

## *Are Girls Getting More Violent?*

Exploring Juvenile Robbery Trends

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Public discussion regarding youth violence is at an all-time high, and this is particularly true of girls' violence. Girls have long been forgotten when juvenile crime is discussed. However, recent statistics showing dramatic increases in the arrests of girls, particularly for traditionally male-dominated offenses (such as assault and robbery), have prompted some to report that girls are getting more violent. Using data from reported juvenile robbery incidents for the City and County of Honolulu during two specific time periods, this research addresses the question, are girls getting more violent? The data indicate that despite claims that youth have become increasingly violent, no major shift in the pattern of juvenile robbery occurred over the two time periods. Instead, it appears that less serious offenses, particularly those committed by girls, are being swept up into the criminal justice system.

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### **TRENDS IN YOUTH VIOLENCE**

In the wake of high-profile murders committed by juveniles, public concern about youth crime, and particularly youth violence, is at an all-time high. Ironically, this public concern comes among mixed but encouraging signals that crime in general, and youth crime in particular, may be declining (see Males, 1996; Ziedenberg & Schiraldi, 1998).

As an example, the nation saw a 4.3% decrease in the number of arrests of youths for violent crimes between 1996 and 1997. Robbery arrests, specifically, declined by 7.8% between 1996 and 1997 (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1998, p. 230). However, these decreases came after years of steady increase, prompting some observers to note that the number of juvenile

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arrests for serious crimes of violence (murder, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault) still remains considerably above levels recorded a decade earlier. As an example, arrests of youth for violent offenses increased by 48.9% from 1988 to 1997 (p. 230). Taking a look at specific offenses, juveniles accounted for 18.7% of all arrests in 1997 but 30.2% of all robbery arrests, which suggests that a focus on juvenile robbery is important both nationally and locally.

In the past decade, Hawaii, like the rest of the nation, has seen an increase in the arrests of youth for serious crimes of violence<sup>1</sup> coupled with a recent decline. In Hawaii, crimes of violence (murder, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault) increased 60% from 1987 through 1996 coupled with an 8.6% decline between 1996 and 1997 (Crime Prevention and Assistance Division, 1997, p. 125, 1998, p. 123). Most of the change can be attributed to increases in the number of youth arrested for two offenses: aggravated assault and robbery. From 1994 to 1996, for example, the number of youth arrested for robbery doubled.

### ARE GIRLS GETTING MORE VIOLENT?

Girls have long been forgotten when juvenile crime is discussed despite the fact that one out of four juvenile arrests is of a girl. Recently, though, the public has been bombarded with scary “facts” about the rising rate of girls’ violence. As an example, a recent flyer promoting a teleconference organized by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) announced:

The juvenile Violent Crime Index arrest rate for girls more than doubled between 1987 and 1994, and then fell in each of the next 3 years. The growth in juvenile violent crime arrests rates between 1987 and 1994 was far greater for females than for males, and the decline after 1994 was less for females than males. The female violent crime arrest rate for 1997 was 103% above the 1981 rate, although the male arrest rate was 27% above the 1981 level. (1999, p. 2)

Increases such as these have prompted a spate of media accounts of girls’ violence. As an example, *The Boston Globe Magazine* ran a cover story recently on girls and violence. Against a backdrop of large red letters reading “Bad Girls,” was text saying, “Girls are moving into the world of violence that once belonged to boys” (Ford, 1998). Earlier, *Newsweek* ran a feature spread on teen violence complete with a box entitled “Girls Will Be Girls,” which noted that “some girls now carry guns. Others hide razor blades in their mouths” (Leslie, Biddle, Rosenberg, & Wayne, 1993, p. 44). Explaining

this trend, the article notes that "The plague of teen violence is an equal-opportunity scourge. Crime by girls is on the rise, or so various jurisdictions report" (Leslie et al., 1993, p. 44; see Chesney-Lind, 1997, for a review of these representations).

An assumption present in virtually all these accounts is the notion that girls' and boys' aggression can be understood without any understanding of gender. This article will challenge this notion and argue instead that girls' aggression can only be fully understood once it is located "within the interpersonal and institutionalized patterns of patriarchal society" (White & Kowalski, 1994, p. 502). Such an understanding will prevent the more typical approaches to girls' and women's aggression that alternately deny and demonize female aggression.

### GIRLS AND ROBBERY

A review of girls' arrests for violent crime during the past decade (1988-1997) initially seems to provide support for the notion that girls have become more violent. Arrests of girls for all Part One Offenses<sup>2</sup> violent offenses were up 100.7%; arrests of girls for aggravated assaults were up 142.6%; arrests of girls for robbery were up 95.3%, and finally, arrests of girls for other assaults were up 130% (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1998, p. 219). More significantly, girls' share of violent arrests, particularly assault and robbery, were up. In 1997, the female share of aggravated assault arrests increased from 15.2% to 20.6% (a 35.5% increase), and in the case of robbery the female share of arrests increased from 7.3% to 9.2% (a 26% increase).

Increases in female arrests for assault are increasingly being explained by policy changes rather than changes in girls' behavior. Changes in police practices with reference to domestic violence have resulted in an increased number of arrests of girls and women for assault. For example, a recent study of domestic violence arrests in California that included both juvenile and adult arrests revealed that over the past decade, girls' and women's share of these arrests nearly tripled (going from 6.0% in 1988 to 16.5% in 1998) (Criminal Justice Statistics Center, 1999, p. 8).

Relabeling of behaviors that were once categorized as status offenses (non-criminal offenses such as "runaway" and "person in need of supervision") into violent offenses cannot be ruled out in explanations of arrest rate shifts. A review of the more than 2,000 cases of girls referred to Maryland's juvenile justice system for person-to-person offenses revealed that virtually all of these offenses (97.9%) involved assault. A further examination of these records revealed that about half were family-centered and involved such activities as a girl hitting her mother and her mother subsequently pressing charges (Mayer, 1994).

But what of girls' participation in the traditionally male offense of robbery? Here, the arrest evidence seems explained less easily. Are girls in fact engaging in nontraditional criminal behavior? Are girls getting more violent?

To answer this question, robbery itself must first be understood. Steffensmeier and Allan (1995) found that offenses such as robbery fit the low-yield, criminal mischief category of offenses—a category that also shows the youngest peaks and sharpest declines. They contend that because of the increased risk and relatively low yield involved in robbery, its appeal decreases to maturing youth. Such a decrease is particularly sharp as peer support for such behavior declines and bonds to society are strengthened.

Popular youth culture, which stresses the importance of name-brand clothing, gold jewelry, and expensive electronic gear and often visibly separates the haves from the have-nots, appears to play a major role in robbery, particularly juvenile robbery. Youth status, then, coupled with economic marginality of some urban youth, creates a fertile environment for robbery. In short, at least some youth resort to victimizing their peers to obtain material goods they could not otherwise afford.

Other research has amplified these findings, noting that youth also commit robbery offenses for reasons less related to economics. The thrill and excitement associated with street robbery, coupled with a desire to target individuals who are perceived as show-offs motivate some youth to participate in robberies (Miller, 1998; Sommers & Baskin, 1993). Existing research also indicates that juvenile robberies are not sophisticated and planned offenses, but rather are impulsive and spontaneous events. Juvenile robbers were less likely to victimize the elderly and most likely to victimize their peers. And although gang involvement was not consistently mentioned in the literature, it is clear that juvenile robberies are generally committed by two or more youth.

The literature also establishes that robbery is a particularly gendered offense. Boys tend to commit the vast majority of offenses, perhaps because the robbery setting provides the ideal opportunity to construct an "essential" toughness and "maleness" (Katz, 1988; Messerschmidt, 1993; Miller, 1998). Typically, male-on-male robberies occur on the streets and entail more physical violence. Female robberies are less frequent and, though occurring on the streets, do not usually involve serious physical violence; they can, however, involve physical contact such as hitting, shoving, and fighting with the victim.

Although females commit fewer robbery offenses than do males, both males and females express similar reasons for engaging in robbery. In a significant qualitative review of the role of gender in robbery, Miller (1998) analyzed interviews with youthful robbers in St. Louis and concluded that the acquisition of money and "status conferring goods," such as jewelry, are the primary motivations for committing the offense for both males and females.

Males are most likely to use weapons when committing a robbery. In Miller's study, for example, all of the males in the sample reported using a gun. Males use physical violence and weapons as a way of accomplishing gender and displaying masculinity (Simpson & Ellis, 1995, p. 50). Female robberies tend not to include weapons because females typically prey on other females, and female victims tend to be more submissive and less likely to fight back (Miller, 1998).

Qualitative research, however, cannot fully address the changes that have been observed over time in the offense of juvenile robbery. For this reason, this research undertook to examine the offense during two specific time periods in an effort to more fully explore both the increase in arrests of all youth for robbery during the '90s and, in particular, the apparent increase in the participation of girls in what was once a quintessentially male offense.

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used City and County of Honolulu Police Department (HPD) juvenile robbery incident files that contained extensive details of actual robberies<sup>3</sup> in which juveniles were arrested for two time periods: 1991 and 1997. These robbery incident files were located using arrest data maintained in the Attorney General's Juvenile Justice Information System (JJIS).

Because of the large number of juvenile robberies in 1997, a random sample of approximately half the cases was created, and the study was able to examine all robberies for which juveniles were arrested in 1991. After elimination of duplicate and misfiled cases, the 1991 data set contained a total of 65 incidents of robbery involving 122 juvenile arrests and the 1997 sample included 115 robbery cases involving 198 juvenile arrests.

Details involving each of these robbery incidents were collected including geographic location of the incident, demographic characteristics of the victim(s) and offender(s), weapon use, extensiveness of injury (if any), type and value of items taken, and so on. A brief summary of each incident was also recorded by coders. Finally, interviews with a few key school officials and law enforcement officials were conducted.

### FINDINGS: "WHO'S ROBBING WHOM?"

#### *Offender Characteristics: Gender*

In 1991, the vast majority of those arrested for robbery in Honolulu were male—of 122 arrestees, 115 (95%) were males and 6 were female (2 missing cases). A shift occurred in 1997; of 198 juveniles arrested for robbery offenses,

84.4% were males. Thus, the proportion of robbery arrests involving girls more than tripled, going from 5% female in 1991 to almost 15.6% in 1997. A similar though less dramatic shift occurred nationally (as noted earlier). Although the proportion of boys arrested for robberies declined over the time period, it is important to note that they continue to constitute the vast majority of juvenile arrestees.

#### *Offender Characteristics: Age*

A change in the age characteristics of arrestees was also observed between the two time periods. In 1997, juvenile robbery arrestees had a median age of 15 compared to a median age of 16 in 1991. Overall, suspects' age ranged from 13 to 17. As can be seen in Figure 1, both study years saw peaks at the age of 16. However in 1991, fewer 14- and 15-year-olds were arrested. In essence, 1991 showed a bimodal distribution, with peaks at ages 13 and 16, though 1997 saw a more or less steady increase in the arrests after age 13.

In both years, the median age of the female arrestees is significantly younger than the median age for males. In 1991 for example, the median age of girls arrested was 13 compared to 16 for males. In 1997, the median age of girls arrested was 14 and the median age of boys was 15.<sup>4</sup> This pattern reflects those found in other studies, which indicate that female criminal careers, particularly violent careers, tend to taper off at a much younger age than males (Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 1998). Moreover, as prior research has suggested, gender and age are related significantly to the magnitude of criminal activity. As these data indicate, girls and younger juveniles tend to be less likely to be arrested for robberies than are older male youth. However, even males appear to age out of the behavior so that by the age of 17 fewer youth are arrested.

#### *Offender Characteristics: Ethnicity*

Hawaiian/part-Hawaiian (35.7%) and Samoan (26.6%) youth comprised almost 63% of the total arrestee sample in 1997. In 1991, a similar pattern was observed, with these groups accounting for nearly three quarters (71.9%) of the arrests (31.4% Hawaiian/part-Hawaiian and 40.5% Samoan). Notably, the absolute number of Hawaiian youth arrested for robbery more than doubled between the two evaluation years, although the proportion of Samoan suspects decreased. It is important to consider that Samoan youth constitute 1.45% of the youth population and Hawaiian/part-Hawaiians constitute 30.9% (Kassebaum et al., 1995, p. 1-5). This indicates that, although both groups are over-represented among juvenile robbery arrestees, this pattern is particularly pronounced among Samoan youth.

**TABLE 1**  
*Juvenile Arrest Demographics*

| <i>1991 Robbery Arrests</i> | <i>1997 Robbery Arrests</i> |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 122 Juvenile arrests        | 198 Juvenile arrests        |
| 95% males                   | 84.4% males                 |
| 5% females                  | 15.6% females               |

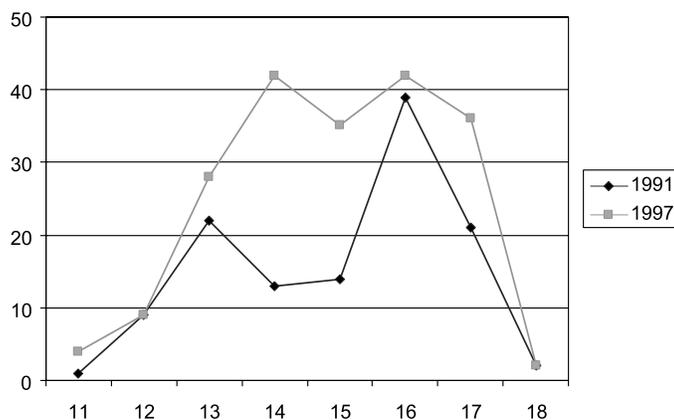


Figure 1: Offenses Committed by Age

With reference to gender and ethnicity, females within these two Polynesian ethnic groups accounted for a combined total of 67.8% of girls arrested for robbery in 1997 (32.3% Hawaiian/part-Hawaiian and 35.5% Samoan). In 1991, however, 67% of the girls arrested for robbery were Hawaiian and none were Samoan.

#### *Victim Characteristics: Age and Gender*

Typically, robbery offenses were intragender, meaning boys victimized boys and girls victimized girls. However, victim/suspect relationships follow a more interethnic pattern. The most likely suspect/victim relationships were Hawaiian/Caucasian, Hawaiian/Filipino, Hawaiian/Japanese, or Samoan/Filipino, respectively.

Based on police data, the characteristics of victims of juveniles arrested for robbery on Oahu shifted considerably between 1991 and 1997. Essentially, the proportion of juvenile victims expanded considerably between the two periods (see Figure 4).

**TABLE 2**  
*Suspects' Age Distribution*

| <i>1991 Age Distribution</i> | <i>1997 Age Distribution</i> |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Median age = 16 years        | Median age = 15 years        |
| Median age by gender         | Median age by gender         |
| Male = 16 years old          | Male = 15 years old          |
| Females = 13 years old       | Females = 14 years old       |

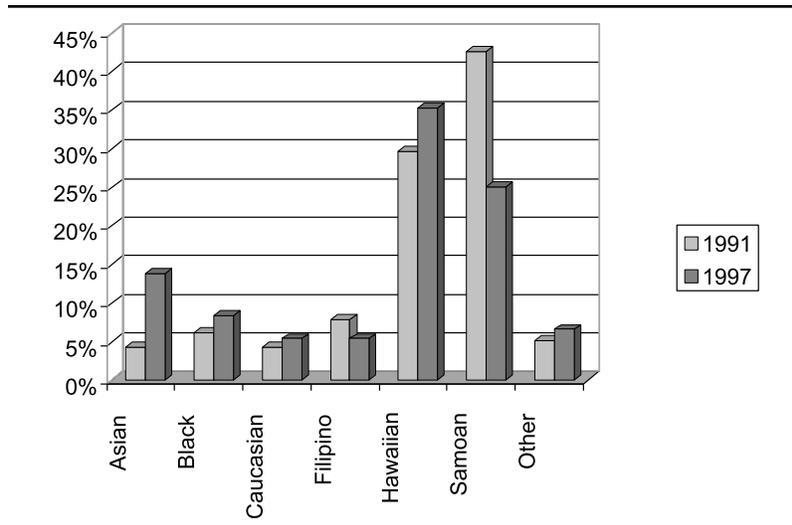


Figure 2: Male Robbery Suspects by Ethnicity

The two time periods also show different proportions of juvenile and adult victims. Of the 70 victims reported for 1991, more than a third (38.6%) were adults and 61.4% were juveniles. In 1997, 21% of the 128 reported robbery victims were adults and 79% were juveniles. In sum, the majority of robbery victims were juveniles.

Within both time periods, the majority of juvenile victims were young and male, although young girls made up a more sizable proportion of the victims in 1997 than they did in 1991. In 1991, 95.3% of the juvenile victims were males, with a median age of 13 years, though there were only two female victims in 1991, ages 8 and 13. However, in 1997 females constituted a larger proportion of the victims. Compared with the previous evaluation year, female victims accounted for 20.8% of the juvenile victims in 1997.

Only 21 of the juvenile victims were female in 1997, with a median age of 14 years. However, 71.4% (15) of female victims were between ages 13 and

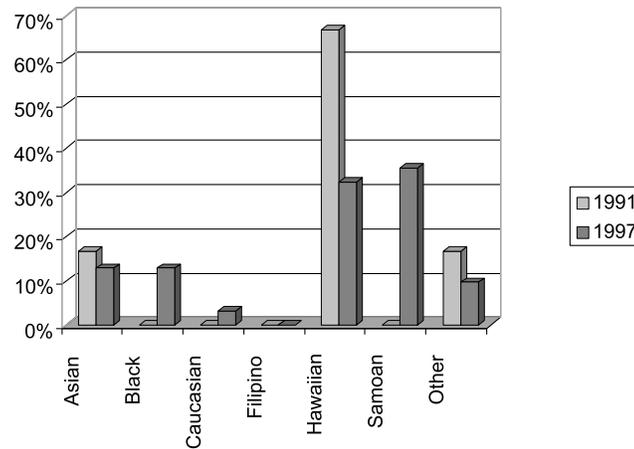


Figure 3: Female Robbery Suspects by Ethnicity

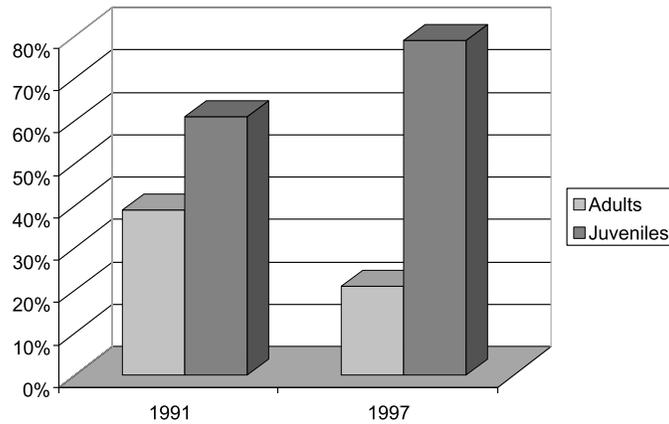


Figure 4: Demographics of Adult and Juvenile Victims by Year

15 years, meaning that male juvenile victims of robbery were younger than female victims. Male victims ranged from age 9 to 17, with the highest percentage (27.5%) age 12, followed by age 13 (17.5%), and age 14 (16.3%).

Adult robbery victims were also quite young. In 1997, adults the most commonly victimized were as young as 19 (18.5%), though the median age was 29. In 1991, however, the age of adults most commonly victimized was 23 (14.8%), with a median age of 32.

Though the numbers are extremely small, girls were actually more likely than boys to victimize adults in 1991. By 1997, both girls and boys were overwhelmingly likely to victimize juveniles (80.4% of the victims of boys arrested for robbery were juveniles and 90.4% of the victims of girls were juveniles).

### VICTIM CHARACTERISTICS: ETHNICITY

#### *Juvenile Victims*

In 1991, Caucasian youth made up the largest group (30.2%) of juvenile robbery victims, followed by Hawaiians (20.9%). During the same year, Filipino youth accounted for 14.0% of victims, and Asian youth (Japanese, Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese) made up 9.3%, Samoans 9.3%, and African Americans 4.7%. In 1997, however, the proportion of Asian youth more than doubled (24.8%), with Caucasian youth (20.8%) continuing to compose a large proportion of youth victims, followed by Filipino (19.8%). Interestingly, Hawaiian youth experienced a sizeable decline, and the number of Samoan youth who were victimized also tapered off substantially.

Examining gender patterns within these ethnic dimensions demonstrates similar gender and ethnic victimization patterns already discussed. For example, in 1991, of the male youth victimized, Caucasian and Hawaiian males made up the largest proportion (31.7% and 22.0%, respectively)—a pattern demonstrated within the broader ethnic dimensions. The latter illustrates that of the Caucasian and Hawaiian youth victimized, all were boys. Meaning there were no girl robbery victims represented by either of these ethnic groups. Because of the small number of girl victims represented in 1991, the remaining ethnic groups also experienced similar trends. Filipino youth made up the only group from which a girl robbery victim was reported. Accordingly, of all the Filipino youth victimized in 1991, Filipino boys accounted for 12.2% of all male robbery victims, and Filipino girls made up 50% of all girl robbery victims.

In 1997, however, girls' victimization became increasingly visible, more visible in some groups than in others. As already demonstrated, Asian youth made up the largest proportion of youth victimized in 1997. Interesting, however, is that compared with their male counterparts, Asian girls make up a sizable proportion of the female robbery victims. Exactly 28.6% of girl robbery victims were Asian, and 23.8% were boys. This gendered ethnic pattern is also reflective among Filipino youth robbery victims. More than one in five (23.8%) girl robbery victims were Filipino, and less than 20% were boys (18.8%). Hawaiian females also experienced a proportional increase in juve-

**TABLE 3**  
*Juvenile Victims' Age Distribution*

| <i>1991 Age Distribution</i> | <i>1997 Age Distribution</i> |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Median age = 13 years        | Median age = 13 years        |
| Median age by Gender         | Median age by Gender         |
| Male = 13 years old          | Male = 13 years old          |
| Females = 10.5 years old     | Females = 14 years old       |

**TABLE 4**  
*Percentage of Juvenile Victims by Ethnicity*

| <i>Ethnic Groups</i> | <i>1991</i> | <i>1997</i> |
|----------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Asian                | 9.3         | 24.8        |
| Black                | 4.7         | 0           |
| Caucasian            | 30.2        | 20.8        |
| Filipino             | 14.0        | 19.8        |
| Hawaiian             | 20.9        | 12.9        |
| Samoan               | 9.3         | 3.0         |
| Other                | 11.6        | 15.9        |

nile robbery victimization, accounting for 14.3% of girl victims, although 12.5% of male victims were Hawaiian. Although Caucasian males continued to make up a large share of juvenile robbery victims, less than 10% of girl robbery victims were Caucasian.

#### *Adult Victims*

The ethnicity pattern of adult victims is much the same as that seen with juvenile victims, with Asians composing a large proportion of adult victims. In fact, Asians accounted for close to half (40.7%) of the adult robbery victims in 1991 and 33.3% in 1997—experiencing a moderate decline. The proportion of adult Filipino victims more than doubled between 1991 and 1997. In 1991, Filipinos made up less than 12% of the adult victims, but in 1997 they accounted for 25.9% of the adult victims. Also, in 1991 Caucasians accounted for almost one in five adult victims (18.5%) and Hawaiian adults made up 11%. In 1997, the proportion of Caucasian adults remained steady (14.8%), although there were no adult Hawaiian victims.

Taking a closer look at gender and ethnicity, Asian and Caucasian males, similar to their youth counterparts, compose the largest proportion of adult

robbery victims in 1991. Specifically, nearly 30% of the adult male victims were Asian, and close to 23% were Caucasian. However, unlike Caucasian females who represented 11% of adult female robbery victims Asian women made up 66.7% of the adult female robbery victims. Although no Hawaiian females reported being a robbery victim in 1991, Hawaiian men accounted for 16.7% of the adult males victimized within the same year. Filipino men and women accounted for a relatively small share of the adults victimized in 1991—each accounted for 11.1% of the proportion of victimization within their respective gender categories. African American women also accounted for 11.1% of the female robbery victims in 1991 and a smaller share in 1997 (8.3%).

In 1997, Asian men experienced an increased in reported victimization, although Asian women experienced a considerable decline. Continuing to make up a large proportion of adult robbery victims, Asian men accounted for 40% of adult male victims, and Asian women made up 25% of female robbery victims. Within the same year, Caucasian women continued to compose a small share of female robbery victims (8.3%).

However, in 1997 the tides turned. Filipino men made up for 20% of male victims, even as the proportion of Filipino women tripled and accounted for more than a third (33.3%) of adult female victims. There were no African American adult male victims in either year. Also, there were no adult Samoan victims in either year, neither any adult Hawaiian victims in 1997.

### **CHARACTERISTICS OF SUSPECT/VICTIM RELATIONSHIP**

#### *Victim/Suspect Data*

Based on information observed on the police reports, it is clear that the majority of juvenile suspects were at least casually acquainted with the victim. In fact, of the 43 juvenile victims reporting a robbery in 1991, fully 81.4% reported someone with whom they were acquainted. When accounting for gender, only 19.5% of males reported being robbed by a stranger, and there were no female-to-stranger robberies in 1991. Thus, all juvenile females in 1991 were robbed by acquaintances. In 1997, 58.4% of the 101 juvenile victims were acquainted with the suspects. However, with regard to gender, almost half (48.8%) of the male victims reported being robbed by strangers, although only one female victim was robbed by a stranger.

A 16-year-old Filipino male was victimized in the school's bathroom. While utilizing the boys' bathroom at Farrington High School, the victim

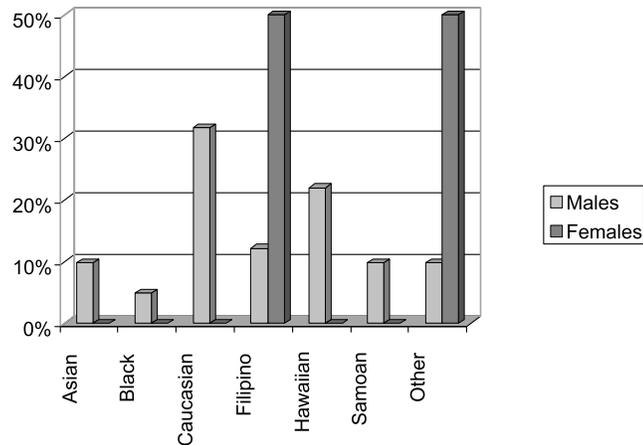


Figure 5: 1991 Juvenile Victims' Ethnicity by Gender

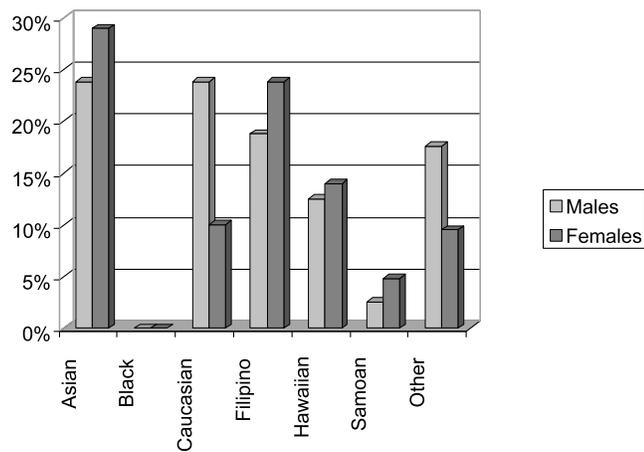


Figure 6: 1997 Juvenile Victims' Ethnicity by Gender

was approached by a schoolmate who demanded money. The suspect, a 16-year-old Samoan male shouted, "I like one-dollar." The male victim complied with the suspect's demand because "I was afraid."

This relationship did not hold true for adult victims. In 1991, the vast majority (85.2%) of adult victims reported being victimized by a stranger,

**TABLE 5**  
*Percentage of Adult Victims by Ethnicity*

| <i>Ethnic Groups</i> | <i>1991</i> | <i>1997</i> |
|----------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Asian                | 40.7        | 33.3        |
| Black                | 3.7         | 3.7         |
| Caucasian            | 18.5        | 14.8        |
| Filipino             | 11.1        | 25.9        |
| Hawaiian             | 11.1        | 0.0         |
| Samoaan              | 0.0         | 0.0         |
| Other                | 14.8        | 22.2        |

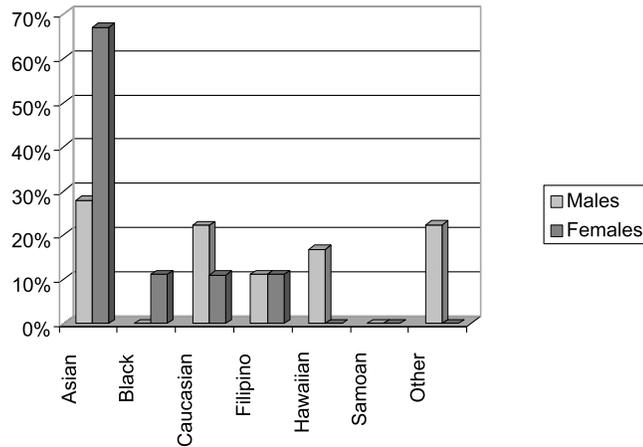


Figure 7: 1991 Adult Victims' Ethnicity by Gender

although all the adult victims in 1997 were robbed by strangers. Also, unlike adult victims, juveniles were more likely to identify the suspect as a schoolmate, neighbor, friend, or “kid I meet once at the park.” As will be demonstrated in the next section, this latter category corresponds with the large proportion of robberies occurring at schools and around locations at which youth are often found.

Two female juveniles, who were later identified as repeat offenders, were responsible for the kidnapping and robbery of an elderly Japanese woman. While entering her car, which was parked outside on a Daiei located in Pearl City, the elderly victim was approached by two strangers. After demanding cooperation, the juveniles shoved the victim into her car. After taking pos-

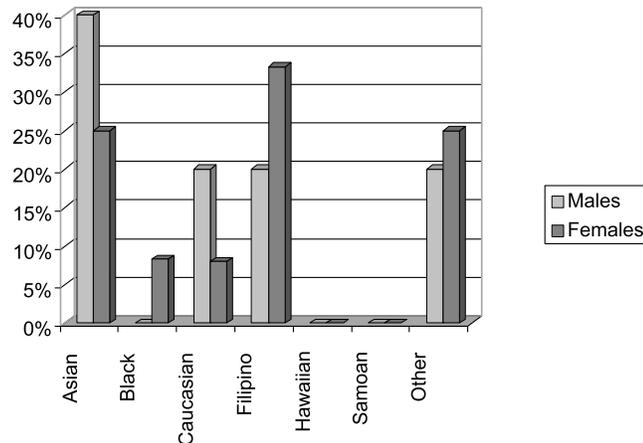


Figure 8: 1997 Adult Victims' Ethnicity by Gender

session of the vehicle, the suspects began punching the victim in the head. In addition to injuring the victim, the suspects drove into the Kunia sugar cane fields, where they took the victim's purse, pushed the victim out of her car, and drove away, leaving the elderly woman stranded. The victim, some time later managed to flee the fields and contact the authorities for help.

Similar to the trends found among juvenile victims, adult males were most often victimized, although females accounted for a larger proportion of adult victims compared to juvenile victims. In 1991, males accounted for 67% of the adult victims, although women made up less than a third of robbery victims. In 1997, almost half the adult robbery victims were female.

The victims: two 14-year-old Japanese females attending McKinley High School have been the subjects of repeated "school jackings" perpetrated by the same two suspects. The suspects, a 17-year old Hawaiian female and a 15-year-old Hawaiian-part Hawaiian female, who were later identified (based on police records) as repeat offenders, have been harassing the victims and other female students for months. In particular, the victims report the suspects have been "jacking" them since January. On a Friday morning in April, the suspects approached the victims and demanded money. Without permission, the suspects began searching the victims and taking some of their personal items, such as jackets and backpacks.

### ITEMS STOLEN

The median value of items stolen from all victims in 1991 was \$10. However, in 1997 the dollar amount decreased substantially to a median value of \$1.25. The sums of money ranged from \$1 to \$20, with some young victims reporting having as little as 25¢ stolen. These data indicate that many youth are robbing for small amounts of money. The amount of money victims had taken from them follows a similar trend for both years. In 1991, money accounts for almost half (53%) of all items stolen, although money composed as much as 65% of items taken in 1997. A distant second to money is jewelry, followed by electronic gear. Jewelry made up more than a tenth of the items stolen in 1991 (14.4%). In 1997, there was a decrease, with jewelry accounting for 9.4% of items stolen. Similarly, electronic gear accounted for almost 1 in 10 items (8.8%) stolen in 1991, but only a small fraction (2.0%) of the items stolen in 1997. In short, money accounted for the bulk of the items taken.

Disaggregating the items taken by gender, girls were slightly but statistically significantly more likely to take items other than money in 1997; specifically, they were more likely than boys to take jewelry (13.0% compared with 9.0% for boys), purses (9.4% compared with 4.1%), or clothing (3.1% compared with .6%) (see Table 5).

### GROUP VERSUS INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITY

Although the police files did not consistently include information on gang involvement (or lack thereof), it is clear that juvenile-perpetrated robbery is a group rather than individual activity. In 1991, two or more arrestees were involved in 46.2% of the robbery incidents, with an average of 1.86 juveniles arrested per robbery incident. A very similar pattern was observed in 1997, with about half (49.6%) of the robbery incidents involving two or more youth (1.71 juveniles arrested on average per robbery incident). A particular look at gender reveals interesting differences. In 1991, boys were more likely than girls to commit robbery offenses in a group; 46.7% of male-perpetrated robbery offenses versus 40% of female-perpetrated robbery offenses involved two or more juveniles. However, in 1997, the pattern changed. Within this year, the bulk of female-perpetrated robberies involved two or more juveniles (52.6%). But group robberies among boys declined and accounted for 49% of robberies including two or more juveniles. Overall, it appears that juvenile robbery is a group phenomenon, meaning robberies are committed by at least two or more youth.

**TABLE 6**  
*Items Stolen by Year*

|             | 1991  | 1997  |
|-------------|-------|-------|
| Money       | 52.8% | 65.3% |
| Jewelry     | 14.4% | 9.4%  |
| Purses      | 9.6%  | 5.0%  |
| Clothing    | 5.6%  | 1.0%  |
| Electronics | 8.8%  | 2.0%  |
| Bikes       | 3.2%  | 3.0%  |
| Cigarettes  | 2.4%  | 1.5%  |
| Alcohol     | 3.2%  | 1.5%  |
| Other       | 0.0%  | 5.4%  |

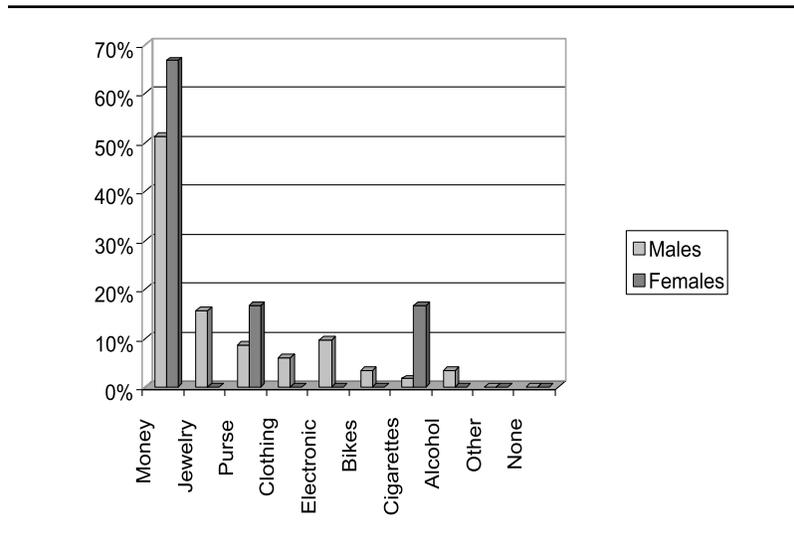


Figure 9: 1991 Items Stolen by Gender

The data yielded some evidence of gang membership, particularly in the first time period. In 1991, nearly a quarter (21.7%) of youth arrested for robbery reported gang involvement. However, in 1997 the number of youth reporting the same sharply declined to only 5.6%. With specific reference to gender, there were no gender differences in either time period, meaning that roughly the same proportion of girls as boys reported gang involvement (or

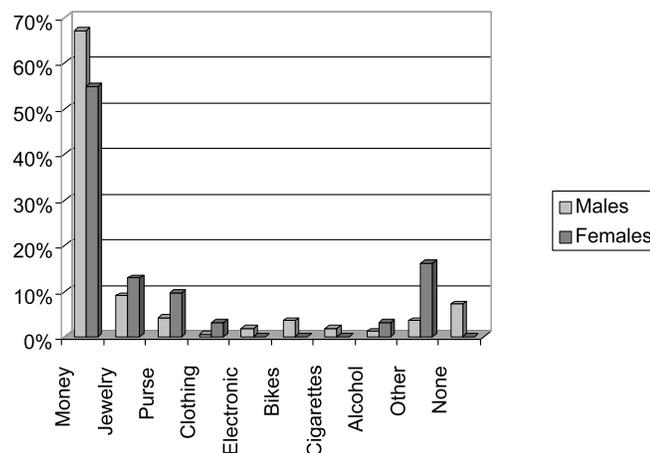


Figure 10: 1997 Items Stolen by Gender

noninvolvement) during the periods under study. In 1997, as an example, 94.0% of the boys arrested for robbery and 96.8% of the girls did not appear to be involved in gangs. In 1991, the boys were slightly but not significantly more gang involved: 21.7% of the boys arrested for robbery and 16.7% of the girls arrested for robbery were gang involved.

### WEAPON USE

According to our interviews with law enforcement officials, juveniles on Oahu tend not to commit sophisticated and/or well-planned robberies such as the widely publicized purse snatchings in Waikiki. According to law enforcement officers with the HPD Robbery Detail, juvenile-perpetrated robberies tend to follow an offense pattern that is casual, in which juveniles hijack youth with whom they have frequent contact. These types of robbery offenses do not entail detailed planning, but are more impulsive and spontaneous.

As a result of these patterns, a weapon was not involved in the majority of the offenses. Thus, the most likely robbery reported to police for both years involved a Robbery Two offense: 90.2% in 1991 and 80.4% in 1997. As far as gender is concerned, there was no difference in the proportion of Robbery One/Two offenses for 1997, with the vast majority of boys' cases (91.9%) and girls' cases (93.1%) classified as Robbery Two.

A weapon was used in 10.6% of all robbery offenses in 1991 and in 23.2% of the robberies in 1997. Specific weapon types changed over the study period. In 1991, in those few robbery incidents in which a weapon was used, 54% involved firearms. In 1997, a knife was the most likely weapon (70.2%) used in the commission of juvenile robberies. In fact, in 1997, firearms only accounted for a very small proportion of the weapons used (5.8%).

Examining weapon use by gender, girls were about as likely as boys in 1991 and more likely than boys in 1997 not to use a weapon. As an example, about three quarters of the boys (74.1%) and more than four fifths of the girls (83.3%) did not use a weapon in the robbery that resulted in their arrest in 1997. Gun use was exclusively male, though girls used knives during both periods (see Table 6).

Two juvenile offenders were involved in the robbery of a local liquor store. The primary suspect was a 15-year-old Hawaiian female. It was later discovered that the female was a runaway from Home Maluhia. The second suspect, a military dependent (later charged as an accomplice) was a 16-year-old White male, who also had a history of running away from home. At 1315 hours on a Saturday afternoon, the two underaged suspects walked into the liquor store and began to browse around. Armed with a knife that she later placed to the neck of a 29-year-old Korean cashier, the female suspect demanded money from the register be placed into a bag. With the weapon pressed to her throat, the victim yelled for help using a Korean dialect. The male suspect, who stood by the door and acted as a lookout, immediately fled the scene. Without retrieving any money or inflicting serious injury (i.e., stabs, cuts, slashes), the female suspect also fled the scene. With the help of local citizens who were perusing the streets, the female suspect was tackled and later apprehended by police. After being arrested and charged with first-degree robbery (weapon involved in offense), the female suspect informed police about her accomplice. The male suspect, however, fled the island before an arrest could be made by using an airline ticket that he had stolen from his father's safe. After arriving to the mainland, the juvenile surrendered to authorities in Columbus, Georgia.

Most of the juvenile robberies did not result in serious injuries to the victims. In 1991, 38.4% of victims reporting a robbery did not report any injury as a result of the incident, and when an injury was reported the most common injury was bruises (58.4%). The majority of the bruises resulted from scrapes and scratches received during physical altercations. In 1997, 70.0% of robbery victims reported no injuries. Of the remaining 30.0% of victims who reported injuries, 49% reported bruises, 30.8% received a blow to the head, and 20.5% reported cuts and abrasions. Qualitative review of police files indicated that many of the head contusions did not induce skin breakage, but

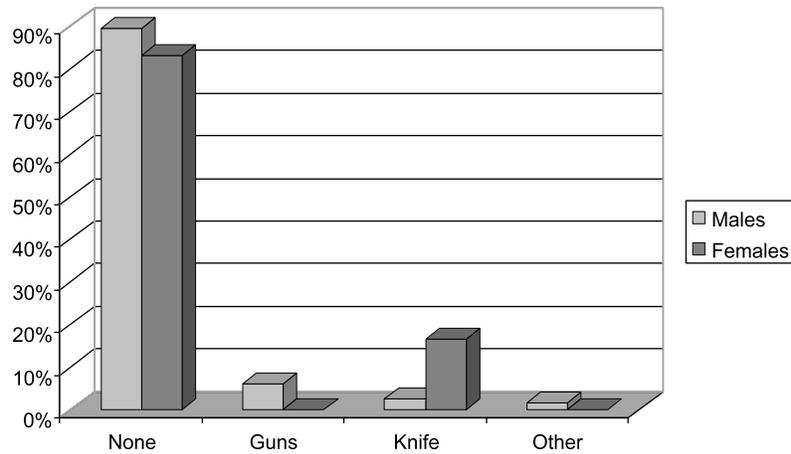


Figure 11: 1991 Weapon Use by Gender

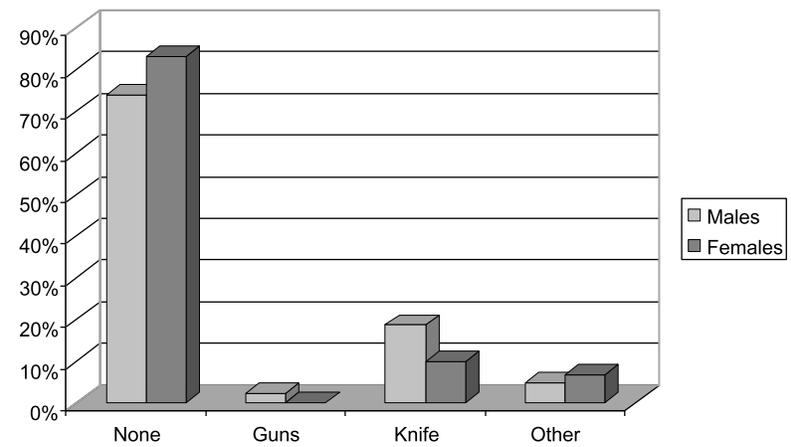


Figure 12: 1997 Weapon Use by Gender

did commonly result in swelling and/or inflammation. The cuts and abrasions, however, were minor and did not typically consist of punctures and/or deep gouges. In addition, no injuries resulted in emergency care, hospitalization, or broken limbs.

In essence, the overall seriousness of juvenile robbery offenses appears to have decreased between 1991 and 1997. In 1997, the choice of weapon changed from a firearm to a knife, a decline occurred in the number of adults victimized and the frequency and severity of injuries sustained by victims, and the value of items stolen. Items most often stolen by juveniles above were money, jewelry, and electronic gear.

### CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The data also suggest that no major shift in the pattern of juvenile robbery occurred during the period 1991 to 1997 in Honolulu, which like other jurisdictions had seen the number of girls arrested for robbery increase substantially. Rather, it appears that less serious offenses, particularly those committed by girls, are being swept up into the system. Consistent with this explanation are the following observable patterns: during the two time periods under review, the age of offenders shifted downward as does the value of items taken. Most significantly, the proportion of adult victims declined sharply as the number of juvenile victims increases. Finally, although more of the robberies involved weapons in 1997, those weapons were less likely to be firearms and the incidents were less likely to result in injury to the victim. In short, the data suggest that the problem of juvenile robbery in the City and County of Honolulu is largely characterized by slightly older youth bullying and hijacking younger youth for small amounts of cash and occasionally jewelry.

What accounts for the change over time? First and foremost, shifts in public and official attitudes about youth violence are the most persuasive explanations; indeed, our interviews with officials both within the police department and the state Department of Education reveal that personnel do believe that there has been an increase in reporting to the police (see Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 1998 for a detailed report of these data).

The data presented in this report suggest Oahu did not necessarily experience a surge in juvenile robberies. Instead, it is possible that the informal redefining of schoolyard thefts, particularly those involving girls and younger boys, to robbery offenses had a substantial affect on the increase in the number of juvenile robbery arrests.

It does appear that gender matters in juvenile robbery. Most of the victims of girls arrested for robbery were other girls from whom they took small amounts of cash and occasional jewelry. Artz (1998), in her research on violent girls, has suggested that girls' aggression is much like horizontal violence found in other powerless groups. Here, girls mimic the oppressor's behavior (male violence) and beat up similarly situated girls, often on the most specious of pretexts. Such behavior may give the girls who commit the

act a fleeting sense of power, but it ultimately does little to advance her status (because she can never be a boy). Artz contended that such female-on-female violence does little to challenge the sexual status quo and becomes a form of tension release that affirms rather than challenges the sex/gender system in high schools. Moreover, as virtually all of Artz's girls demonstrated, today's victor is tomorrow's victim; the girls she interviewed were staying away from school because of fear of future violence and victimization, often at the hands of former girl friends or acquaintances. One girl even told her that she was getting really mad at another girl "because she reminds me of me" (Artz, 1998, p. 124). Artz also found that violent girls, had more serious histories of physical/sexual violence at home, although the same was not found with violent boys (who were more affected by violent neighborhoods). Violent girls were also more fearful of assaults from boyfriends than nonviolent girls.

At one time, youthful misbehavior of a sexual nature used to be the focus of those concerned with youthful defiance, particularly the defiance of girls. It appears from these data that it is now violence that we police and seek to control in girls as well as boys. But one must ask, is this the best approach to this sort of misbehavior?

Cracking down on incidents of bullying by arresting youth is one approach to the problem of youthful violence in schools, but it should not be our only response. As with the youth gang problem, a balanced approach that mixes prevention, early intervention, and suppression is desirable (see Elliot, 1993). Artz also found that girls felt more guilty about their violence, and that violence-prevention strategies, as a result, work much more effectively with this group (Artz & Riecken, 1997).

School officials might want to explore violence prevention curricula (see Artz, 1998; Artz & Riecken, 1997), with a particular focus on the problem of bullying. Programs that target bullying can be classified as either schoolwide or person-oriented, and it is believed that components of both types of programs are necessary for successful interventions (for review, see Howard, Flora, & Griffin, 1999, pp. 97-215). Schoolwide efforts such as increased adult supervision combined with individual-focused interventions, which include social skills training, are thought to affect greater change than focusing on the school or individual alone (Olweus, 1992). Prevention efforts should involve special efforts to deal with girls as well as boys, because these data indicate that girls are involved in a substantial number of recent robberies. School-based interventions might also be developed as an alternative to arrests, because many of the incidents detailed in this study were of the sort that seem amenable to broader school-based responses.

Increased adult supervision in areas immediately surrounding schools, as well as areas on the school ground that have been demonstrated to be unsafe for youth such as bathrooms, and lunch and recess areas, is also suggested by

this research. Here, the school might wish to involve families and community members more completely in crafting potential solutions to dangerous settings around or near campus.

The findings also point to a serious problem that our community faces with interethnic violence among school-aged youth. Although juvenile robbery patterns are clearly shaped by age and class differences as well, schools should consider implementation of programs and curricula that are designed to encourage racial/ethnic tolerance and sensitivity. Schools might also benefit by providing activities that illuminate cultural diversity and foster a positive environment for youth to discuss cultural differences and acceptance.

Finally, scarce criminal justice resources should be employed when the incident suggests that the youth involved are of sufficient danger to the school and community that they require a more formal and structured response than the school is able to provide.

#### NOTES

1. In this report, "serious crimes of violence" will refer to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's index offenses used to measure violent crime: murder, forcible rape, aggravated assault, and robbery.

2. Defined by the FBI as murder, forcible rape, robbery, burglary, aggravated assault, larceny theft, auto theft, and arson.

3. Robbery refers to the taking of another person's property through either the use or threatened use of physical force.

4. Given the small number of arrests of girls ( $N = 6$ ) in the entire population of those arrested in 1991, these findings should be regarded as suggestive rather than definitive. We are currently gathering additional data from a contiguous year to better explore the dynamics between gender and robbery arrests.

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