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UNH Researchers Find Juveniles More often Victims in Property Crimes

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UNH News Bureau

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DURHAM, N.H. -- One out of six juveniles ages 12 to 17 is the victim of theft, robbery or burglary every year, a rate 40 percent higher than the rate for adults, according to a new report by University of New Hampshire researchers. Yet, juveniles are much less likely than adults to report their property crimes to police, even though reporting to police may help victims to get their property back.

These findings, released today by the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, are reported in "Juvenile Victims of Property Crimes," by David Finkelhor and Richard Ormrod, of the UNH Crimes Against Children Research Center.

According to the study, property crimes against juveniles differ from property crimes against adults in a number of ways, in addition to their frequency:

- The most common items taken from juveniles are electronic and photo gear and clothing and luggage, while motor vehicles and auto parts top the list for adults.
- A majority of juvenile property victimizations occur at school, while adults are more victimized in and around the home.
- While adults from higher incomes and rural locations are somewhat insulated from high rates of property victimization, higher income and rural juveniles are not.

"As many might expect, property taken from juveniles also tends to be of lesser value than property taken from adults," says Finkelhor, UNH professor of sociology.

"But from a child's point of view, a less expensive item may be more of a loss because it may constitute a larger share of a child's total assets, and in the absence of an income, it may be harder to replace."

One of the study's conclusions is that school authorities need to be more aggressive about property crime prevention with remedies like theft awareness campaigns, more secure lockers, more surveillance equipment and even more investigative personnel. A significantly larger proportion of property crime occurs on school premises than violent crime, which school officials have targeted energetically in recent years.

The study also urges youth, their families and school authorities to consider more police reporting. Only 11 percent of thefts against juveniles are reported to the police, one-third the rate for adults. It noted that the lower value of stolen property and the fact that it occurs in school often are factors in reluctance to report. But the study found that when such property crimes against youth are reported to the police, the youth are 78 percent more likely to recover stolen items.

Like all kinds of crime, property crime did decline in the 1990s. It was down 23 percent for youth as well as 20 percent for adults between 1993 and 1997. But the still high rates for youth prompt the authors to note that "before this society can be considered safe and just, it will certainly have to confront such a widespread condition."

Finkelhor urges those concerned about children and their welfare to give this issue a more prominent place on the public policy agenda.

The full report "Juvenile Victims of Property Crimes" is available on online at <http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/pubs/violvict.html#184740>. To contact Finkelhor, call 603-862-2761.

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