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RESEARCH FOCUS ON YOUTH

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VIOLENT OFFENDERS

The recent increase in violence among juveniles has been well chronicled. Whether it is the increased availability of drugs and weapons, the continued decline in the economies of our inner-cities or a combination of a wide range of social and legal factors, there is no shortage of explanations regarding the causes of the phenomenon. Yet, perhaps owing to the manner in which information of this nature is typically conveyed, it is often difficult to develop a full understanding of the dynamics of the problem itself. While emphasis is generally placed on the details surrounding a particular violent incident(s), little is provided that might help in establishing an overall contextual framework within which the information might be better understood.

Noticeably absent from most discussions concerning juvenile violence is an examination of the problem over time, its distribution across social and personal characteristics or, most importantly, the implications it will have for the continued operation of the juvenile justice system.

The purpose of this report is to fully describe the Division's recent experience with youth placed in its custody for having committed a violent offense(s). Following an analy-

sis of changes over time in the proportion of admissions comprised of both violent and non-violent offenders, this report offers a very detailed description of the distribution of violent offenders across the relevant social and legal statuses. Further, it examines the service needs and security requirements of this population. The report concludes with a review of the changes that occurred between

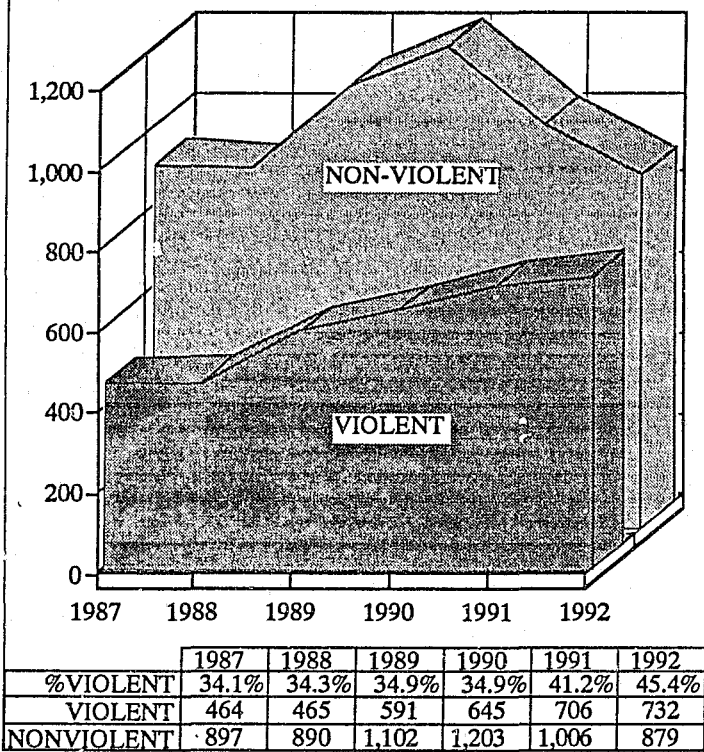
1987 and 1992 in the actual number of youth placed for each of the specific violent offenses.

Any discussion of violence must begin with a clear definition of what specific offenses should be considered violent. While there certainly can be legitimate disagreement over the inclusion of any individual offense, the categorization used in this report is consistent with previous work in this area.¹

Additionally, it is important for the reader to understand that this report focuses exclusively on the most serious offense for which a youth has been adjudicated or convicted and offers no discussion of the offense for which he/she was arrested. Thus, the extent to which such factors as plea bargaining impacts upon final disposition, the offense for which a youth is adjudicated or convicted will under-represent the seriousness of the behavior that prompted the initial arrest. Therefore, it is likely that a substantial number of both violent and non-violent adjudication/conviction offenses discussed in this report originated with an even more serious arrest offense.

As Figure 1 indicates, the number of youth admitted to a DFY-operated program for a violent offense has risen steadily since 1988.

FIGURE 1
CUSTODY ENTRIES INTO DFY-OPERATED PROGRAMS BY YEAR AND TYPE OF PLACEMENT OFFENSE

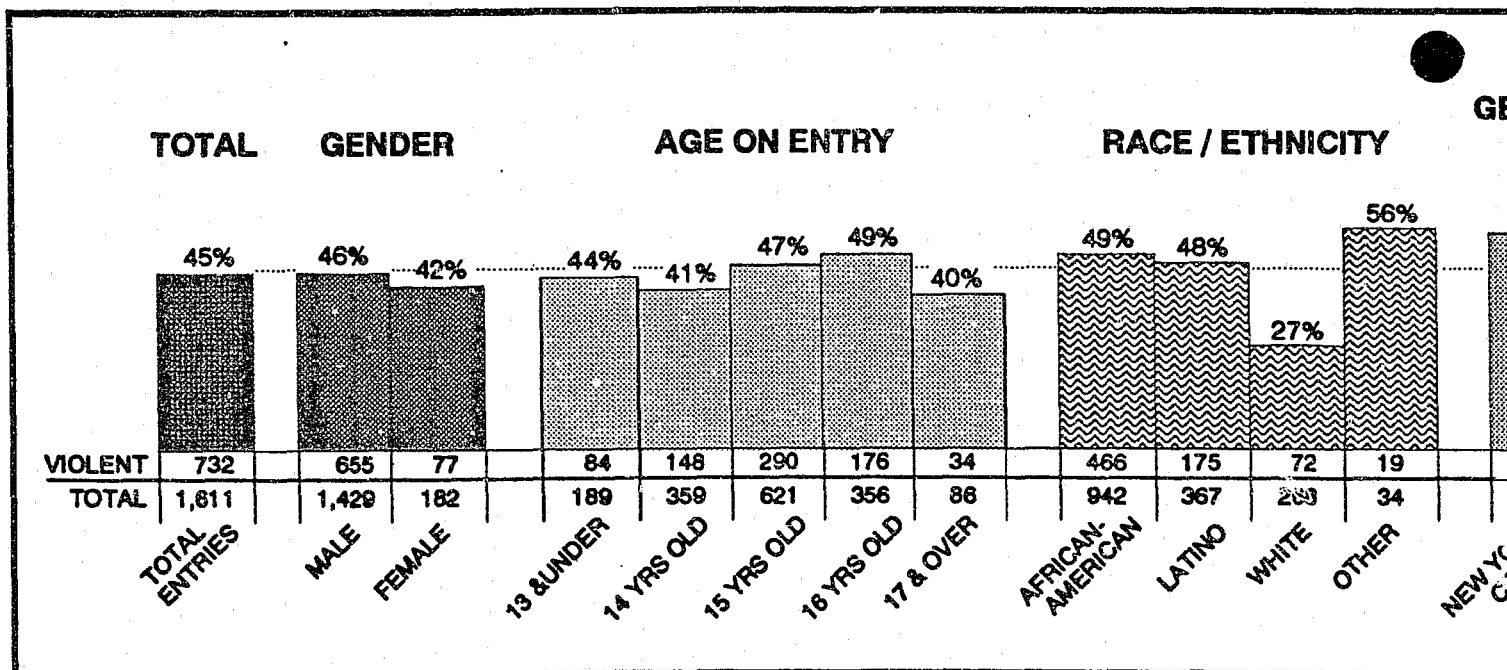


¹ Of the 9,303 youth placed into Division operated programs (excludes youth initially placed into voluntary agencies and parole violators) since 1987, the following Law Codes for their most serious placement offense were counted as violent:

- PL 120 ASSAULT AND RELATED OFFENSES
- PL 125 HOMICIDE
- PL 130 SEX OFFENSES §20, §35, §50, §55, §65, and §70.
- Not counted was §60 (n=7).
- PL 135 KIDNAPPING, COERCION & RELATED OFFENSES
- PL 140 BURGLARY & RELATED OFFENSES limited to Designated Felony §25 and §30.

- PL 150.15 Arson 2nd
- PL 160 ROBBERY
- PL 195.05 Obstructing Governmental Administration 2nd
- PL 240.30 Aggravated Harassment 2nd
- PL 265 FIREARMS & OTHER DANGEROUS WEAPONS §01, §02, §03, §04, and §08
- Agriculture and Markets Law §353 Torturing Animals

FIG
PERCENT OF 1992 CUSTODY ENTRIES PLACED FOR



In fact, over the five year period covered by this report, there has been a 58% increase in admissions of these violent offenders; since 1990, there has also been a 27% decline in the number of admissions of non-violent offenders.

Just as the number of youth admitted for violent offenses has increased, so too has the proportion of all admissions that this group comprises. While only 34% of all custody entries were for violent offenses in 1987, this percentage had increased to 45% in 1992; virtually this entire increase has occurred since 1990. Thus, over the period of study, there has been a 32% increase in the proportion of total admissions comprised of violent offenders.

Youth Characteristics

While the examination of admission trends over an extended period of time is useful for understanding the need to affect system-wide change, it is the analysis of the distribution of violent offenses across the relevant social and legal youth characteristics which should help to direct this change. Figure 2 presents data for all 1992 custody entries and distinguishes violent from non-violent offenders according to relevant social and legal

characteristics. Here, our interest is focused on identifying the difference between violent and non-violent offenders on a range of attributes as well as identifying the ways in which violent offenders distribute across these same characteristics.

Overall, of the 1611 youth admitted to DFY-operated programs in 1992, 45% were placed for having committed a violent offense. Perhaps somewhat noteworthy given conventional wisdom, males (46%) were only slightly more likely than females (42%) to be admitted for having committed a violent offense. Interestingly, however, this similarity between the sexes is a relatively recent phenomenon. Whereas during each year prior to 1988 male admissions were comprised of at least twice the proportion of violent offenders as female admissions, the recent increase in the annual proportion of female admissions identified as violent has made the difference between the two groups considerably less pronounced. From 1980-1987, the average annual proportion of all female admissions identified as violent was 13%, yet, from 1988-1992 it increased to 33%; the proportion of male admissions identified as violent, although greater than females during each year, has remained relatively constant over the same time period.

With respect to age at admission, Figure 2 reveals that 15 and 16 year old youth were more likely to have been admitted for committing a violent offense than were any of the other age groups. The 1992 distribution of violent offenders across the age groups is generally consistent with that found in previous years. The reader is reminded that the relationship between age and admission to DFY is not as straightforward as one might think. While the data presented refer to the age of youth at their time of admission to the Division, all those entering Division custody must have committed the offense(s) for which they are being placed prior to their 16th birthday. The fact that youth are admitted subsequent to turning sixteen simply reflects the processing time involved between the commission of the offense and formal admission to the Division.

Turning to the distribution of violent offenders across racial/ethnic groups, the figure indicates that African-American and Latino admissions were comprised of significantly more violent offenders than were White admissions in 1992. Although the small number of entries and the fact that it is comprised of many individual groups make it difficult to substantively interpret the "other" category, it is important to note that Asian youth ac-

¹ NYC Metro category is Nassau, Rockland, Suffolk, and Westchester Counties.

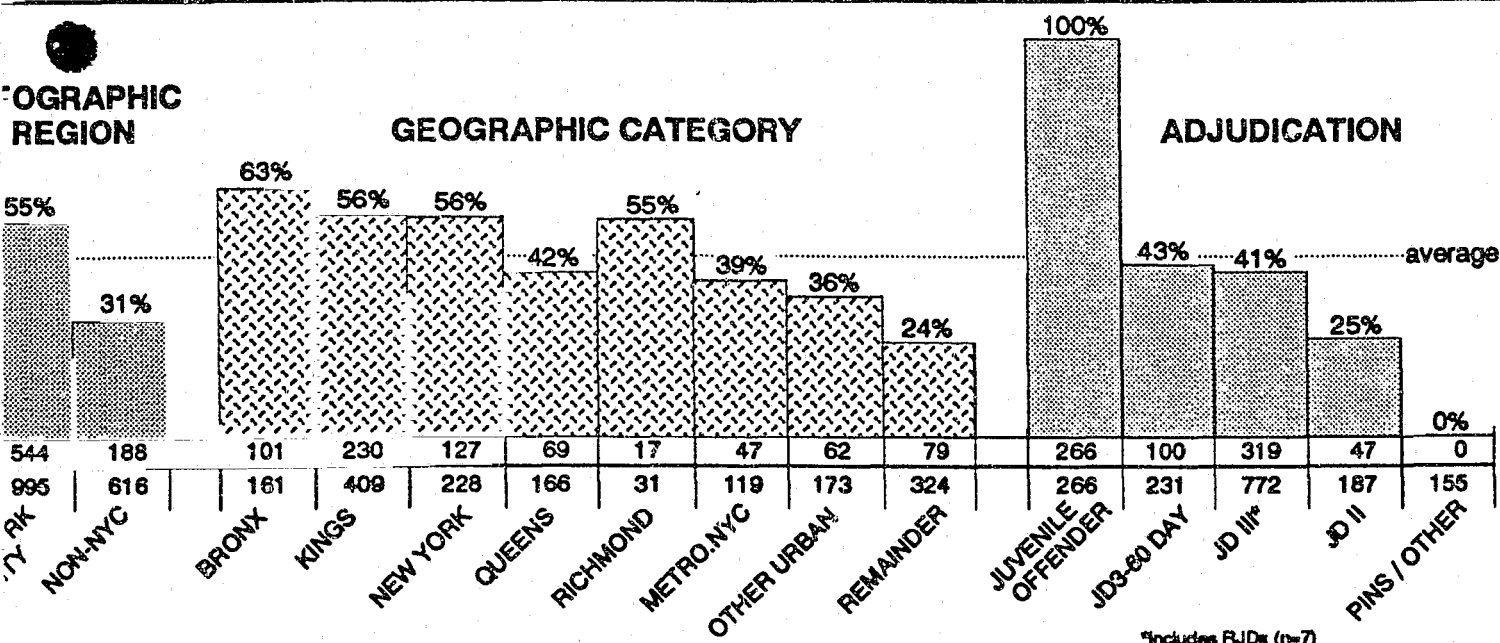
² Other Urban category is Albany, Erie, Monroe, and Onondaga Counties.

FIGURE 2 VIOLENT OFFENSES INTO DFY-OPERATED PROGRAMS

GEOGRAPHIC REGION

GEOGRAPHIC CATEGORY

ADJUDICATION



counted for a greater number (10) of admissions within this category than did any other single group.

For each of the three racial/ethnic groups identified, a greater proportion of their 1992 admissions was comprised of violent offenders than in any other single year since 1985. Additionally, the proportion of violent offenders in each group had been quite stable from year to year prior to 1990, yet, each has experienced significant increases between 1990 and 1992.

Moving to a consideration of the distribution of violent offenders across geographic areas, Figure 2 reveals some interesting differences. Whereas 55% of all admissions from NYC were violent offenders, only 31% of those youth from the rest of the state were so identified.

Also indicated in the figure is the extent to which the distribution of violent offenders varies across the counties comprising NYC and the other relevant geographic groupings. Considering NYC alone, while three of its counties (Kings, New York, Richmond) have an almost identical proportion of violent offenders, the remaining two (Bronx, Queens) are significantly different from the group as well as from one another. Bronx County has a far greater proportion (63%) of its admis-

sions comprised of violent offenders than does any other county in the state, yet Queens County is the only county in NYC whose proportion of violent offenders was lower (42%) than the overall State average (45%).

When examining the distribution across the three geographic categories outside NYC, the data show that each of these areas is comprised of a smaller percentage of violent offenders than any of the NYC counties. In fact, when considering only the two geographic areas at opposite ends of the distribution, the proportion of violent offenders among Bronx County's admissions (63%) was almost three times greater than that of the "Remainder" category (24%).

The distribution of violent offenders across geographic areas in 1992 is quite consistent with previous years. New York City has traditionally had a greater proportion of its admissions comprised of violent offenders than has the balance of the State. Perhaps the only noteworthy difference overall is that there was a much greater difference between "Other Urban" and "Remainder" in 1992 than there was in any previous year.

Notwithstanding the considerable impact of plea-bargaining, one would still expect to find a direct relationship between the severity of offense and final adjudication status. The

nature of New York's statutes governing juveniles constrains the relationship between offense and adjudication status. The effect of this is most obvious at the extremes of the adjudication continuum.

By definition, all youth adjudicated as Juvenile Offenders (JO) are considered violent while no youngster awarded PINS status can be found to have committed a violent offense. The data presented in Figure 2 for each of these statuses are consistent with this requirement.

Although also related to offense severity, there is considerable overlap with respect to the three remaining adjudication categories and the range of offenses that can fall under each of them. While those criteria that distinguish among the three types of juvenile delinquents extend beyond a simple consideration of the severity of the immediate offense, the distribution presented in Figure 2 is consistent with what one would expect. Those Juvenile Delinquents placed with a provision that permits their transfer to the highest level of security within sixty days after admission are significantly more violent (43%) than those Juvenile Delinquents (JDII) whose very status precludes their admission to a limited secure or secure facility at any point during their placement (25%).

TABLE 1

PERCENT OF 1992 DFY CUSTODY ENTRIES INTO DFY-OPERATED PROGRAMS WITH SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS BY OFFENSE										
	TOTAL	NONVIOLENT	VIOLENT	ROBBERY	ASSAULT	WEAPONS	HOMICIDE	SEX	BURGLARY	OTHER
TOTAL ENTRIES	1,611	879	732	322	181	74	55	46	33	2
GENDER										
MALE	89%	88%	89%	93%	79%	93%	82%	100%	100%	90%
FEMALE	11%	12%	11%	7%	21%	7%	18%			10%
AGE AT ADMISSION										
13 & UNDER	12%	12%	11%	10%	14%	11%	9%	15%	12%	10%
14 YEARS OLD	22%	24%	20%	18%	29%	14%	11%	26%	15%	24%
15 YEARS OLD	39%	38%	40%	44%	31%	46%	31%	35%	42%	48%
16 YEARS OLD	22%	20%	24%	23%	24%	27%	31%	17%	30%	19%
17 & OVER	5%	6%	5%	5%	2%	3%	18%	7%		
RACE / ETHNIC ORIGIN										
LATINO ALL RACES	23%	22%	24%	26%	24%	30%	20%	15%	6%	24%
AFRICAN AMERICAN	65%	60%	72%	80%	71%	76%	67%	52%	36%	62%
LATINO	7%	6%	8%	10%	7%	11%	4%	4%	3%	5%
NON-LATINO	58%	54%	64%	69%	64%	65%	64%	48%	33%	57%
WHITE	31%	36%	24%	18%	22%	18%	25%	43%	64%	33%
LATINO	14%	14%	14%	16%	13%	15%	16%	11%	3%	14%
NON-LATINO	17%	22%	10%	3%	9%	3%	9%	33%	61%	19%
NATIVE AMERICAN	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%					
ASIAN	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	3%	3%			
OTHER	3%	3%	3%	1%	5%	4%	2%	4%		5%
LATINO	2%	2%	2%	1%	4%	4%				5%
NON-LATINO	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%		2%	4%		
RESPONSIBLE DEMOGRAPHIC AREA										
NEW YORK CITY	62%	51%	74%	88%	63%	86%	82%	48%	9%	67%
Bronx	10%	7%	14%	18%	12%	9%	15%	13%	3%	5%
KINGS	25%	20%	31%	38%	23%	43%	36%	11%	6%	33%
NEW YORK	14%	11%	17%	22%	16%	20%	7%	11%		19%
QUEENS	10%	11%	9%	7%	11%	14%	15%	13%		5%
STATEN ISLAND	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%		9%			5%
NON-NYC	38%	49%	26%	12%	37%	14%	18%	52%	91%	33%
NYC METRO	7%	8%	6%	5%	9%	4%	5%	7%	18%	5%
OTHER URBAN	11%	13%	8%	6%	14%	3%	7%	11%	9%	19%
REMAINDER	20%	28%	11%	2%	14%	7%	5%	35%	64%	10%

Note: columns may not add to 100% due to rounding

Offense Types

While the preceding discussion centered on the distribution of violent offenders across a host of social-legal characteristics, this section will focus on how each of these characteristics is related to specific violent offenses. Here, we examine what, if any, differences exist in the way in which these attributes are distributed across each of the individual offense categories. Determining if certain "types" of offenders are over- or under-represented in selected offense categories should help to inform the development of both preventive and remedial habilitative services.

Table 1 provides a comparison of non-violent and violent offenders according to selected characteristics, as well as a comparison of how each of the individual offense categories differ across these characteristics.

For gender, the overall distribution was identical to that found in the general DFY population. Whereas males comprised the overwhelming majority (89%) of violent offenders, so too did they represent the vast majority of all custody entries (89%). While females were a relatively small percentage of each individual offender group, they com-

prised a far greater proportion of assault (21%) and homicide (18%) offenders than they did any other single offense.

Overall, compared to non-violent offenders, violent offenders tend to be slightly older upon custody entry. As indicated in the table, youth 15 years of age and older accounted for the greatest proportion of offenders in each of the individual crime categories. This relationship between age and violence was most pronounced for homicide offenders, where almost half of the offenders were 16 years of age or older.

There were a number of interesting differences with respect to the racial/ethnic composition of the various offender groups. Of the three major racial/ethnic groups, Non-Latino African-Americans comprised the overwhelming majority of violent offenders (64%), followed by Latinos of all races (24%) and Non-Latino Whites (10%). Interestingly, when compared with their respective proportion of all custody entries, the table reveals that Non-Latino African-Americans are slightly over-represented among violent offenders (64% versus 58%), Latinos proportionally represented (24% versus 23%) and Non-

Latino Whites greatly under-represented (10% versus 17%).

When examined across individual categories, the table reveals a relatively stable distribution with a few notable exceptions. Notwithstanding some minor variation, Non-Latino African-Americans and Latinos of all races comprised a percentage of each offense category that was fairly consistent with the overall percentage of violent offenders attributed to each of the groups, respectively. However, there was a major deviation from this pattern with respect to those offenders placed for either a Sex or Burglary offense.

Although the small number of cases included in both the Sex (N=46) and Burglary (N=33) categories requires caution in interpretation, it is interesting that Non-Latino African-Americans and Latinos of all races were clearly under-represented in these two offender groups. Given the proportion of overall violent offenders that they comprise, Non-Latino White youth were significantly over-represented. While there were even fewer Non-Latino White youth in every other individual violent crime category than their already disproportionately low overall figure

TABLE 2

PERCENT OF 1992 CUSTODY ENTRIES INTO DFY-OPERATED PROGRAMS WITH SELECTED NEEDS BY OFFENSE										
NUMBER SCREENED	TOTAL	NONVIOLENT	VIOLENT	ROBBERY	ASSAULT	WEAPONS	HOMICIDE	SEX	BURGLARY	OTHER
	1,611	879	732	322	181	74	55	46	33	21
SERVICE NEEDS										
SUBSTANCE ABUSE	59%	66%	51%	48%	54%	54%	44%	46%	70%	52%
MENTAL HEALTH	28%	33%	23%	20%	25%	20%	15%	28%	42%	29%
SPECIAL EDUCATION	24%	28%	19%	13%	24%	14%	15%	33%	42%	33%
SEX OFFENDER	8%	6%	10%	3%	7%	3%	2%	96%	9%	24%
LIMITED ENGLISH	7%	4%	11%	15%	6%	7%	22%	7%		5%
CONTROL NEEDS										
PRIOR INSTITUTIONAL VIOLENCE	40%	31%	50%	59%	48%	22%	67%	39%	30%	38%
PRIOR ESCAPE ATTEMPTS	27%	34%	18%	16%	24%	12%	7%	11%	55%	24%
HISTORY OF FIRESETTING	8%	9%	6%	4%	7%	3%	2%	13%	18%	33%

Note: Table lists percentage of youth in each crime type with the specific need. Youth may have multiple needs.

(10%), these youth comprised 30% of all Sex and 61% of all Burglary offenders.

New York City made up 62% of all custody entries in 1992, yet youth from this area comprised almost three quarters (74%) of all violent offenders. Comprising 10% and 25% of all custody entries, respectively, Bronx (14%) and Kings (31%) counties were over-represented among violent offenders.

Given the proportion of all total entries coming from areas outside NYC, each of these areas was under-represented among violent offenders. Most notable in this regard is the area identified as "Remainder." While this largely suburban and rural grouping accounted for 20% of all custody entries, it contributed only 11% of all violent offenders.

With respect to the individual crime categories, Table 1 indicates that NYC contributes a far greater percentage of all Robbery (88%), Weapons (86%) and Homicide (82%) offenders than would be expected (74%). At the same time, however, it is under-represented among all Assault (63%), Sex (48%) and Burglary (9%) offenders.

Within NYC, Bronx (18%), Kings (38%) and New York (22%) counties were over-represented among Robbery offenders and under-represented among offenders placed for either a Sex or Burglary offense. Although having contributed only 9% and 2% of all violent offenders, respectively, Queens comprised 15% and Richmond, 9%, of all homicide offenders. Finally, there were no Burglary offenders from either New York or Queens, while Richmond didn't contribute any Weapons, Sex or Burglary offenders.

Given both the high percentage of all violent offenders coming from NYC and the distribution across individual crime categories described above, it is not surprising to find that each of the remaining three geographic areas are over-represented among Sex and Burglary offenders. In fact, although comprising

only 11% of all violent offenders, the counties included in "Remainder" accounted for 35% of all Sex and 64% of all Burglary offenders.

Youth Needs

It is critical that the Division identify the existence of any special needs that youth placed in its custody may demonstrate. Addressing these needs while youth are in care will increase the likelihood of their successful return to the community. Toward this end, the Division administers a series of "screens" (see Table 2) to all youth prior to their admission to a DFY-operated program.

The Division screens youth for both service and control needs. While the former relates to substantive program areas, the latter helps to identify the physical plant requirements necessary for the safety and well-being of both the youth and community while he/she is in care. The results of this screening process are used to place a youngster in a residential program best suited to meet his/her needs. Table 2 presents the distribution of service and control needs for all custody entries, for those identified as non-violent and violent and, finally, for each of the individual violent crime categories.

Considering service needs first, the table indicates some interesting differences between non-violent and violent offenders. Violent offenders are much less likely than non-violent offenders to be identified as having Substance Abuse (51%), Mental Health (23%), or Special Education (19%) needs. Although relatively few youth entering DFY custody demonstrate a need for Sex offender or limited English services, violent offenders were, nonetheless, more likely than their non-violent counterparts to present this need.

In examining what, if any, differences may exist across the different violent offender categories with respect to these service needs,

no clear pattern emerges. Interestingly, however, youth placed for Burglary were more likely than any other individual group to evidence Substance Abuse (70%), Mental Health (42%) and Special Education (42%) needs; again, the reader is reminded that the small number of Burglary cases (N=33) requires added caution in interpretation.

Turning to control needs, the table indicates that violent offenders were more likely (50%) than non-violent offenders (31%) to have had a history of institutional violence, yet they were less likely (18% versus 34%) to have had prior escape attempts in any of their previous institutional placements.

There was considerable variability across the individual offense categories with regard to both prior institutional violence and escape history. Compared to all other offenders, homicide offenders were the most likely (67%) to have a history of institutional violence and the least likely (7%) to have an escape history. Youth placed for Burglary were the most likely (55%) to have an escape history and, together with Sex offenders (13%), had a far greater proportion (18%) of youth with a history of fire setting than would be expected given the figure for all violent offenders (6%).

Violence Over Time

It is often difficult to gauge accurately the impact of any social phenomenon by focusing solely on its status at a single point in time. Whether it is the implication of violence for the continued operation of the juvenile justice system, or its impact on the quality of life in our communities, matters little. Unless we are able to examine changes in violence over time, our ability to establish a context within which to fully understand violent offenders will be severely compromised.

Table 3 compares the years 1987 and 1992 for the number and percentage of vio-

lent offenders in DFY-operated programs. While there has been a very slight (-2%) overall decrease in the number of total youth in custody between 1987 and 1992, the number of youth placed for a violent offense has increased 14%. This, coupled with the fact that there has been a simultaneous decrease (-12%) in the number of youth placed for non-violent offenses, suggests that the Division has increasingly had to provide services to a more serious type of offender.

Overall, the greatest single increase has occurred in weapons offenses (96%). Given this increase in weapons offenses, it is perhaps not surprising to find significant increases in both Homicide (42%) and Robbery (25%) offenders as well; these are two crimes whose commission often involves the threat or use of a weapon. Finally, there was a substantial decrease in the number of youth placed for Burglary (-35%) and "Other Violent" offense (-20%).

TABLE 3

YOUTH IN DFY-OPERATED PROGRAMS ON DECEMBER 31 BY CATEGORY OF MOST SERIOUS OFFENSE			
	1987	1992	Percent Change
TOTAL POPULATION	2,753	2,704	-2%
Non-Violent	1,683	1,479	-12%
Violent	1,070	1,225	14%
WEAPONS	54	106	96%
HOMICIDE	112	159	42%
ROBBERY	355	443	25%
ASSAULT	283	304	7%
SEX	121	112	-7%
OTHER VIOLENT	41	33	-20%
BURGLARY	104	68	-35%

ERRATA

Table 2 of the Summer 1992 Research Focus: Females in DFY Custody contains erroneous data for English as a Second Language. The 1990 and 1991 percent with this need should be 2% and 5%, respectively.

CONCLUSIONS

This report provided an analysis of the Division's recent experience with violent offenders. By first offering a five-year trend analysis and then moving to a critical examination of the manner in which violent offenders are distributed across various socio-legal characteristics and demonstrate the need for specialized services, much of the discussion centered on the way in which violent offenders are different from one another and, more importantly, from non-violent offenders.

To be sure, a number of interesting findings emerged from this analysis. Among them: the recent surge in the proportion of female offenders identified as violent; at least as measured here, violence overall remains a disproportionately urban phenomenon; violent offenders, on average, demonstrate fewer specialized needs than their non-violent counterparts; and, the dramatic increase

in weapons offenses suggests that there was a real potential for even greater violence.

Yet, among all of the findings presented, perhaps the most striking, and certainly the most alarming, is simply the size of the increase in the overall DFY population that is comprised of violent offenders. The type of youngster for whom care must be provided, at least with respect to the nature of her/his admitting offense, is radically different than was the case just a few years ago. If this alone did not present sufficient challenge to those in juvenile justice, the findings further suggest that there is no prototypical violent offender. On the contrary, with only few substantively meaningful exceptions, the data presented here suggest that violence is rather pervasive, and, thus, likely to resist any attempt to either "explain" or "remedy" it through narrowly focused approaches.



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