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Paul Wiers

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# JUVENILE DELINQUENCY IN RURAL MICHIGAN

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PAUL WIERS<sup>1</sup>

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## *Introduction*

Juvenile delinquency has been treated frequently as a phenomenon of the effects of growing industrialization on our social life. Much has been done to measure and analyze the juvenile delinquency in large urban areas. Less attention has been given to rural areas.

From an administrative point of view, this procedure is certainly justified. Even though delinquency *per capita* were not higher in cities than in rural districts, the majority of the *actual number* of cases would occur in cities. Since the resources available to combat delinquency are limited, it is wise to use them where they will reach the greatest number. Nevertheless, rural delinquency should be studied both for its own sake, and for the light which comparisons between the delinquency in such areas and that in cities may throw upon the general problem of delinquency.

Unfortunately, records concerning juvenile delinquency in rural counties are even more meagre than those for urban districts. In Michigan, two organized sources of such information exist. The State Welfare Department has published data concerning the volume of juvenile delinquency for certain years based on the reports of the County Welfare Agents. Classifications according to age, race, and nature of offense are also given for 1934-35, though not by counties. Monthly figures for the volume and disposition of delinquents by counties are published by the Michigan Juvenile Delinquency Information Service. This information is based upon reports of the Probate Courts directly to the Information Service.

Although neither of these sources cover delinquency in the wider sense of the term, yet they do show how many children actually came into contact with "the law." They are thus important as a measure of the *minimum* amount of juvenile delinquency. At present, only comparisons between rural *counties* and industrial

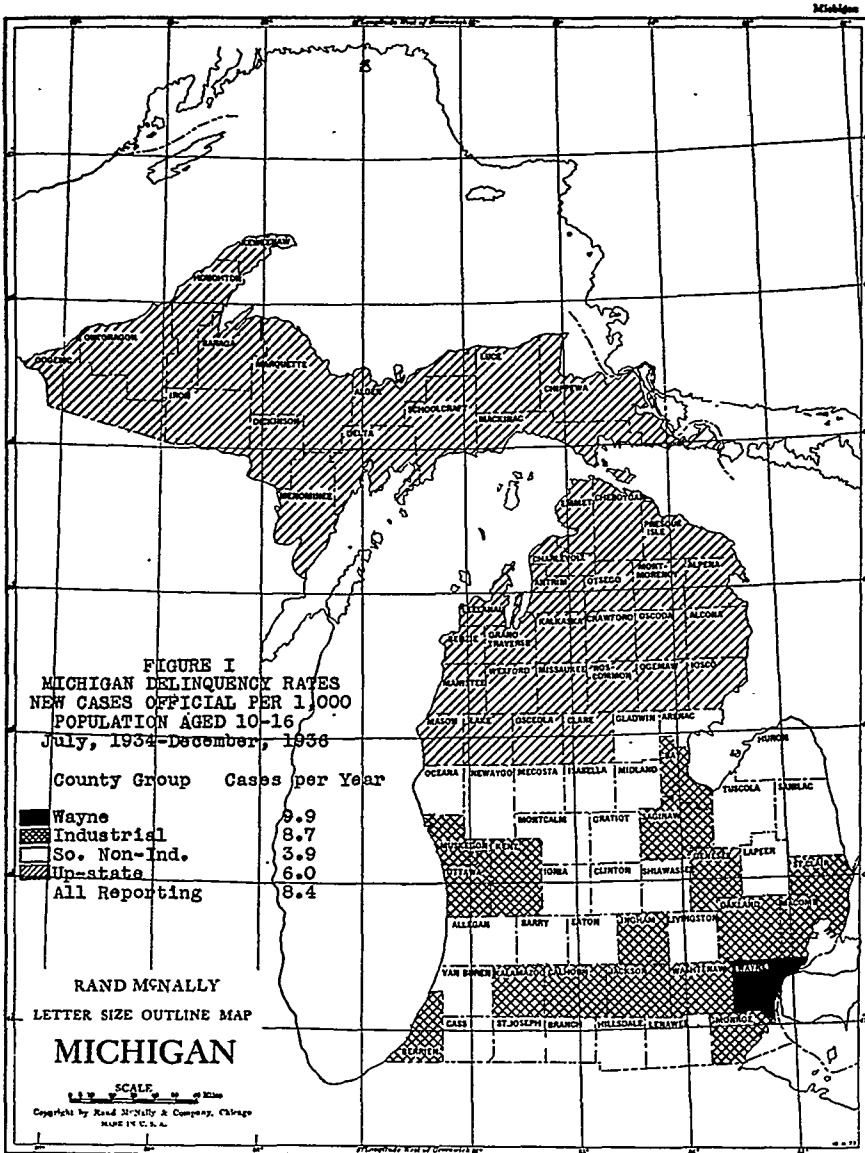
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<sup>1</sup> University of Michigan.

counties are possible. Separate information for the rural parts of industrialized counties is not available.

*County Groupings*

Michigan counties are so widely divergent in character that statements concerning their combined delinquency are likely to be



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misleading. Yet the juvenile populations of many rural counties are so small that they do not constitute fair population samples. For this reason, the counties have here been classified into four main groups:

1. Wayne County
2. Industrialized Counties
3. Southern Non-Industrialized Counties
4. Up-State Counties

The industrialized group includes all those counties, except Wayne, which have a population density of more than 90 persons per square mile. All cities of 18,000 or more population (1930) in Michigan are included in these counties. With four exceptions, each county has one or more cities of over 25,000 population. Wayne county, which includes Detroit, has been shown separately.

The southern non-industrialized county group consists of agricultural counties, all of which adjoin high population density counties. Up-state counties are low in population density, and relatively distant from large industrial centers. Agriculture, and to some extent forestry and mining, constitute their major occupations. The Up-state group includes all counties in the upper peninsula and the northern part of the lower peninsula. Figure 1 shows the geographical locations of the counties. Table I presents the area, population density, and the percentage of total employed who were engaged in either agriculture, forestry, fishing or mining, for each county group.

TABLE I  
COUNTY GROUP CHARACTERISTICS

County Group	Population Density	1930 Census		
		% of State's Population Aged 10-16	% of State's Area	Total Employed: % Engaged in Agri., Fishing Forestry & Mining
Wayne	3,046.7	36.3	1.1	.9
Ind.	167.6	34.7	17.9	12.8
So. Non-Ind.	41.5	15.2	28.3	44.8
Upstate	18.3	13.8	52.7	44.4
Michigan	84.2	100.0	100.0	15.1

The use of county groups eliminates some of the objections to which comparisons between individual counties are subject. The

number of counties in each group is sufficiently large to permit some "balancing" of differences in court procedure. The population units are also large enough to constitute fair samples.

### *Volume of Delinquency*

Rural county groups were consistently below the state average in the number of official new cases per capita throughout the period. (Table II.) State Welfare reports show the rural counties to have 54% of the state average for 1932-33 and 1934-35. Industrialized counties had 117%. Information Service data for July, 1934-December, 1936, gives 58% of the state average for the rural counties, 111% for the industrialized.

TABLE II

NEW CASES, OFFICIAL PER 1000 POPULATION, AGED 10-16

Year <sup>1</sup>	<i>All Reporting</i>		<i>South Non-</i>		
	<i>Counties</i>	<i>Wayne</i>	<i>Industrial</i>	<i>Industrial</i>	<i>Up-State</i>
	(STATE WELFARE REPORTS)				
1932-33	8.8	11.6	9.6	3.5	4.1
1934-35	8.5	10.8	8.5	5.0	6.2
	(INFORMATION SERVICE REPORTS)				
1934-35	8.9	11.1	8.6	3.5	6.4
1935-36	8.0	8.8	8.5	4.3	6.1
1936 <sup>2</sup>	8.4	9.9	9.1	3.9	5.2
30 Mo.s <sup>2</sup>	8.4	9.9	8.7	3.9	6.0

<sup>1</sup> July to June.

<sup>2</sup> Converted to yearly basis, 1936—is for July to December, 1936, converted to yearly basis.

Each year the cases per capita for Wayne County were more numerous than those of the other high population-density counties combined. The latter counties likewise had considerably higher rates than their adjoining agricultural counties or the up-state counties. Despite the mobility afforded by the automobile and the proximity of youngsters in the southern non-industrialized counties to industrialized centers, the delinquency rate for these counties is noticeably lower than that of the up-state group in each of the years.

Industrialized counties reported a much smaller percentage of unofficial cases than the rural counties (Table III). Urban counties are better provided with other child-care agencies. Many of the unofficial cases do not reach the attention of their juvenile courts. The number of individuals involved per official case is about the

same in both rural and industrialized counties. Although on the basis of official and unofficial cases combined up-state counties ranked with the industrialized counties, without question actual delinquency rates were higher in the industrial counties than in either of the rural groups.

**TABLE III**  
**INDIVIDUALS REPORTED AS INVOLVED IN NEW CASES**  
**OFFICIAL COMPARED TO DISPOSITIONS REPORTED**  
 July, 1934-December, 1936

<i>County Group</i>	<i>Number of Individuals Reported</i>	<i>Number of Dispositions Reported</i>	<i>Unofficial Cases as % of Official Cases</i>	<i>Individuals Per Official Case</i>
Wayne	5,746	6,394	.5	1.06
Industrialized	4,117	5,019	29.5	1.11
So. Non-Ind.	606	867	65.2	1.09
Up-State	819	1,246	77.7	1.14
All Reporting	11,288	13,526	19.7	1.09

The juvenile delinquency rate, which in 1932-33 was 8.8 cases per 1000 population aged 10-16 in 66 counties reporting to the State Welfare Department, tended to be lower in subsequent years. From July, 1934 to June, 1936, new cases in industrialized counties declined. In contrast, the rates for the rural county groups rose. During the past six months these trends have been reversed.<sup>1</sup>

**TABLE IV**  
**NEW CASES OFFICIAL AND THEIR DISPOSITION**  
 July, 1934-December, 1936

<i>County Group</i>	<i>New Cases Official</i>	<i>New Cases Un-official</i>	<i>Number of Individuals</i>		<i>Dispositions of Individuals Involved in New Cases Official</i>			
			<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>	<i>Dis-missed</i>	<i>Placed on Pro-bation</i>	<i>Sent to Institutions</i>	
							<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>
Wayne	5,412	29	4,989	757	2,664	3,033	412	285
Industrial	3,703	1,093	3,299	818	1,641	2,800	406	172
So. Non-Ind.	558	364	484	122	178	562	76	51
Up-State	717	557	707	112	275	805	107	59
All Reporting	10,390	2,043	9,479	1,809	4,758	7,200	1,001	567

Over 10,000 official new cases were reported to the Information Service during the thirty months from July, 1934 to December, 1936 (Table IV). The number of dispositions reported is 20% larger than the number of individuals stated as involved in the official new

<sup>1</sup> July to December, 1936.

cases. This discrepancy is partially due to the inclusion of recidivists in the data for dispositions.

The percentage which girls form of the total number of individuals involved in official new cases varies from 13 to 20% (Table V). Peculiarly enough Wayne is paired with the up-state group in this instance (13%), while the other industrialized counties and the southern rural group have a somewhat larger percentage of girls (20%).

TABLE V  
PERCENTAGE OF GIRLS AND BOYS CASES INSTITUTIONALIZED  
July, 1934-December, 1936

County Group	No. of Boys in 100 Typical Dispositions	% Boys Form of the Total No. Institutionalized	Number Institutionalized in 100 Typical Dispositions			% Institutionalized	
			Total	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Wayne	86.8	59.1	10.9	6.4	4.5	7.4	34.1
Industrial	80.1	70.2	11.5	8.1	3.4	10.1	17.1
So. Non-Ind.	79.9	59.8	14.6	8.7	5.9	10.9	29.4
Up-State	86.3	64.5	13.3	8.6	4.7	10.0	34.3
All Reporting	84.0	63.8	11.6	7.4	4.2	8.8	26.3

*Dispositions of Individuals Involved*

Interesting differences in the treatment of delinquents are disclosed if the dispositions for the separate county groups are compared (Table VI). Industrialized counties dismissed 38%, whereas rural counties dismissed only 22%. Correspondingly, the former group placed a smaller percentage on probation or in institutions. On the other hand, the proportion of those institutionalized to those placed on probation is almost the same for each group.

TABLE VI  
DISPOSITIONS  
July, 1934-December, 1936

County Group	% Dismissed	% Placed on Probation	% Sent to Institutions	Institutionalized as % of Those Placed on Probation
Wayne	41.7	47.4	10.9	23.0
Industrial	32.7	55.8	11.5	20.6
So. Non-Ind.	20.5	64.8	14.6	22.6
Up-State	22.1	64.6	13.3	20.6
All Reporting	35.2	53.2	11.6	21.8

Of one-hundred typical dispositions of delinquents, eighty-four were boys and sixteen were girls. Of these eighty-four, 7.4 boys (8.8%) were committed to institutions. Of the sixteen girls, 4.2 (26.3%) were committed. Although fewer girls are formally charged with delinquency, a greater percentage of those that are so charged are committed to institutions.

Greater uniformity exists between the county groups with respect to the percentage of boys committed, than with the girls (Table V). The industrialized counties *excluding Wayne* institutionalize a considerably lower proportion of the girls' cases, though even these counties committed a larger percentage of the girls than the boys. Wayne County institutionalized a lower proportion of boys, but a larger proportion of girls than other counties.

The percentage of juveniles on probation in the various county groups correlates with population density. Industrial counties had rates over twice that of the non-industrialized (Table VII). If the relative numbers of new cases and the percentages placed on probation are compared, it appears that the average term of probation in Wayne County must be slightly longer than the state average, whereas the term in up-state counties is considerably shorter.

TABLE VII  
 PROBATIONERS PER 1000 POP. AGED 10-16  
 END OF MONTH AVERAGE  
 September, 1936-December, 1936

<i>County Group</i>	<i>On Probation</i>
Wayne .....	5.8
Industrial .....	4.9
So. Non-Ind. ....	2.9
Up-State .....	1.7
All Reporting .....	4.7

*Seasonal Changes*

Delinquency for all reporting counties combined tends to reach two peaks a year, one in the spring in April or May, and one in the fall in October or November. From December to February the number of new cases is lower than at any other time of the year. (Figures 2-6.)

Only official new cases for the up-state counties gave no indication of seasonal variation. Other groups show remarkably consistent variation with the seasons of the year. Furthermore, the peaks and lows correspond quite closely between county groups.



It would be interesting to know whether this seasonal movement is due to seasonal tendencies in certain types of offenses.

Differences in court procedures or in the population samples can scarcely be regarded as the causes of the variations noted. The number of new cases per capita and their seasonal variation and trend are nearly the same when the figures for "identical counties" published monthly in the "Delinquency News Letter" are used.

In this series, for a particular month only those counties which reported for that month during both the current and preceding year are included. Though the sample varies slightly from month to month, for 75% of the counties included during the thirty months, 80% or more of the reports called for were received. The average monthly county coverage is 50%, population coverage, 70%.

Analysis of the percentage composition of dispositions did not show any uniform seasonal tendencies. There is considerable variation from month to month in the percentages of those dismissed, placed on probation, and committed to institutions. The variations, however, show no regularity of either a seasonal or trend nature.

#### *Age, Race, and Offense*

Age, race and offense distributions by counties are not available. Table VIII presents these distributions for 77 counties exclusive of Wayne during July 1, 1934 to June 30, 1935. Since wayward minors (aged 17, under 18) have been included, the figures are not strictly comparable to the other tables. Nevertheless, they present an approximate picture.

TABLE VIII  
AGE, RACE, AND OFFENSE DISTRIBUTIONS  
DELINQUENT INDIVIDUALS REPORTED BY 77 COURTS  
WAYNE EXCLUDED

<i>Age</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>
Under 10			
10 Years, Under 11.....	124	110	14
11 Years, Under 12.....	150	133	17
12 Years, Under 13.....	215	198	17
13 Years, Under 14.....	388	345	43
14 Years, Under 15.....	597	519	78
15 Years, Under 16.....	833	681	152
16 Years, Under 17.....	848	653	195
17 Years, Under 18.....	764	582	182
Unknown .....	46	30	16
Totals .....	3,965	3,251	714

Race	Total	Boys	Girls
White .....	3,546	2,917	629
Negro .....	371	295	76
Other .....	48	39	9
Totals .....	3,965	3,251	714

*Reason Referred*

Automobile Stealing .....	152	152	0
Burglary or Unlawful Entry .....	661	656	5
Hold-Up .....	152	152	0
Other Stealing .....	1,072	1,004	68
Truancy .....	410	288	122
Running Away .....	224	121	103
Ungovernable .....	399	184	215
Sex Offenses .....	247	110	137
Injury to Person .....	99	87	12
Act of Carelessness or Mischief .....	381	356	25
Traffic Violation .....	74	69	5
Liquor or Drug Offense .....	8	8	0
Other .....	86	64	22
Totals .....	3,965	3,251	714

Over 50% of all individuals involved (wayward minors excluded) were fifteen or sixteen years of age. Burglary and stealing constituted 60% of the offenses charged for the boys. Among the girls accused of delinquency, the highest ranking offense was "ungovernable," 30%, while "sex offenses" came second with 19%.

*Summary*

Though delinquency is somewhat less prevalent in rural areas than in urban districts even on a per-capita basis, there is considerable rural delinquency. The courts in rural areas also handle many cases unofficially which in industrialized counties are dealt with by other child-care agencies.

Rural counties dismissed a lower percentage of the individuals involved, and placed more on probation or in institutions. At any given time, however, the number of juveniles per capita on probation is larger in industrialized counties than in rural districts.

Definite seasonal variation in the number of delinquents is found for industrial counties. Non-industrialized counties show more doubtful indications of seasonal change. Seasonal changes were not discernible in the types of dispositions either for industrial or rural county groups.

OFFICIAL NEW CASES  
PER 100,000 POPULATION AGED 10-16

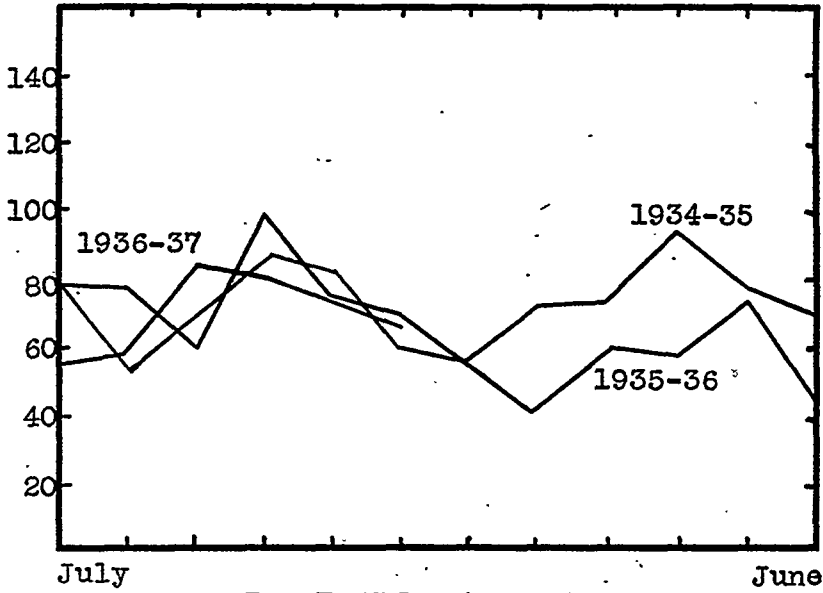


FIGURE II. All Reporting Counties

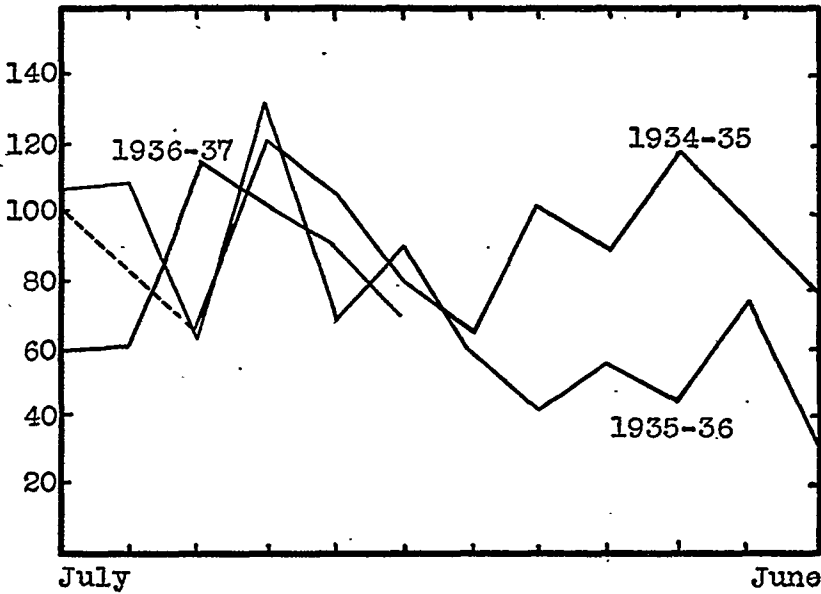


FIGURE III. Wayne County

OFFICIAL NEW CASES  
PER 100,000 POPULATION AGED 10-16

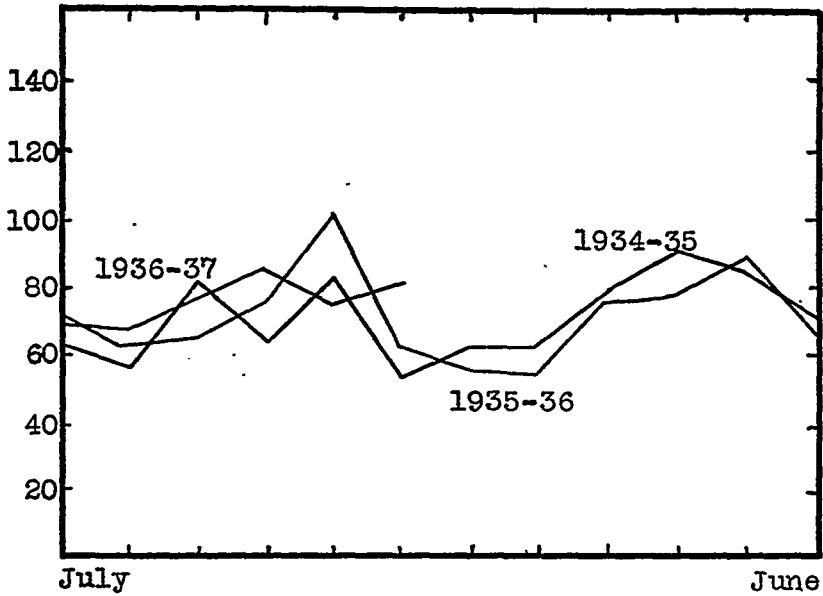


FIGURE IV. Industrial Counties

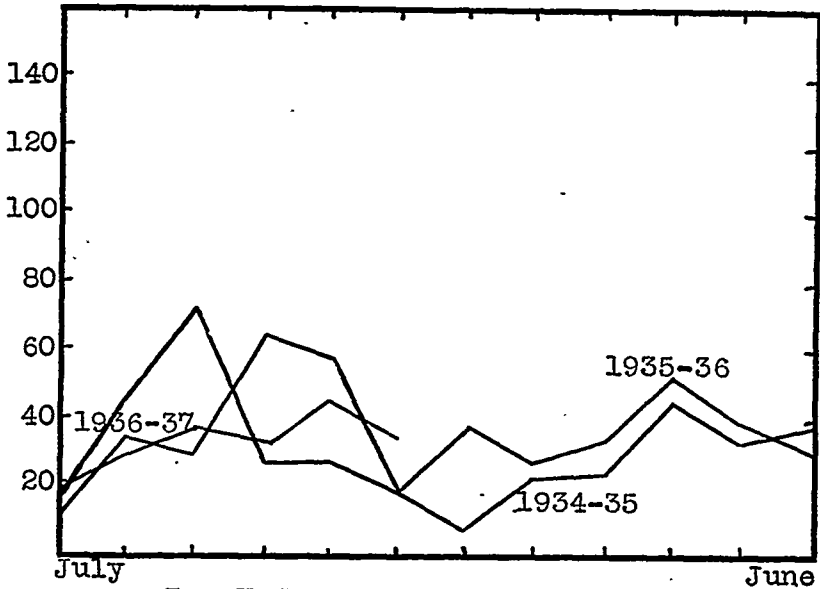


FIGURE V. Southern Non-Industrialized Counties

OFFICIAL NEW CASES  
PER 100,000 POPULATION AGED 10-16

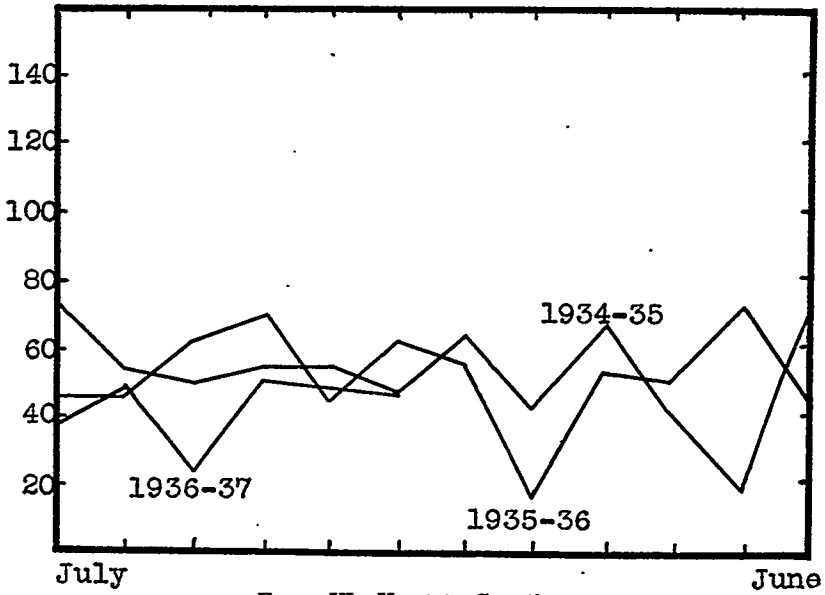


FIGURE VI. Up-state Counties