Juvenile Delinquency Rates in City, Suburban, and Rural Areas from 1988-1993

by

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ABSTRACT: Juvenile delinquency increasingly is a problem in the United States. Gangs, drugs, and violence in urban areas are stereotypically portrayed in the media. However, the media have left out any juvenile crime problems in rural areas. Are urban youths really responsible for a majority of the juvenile crime statistics or are rural youths to blame also? To answer this question, an analysis of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Reports from 1988-1993 for city, suburban, and rural areas was done. A majority of the juvenile crime is occurring in heavily populated cities. However, several of the crime rates for rural areas exceeded suburban areas. These crimes included burglary, vandalism, drunkenness, and liquor law violations. There are several reasons this may be occurring, such as the lower house density in rural areas compared to suburban. Also, there may be less activities for rural youths, therefore they turn to crime. The law enforcement may be more lenient toward rural than suburban youths. Nevertheless, juvenile crime has become a big problem in this country.
Juvenile delinquency is an ever growing problem in the United States. The news reports daily on handguns and illegal drugs confiscated from schools, especially inner-city areas. The public is horror struck when a young teen is convicted of murder and citizens in urban areas are frightened by teen gangs. Unfortunately, violence seems to be widespread among juveniles.

Researchers continue to study the problems of juvenile delinquency in urban areas. Farrel et al. studied drug use and other deviant behaviors in low income inner-city schools by the use of self-reported measures (1992). Shaw and McKay extensively studied juvenile court statistics in five American cities to provide a description of delinquency trends (1972).

Although, the media focus largely on inner city and heavily populated areas when it comes to crime in the United States, we must ask if urban teens are the only ones to blame? Carter (1982) focused only on the rural crime problem in America, and found evidence that the urban youths are not entirely responsible for the crime statistics. This book stressed that rural crime among youths may go unreported. This happens he believes because the law
enforcement officials allow parents, the community or even the schools handle the delinquent behavior.

This could mean that rural crime is occurring just as much as in urban settings. Urban youths usually have movies, the mall and bowling alleys near them in which they can walk or take the bus. Whereas, rural youths have to rely on parents to take them to such places which is not always possible. Therefore, the rural youths have to look for other activities to keep them preoccupied, such as committing crimes.

Rural youths may also have less fear of being caught for a crime by a law enforcement official than urban youths. A rural community tends to be more spread out geographically and less law enforcement officers are patrolling the areas. The chance of a group of rural youths being caught for a crime is lessened because of these factors. Also, the police may be less feared by juveniles because law enforcement is less likely to be violent towards them in a small community. The officials may know the juvenile's family and therefore want to be more of a father figure than a law enforcement official.

This report will determine where juvenile crime in the 1990's is only taking place in urban areas. The media stereotype urban areas as crime ridden and infested with drugs and alcohol abuse. Urban teenage gangs are associated
with guns and killing sprees for just looking at another
gang member in a strange way. Are rural youths protected
from this violence and less likely to commit as many crimes
as urban youths? Or are rural youths as responsible for the
juvenile crime statistics as urban teenagers?

Method

Subjects

The reports of eleven juvenile delinquents were
analyzed from the years 1988-1993 for the city, suburban and
rural areas of the United States. The Federal Bureau of
Investigation's Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) were utilized
for the analysis. A juvenile was defined as a youth under
eighteen years of age by 38 states and the District of
Columbia. The other states juvenile age laws vary from 17-
19 years of age. This study will use the law that a
majority of the states follow. A juvenile was considered a
delinquent when the youth was arrested and the crime was
turned into the data collection for the UCR. Thus, crimes
in which there was no arrest or unreported are not included
in this study.

Procedure

City, suburban and rural areas were defined by the
Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas (SMSA). Urban
regions or metropolitan statistical areas (MSA) are central
cities of at least 50,000 people. Suburban areas are
defined as areas fewer than 50,000 people within the MSA and rural areas are outside of the MSA.

Crimes that were analyzed included: murder and nonnegligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, arson, vandalism, liquor law violations and drunkenness. Each of these crimes were defined precisely by the FBI. In order for a crime to be reported to the UCR, it would have to meet the definition of the crime and also reported on a standard form provided by the FBI.

Population figures for persons under eighteen living in the city, suburban or rural areas as defined by the SMSA were collected from the Current Population Reports, 1988-1993.

After collection of this data, a spreadsheet program was used to calculate the rates of the eleven crimes for the city, suburban and rural areas of the United States. A standard equation was used to calculate the rates:

\[
\text{number of arrests for crime}_x \times \frac{1000}{\text{population figure for year } y}
\]

For example, in 1990 there were 30,204 under eighteen city robbery arrests in the United States. The population of under eighteen persons in urbanized areas was 20,272,000 in 1990. Therefore, 30,204 was divided by 20,272,000 and then multiplied by 10,000. This gave a rate for each area per
10,000 persons of 14.9 percent.

Along with calculating individual crime rates, a few of the crimes were summed together to obtain aggregate crime rates for violent and property crimes by juveniles. The violent crime rate included the crimes: murder and nonnegligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery and aggravated assault. The crimes of burglary, larceny-theft, motor-vehicle theft and arson defined the property crime rate. These were also fitted to the above formula. For instance, the number of arrests for property crimes were summed for a specific year, and then that figure was divided by the population for the specific year and multiplied by 10,000.

Each figure entered into the spreadsheet program was double checked to minimize human error. Also, a random sample of calculated rates were checked by calculator to further check for any problems with the spreadsheet formulas.

Results

Overall, the crime rates analyzed showed that city crime rates were far higher than the suburban and rural populations. However, for several crimes the rural crime rate was higher than the suburban crime rate. Table 1 shows the burglary rates for the rural areas were a little higher than suburban rates except for the year 1992. Chart 1
provides a picture of the difference between the two localities of residence. Nonetheless, the city burglary rates were dramatically higher than either of the two geographic areas. However, burglary by juvenils appears to be a greater risk in rural areas than in suburbs.

Vandalism crime rates for the suburbs and rural areas are given in Table 2 and Chart 2. There is not a significant difference between these two areas, although in years 1988, 1990, and 1991 the rates for rural areas were slightly higher. However, overall the rates were about equal for vandalism. Juvenile vandalism, therefore, may be as much of a problem in rural areas as in the suburbs.

There were dramatic differences between the rates of rural and suburban alcohol abuse and liquor law violations. In both crimes, rural rates were significantly higher, especially for the latter. Table 3, shows the rates of the three areas and rural crime rates were higher than suburban rates for all years. Chart 3 also provides the comparison of suburban and rural rates. Table 4 and Chart 4 show that liquor law violations were almost twice as high in rural areas than suburban areas for all years. Irrespective of any unmeasured difference in drinking or drunk driving behavior, juveniles in rural areas are clearly apprehended much more often than their suburban counterparts.

The violent crime arrest rates again proved that city
crime is by far the greatest per 10,000 persons. The suburban rates were a little higher than the rural rates for all years analyzed (Table 5 and Chart 5). Table 6 and Chart 6 provide the property crime rates for 1988-1993. Again, the city rates per 1,000 persons were dramatically higher. The rates for rural and suburban regions were very similar, therefore showing no large differences between the two of them.

Discussion

The juvenile crime rate is occurring more in heavily populated areas of the country. Therefore, the hypothesis that rural crime may be occurring just as much as city crime is proven false. However for certain crimes, the rural crime rate was equal or greater when compared to the suburban regions of the country.

The large differences between burglary rates in rural and suburban areas may be do to the geographic layout of these areas. Rural houses tend to be more spread out than in community settings of the suburbs. It may be a lot easier for a rural juvenile to steal, especially out of homes which are far apart. Juveniles may have greater familiarity of the area than suburban teens. Everyone in a rural community may know when a family is going out of town which gives a juvenile access to steal. Nevertheless, during 1988 and 1993 the rates for both geographic regions
were roughly equal. Therefore, it is difficult to ascertain consistent or recurring reasons for the higher rural rates.

The vandalism rates for rural and suburban areas were also very similar, although for a few years the rates were higher in rural areas. Again, the fact that homes may be farther apart may play a factor in the vandalism occurring. A group of rural youths smashing mailboxes for example, maybe less likely to get caught because of houses far apart whereas the loud noises heard in a suburban area may deter suburban youths from vandalizing.

The crimes rates for drunkenness and liquor law violations were rather surprising. From this analysis, rural juveniles appear to be violating liquor laws twice as much as suburban youths. Rural youths may find it easier to find hide somewhere to go and drink compared to suburban youths. In contrast to media images, there may be more activities and community events for suburban youths to take part in, and therefore do not find it necessary to drink. For example, suburban youths may have pools in their neighborhood and perhaps more of them are able to get together after school to find other things to do.

Although the crime rates for rural areas are in some cases a little higher than the suburbs; it is also clear that city youths are committing a wide majority of the crimes. There could be many reasons for this such as the
breakdown of the family, influence of drugs or lack of community support. Unfortunately, it is difficult or impossible to find one reason that urban crime rates are so high. It is important for researchers to continue to find ways to reduce the juvenile crime rate to help these youths and also the communities involved.

Further Research

When this research began, I found another data set called the National Crime Victimization Survey (NVCS) which is collected by the Bureau of Justice Statistics. This data takes a look at the crime that is not reported to the police. Unfortunately, "it is estimated that less than half of the crime experienced by citizens is reported to law enforcement" (Carter, 1982). The UCR are not a complete picture of the juvenile crime that is taking place in America. I was unable to look at the other data set because of the time restraints of this project.

Nevertheless, the use of these two data sets would paint a full picture of juvenile crime in city, suburban and rural areas. Although these data sets don't both define some crimes in the same way, robbery and assault are very similar. The use of this alternate data set might show an even larger rural crime rate. However, in order to describe juvenile crime in America both of these data sets should be compared and analyzed.
Table 1: Juvenile Crime Rates for Burglary Arrests
Per 10,000 Persons

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Chart 1: Juvenile Burglary Rates
Per 10,000 Persons, 1988-1993
Table 2: Juvenile Crime Rates for Vandalism Arrests
Per 10,000 Persons

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Chart 2: Juvenile Vandalism Rates
Per 10,000 Persons, 1988-1993
Table 3: Juvenile Crime Rates for Drunkenness Arrests
Per 10,000 Persons

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Chart 3: Juvenile Drunkenness Rates
Per 10,000 Persons, 1988-1993
Table 4: Juvenile Crime Rates for Liquor Law Arrests
Per 10,000 Persons

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Chart 4: Juvenile Liquor Law Rates
Per 10,000 Persons, 1988-1993

Years

Rates

- Suburbs
- Rural
Table 5: Violent Juvenile Crime Arrests
Per 10,000 Persons

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Violent Crimes: murder, forcible rape, robbery, aggravated assault

Chart 5: Juvenile Violent Crime Rates
Per 10,000 Persons, 1988-1993
Table 6: Juvenile Property Crime Rates  
Per 1,000 Persons

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<td>1.54</td>
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Property Crimes: burglary, larceny-theft, motor-vehicle theft, and arson
Bibliography


