

# Healthy Adolescent Development IS Public Safety

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# Positive Development is Public Safety

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- Youth with essential and pro-social assets are less likely to be involved in risky behavior
- Key pro-social assets include attachment, engagement, and a sense of usefulness and belonging
- Not a single program – requires a broad system of supports
- All youth need the same opportunities and activities that youth in wealthy communities take for granted:
  - Supportive relationships
  - Rewards for work
  - Skill development
  - Success in learning
  - Physical activity and sports
  - Music and the arts
  - Civic engagement
  - Community/political involvement
  - Excitement, Fun, and Adventure

# We Need to be Guided by Theory

Community disorder      Family support

Cognitive defects      School success

Poverty      Secure housing

Family violence      Friends

Greed      **Active**

Unemployment      Work

Substance use      Guidance

Lack of community respect

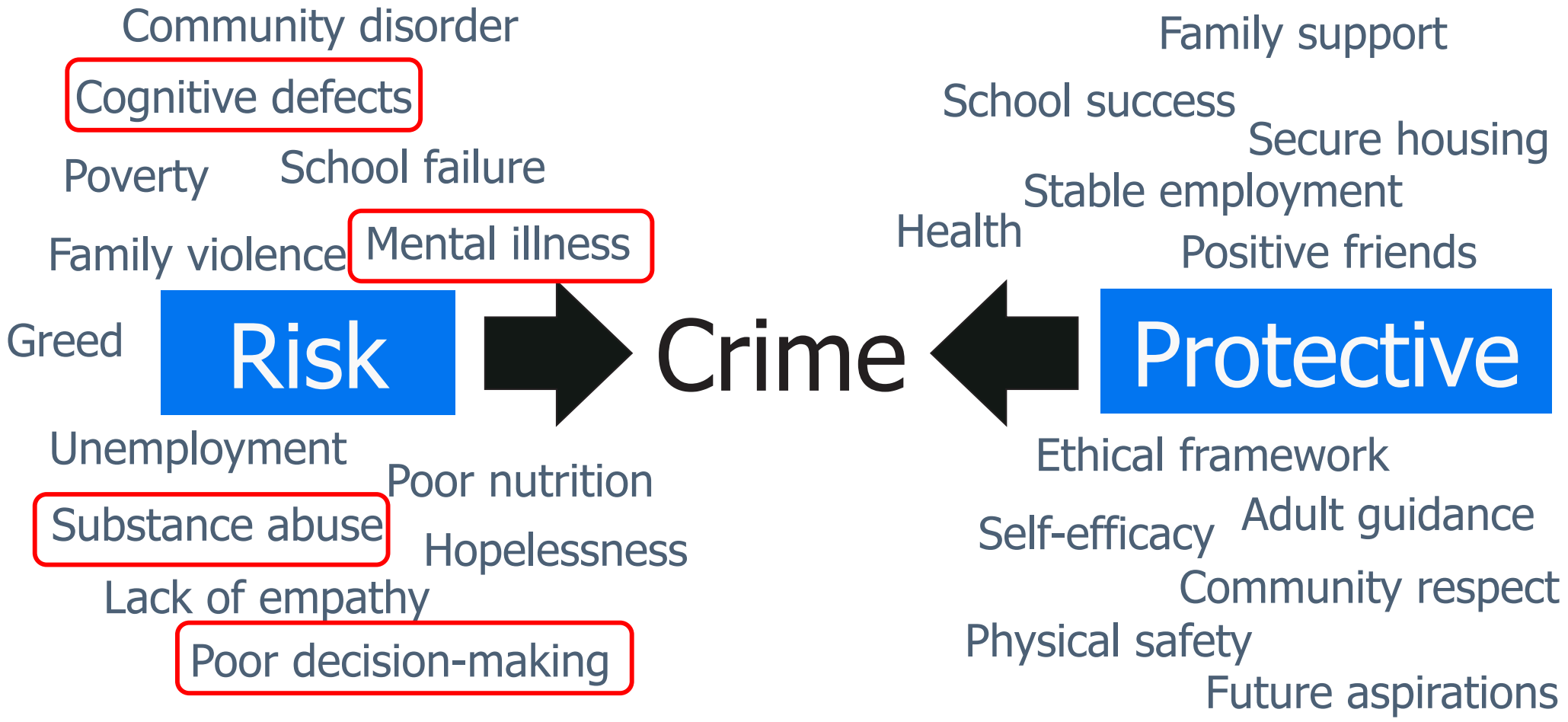
Poor decision-making      Physical safety

Future aspirations

**How Do We Select Interventions?**

Our choice of interventions is usually based on convenience and cost, as well as the likely political acceptance of the intervention model.

# We Need to be Guided by Theory



# The Misunderstood Role of Neuroscience

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- Adolescents have **poor self-control** in emotionally charged situations, are easily influenced by **peers** and don't think through **consequences** of some actions



# The Misunderstood Role of Neuroscience

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- Research suggests adolescence is characterized by rapid growth in brain areas governing **pleasure-seeking** & emotional **reactivity** – with slower development in areas that support **self-control and judgment**



# The Misunderstood Role of Neuroscience

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- Research also suggests that **adversity and stress** “down regulate” the brain systems that allow for adaptive behavior and “up regulate” the emotional systems that can hijack rational regions important for guiding choices and actions



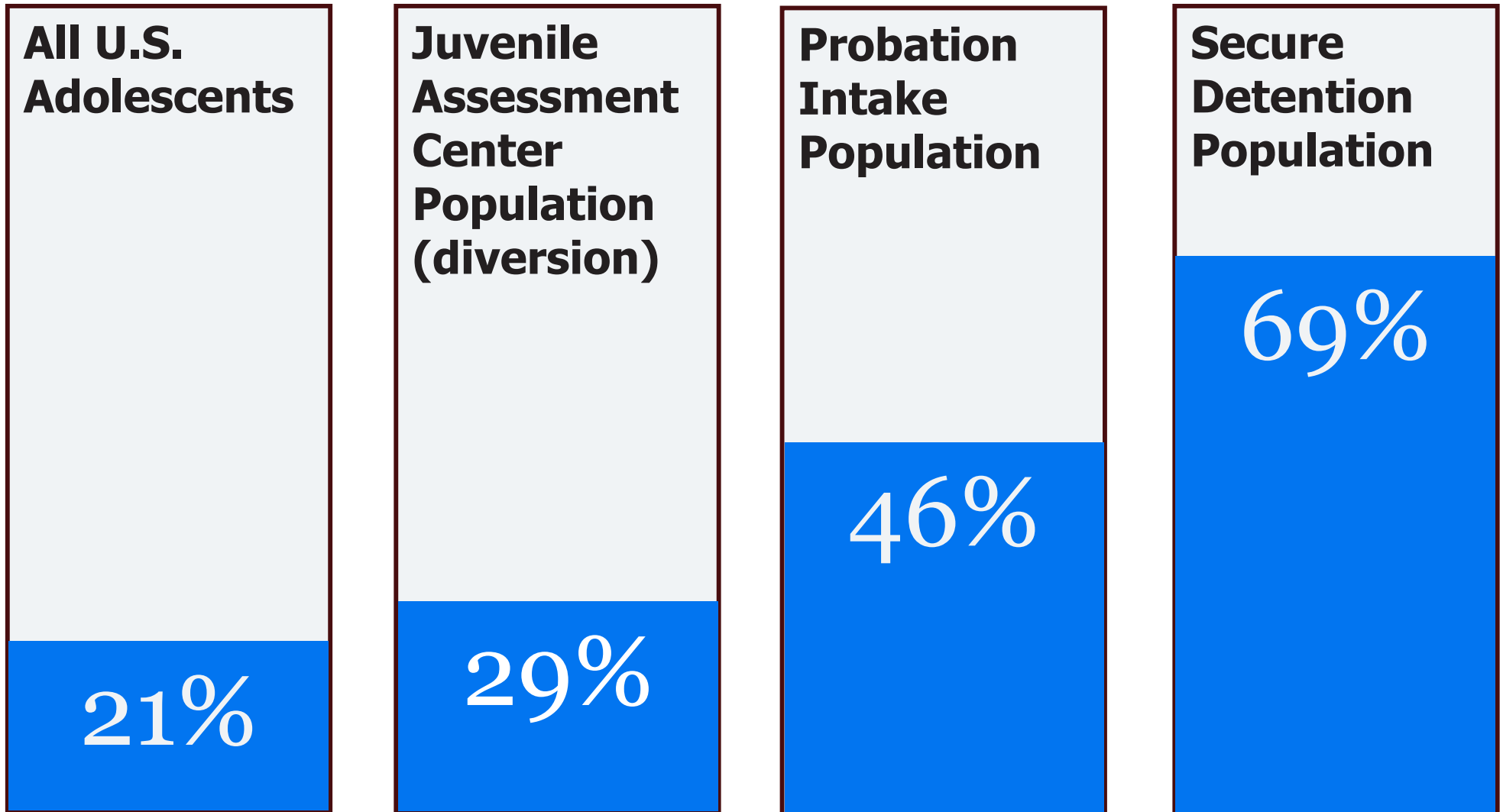
# What Does This Mean for Justice?

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- Understanding the adolescent brain is important if we're trying to influence adolescent behavior
- BUT youth crime is **not** a neurological "disorder" or a mental health problem
- Addressing substance abuse and mental health will help some youth but it is **not** a sufficient approach for supporting youth development and youth justice



# Prevalence of Mental Health Problems

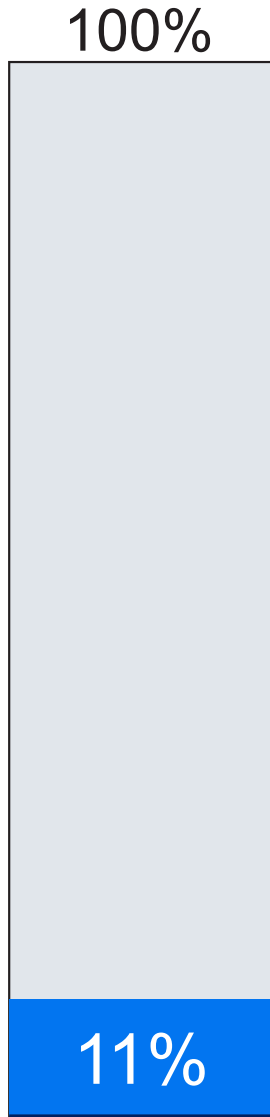


# Another Example: Drug Problems

Rate of substance use disorders among all U.S. 12-17 year-olds.

- SAMHSA (2006)

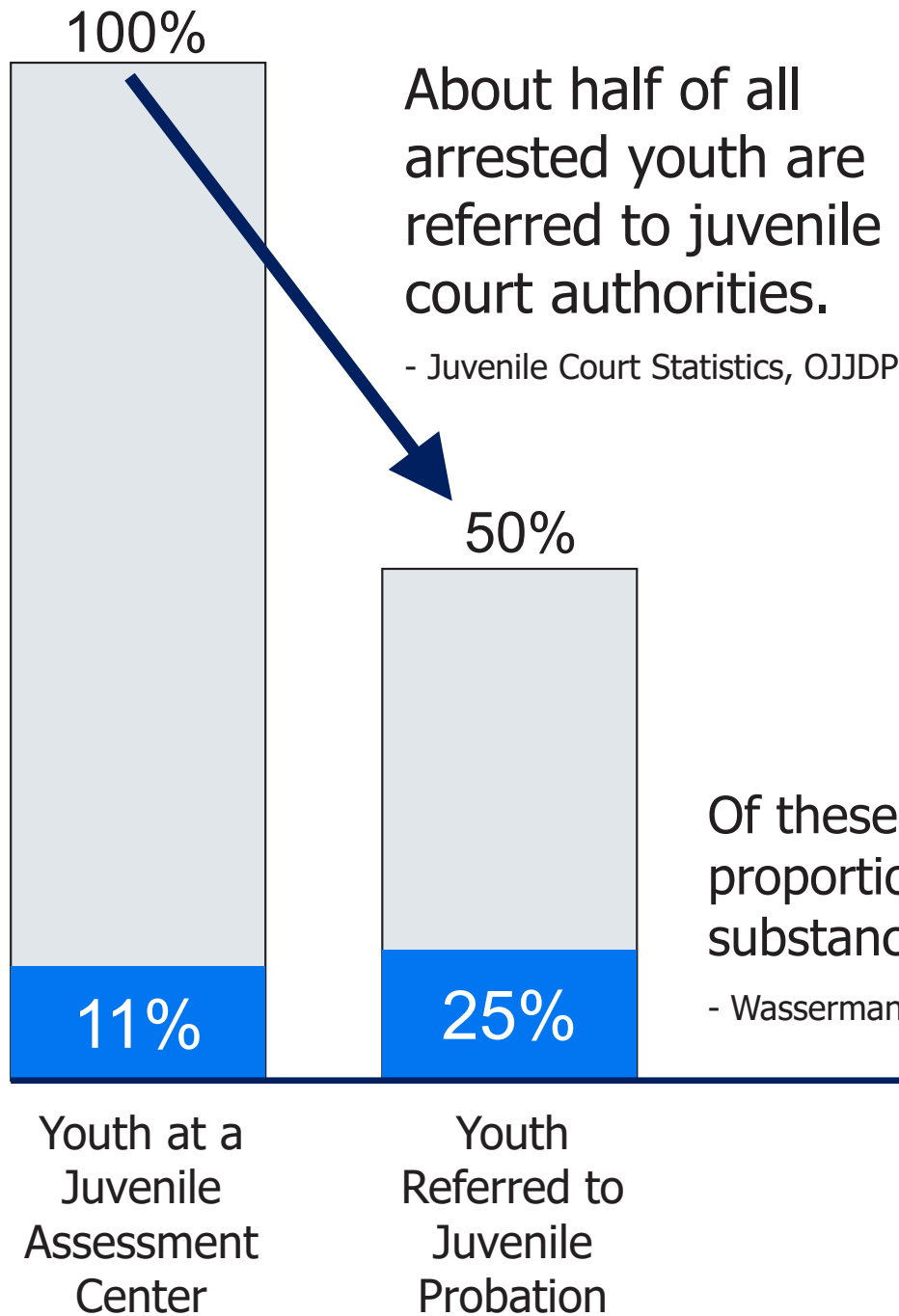
8%



What proportion have a substance use disorder?

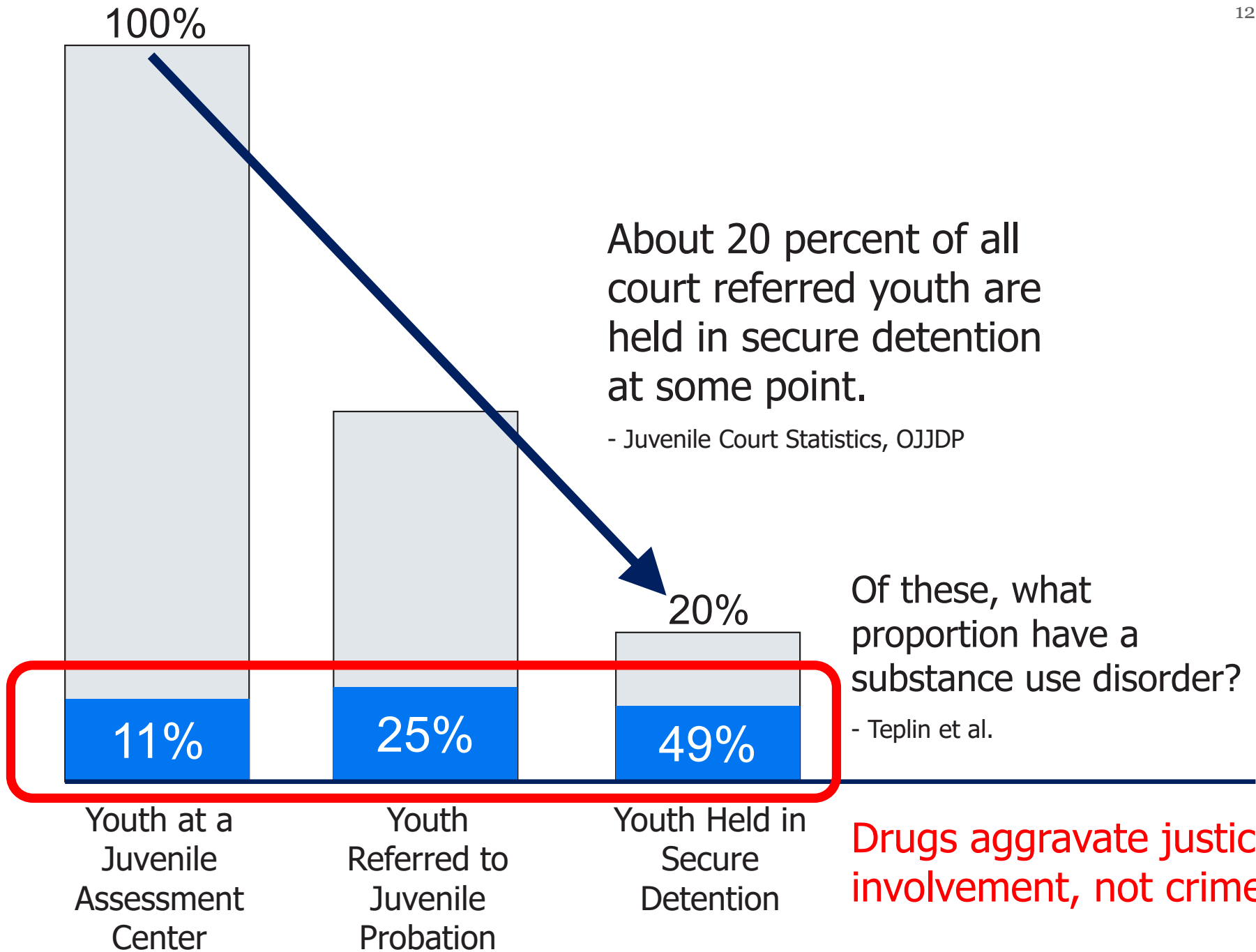
- McReynolds et al. (2008)

Youth at a Juvenile Assessment Center



# Looking at National Data on Juvenile Offenders...

Of these, what proportion have a substance use disorder?  
- Wasserman et al.



# We Need Research-Informed Interventions

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- Suitable for all youth, including those not primarily affected by mental health, substance abuse issues, and cognitive issues
- Designed to support behavior change, not just monitor violations
- Focused on protective factors & healthy development, not just risk mitigation
- Evaluation research that identifies individual components:
  - inputs
  - outputs
  - outcomes

... all at the level of individual youth and their activities

# Contact Information

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