



TYOLOGY OF YOUTH RIOTERS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study examines the profile of 300 youth rioters aged 21 years and below and ascertains the causes of their rioting. A summary of the findings are as follows :

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Sex Distribution	: 85% Males, 15% Females
Ethnic Profile	: 67% Chinese, 24% Malays, 6% Indians, 3% Others
Age Profile	: 47% aged 16-17, Mean Age = 16.9 years
Economic Activity Status	: For those aged < 16 63% studying, 24% working
	: For those aged 16-21 44% studying, 27% working, 11% in NS

FAMILY BACKGROUND

Marital Status of Parents	: 22% divorced / separated 70% married 8% widowed
Occupation of Parents	: Father - 54% in low skilled jobs - 14% in managerial positions Mother - 33% housewives - 24% in sales and services sector
Average Family Size	: 4.9
Type of Dwelling	: 96% in HDB flats
Family Income	: 77% below \$3,000 per month

SOCIAL BACKGROUND

Social Activities	: 40% visit discotheques, play arcade games, go to the movies and shopping
Constant Companions	: 36% schoolmates 31% neighbourhood friends

ANTECEDENT RECORDS

- 30% with previous criminal records
- Mainly for theft

SIGNS OF DELINQUENT BEHAVIOUR

- 78% involved in secret society activities
- 57% smokes

CAUSES OF RIOT

The main proximate factors that trigger the rioting:

For Non-SS Related Cases	- Uncalled for Remarks/ Vulgar Languages - Staring Incident
For SS Related Cases	- Revenge from earlier dispute/provocation - Victims from rival gang

USE OF WEAPONS

27% carried or used weapons

VICTIMS' INJURIES

193 victims were involved -
71% sustained minor injuries

SENTENCING PATTERNS

For those aged <16	: 35% to approved homes, 33% placed on probation
For those aged 16 - 21	: 35% on probation, 33% to imprisonment only 12% to imprisonment & caning, 8% to RTC

INTRODUCTION

The crime trend of young offenders¹ in Singapore has been steadily declining in recent years with the number of arrests declining from 6,144 in 1995 to 5,342 in 1996 and 5,111 in 1997. An increasing proportion of young people arrested were involved in rioting. This rose from 8% in 1995 to 13% in 1996 and 1997.

With rioting among youth becoming more prevalent, a number of preventive measures had been undertaken by various government and voluntary organisations to deal with this problem. The Courts have also been getting tough with rioting cases. This research project studies the profile of youth rioters aged 21 years and below whose cases were heard in 1997. Comparisons were made between the profile of juvenile rioters below 16 years of age and rioters aged 16-21.

Having obtained a profile of the youth rioters and ascertained the causes of rioting, the study also examined the sentencing patterns as well as the recidivism rates of these rioters. Finally, comparison was also made between youth gangs in Singapore and that in the United States.

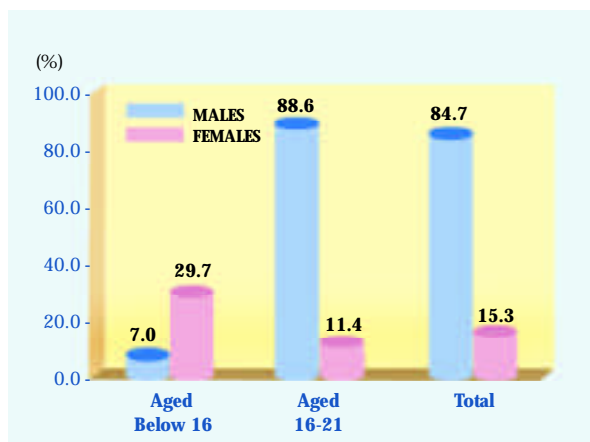
DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF YOUTH RIOTERS

A total of 300 youth rioters were studied – 64 juveniles below 16 and 236 aged 16-21. All the juveniles were Singapore Citizens while 97% of the other rioters aged 16-21 were Singaporeans. The remaining 3% comprised Thais, Malaysians and Taiwanese.

Sex Distribution

A higher proportion of female juveniles were involved in rioting (30%) compared to those aged 16-21 (11%). On the whole, 85% of the youth rioters are males and 15% females [Figure 1].

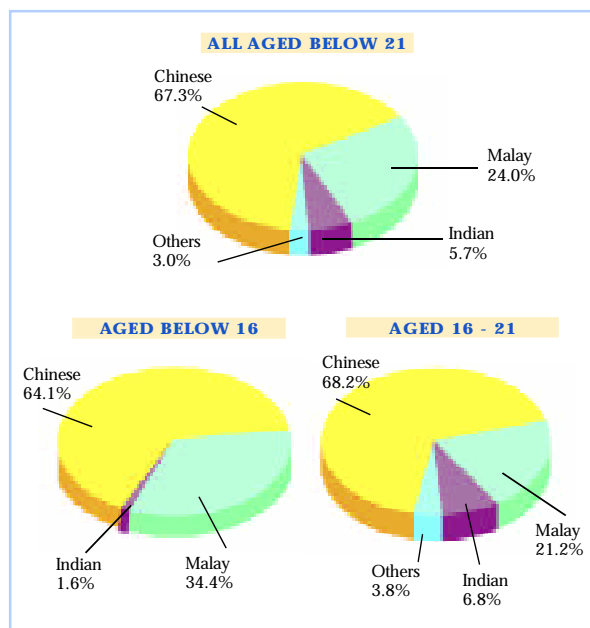
**FIGURE 1
Youth Rioters by Gender**



Ethnic Distribution

The ethnic distribution of youth rioters are as follows - 67% Chinese, 24% Malays and 5.7% Indians. There was proportionately more Malay juvenile rioters, accounting for one third of all juvenile rioters, compared to only 21% for Malay rioters aged 16-21. A higher proportion of Chinese, Indians and offenders of the other ethnic groups were recorded for the older cohort [Figure 2].

**FIGURE 2
Youth Rioters by Ethnic Group**



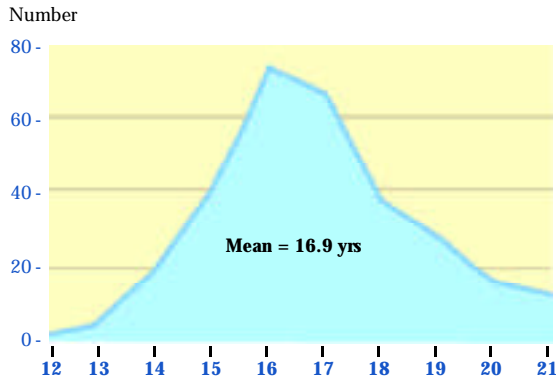
¹ This project is confined to offender aged 12-21.



Age Profile

The age distribution of youth rioters in Figure 3 show that most of the youth rioters were aged 16-17, accounting for 47% of all youth rioters. The mean age of a youth rioter is 16.9 years.

FIGURE 3
Age Profile of Youth Rioters

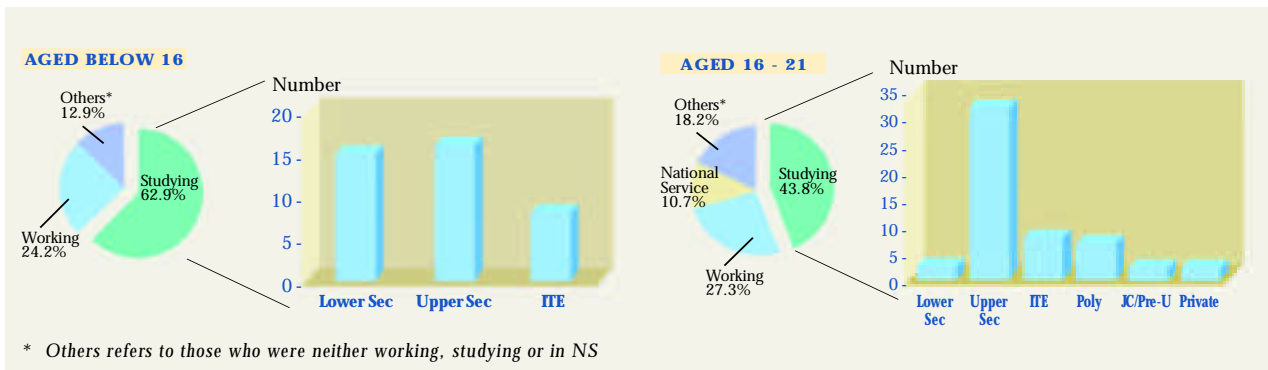


Economic Activity Status & Education

Among rioters aged below 16, 63% were studying – mainly in the lower and upper secondary schools [Figure 4]. Those who were working formed 24%. It was noted that a significant 13% were neither working, studying or in NS.

As for those aged 16-21, 44% were studying - mainly at the upper secondary levels. This was followed by 27% who were gainfully employed, 18% were neither working nor studying and 11% were in national service. Most of the rioters who were in the workforce were mainly working in the sales and services industry, followed by those working as production craftsmen or machine operators.

FIGURE 4
Youth Rioters by Economic Activity Status and Education Attending



* Others refers to those who were neither working, studying or in NS

FAMILY BACKGROUND

Marital Status of Parents

A comparison of the two cohorts of rioters showed that a larger proportion of the juveniles came from broken homes (i.e where parents are divorced or separated) - 31% compared to 17% for rioters aged 16-21. In general, 22% of all youth rioters came from broken families [Figure 5].

FIGURE 5
Marital Status of Parents

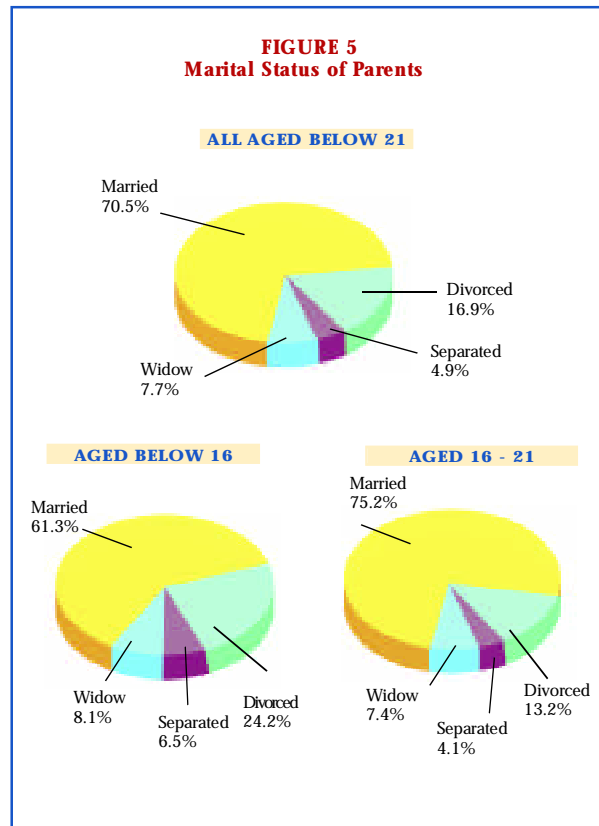
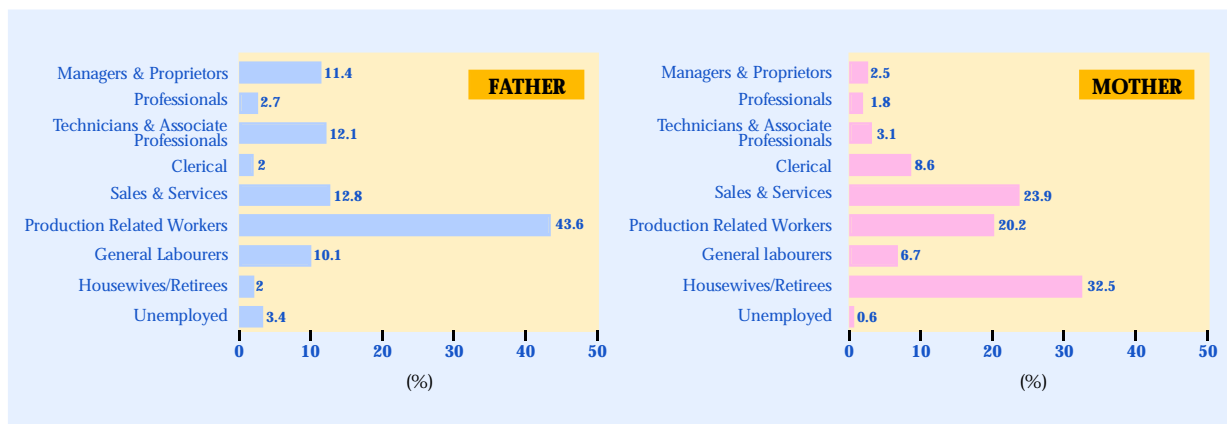


FIGURE 6
Occupational Status of Parents



Occupational Status of Parents

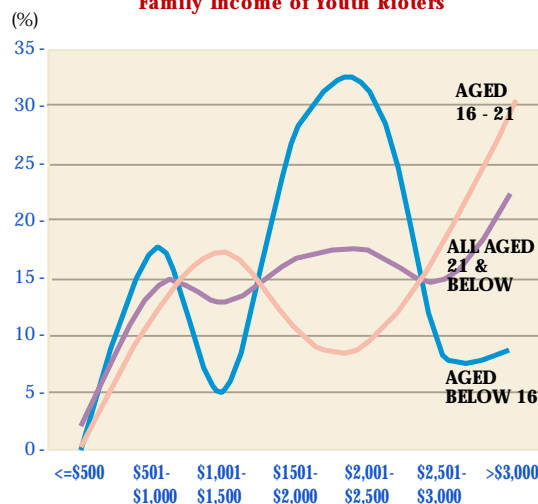
Slightly more than half (54%) of the youth rioters' fathers were in the lower end skilled jobs (i.e production operators & general labourers). A significant proportion (14%) was in administrative, managerial & professional positions. As for the mothers, 33% were housewives, 24% in the sales and services sector and 20% working as production operators. Only 4% were in highly skilled jobs [Figure 6]. A very small proportion of the rioters' parents were unemployed - 3.4% for fathers and 0.6% for the mothers.

Family Size, Dwelling and Income

The average family size of a youth rioter is 4.9. 96% lived in HDB flats. The remaining 4% resided in condominiums, private apartments or landed properties. A distribution of the family income by the two age cohorts of youth rioters showed that juveniles aged below 16 came mostly from families earning a monthly income of \$1,501-\$2,500 (60%). In the case of those aged 16-21, 49% recorded a family income of more than \$2,500 [Figure 7].

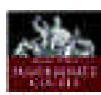
It was noted that 7 out of 10 youth rioters came from families which were structurally complete and home conditions were good. In most of these cases, the implicit causes of the rioters' delinquent behaviour were attributed to peer influence, poor parenting and parental negligence. Most of the offenders under this group

FIGURE 7
Family Income of Youth Rioters



cultivated delinquent traits such as smoking and alcohol consumption. 51% was actually involved in secret society activities.

As for youth rioters who came from structurally incomplete families, there was also a lack of parental supervision and guidance in their home environment. This was further exacerbated by their parents having problems in their marital relationships, and the offenders not relating well to either of the parents. In a substantial number of cases, the parents or siblings of the youth rioter have previous criminal records or, are currently serving their term in the Drug Rehabilitation Centre or prison. 87% of the offenders under this group have some form of secret society involvement.



SOCIAL BACKGROUND

Social Activities

The youth rioters were mainly engaged in social activities such as visiting discotheques, playing arcade games, going to the movies and shopping. This accounted for 40%. Those who were involved in sports activities formed 29%. A substantial proportion (20%) would usually gallivant, loiter around or hang out at shopping centres, coffee shops and void decks. Only 1.2% spent time with their family members during their leisure time. It was noted that 2.3% of the juveniles below 16 years of age gambled during their leisure time.

Type of Constant Companions

36% of the juvenile rioters mixed around with their schoolmates, followed by 31% who usually associated with their neighbourhood friends. One in ten hanged out with their gang friends i.e friends from the secret society. This is lower than 29% of youth rioters aged 16-21 whose constant companions were those from the secret society. For all youth rioters, 29% mixed with schoolmates, 23% with gang friends and 9% with neighbourhood friends.

ANTECEDENT RECORDS

Youth rioters aged 16-21 recorded a higher proportion with antecedents compared to the juvenile

rioters – 34% vs 18% [Figure 8]. Slightly more than half (55%) of the juvenile rioters with previous criminal records committed theft previously, followed by 9% each for unlawful assembly, dishonest misappropriation of property and gang robbery [Figure 9]. In the case of rioters aged 16-21, 40% previously committed theft. This is followed by 11% who have previously been convicted for rioting, 7.9% for abusing inhalant and 6.4% for unlawful assembly. It is also noted that 3.2% of rioters aged 16-21 were previously charged for voluntarily causing hurt and another 3.2% for the possession of drugs. This seems to show a trend from youth committing simple offences on an individual basis to youth committing more serious or violent crimes in groups. Youth rioters seem to get bolder as they get older.

FIGURE 8
Youth Rioters by Previous Antecedents

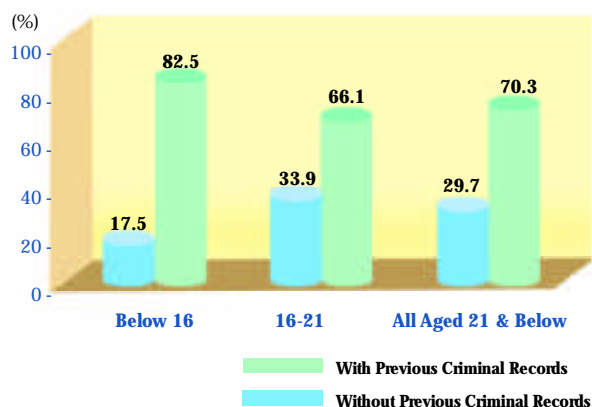
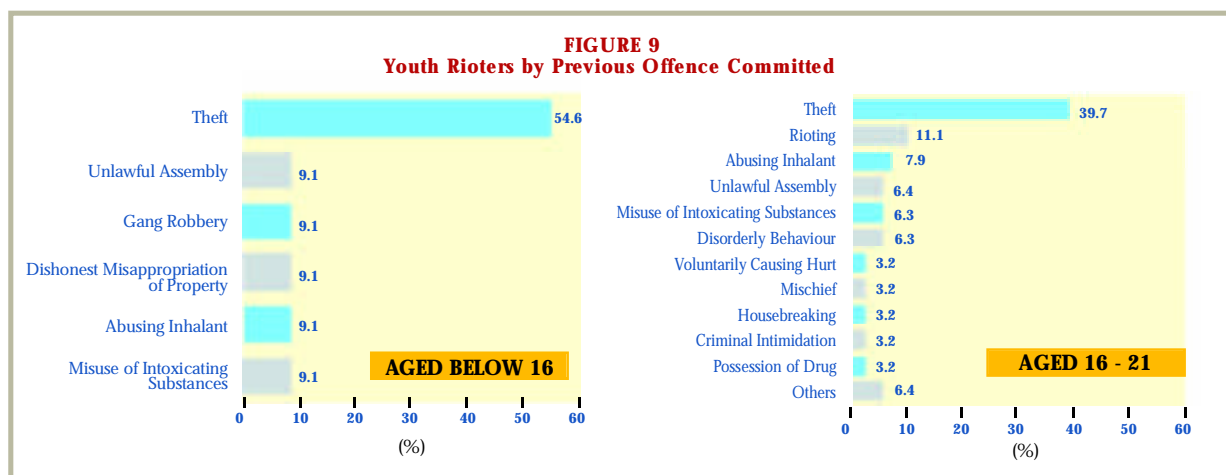
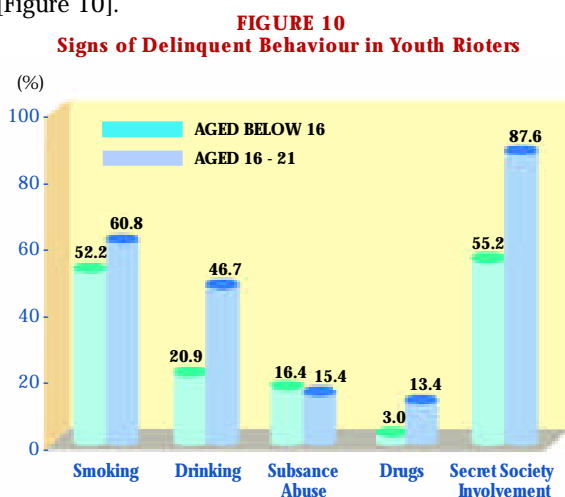


FIGURE 9
Youth Rioters by Previous Offence Committed



SIGNS OF DELINQUENT BEHAVIOUR

An attempt was also made to ascertain the presence of any signs of delinquent behaviour such as smoking, alcohol consumption, substance abuse, drugs or secret society involvement. The data showed that a significant proportion of youth rioters were involved in secret society activities – 88% for rioters aged 16-21 and 55% for juvenile rioters. A large proportion of these youth also smoked – 52% for juveniles and 61% for the older cohort. Youth rioters aged 16-21 recorded a higher proportion with delinquent traits compared to the juvenile rioters, except for substance abuse where a higher proportion of juvenile rioters were involved [Figure 10].



OFFENCE DETAILS

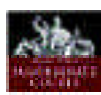
Other Offences

Among the 64 juvenile rioters, 91% were charged for rioting and 9% for rioting with deadly weapons. In the case of the older cohort of rioters, 14% or 32 youths committed other offences in addition to the rioting and unlawful assembly. Most of them were charged at the same time for voluntarily causing hurt (34% of 32), theft (22%) and robbery (9%). Two youth rioters were also initially charged for murder but subsequently their charges were reduced.

Location of Riot

The riots occurred mainly in open streets or carparks (32%), HDB common indoor areas (28%), followed by places of entertainment (17%) and shopping centres (16%). A higher proportion of juvenile rioters rioted in open streets/carparks (42%) and shopping centres (28%) compared to rioters aged 16-21 whose corresponding figures were 29% and 13%. One third of the older rioters (34%) rioted at HDB common indoor areas [Figure 11].

FIGURE 11
Locations of Riots



Causes of Riot

In the United States, the study of youth violence has been dominated by criminologists, researchers and academicians who have focused their efforts on trying to explain the causes of violent youth crimes. Psychologists and more recently epidemiologists and other researchers in public health have also taken on the study of youth violence. All three disciplinary approaches have yielded important insights

on the aspects of youth violence but none has found what can definitively be regarded as the cause(s) of this phenomenon. Given the multi-factorial nature of the causes of violent crimes such as rioting, this study thus aims only to identify the proximate factors or causes that trigger off the rioting process. Two main categories were identified - one which is secret society (SS) related and another which is not.

FIGURE 12
Proximate Causes of Riot

Proximate Causes	Aged Below 16 (%)	Proximate Causes	Aged 16-21 (%)
Non-SS	100.0		100.0
Uncalled for remarks / rumours / vulgar signs or languages	31.4	Personal Dispute	58.2
Staring incident	28.6	Uncalled for remarks/ rumours / vulgar signs or languages	9.0
Thought friend was bullied	17.1	Dislike victim	9.0
Victim was insolent/ arrogant	8.6	Staring incident	7.5
No apparent reason	8.6	Over women	7.5
Challenged to fight	2.9	Drunk*	6.0
Over women	2.9	Gambling	1.5
		Misunderstanding	1.5
SS -Related	100.0		100.0
Revenge from earlier dispute/ provocation	40.7	Revenge from earlier dispute/ provocation	26.6
Victim from rival gang	14.8	Staring incident	15.2
Suspect victim from rival gang (usually started with the question of "Which gang are you from?")	11.1	Dispute with rival gang	13.9
Staring incident	11.1	Victim from rival gang	13.3
Uncalled for remarks/ rumours/ vulgar signs or languages	11.1	No apparent reason	7.6
Victim did not attend gang meetings	7.4	Challenged to fight by rival gang	6.3
No apparent reason	3.7	Victim did not attend gang meetings	5.7
		Uncalled for remarks/ rumours / vulgar signs or languages	4.4
		Victim refused to apologize	3.2
		Settlement talks with rival gang	1.3
		Victim refused to join gang	0.6
		Thought friend was bullied	0.6
		Victim did not follow SS instructions	0.6
		Mistaken identity	0.6

* Drunk foreign construction workers creating a riot.



• **Non -SS Related**

For non-SS related cases, it was noted that trivial matters such as uncalled for remarks by the victims or the use of vulgar languages or signs could trigger off a riot. This proximate cause was especially prominent among juvenile rioters, accounting for 31% of the reasons for rioting [Figure 12]. The second most prominent factor that triggered a riot for the juvenile rioters was a staring incident - constituting 29% of all reasons. This is followed by rioting because they thought their friend was being bullied (17%). As for the older cohort of rioters, most riots started because of personal disputes (58%).

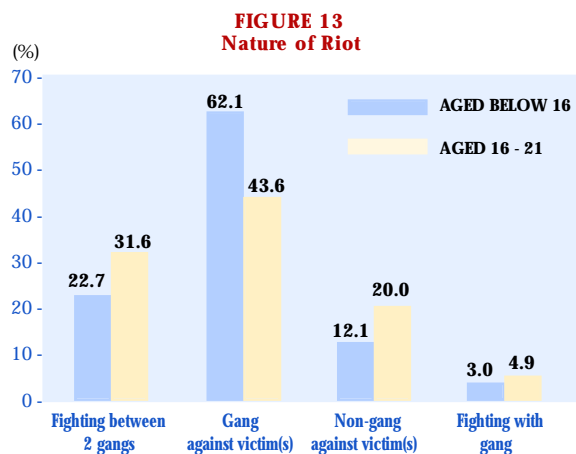
• **SS Related**

Revenge from an earlier dispute or provocation seems to be the leading cause of riots that involved secret society gangs - 41% for juvenile rioters and 27% for rioters aged 16-21. This is followed by an attack because the victims were from the rival gang - 15% for juvenile rioters and 13% for the older cohort. Staring ranked third as the proximate cause for riot [Figure 12].

An interesting trend showed that although some rioting cases did not initially arise purely out of secret society involvement such as those of personal disputes, these youth rioters subsequently sought help from their secret society gang friends. The findings also showed a worrying trend of youth, especially those below 16, turning to violence over some trivial matters or disputes.

Nature of Riot

The average group size of youth rioters was 10. Most riots involved a gang attacking a victim(s) - 62% for juvenile rioters and 44% for youth rioter aged 16-21. Fighting between two gangs ranked second with 32% for the older cohort of rioters and 23% for juvenile rioters. Fighting within the same gang also occurred but accounted for less than 5%. Riots between a group of youth and another victim(s) where there was no secret society involvement accounted for 12% for juvenile rioters and 20% for rioters aged 16-21 [Figure 13].



Usage of Weapons

In general, two thirds of the youth rioters did not carry or use a weapon when rioting. Those who rioted with weapons accounted for 27% and 7% just watched. A higher proportion of rioters aged 16-21 used/carried weapons when rioting - 30% compared to only 15% for juvenile rioters [Figure 14].

Victims' Injuries

A total of 193 victims involved in these cases were analysed. Out of whom, 71% sustained minor injuries, 23% major injuries and 4% resulted in death. No injuries were sustained in the remaining cases.

