



Behavior

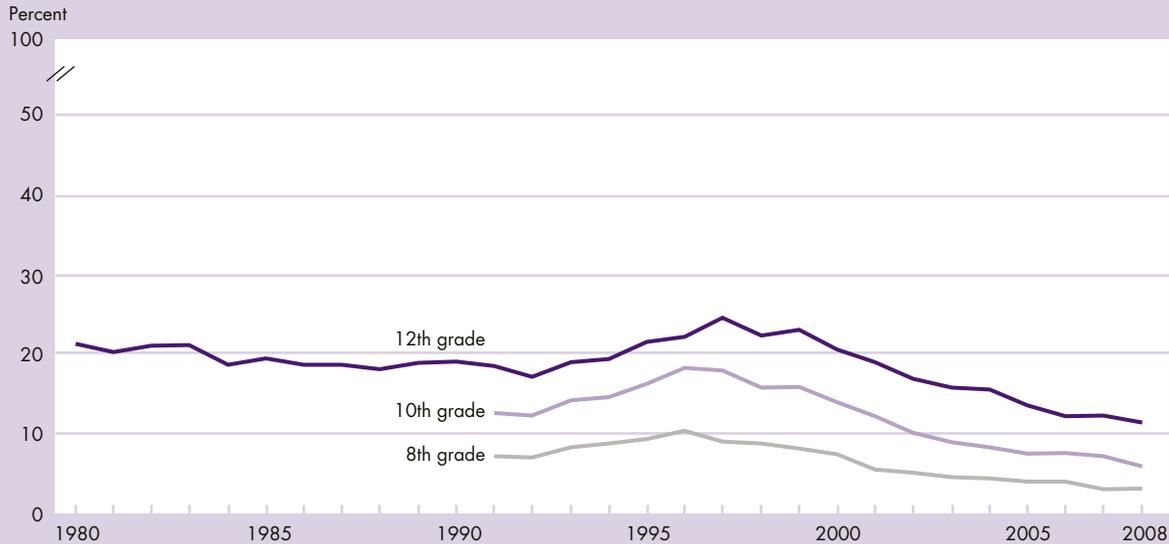
The well-being of young people can be affected by aspects of their behavior and social environments. The indicators in this section focus on illegal and high-risk behaviors. Substance use behaviors are shown for regular cigarette smoking, alcohol use, and illicit drug use. Other indicators in this section present data on behaviors such as sexual activity and perpetration of serious violent crime.

Regular Cigarette Smoking

Smoking has serious long-term consequences, including the risk of smoking-related diseases and premature death, as well as the increased health care costs associated with treating the illnesses.⁹¹ Many adults who are currently addicted to tobacco began smoking as adolescents, and it is estimated that more than 6 million of today's underage smokers will die of tobacco-related illnesses.⁹² These consequences underscore the importance of studying patterns of smoking among adolescents.

Indicator BEH1

Percentage of 8th-, 10th-, and 12th-grade students who reported smoking cigarettes daily in the past 30 days by grade, 1980–2008



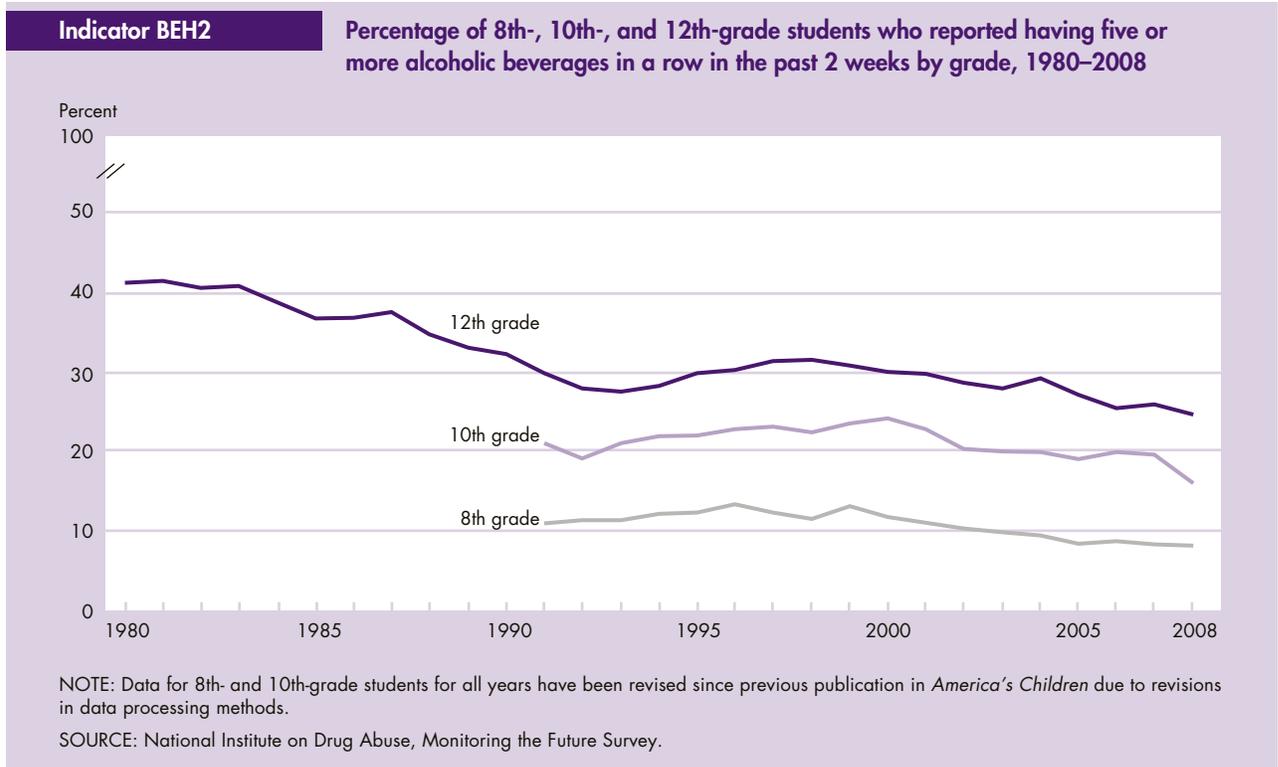
SOURCE: National Institute on Drug Abuse, Monitoring the Future Survey.

- Among 8th-, 10th-, and 12th-grade students in 2008, the percentage who reported smoking cigarettes daily in the past 30 days was about a third to a half of the percentage for the same groups in the peak years of 1996 and 1997. The most dramatic declines were seen among the youngest students. In 2008, 3 percent of 8th-grade students, 6 percent of 10th-grade students, and 11 percent of 12th-grade students reported smoking cigarettes daily in the past 30 days, compared with the respective peaks of 10, 18, and 25 percent.
- Three percent of both male and female 8th-grade students, 6 percent of both male and female 10th-grade students, and 12 percent of male and 11 percent of female 12th-grade students reported daily smoking.
- In 2008, 14 percent of White 12th-grade students reported smoking cigarettes daily in the past 30 days, compared with 6 percent of Black and 7 percent of Hispanic 12th-grade students.

Bullets contain references to data that can be found in Table BEH1 on page 146. Endnotes begin on page 73.

Alcohol Use

Alcohol is the most common psychoactive substance used during adolescence. Its use is associated with motor vehicle accidents, injuries, and deaths; problems in school and in the workplace; and fighting, crime, and other serious consequences.⁹³ Early onset of heavy drinking, defined here as five or more alcoholic beverages in a row or during a single occasion in the previous 2 weeks, may be especially problematic, potentially increasing the likelihood of these negative outcomes.



- Heavy drinking declined from the most recent peaks of 13 percent in 1996 to 8 percent in 2008 for 8th-grade students, from 24 percent in 2000 to 16 percent in 2008 for 10th-grade students, and from 32 percent in 1998 to 25 percent in 2008 for 12th-grade students.
- In 2008, 8 percent of both male and female 8th-grade students reported heavy drinking; among 10th-grade students, the proportion was 17 percent for males and 15 percent for females. Twenty-eight percent of 12th-grade males reported heavy drinking, compared with 21 percent of 12th-grade females.
- For 10th- and 12th-grade students in 2008, the percentage of White and Hispanic students who were heavy drinkers was approximately double the percentage of Black students. The percentages of 10th-grade White, Hispanic, and Black students who were heavy drinkers were 20, 20, and 10 percent, respectively. The percentages of White, Hispanic, and Black 12th-graders who were heavy drinkers were 30, 22, and 11 percent, respectively. Among 8th-grade students, the rate of heavy drinking was 8 percent for White, 12 percent for Hispanic, and 6 percent for Black students.

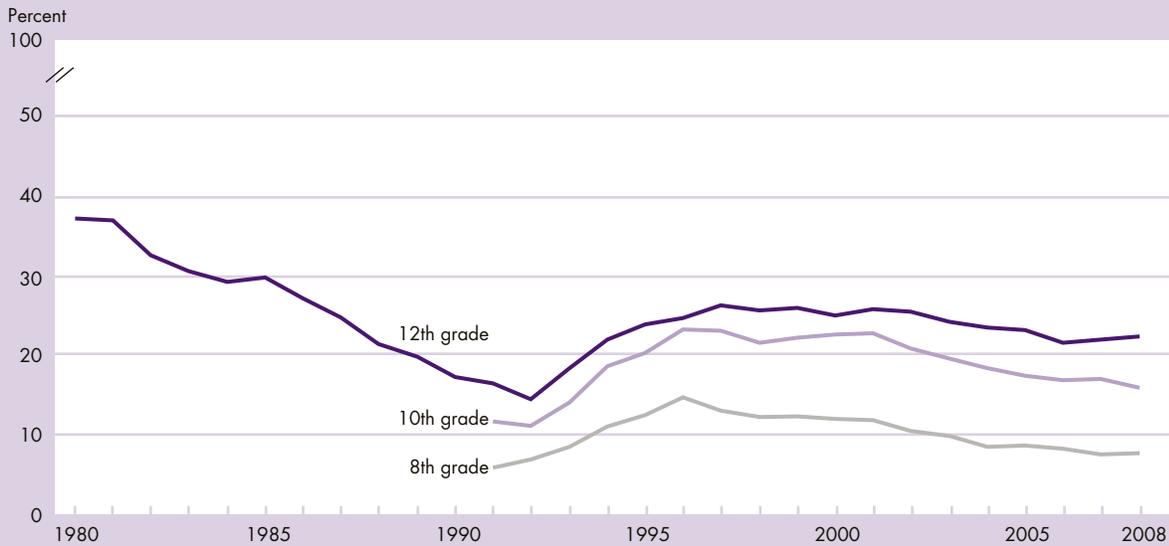
Bullets contain references to data that can be found in Table BEH2 on page 147. Endnotes begin on page 73.

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.⁹⁴ Marijuana use poses both health and cognitive risks, particularly for damage to pulmonary functions as a result of chronic use.^{95,96} Hallucinogens can affect brain chemistry and result in problems with memory and learning new information.⁹⁷ As is the case with alcohol use and smoking, illicit drug use is a risk-taking behavior that has potentially serious negative consequences.

Indicator BEH3

Percentage of 8th-, 10th-, and 12th-grade students who reported using illicit drugs in the past 30 days by grade, 1980–2008



NOTE: Use of “any illicit drug” includes any use of marijuana, LSD, other hallucinogens, crack, other cocaine, or heroin, or any use of other narcotics, amphetamines, barbiturates, or tranquilizers not under a doctor’s orders. For 8th- and 10th-graders, the use of other narcotics and barbiturates has been excluded because these younger respondents appear to overreport use (perhaps because they include the use of nonprescription drugs in their responses).

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

- Illicit drug use in the past 30 days was unchanged from 2007 to 2008. Eight percent of 8th-grade students, 16 percent of 10th-grade students, and 22 percent of 12th-grade students reported use in the past 30 days in 2008.
- Eight percent of male and 7 percent of female 8th-grade students reported using illicit drugs in the past 30 days. Among 10th-grade students, the percentages were 17 percent for males and 14 percent for females. Among 12th-grade students, the percentages were 25 percent for males and 19 percent for females.
- Reports of illicit drug use in the past 30 days have declined from the most recent peaks of 15 percent for 8th-grade students and 23 percent for 10th-grade students in 1996, and 26 percent for 12th-grade students in 1997.

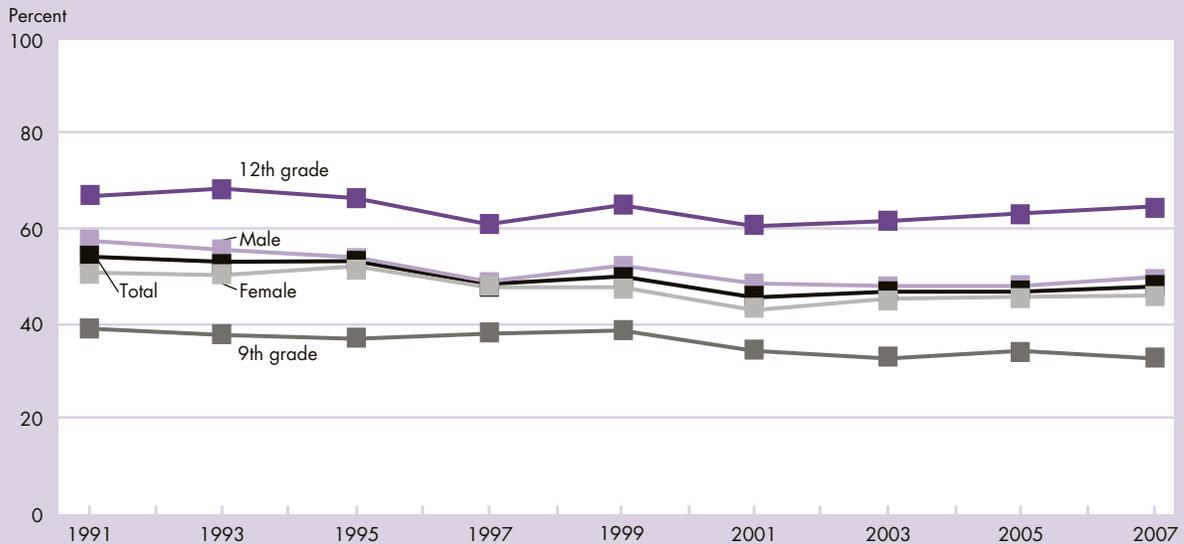
Bullets contain references to data that can be found in Table BEH3 on page 148. Endnotes begin on page 73.

Sexual Activity

Early sexual activity is associated with emotional⁹⁸ and physical health risks. Youth who engage in sexual activity are at risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and becoming pregnant. STIs, including HIV, can infect a person for a lifetime and have consequences including disability and early death. Meanwhile, delaying sexual initiation is associated with a decrease in the number of lifetime sexual partners,⁹⁹ and decreasing the number of lifetime partners is associated with a decrease in the rate of STIs.^{100,101} Additionally, teen pregnancy is associated with a number of negative risk factors, not only for the mother but also for her child (see FAM6).

Indicator BEH4

Percentage of high school students who reported ever having had sexual intercourse by gender and selected grades, selected years 1991–2007



NOTE: Students were asked, "Have you ever had sexual intercourse?" Data are collected biennially.

SOURCE: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System.

- In 2007, 48 percent of high school students reported ever having had sexual intercourse.
- The proportion of students who reported ever having had sexual intercourse declined significantly from 1991 (54 percent) to 2001 (46 percent) and has remained relatively stable from 2001 to 2007.
- The percentage of students who reported ever having had sexual intercourse differs by grade. In 2007, 33 percent of 9th-grade students reported ever having had sexual intercourse, compared with 65 percent of 12th-grade students.
- Trends differed by race and ethnicity. The percentage of White, non-Hispanic students who reported ever having had sexual intercourse declined from 50 percent in 1991 to 43 percent in 2001, and remained between 42 percent and 44 percent from 2003 to 2007. This rate also declined among Black, non-Hispanic students, from 82 percent in 1991 to 67 percent in 2003, and remained between 67 percent and 68 percent from 2003 to 2007. There was no statistically significant change among Hispanic students between 1991 and 2007 (when the proportion was 52 percent).
- Overall, rates of sexual intercourse did not differ by gender, though they did differ by gender within some racial and ethnic groups. In 2007, 73 percent of Black, non-Hispanic male students reported ever having had sexual intercourse, compared with 61 percent of Black, non-Hispanic female students, and 58 percent of Hispanic male students reported ever having had sexual intercourse, compared with 46 percent of Hispanic female students.¹⁰²
- In 2007, 16 percent of students who had sexual intercourse in the past 3 months reported that they or their partner had used birth control pills before their last sexual intercourse, and 62 percent reported condom use. Of note, condom use increased since 1991 (from 46 percent) among high school students, while there was a statistically significant decrease in the use of birth control pills (from 21 percent).

Bullets contain references to data that can be found in Tables BEH4.A and BEH4.B on page 149. Endnotes begin on page 73.

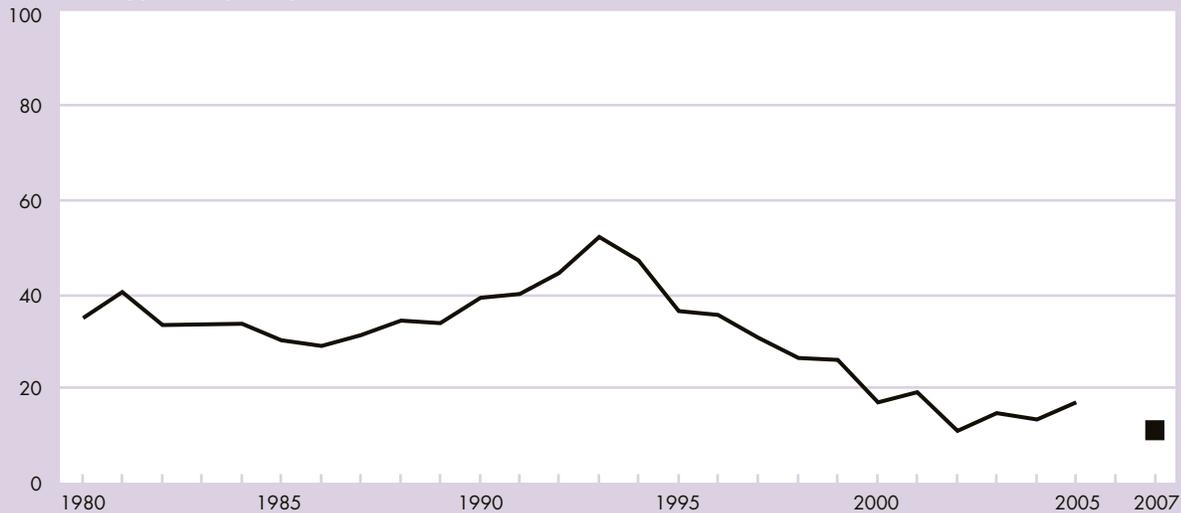
Youth Perpetrators of Serious Violent Crimes

The level of youth violence in society can be viewed as an indicator of youths' ability to control their behavior and 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 extent to which at least one juvenile offender is reported by the victim to have been involved in a crime.

Indicator BEH5

Rate of serious violent crimes by youth perpetrators ages 12–17, selected years 1980–2005 and 2007

Youth offending per 1,000 youth ages 12–17



NOTE: The offending 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 that involved at least one offender perceived by the victim to be 12–17 years of age, plus the number of homicides reported to the police that involved at least one juvenile offender, 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. Data from 2006 are not included because, due to changes in methodology, 2006 crime perpetration rates are not comparable to other years and cannot be used for yearly trend comparisons. See *Criminal Victimization, 2006*, <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/abstract/cv06.htm>.

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

- In 2007, the serious violent crime offending rate was 11 crimes per 1,000 juveniles ages 12–17, with a total of 277,000 such crimes involving juveniles. This is lower than the rate in 2005, and it is substantially lower than the 1993 peak rate of 52 crimes per 1,000 juveniles ages 12–17.
- Since 1980, serious violent crime involving youth offenders has ranged from 19 percent of all serious violent crimes in 1982 to 26 percent in 1993, the peak year for youth violence. In 2007, 17 percent of all such victimizations reportedly involved a juvenile offender.
- In over half of all serious violent juvenile crimes reported by victims in 2007, more than one offender was involved in the incident. Because insufficient information exists to determine the ages of each individual offender when a crime is committed by more than one perpetrator, 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 rate of crimes involving a juvenile.

Bullets contain references to data that can be found in Table BEH5 on page 150.

Indicators Needed

Behavior

A broader set of indicators than those presented in this section is needed to adequately monitor the behaviors of youth. Additional behavioral measures are needed on:

- *Activities promoting health and development.* The participation of youth in a broad range of activities (e.g., volunteering, part-time employment, after-school activities) has been linked to positive developmental outcomes. However, additional research is needed to ascertain how and under what circumstances such activities relate to success in later life. The Forum has presented “Youth Employment While in School” and “Participation in Volunteer Activities” as special features in past *America’s Children* reports. However, we currently lack regular indicators on youth involvement in various organized activities as well as data to monitor specific health-promoting behaviors such as exercise.
- *Youth in the justice system.* The youth perpetrators of serious violent crime indicator does not provide critical information on the involvement of youth in the juvenile and criminal justice systems, including the characteristics of youthful offenders and the number and characteristics of youth arrestees and detainees, those prosecuted in juvenile and adult courts, and those incarcerated in the Nation’s jails, prisons, and juvenile facilities. Additional work is needed to produce a more comprehensive and useful picture of the number, experiences, and characteristics of youth within the criminal justice system.