
Introduction

Juvenile arrests increased by 40 percent in Wisconsin in the 10-year period between 1984 and 1993 (Wisconsin Office of Justice Assistance, 1993; 1994). Perhaps more alarming is the sheer size of the juvenile crime problem with over 122,000 arrests in the state in 1993 (Wisconsin Office of Justice Assistance, 1994); yet even this alarming number is vastly understated, since police records may account for as little as 2 percent of the actual juvenile law violations (Dunford & Elliott, 1982 cited in Patterson, DeBaryshe, & Ramsey, 1989). Curbing the growth in juvenile crime has taken on a new sense of urgency as crime has topped recent public opinion polls as the most important social problem facing the country (Yoshikawa, 1994).

Not only do the victims and perpetrators and their families bear tremendous costs of crime in their personal lives, the costs to society are substantial; considering only the cost of maintaining juvenile correctional facilities, over \$1 billion was spent in 1985 (U.S. Department of Justice, 1986 cited in Reid, 1993). According to recent estimates, the average cost of incarcerating a juvenile for one year is over \$40,000 (Davidson & Redner, 1988). Increasingly, taxpayers are demanding to know whether the programs they support are worthwhile or whether the money could be better spent in other ways.

To address these growing concerns, this report attempts to answer several fundamental questions:

- ❖ How many crimes do juveniles commit in Wisconsin?
- ❖ Are all juvenile delinquents the same? Are youth who commit occasional or nonviolent crimes different from those who commit frequent and violent crimes?
- ❖ Is prevention possible? Which prevention programs hold the most promise?
- ❖ What are the implications of these findings for policymakers and programmers?
- ❖ What efforts of the juvenile justice system have proven most successful in reducing repeat crimes?
- ❖ What resources are available in Wisconsin for further information?