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# TREND IN JUVENILE-DELINQUENCY STATISTICS

GRACE ABBOTT

No plan has yet been put into operation for the collection on a national scale of statistics of juvenile delinquency. The United States Bureau of the Census at approximately 10-year intervals publishes statistics of juvenile delinquents in institutions, but no attempt is made by that bureau to procure statistics concerning delinquents dealt with by the courts in other ways than by commitment. Relatively few juvenile courts print annual reports which include statistical material, but for some other courts manuscript reports of this nature are available. The Children's Bureau endeavors to obtain both printed and manuscript reports from juvenile courts throughout the country. However, lack of uniformity in methods of compiling statistics used in the different courts and marked variations in inclusions and methods of presentation make the statistics practically valueless for purposes of comparing delinquency rates in one city with those of other cities. Such figures are, however, of value in determining the trend in juvenile delinquency in a given city over a period of years.

The material now available in the Children's Bureau which is of significance in connection with a consideration of trends in juvenile delinquency will be summarized under the following headings: Delinquency rates in 14 cities in different parts of the country based on annual reports of courts; statistics of juvenile delinquents committed to institutions during the first six months of 1923 as reported by the U. S. Bureau of the Census (to be included in a forthcoming census publication dealing with children under institutional care); and an analysis of the age distribution of the adult population of prisons and reformatories, jails, and workhouses from 1880 to 1923, compiled from published census reports.

## DELINQUENCY RATES IN 14 CITIES.

Table I shows the number of delinquency cases per 1,000 children of delinquency age in 14 cities for which statistics are available for the years 1915 to 1924 or 1925. (For some of these cities statistics can be obtained for part of the period only.) The notes to the table explain the sources from which the statistics were compiled. As pointed out

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<sup>1</sup>From Children's Bureau, U. S. Department of Labor, Washington, D. C.

above, these figures are of value in determining the trend in juvenile delinquency in a given city, but they can not be used for the purpose of comparing delinquency rates in different cities. Great confusion exists with reference to types of cases included, some cities reporting only cases officially heard by the court and others reporting in addition, cases adjusted unofficially by the probation department. The policy with reference to informal treatment varies greatly. In some courts by far the largest number of cases are handled in this way, and in others only a small proportion are so dealt with. The Juvenile Court of the District of Columbia, for example, deals with a considerable number of cases informally, and these cases are included in the totals on which the percentages are based.

A study of this table indicates for most of the cities lower delinquency rates at the end of the period than at the beginning, with a tendency toward higher rates during the war years, 1918 and 1919. Slight fluctuations from year to year are to be expected and are not especially significant. For example, in Chicago the rate has fluctuated around 3 and 4 since 1920, whereas before that period it fluctuated around 5 and 6. The decrease in New York has been quite marked, the rate at the beginning of the period being 11.1 as compared with 6.8 in 1924. The Detroit figure was higher at the end of the period than at the beginning, but the 1924 rate was lower than the rates for the years 1918, 1919, 1920, and 1923. Providence and Boston, like Detroit, had higher rates during 1918 and 1919, the Providence rate having declined markedly and the Detroit rate slightly since 1919. The Boston figures also show an increase during the war years, 1918 and 1919, but a marked decrease since that time except for a slight rise in 1923 and 1924 as compared with 1922. The Boston rates for the years since 1920 are considerably lower than the rates for any previous year. Philadelphia and Seattle rates increased rather consistently up to 1923 but declined somewhat in 1924.

JUVENILES COMMITTED TO INSTITUTIONS FOR JUVENILE DELINQUENTS  
AND TO PENAL INSTITUTIONS AS REPORTED BY THE  
U. S. BUREAU OF THE CENSUS

Published census reports of juvenile delinquents in institutions or committed to institutions are available for the years 1880, 1890, 1904, and 1910, and a report covering the first six months of 1923 is now in press. Differences in methods of taking the census make the figures for the earlier years only roughly comparable, but the statistics for 1910 and 1923 are not seriously affected by such differences. The fig-

ures include persons in or committed to institutions for juvenile delinquents and persons under 18 years of age in or committed to prisons and reformatories, jails, and workhouses.

The number of persons 10 to 17 years of age enumerated on a given date in institutions of the kind specified per 100,000 population of the same age was 143.4 in 1880, 149.2 in 1890, and 154.5 in 1923. The relatively slight increase reflects the more adequate provision of institutional care especially adapted to juvenile delinquents in 1923 as compared with the earlier period. It is not possible to present similar ratios for 1904 and 1910, but considering only persons in institutions for juvenile delinquents and not persons in penal institutions the ratio per 100,000 population has been practically stationary since 1904. The growth of the probation system has come mainly within the period since that date.

A more significant figure is the number of commitments during a given period. The total number of delinquent persons 10 to 17 years of age admitted to institutions of all types during the entire year 1910 was 24,854, or 171.7 delinquents per 100,000 of the same age. The corresponding figure for 1923 (estimate based on exact figures for first six months) was 25,565, a ratio of 156.5 per 100,000 population of the same age. (The ratio in 1923 would have been 161 if the small number of dependent children admitted to institutions for juvenile delinquents had been included as it was in 1910.) There has thus been a decline in delinquent children committed to institutions if growth in population is taken into consideration.

Comparable figures for offenses are available only for those committed to penal institutions, as in many cases of commitment to institutions for juvenile delinquents the only record of offense is the general term "juvenile delinquency." In the first six months of 1923, 16.3 per cent of the commitments to penal institutions of persons under 18 years of age were for homicide, robbery, and burglary. For the entire year 1910 the corresponding percentage was 8.5. However, the larger percentage in 1923 committed for grave offenses is largely due to the fact that increasing numbers of children who commit the less serious offenses are now being sent to institutions for juvenile delinquents instead of to penal institutions. There has been no significant increase in the actual number of children committed for the three offenses specified. The total number of children committed for such offenses in 1910 was 1,011. The estimated number for 1923 based on exact figures for the first six months was 1,104. In 1910 the number of persons 10 to 17 years of age committed for these three serious

offenses was 7.0 per 100,000 children of the same age, and in 1923 it was 6.8.

#### AGE DISTRIBUTION OF ADULT POPULATION OF PRISONS AND REFORMATORIES, JAILS, AND WORKHOUSES, 1880 TO 1923

The U. S. Bureau of the Census has published statistics of prisoners for the same years as those for which they have published statistics of juvenile delinquents. The last census report of this character is entitled "Census of Prisoners, 1923 (Preliminary Report)." Table II based on prisoners of known age, 18 years of age and over, has been compiled from these published census reports. The group under 18 years is omitted because of the marked effect which the establishment of special institutions for juvenile delinquents has had on the figures for persons of this age. Figures for 1904, 1910, and 1923 are based on commitments, and for 1880 and 1890 on persons present on the date the census was taken. Differences in methods of taking the census in the earlier and later periods affect considerably the comparability of the figures, but it is believed that the per cent distribution according to age can fairly be taken as indicative of general trends.

Contrary to opinions which have been expressed there seems to have been no marked decrease in age of commitment. On the contrary only 9.4 per cent of the commitments in 1923 were of persons between the ages of 18 and 20 years, as compared with 9.8 per cent in 1904 and with percentages of 11.8 and 12.1 based on persons present in 1880 and 1890 respectively. There has been no increase since 1904 in the percentages of persons between the ages of 21 and 24 years, and the percentages for this age are lower for recent years than for the years 1880 and 1890. The same may be said of the age group 25 to 34 years. Persons between the ages of 35 and 44 are contributing a slightly larger percentage of the total commitments at present as compared with earlier years.

TABLE NO. 1  
 NUMBER OF DELINQUENCY CASES<sup>1</sup> PER 1,000 CHILDREN OF DELINQUENCY AGE (OVER 6 YEARS OF AGE AND WITHIN THE DELINQUENCY AGE<sup>2</sup>)—FOURTEEN CITIES, 1915 TO 1925

Year	Boston <sup>3</sup>	Buffalo	Chicago <sup>3</sup>	Detroit <sup>3</sup>	Minneapolis	New Orleans	New York	Philadelphia	Providence	Richmond	Rochester	St. Louis	Seattle	Washington <sup>3</sup>
1925	....	10.4	....	....	....	....	....	20.4	10.8	....	....	....	....	45.6
1924	16.5	10.5	4.7	11.0	....	13.7	6.8	23.0	13.3	40.1	6.2	13.3	15.9	42.8
1923	15.8	12.1	3.1	11.6	12.2	12.1	6.9	25.0	14.1	41.3	6.4	15.9	17.9	41.0
1922	14.5	9.8	3.4	9.6	11.3	16.4	6.8	21.3	12.0	39.0	6.2	12.4	17.6	44.9
1921	16.9	....	4.4	9.5	11.4	20.7	7.4	21.6	15.9	46.4	....	13.5	15.9	44.5
1920	18.7	14.7	4.7	11.2	14.4	20.5	8.6	21.3	16.1	44.0	....	13.7	16.2	52.1
1919	26.5	13.9	6.4	12.0	13.4	22.3	10.1	18.0	20.4	49.3	....	18.1	10.5	54.4
1918	24.8	23.6	5.8	12.5	12.2	18.7	10.6	19.3	20.9	54.6	....	19.1	7.7	50.4
1917	23.9	14.2	5.8	10.1	10.2	20.2	10.9	19.0	15.6	53.7	....	17.3	10.0	....
1916	20.4	12.5	5.5	8.7	10.7	22.9	8.8	....	15.3	43.2	....	14.2	11.5	....
1915	23.6	....	5.9	8.6	9.6	22.8	11.1	....	13.3	....	....	....	13.5	....

<sup>1</sup>The numbers of cases were compiled from the annual reports of the courts either printed or in manuscript with the exception of the Boston figures which were compiled from the annual reports of the State Department of Correction (formerly Bureau of Prisons), and the Detroit figures which were compiled from the annual reports of the Michigan State Welfare Commission. The delinquency figures relate to cases, not children, with the exception of the Richmond figures, which relate to children; that is, if the same child was in court twice during the year he was counted twice. Cases dealt with informally as well as official cases are included.

<sup>2</sup>Population estimates were based on the 1910 and 1920 censuses. If the court exercised jurisdiction over a county, the population of the county was used.

<sup>3</sup>Chicago, fiscal year December 1 to November 30; Detroit and Washington, fiscal year ending June 30 of the year indicated; Boston, some years calendar, other years fiscal.

TABLE NO. II  
AGE DISTRIBUTION OF ADULT POPULATION OF PRISONS AND REFORMATORIES, JAILS AND WORKHOUSES, 1880 TO 1923<sup>1</sup>  
Population<sup>2</sup> of prisons and reformatories, jails and workhouses.

Age of prisoner	Number of commitments		Number of persons present on census day		Per cent distribution of commitments		Per cent distribution of persons present on census day	
	<sup>3</sup> 1923	1910	<sup>4</sup> 1904	1890	1923	1910	1904	1890
Total	330,457	414,684	138,901	77,360	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
18 to 20 years <sup>5</sup>	31,086	35,119	13,629	9,326	9.4	8.5	9.8	12.1
21 to 24 years	52,766	64,212	22,239	16,215	16.0	15.5	16.0	21.0
25 to 34 years	100,007	129,974	42,451	27,426	30.3	31.3	30.6	35.5
35 to 44 years	80,829	99,023	31,720	13,848	24.5	23.9	22.8	17.9
45 years and over	65,769	86,356	28,862	10,545	19.9	20.8	20.8	13.6

<sup>1</sup>Compiled from published reports of the U. S. Bureau of Census.

<sup>2</sup>Excluding population under 18 years of age and population, age unknown.

<sup>3</sup>Reported for first six months, estimated for last six months of the year.

<sup>4</sup>Excluding commitments for nonpayment of fine.

<sup>5</sup>Not including persons committed to institutions for juvenile delinquents.