
Executive Summary

Juvenile arrests increased by almost 40 percent in Wisconsin in the 10-year period between 1984 and 1993. Perhaps more alarming is the sheer size of the juvenile crime problem with over 122,000 arrests in the state in 1993. While violent juvenile arrests increased by almost 60 percent from 1984 to 1993, violent offenses accounted for only 1.9 percent of all juvenile offenses in 1993. In fact, the violent crime rate in Wisconsin represented less than one-half of the corresponding 1992 rate for violent crime in the Midwest and the nation. In Wisconsin, 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.

Serious or repeat juvenile offenders are likely to be incarcerated at one of the state's two secure juvenile correctional institutions with an annual cost of approximately \$40,000 per placement. In a four-year period spanning fiscal years beginning in 1988 and ending in 1993, the average daily population increased by about one-third from 530 to 705. Of juveniles in correctional institutions in 1992, nearly 25 percent were convicted of auto theft, 15 percent of battery, followed by unarmed burglary, armed robbery, and weapons offenses; murder and aggravated assault comprise only 1.4 percent of crimes committed. Among girls, who comprise under 10 percent of the total population, more were convicted of battery than auto theft.

Over 80 percent of all adolescents report having committed a chargeable offense at one time or another, but most of these "normal" adolescents do so infrequently. A small proportion of youth, an estimated 5 to 8 percent, are responsible for 40 percent of all police contacts and two-thirds to three-fourths of all offenses. Assuming that all these teenagers who commit crimes are psychologically similar is wrong and can thwart efforts to develop effective policies and programs.

Late bloomers, youth who begin delinquent activity at age 15 or later, are more apt to straighten out their lives after a few petty delinquent acts. Psychologically, late-bloomers appear to be quite normal: socially skilled, popular with peers, and with no history of previous problems. Late blooming delinquency appears to be influenced primarily by factors such as knowledge of their peer's delinquent acts; susceptibility to antisocial peer pressure; poor supervision by parents; and few opportunities, other than delinquency, for youth to demonstrate their maturity.

Early starters, those who begin their criminal career before age 15, are more apt to become frequent offenders, commit violent crimes, and continue their criminal activity as adults. Early starters come from families that are low socioeconomic

status, frequently unemployed, and oftentimes divorced. Early starters are anti-social as preschoolers and 30 to 40 percent of their antisocial behavior can be accounted for by family interaction patterns. Their parents tend to be harsh and inconsistent; they threaten, nag, and scold but seldom follow through. Children are successful in resolving conflict with whining, yelling, temper tantrums or physical attacks; thus, children learn that aggression works. This aggressive behavior also leads to peer rejection, trouble with teachers, and poor school performance.

The best predictors of who will become violent offenders are youth who commit their first crime at an early age and continue their criminal careers. No special explanation for violent crime is needed; if you can determine who starts early, you can predict frequent offenders, and frequency appears to predict violent offenses.

Instead of one grand theory for delinquency, it may be more accurate to think of one explanation for those who begin their criminal careers at a later age and one for those who begin their criminal careers earlier. The causes of these two patterns of delinquency are quite different and require different responses from policymakers and practitioners. Given the two types of juvenile delinquents, one set of prevention programs is needed to head off those children at risk of becoming early starters. Another set needs to begin after the age of 10 or 11 to focus on those children at risk of becoming late bloomers.

For early starters, prevention programs provided early, specifically before school entry, hold the greatest promise. Studies indicate that aggression is quite stable, much like IQ; those children who were most aggressive in third grade went on to commit more crimes as adults. For late bloomers, broad-based programs are needed that help youth resist negative peer pressure, teach parents the importance of supervision, reduce stress on families, and provide opportunities for youth to demonstrate their maturity in ways that benefit society. Seven prevention programs that appear to be promising in preventing antisocial behavior and juvenile crime are described in the report: parent management training; early childhood intervention and family support; functional family therapy; teaching problem-solving skills; social perspective-taking training; community-based programs; and broad-based intervention.

The juvenile court has been searching for effective intervention strategies for nearly a century. Commonly used approaches include office casework supervision; intensive casework supervision and intensive surveillance supervision; insight-oriented counseling; psycho-dynamic counseling; job placement and work experience; out-of-home placement; and teaching accountability through restitution and community service. Unfortunately, most of these approaches had either mixed results or no positive impact on delinquent behavior; in fact, in some instances, these interventions actually increased the likelihood of repeat crimes. One of the most successful intervention strategies that has emerged recently in the juvenile justice system is competency development. Increasingly, the evidence suggests that all forms of treatment should result in youth becoming more competent. Community service and restitution programs offer an excellent mechanism for delivering competency-based programs.