

Juvenile Arrests Drop, More Remains to be Done for Prevention

Trends Analysis for Michigan, 2009 – 2018

The number of juveniles arrested each year in Michigan has been dropping steadily over the past decade. In 2009, law enforcement agencies in the state reported 22,222 arrests of juveniles. In 2018, the number had dropped to 8,765. These numbers are in stark contrast to widespread fears that took hold in the 1990s of an impending national crime wave that would be driven by a new generation of juvenile “superpredators.”¹ In fact, while juveniles (ages 10-16) accounted for about 10% of Michigan’s total population over the age of 10 in 2018, they accounted for less than 4% of all arrests in the state.²

Although juveniles account for a relatively small and shrinking portion of arrests, the arrests reported in 2018 involved very real and, in some cases, serious consequences for individual victims, communities, families, and the juveniles themselves. Still, crimes committed by juveniles are different from crimes committed by adults, because children and adolescents are different from adults. Based on research conducted over the past couple of decades, there is now solid scientific evidence that throughout adolescence the brain is still developing the physical structures needed to weigh risks and rewards, regulate emotions, and carry out complex decision-making processes when under pressure.³ Likewise, the still-developing brains of adolescents are naturally more receptive to learning and change. Perhaps the strongest evidence for the adolescent predisposition to change and rehabilitation comes from numerous studies demonstrating that most individuals who commit crimes as children or adolescents do not go on to commit crimes as adults.⁴

However, as adolescents transition to adulthood, the development of more prosocial patterns of thinking and behavior is not inevitable. In fact, most adults involved in criminal activity committed their first crimes as juveniles, and those who were arrested for the first time as adults were more likely to have fewer subsequent arrests than their counterparts who had been arrested as juveniles.⁵ In other words, failure to recognize and attend to the developmental needs of youth does have potential long-term impacts on crime and community safety.

Finally, apart from any possible impact on future crime, young people who enter the juvenile justice system often face serious consequences that can challenge their ability to live healthy, productive lives for years to come. A delinquency adjudication, for example, can affect access to public housing and schooling, limit one’s ability to join the military, and hinder employment opportunities.⁶

It is therefore crucial for policymakers and practitioners to understand the dynamics of juvenile crime—its frequency, the prevalence of specific crimes, geographic patterns, and the role of racial and ethnic disparities.

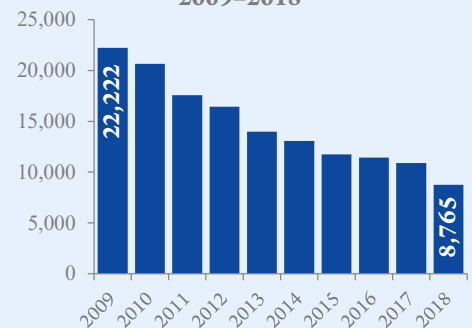
Key Trends

Juvenile crime is not confined to large, urban communities. Certainly, the overall numbers of juveniles arrested have been highest among the counties with the largest populations. In 2018, the five counties of Genesee, Kent, Macomb, Oakland, and Wayne accounted for 50% of the state’s juvenile population and 44% of juvenile arrests in the state. However, the combined juvenile arrest rate among those five counties, approximately 8.8 arrests per 1,000 juveniles, was below the statewide rate of 10.0. Conversely, the ten counties with the highest juvenile arrest rates in the state had a combined rate of 24.0 arrests per 1,000 juveniles and accounted for less

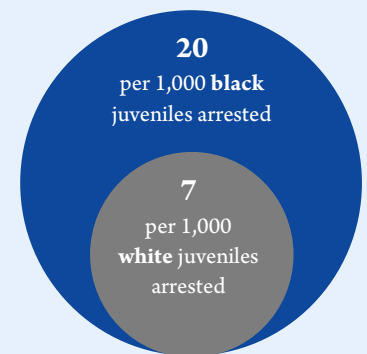


Over ten years, the number of juvenile arrests per year in Michigan dropped by more than 13,000.

Juvenile Arrests in Michigan
2009–2018



Even so, in 2018, significant disparities persisted, as arrest rates among black youth were nearly three times larger than rates among white youth.



than 10% of the state's total juvenile population.

Non-aggravated assault and larceny top the list of the most prevalent types of offenses among juveniles. In each of the past ten years, juvenile arrests for non-aggravated assault, which could include domestic violence incidents and physical altercations among peers, and larceny, which includes shoplifting and other types of theft, have far outnumbered juvenile arrests for other types of offenses. In 2018, one out of every five juvenile arrests was for non-aggravated assault, and approximately one out of every six juvenile arrests was for larceny.

Racial and ethnic disparities persist among the juveniles arrested. Although the drop in juvenile arrests between 2009 and 2018 included a drop in arrest rates across racial and ethnic groups, there has been little progress in reducing long-standing disparities, particularly among black youth. Over that time period, the arrest rate among black youth dropped from 44 to 20 arrests per 1,000 juveniles. Even so, in 2018, black youth were arrested at almost three times the rate of white youth. Overall, the Michigan data are generally consistent with national data showing that young people of color are substantially more likely to enter the

juvenile justice system than their white peers.⁷

Implications

PPA has identified the following questions and recommendations for policymakers to consider as they seek to protect public safety and reduce the number of juveniles entering the juvenile justice system:

Key Questions to Consider

- Do current funding allocations at the state and local levels reflect the current evidence on what works to prevent delinquency?
- What are the opportunities to identify youth and families in need of support earlier? How can interventions prevent problematic and/or dangerous behaviors among youth?
- In what ways might current policies and practices help to perpetuate racial and ethnic disparities within the juvenile justice system?
- Are kids and families considered partners in discovering what issues brought a youth into contact with the justice system?

Suggested Practices and Policies

Focus on policy changes that address factors associated with increased risk for delinquency. Research demonstrates a number of individual, family, and community factors that increase the risk of delinquent behaviors, including poverty,⁸ low school attachment,⁹ poor academic performance,¹⁰ and experiences of abuse and/or neglect.¹¹

Policymakers and funders should seek opportunities to build capacity for cross-system coordination and delivery of prevention services. Efforts to identify risk factors and provide youth and families with the support needed to be successful are most effective when they are coordinated across the multiple systems that serve youth and families (e.g., education, child welfare, community mental health).

Invest in data collection and evaluation. Access to high-quality and timely data about the juvenile justice system and related systems is critical for developing strategies that target the right needs. Rigorous evaluation is essential for providing stakeholders with insights to inform effective solutions and the impact of those solutions.

¹ James C. Howell, "Superpredators and Other Myths about Juvenile Delinquency," in *Preventing and Reducing Juvenile Delinquency: A Comprehensive Framework* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2009), 3-16.

² All arrest data analyzed for this brief are from the Michigan State Police, Michigan Incident Crime Reporting System. Because Michigan automatically prosecutes all 17-year-olds as adults, the juvenile arrest data presented for Michigan in this report include individuals between the ages of 10 and 16, except where noted otherwise.

³ Benjamin Chambers and Annie Balck, *Because Kids Are Different: Five Opportunities for Reforming the Juvenile Justice System* (Chicago, IL: John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, December 2014).

⁴ Alex R. Piquero et al., *Bulletin 2: Criminal Career Patterns (Study Group on the Transitions between Juvenile Delinquency and Adult Crime)* (Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Justice, July 2013), 9-12.

⁵ Ibid., 9-12.

⁶ National Juvenile Defender Center, *Innovation Brief: Avoiding and Mitigating the Collateral Consequences of a Juvenile Adjudication* (Washington, D.C.: Author, 2013).

⁷ *OJJDP Statistical Briefing Book* (Washington, D.C.: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2019), accessed March 23, 2020 from <http://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/dmcd/b/>.

⁸ Gail A. Wasserman et al., *Risk and Protective Factors of Child Delinquency* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, April 2003).

⁹ Ibid., 8.

¹⁰ Eugene Maguin and Rolf Loeber, "Academic Performance and Delinquency," *Crime and Justice: A Review of Research*, Vol 20, Michael Tonry, ed. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 145-264.

¹¹ Wasserman, *Risk and Protective Factors*, 5.