime.

Placement History

As was discussed earlier, committed youth spend a great proportion of their formative years in a placement facility, especially violent youth. In 1987, the typical nonviolent committed youth interviewed in the survey had spent, up to that point, a total of nearly 13 months in various commitment placements. In comparison, those with a violent offense in their official careers had served on average 6 months more time and a greater proportion of their lives in commitment facilities. Correspondingly, during their interviews most committed youth (58%) admitted they had a prior admission to a correctional facility, with 20% reporting they had had at least three prior commitments to a juvenile correctional facility.

Mental Health

The mental health problems of some youth may contribute to the prevalence and frequency of their law-violating behavior (Loeber, Farrington, Stouthamer-Loeber, & Van Kammen, 1998). This may explain why studies have found much higher rates of mental problems in committed juveniles than among juveniles in the general population (Otto, Greenstein, Johnson, & Friedman, 1992; Roberts, Attkisson, & Rosenblatt, 1998). For example, a recent study diagnosed the mental health disorders of 292 males entering long-term commitment facilities in Illinois and New Jersey (Wasserman, MacReynolds, Lucas, Fisher, & Santos, 2002). More specifically, the study generated diagnoses present in the prior month to understand the immediate treatment needs of these youth. The study found that two thirds (68%) of committed males had a mental health disorder. Half (50%) had a substance abuse diagnosis. Thirteen percent (13%) were alcohol dependent, 26% were marijuana dependent, and 13% were dependent on some other substance. One third (32%) had a disruptive diagnosis: 32% had a conduct disorder, 3% were oppositional defiant, and 2% were diagnosed with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Nineteen percent (19%) had an anxiety diagnosis such as panic disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder, agoraphobia, a social phobia, or obsessive-compulsive. Ten percent (10%) had a mood disorder, such as depression. In addition, 10% of committed males had considered committing suicide in the previous month and 3% had attempted it.

There is evidence that the rate of mental health disorders is higher for females in the juvenile justice system than for males. A study assessing the mental health of youth in Cook County's juvenile detention center found (similar to the previous cited rate for committed males) that 66% of males had at least one diagnosable mental disorder, whereas the rate was 74% for detained females (Teplin, Abram, McClelland, Dulcan, & Mericle, 2002). This

study also found that the prevalence of mental disorders was higher for detained non-Hispanic White youth than for detained Black or Hispanic youth.

Youth in Adult Facilities

Annual reports from the Bureau of Justice Statistics document the number of juveniles in jails. For example, on June 29, 2001, there were 7,613 persons younger than age 18 in jails across the United States, with 856 (or 11%) of these youth classified as juveniles by the justice system (Beck, Karberg, & Harrison, 2002). The 1-day counts of persons younger than age 18 in jails in 2001 were essentially the same as in 2000 (7,615) and somewhat less than in 1995 (7,800). In contrast to this limited information on the jail population, much is known about youth admitted to adult prisons. Strom (2000) estimated that 5,600 persons younger than age 18 were admitted to state prisons in 1999. Such admissions peaked in 1995 (at 7,600), after having risen consistently since 1986 (when admissions were 3,100). In 1997, 61% of admissions were convicted of a violent offense, 22% for a property offense, 11% for a drug offense, and 5% for a public order offense. Nearly all of these youth were male (97%). Three fourths (74%) were age 17 and 5% were younger than age 16. Most were Black, non-Hispanic (58%), one quarter were White, non-Hispanic (25%), and 15% were Hispanic. Significant for the topic at hand, 28% had less than a 9th-grade education, and 66% had between a 9th- and an 11th-grade education.

Strom estimated at what age these youth would be released from prison based on their age at admission and minimum time to be served. He found that 8% of youth admitted to state prison in 1997 would be released before they turned age 18, 38% would be released before they turned age 19, 56% before they turned age 20, and 68% before they had their 21st birthday. Given that most juvenile justice systems can retain jurisdiction and control over a youth until their 21st birthday, Strom's findings imply that the juvenile justice system could have incapacitated most (68%) of these youth for the same amount of time as the adult correctional system. A small, although not insignificant, portion (7%) of youth admitted to prison in 1997 before their 18th birthday would still be in prison at age 27.

Persons admitted before the age of 18 and released from prison in 1997 had served an average of 37 months in prison, or 50% of their original sentence. The time served for those released in 1997 was essentially equal to the time served by those released in 1990 (35 months) and 1985 (37 months), as were their proportions of sentence-time served (45% and 46%, respectively). In 1997, youth committed for a violent crime served on average 46 months in prison. Compared with violent offenders, public order offenders served about 60% as long (27 months), property offenders about 70% as long (33 months), and drug offenders about half as long (22 months). When released, 71% were released with conditions attached, whereas 22% were released unconditionally.

Compared with the estimated volume of committed youth housed in juvenile facilities, the number released from jails and state prisons is small. Prior to recent large increases in the use of statutory exclusions, youth in the criminal justice system were there because someone in the justice system judged the matter to be so serious or the youth so difficult to rehabilitate that the matter could not be handled within the juvenile justice system. Today, exclusion may have watered down the nature of the young offenders in state prison somewhat, but these youth are very likely to be serious threats to public safety and are highly likely to recidivate—both reasons for these youth to be candidates for reentry programs.

Final Thoughts

At the beginning of the new millennium, about 100,000 juvenile offenders are annually leaving commitment facilities (i.e., juvenile facilities, jails, and prisons), a number that increased over the 1990s. About 9 of every 10 of these youth were committed under the authority of the juvenile justice system and will likely return to it for postrelease supervision. These youth have spent a significant portion of their lives in custody. Their actions indicate that they are a potential threat to public safety. Their personal characteristics indicate their needs for education, drug-treatment, and mental health services. Without reducing these risk factors, their personal characteristics will interfere with any rehabilitation effort, whether mounted by the juvenile justice system or by others in the community. The juvenile justice system cannot rely on others to provide the needed services to these youth if it ever hopes to control its own workload or reduce the problems caused by these youth.

Recent trends may further aggravate these problems. First, more females are entering the juvenile justice system (Snyder, 2002). Delinquent females have a complex combination of risk factors that challenge the rehabilitation programs of the juvenile justice system both inside and outside facilities. Second, with more juveniles being held in adult facilities, questions arise about the availability of services in these facilities designed to meet the developmentally linked needs of youthful offenders. Without such services, the difficulty of the problems posed by these youth in reentry programs could be magnified. Third, as Teplin et al. (2002) have pointed out, recent changes in public health policy may increase the flow of youth with mental health disorders into the juvenile justice system. When families of youth moving from welfare-to-work lose Medicare benefits that cover psychiatric treatment and replace Medicare with insurance that does not provide such benefits, the youth lose access to critical mental health services, increasing the likelihood of misbehavior that would lead them into the juvenile justice system. In all, reentry programs could be challenged more in the future than they are today by the types of problems exhibited by youth leaving our commitment facilities.

Also, those designing reentry programs may want to consider another sizeable population within the juvenile justice system, those aging out of foster care. These juveniles have been under the control of the juvenile justice system for most of their lives. They rarely have a stable family unit. Many have been unable to build bonds that will enable them to thrive independently in their communities. Many have not learned the skills needed to live independently (e.g., driving a car, managing their own finances). These youth have relatively high levels of educational failure, unemployment, drug use, and law-violating behavior. Many fail to thrive during their transition into adulthood, due at least in part to the lack of official or unofficial support systems. At age 18, many are sent out on their own to make their ways in the world, without the financial or emotional safety net of a family or social programs.

Compare a youth graduating from the foster care system to that of a typical middle-class 18-year-old graduating from high school and entering college. Family resources, generally in combination with institutional and governmental aid, pay for food and housing for at least 4 years. These resources also support years of training so that these youth will have marketable skills when they graduate. The implication is that a high school graduate needs a transition program between home and independent living. Why aren't the same considerations given to those graduating from the foster care system? Who is responsible for helping these youth in their transition from state custody to independence? They appear

to have transition needs similar to juveniles leaving our commitment facilities and their risk of failure should be of vital concern to juvenile justice policy makers.

In conclusion, youth returning to their homes after their commitment to a juvenile custody facility bring with them track records of failure. These failures were caused by inadequacies with themselves, their families, and/or their communities. Their risk of subsequent failure may even have been aggravated by their experiences away from home. These youth are arguably at greater risk of failure than any group served by the juvenile justice system and are likely to be classified as failures of the juvenile justice system if their behaviors do not improve following release from custody. The simple truth is that the tangible and intangible costs to society of a youth's failure to thrive following release from juvenile custody are so high that society must learn how to reduce this risk. To policy makers, this means that funds must be made available for research and evidence-based treatment programs designed specifically for youth leaving long-term commitments. To researchers, this means that the country cannot afford to have limited information on the scope of the problem, its genesis, and evidence-based treatments. Think about how much time and money are spent by families and society to ensure that a high school graduate becomes a productive citizen. Now, ignoring the costs of custody, think about how much is spent on reentry youth (with arguably greater hurdles to overcome) to aid them in the transition into productive adulthood. The inequity is obvious.

NOTES

1. Unlike CJRP, the CIC effort asked juvenile facilities nationwide to report aggregate statistics on admissions and releases with some detail on the attributes of these populations.
2. Half the committed youth had spent less than 118 days in custody and half had spent more than 118 days in custody. The median will always be less than the mean (or mathematical average) when the distribution is not symmetrical around the mean and is positively skewed.
3. Forty-eight percent (48%) reported that they were under the influence of either alcohol or drugs at the time of the offense that resulted in the current commitment.

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