

---

# Juvenile Crime in Wisconsin: A Statistical Overview

*Linda Hall, Policy Specialist  
Wisconsin Council on Children and Families*

Increases in juvenile crime over the past few years have been of great concern to the public and policymakers. The graphs and charts in this report present a selection of statistics to provide some insights into juvenile crime in Wisconsin and the state's response. Arrest rates, expenditures on juvenile offenders, and average daily populations at the juvenile correctional centers are among the indicators included.

## **How Many Juveniles are Arrested in Wisconsin and What are the Trends Over Time?**

In 1984, juvenile arrests, arrests of all children under age 18, were 87,350. By 1993, arrests had increased to 122,357, a 40 percent increase. Arrest rates, however, provide a better measure of comparison because they adjust the rates to reflect changes in the overall population. Commonly, arrest rates measure one arrest for every 100,000 persons. The juvenile arrest rate in 1984 was 6,430 per 100,000 juveniles. In 1993, the juvenile arrest rate was 9,252, which represented an increase of 44 percent. The arrests and arrest rate information provided in this section is based on the Office of Justice Assistance's "Arrests of Juveniles in Wisconsin 1983-1992," and its preliminary data for 1993.

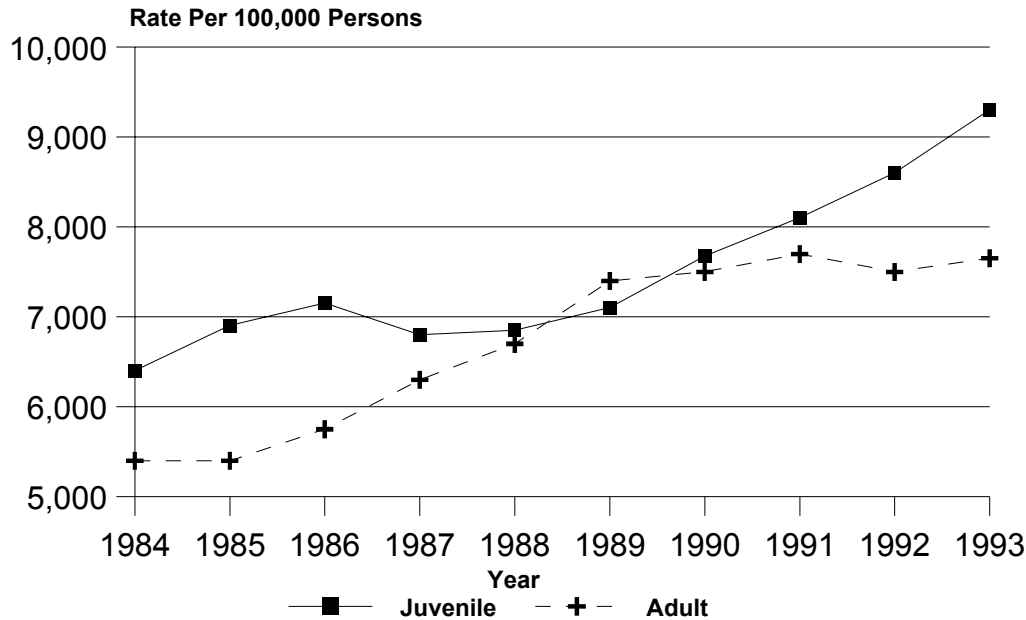
## **What Crimes Do Juveniles Commit?**

To allow more detailed analysis of crime, arrests are also considered in categories. Each of the four categories of juvenile crime include several offenses:

- |          |  |
|----------|--|
| Violent  | Murder, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault;  |
| Property | Burglary, theft, motor vehicle~ theft, and arson;  |
| Status   | Liquor law and curfew violations and runaways, and   |
| Other    | Negligent manslaughter, operating a motor vehicle while intoxicated, and all crimes excluded from the above categories, except traffic violations. |

Examining the arrest rate for each category and its change over time can provide more insight into the current nature of juvenile crime. Graph 1 shows the arrest rates for all offenses from 1984 through 1993. For comparison purposes, arrest rates for adults for the same period are shown.

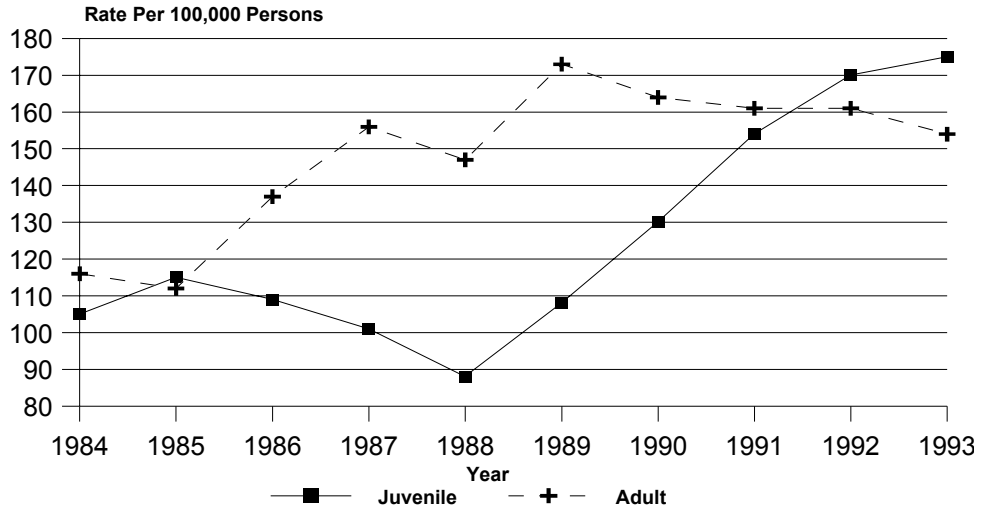
**Graph 1**  
**All Crimes Arrest Rate**  
**1984-1994**



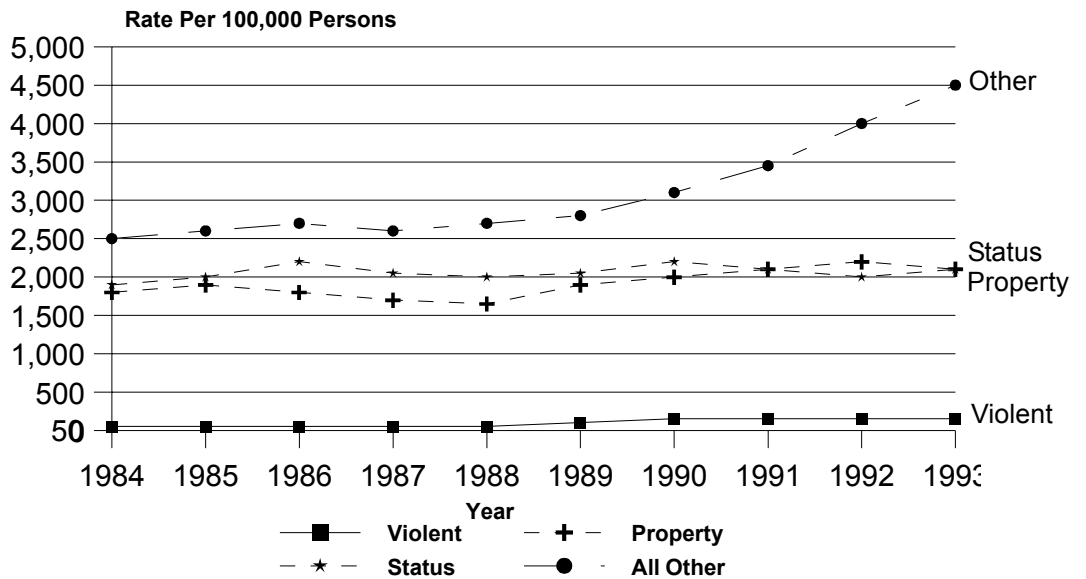
As shown, juvenile arrest rate increases in the early 1980s were followed by decreases through 1988. Since then, the rate has increased each year to a rate of 9,252 per 100,000 adults in 1993. Adult arrest rates increased rather steadily through the 1980s and then began to level off. In 1993, the adult arrest rate was 7,651 per 100,000 adults.

Narrowing the focus to examine arrests for violent crimes only, Graph 2 shows that juvenile arrests for these crimes started out at 105 per 100,000 in 1984, below the adult arrest rate of 116. Juvenile arrests for violent offenses increased in 1985, then decreased in each year through 1988 to a low of 88. However, after 1988, the juvenile arrest rate for violent crimes increased substantially through 1992. Although the 1993 rate of 175 represents another increase, it is smaller than increases in recent years. Over the decade, adult arrest rates for violent crimes fluctuated, peaking in 1989 and declining since then to 154 per 100,000 in 1993.

**Graph 2**  
**Violent Crime Arrest Rates**  
**1984-1993**



While there has been a significant increase in the juvenile arrest rate for violent crime, an examination of the trends for each type of crime reveals that violent crime as a proportion of the total juvenile crime is very small; 1.9 percent in 1993. Graph 3 shows juvenile arrest rates for all four categories of arrests for the period 1984 through 1993.



## What Changes Have Occurred in Arrest Rates Over the Last Decade?

To analyze recent changes in arrest rates compared to those over the last decade, the annual rate of change can be examined. Table 1 shows, for selected arrest rates, annual rates of change over the decade and the last five years. Percent changes from 1991 to 1992 and from 1992 to 1993 are also shown.

The annual rate of change for the juvenile violent arrest rate was 5.8 percent over the period 1984 to 1993. For the latter half of the decade, 1989 to 1993, the rate was higher at 12.6 percent. However, in 1993, the rate grew only 2.8 percent over 1992.

**Table 1**

### Annual Rate of Change for Juvenile and Adult Arrest Rates

	1984 to 1993	1989 to 1993	1991 to 1992	1992 to 1993
<b>Juvenile Arrest Rates</b>				
Violent Crimes	5.8%	12.6%	10.2%	2.8%
Property Crimes	2.1	3.0	2.8	11.1
Status Arrests	1.8	2.1	-3.7	7.9
Other Arrests	6.7	11.7	14.4	12.7
<b>Juvenile Total</b>	<b>4.1%</b>	<b>6.8%</b>	<b>6.3%</b>	<b>7.7%</b>
<b>Adult Arrest Rates</b>				
Violent Crimes	3.2	-2.9	0.0	-4.4
All Other	3.8	1.0	-2.0	2.1
<b>Adult Total</b>	<b>3.8%</b>	<b>0.9%</b>	<b>-2.0%</b>	<b>1.9%</b>

Over the decade, the largest increase in an arrest rate, 6.7 percent, was for “other arrests.” The 1993 rate of increase for these less serious, nonindexed crimes was greatest, 12.7 percent, in that year also. The remaining category of indexed crimes, property crimes, grew at a much smaller rate of 2.1 percent over the decade. This rate declined by 1.1 percent in 1993. The arrest rate for all juvenile crimes increased by 4.1 percent over the entire period and by 7.7 percent in 1993 alone.

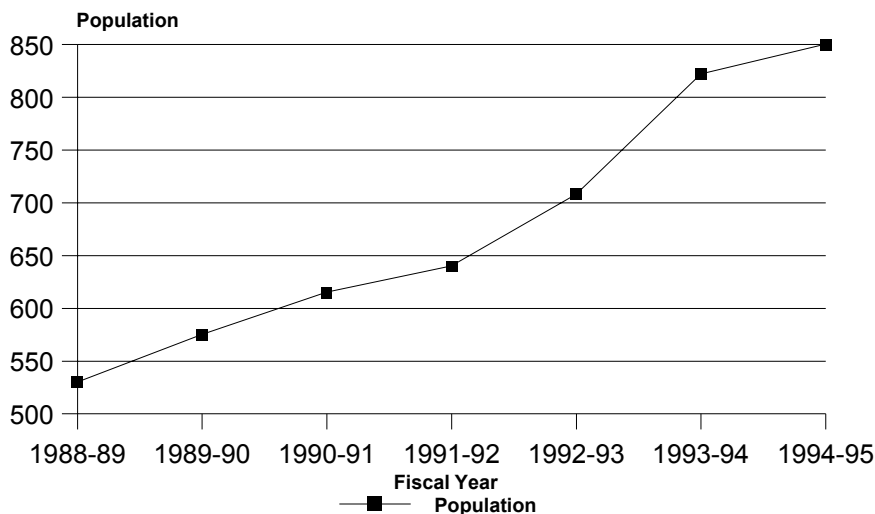
Adult crime over the decade experienced an increase of 3.8 percent annually. Arrests for violent crime grew slightly less at 3.2 percent annually. Examining the 1989 to 1993 period shows smaller overall increases in adult arrest rates, 0.9 percent, and a decline of 2.9 percent in the arrest rate for violent crimes. In 1993, arrests for violent crimes represented 2 percent of total adult crime. According to the Office of Justice Assistance, the violent crime rate in Wisconsin represented less than one-half the corresponding 1992 rate for violent crime in the Midwest and the nation. Adult property crime in Wisconsin was 13 percent lower than the Midwest rate and 23 percent lower than the rate for the entire United States.

Juvenile arrests and arrest rates in 1992, by county, for all crimes and for violent crimes are shown in Appendix A. Arrests include arrests for all crimes and are not limited to indexed crimes. The arrest rates range from a high of 161 for Rock County to a low of 1 for Menominee County. Rock and Menominee Counties also have the high and low rates, respectively, for violent crime. In addition to arrest rates, this chart provides the number of secure detentions, by county, in 1992. As expected, Milwaukee County, with the greatest number of juveniles, had the highest number of detentions, a total of 5,348. Iron County, with one of the smallest juvenile populations, had no detentions.

### How Many Youth are in Juvenile Correctional Institutions?

Serious or repeat juvenile offenders are likely to be incarcerated at one of the state's two secure juvenile correctional institutions (JCIs). On average, in state fiscal year 1993-94, the annual cost of one JCI placement is approximately \$40,000. Despite the substantial cost to counties to place juveniles at the correctional institutions, the population at the institutions has been increasing steadily over the last five years. As shown in Graph 4, between fiscal year 1988-89 and 1992-93 the average daily population increased from 530 to 705, an increase of 33 percent. A 16.3 percent increase in the population is expected in 1993-94 followed by a 3.4 percent increase in 1994-95. In 1994-95, the average daily population is projected to reach 848.

**Graph 4**



In 1993, 53 youth under the age of 18 were housed in adult correctional facilities.

### **What Crimes Do Institutionalized Youth Commit?**

In calendar year 1992, juveniles newly admitted, or returning to a juvenile correctional institution (JCI) from aftercare, were convicted of a total of 36 different crimes. Auto theft was, by far, the most frequently committed crime. Nearly 25 percent of youth in JCIs were committed after conviction of auto theft. Following auto theft, battery was the most frequently committed crime and represented 14.6 percent of all crimes; unarmed burglary, armed robbery, and weapons offenses completed the list of the top five crimes and represented 67 percent of the total. Murder and aggravated assault represented only 1.4 percent of the crimes listed. These are overall figures; among girls, who compose under 10 percent of the total population in JCI's, more were convicted of battery than auto theft.

### **How Much Does Juvenile Institutional Out-Of-Home Placement Cost?**

Youth Aids expenditures for juvenile correctional institutions and child-caring institutions (CCIs) represent the major expenditures for out-of-home placements of juveniles. Although many youth are placed in group homes, foster care or other community placements, the average costs of these noninstitutional placements are much lower than the average annual JCI cost of \$40,000 or the CCI cost of \$51,000. Appendix B lists each county's 1992 Youth Aids allocation, JCI and CCI expenditures, their total and that amount as a percentage of the county's Youth Aids allocation.

Total Youth Aids allocations for 1992 amounted to \$79.5 million. Of that amount, \$27.4 million was spent on JCI placements and \$27.1 million on CCI placements. The \$54.5 million in institutional expenditures represented 68.5 percent of the total Youth Aids allocation for the year. This percentage is somewhat overstated because some counties spent more than 100 percent of their Youth Aids allocation on institutional placements. Counties that exceed their Youth Aids allocations supplement Youth Aids funds with local funds.

The county percentages of Youth Aids funding spent on institutional placements ranged from 0 percent in Iron, Lafayette, and Washburn Counties to a high of 117 percent for Green Lake County. The median percentage for institutional pending was 36.3 percent. For smaller counties, whose allocations are also small, the entire allocation may be expended on one child's placement costs. Other counties may minimize institutional costs by diverting juveniles to community placements or providing more preventive and early intervention services to avoid later incarcerations of youth.

Poverty, previous abuse and neglect, and single parent households are risk factors that predispose youth to becoming juvenile delinquents. An April, 1994 study by the Wisconsin Department of Health and Social Services showed that of the youth at the juvenile correctional institutions on September 7, 1993, only 13 percent came from two-parent, biological families as compared to 57.7 percent of children in the general population. County-by-county information on the percentage of youth in single parent households, the number of youth ages 12 to 17, the percentage of these youth in poverty, and the number of substantiated abuse and neglect cases is available from Linda Hall at the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families (608) 284-0580.

### **Conclusion**

The increase of juvenile crime, the increasing use of large juvenile correctional facilities for delinquent youth, and the substantial costs of these and child-caring institution placements are issues of major significance and visibility in Wisconsin. Hopefully, the data provide insights into these issues and the nature of juvenile behavior and crime in the state.