

1972

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### Recommended Citation

Karl O. Christiansen, S. Gram Jensen, Crime in Denmark--A Statistical History, 63 J. Crim. L. Criminology & Police Sci. 82 (1972)

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## CRIME IN DENMARK—A STATISTICAL HISTORY

KARL O. CHRISTIANSEN\* AND S. GRAM JENSEN†

Denmark's population numbers less than five million persons. In most respects the population may be characterized as homogeneous; there exist no minority group conflicts. The main part of the population lives in towns, 28% in the capital and 31% in other towns in 1960. Only 41% of the population lives in rural areas. Apart from a considerable movement of persons from rural districts to urban districts population mobility is low.

Denmark is often termed a welfare state. The social welfare and security system provides maternity care, free meals for needy children, home help service, relief to orphans, child welfare and sickness insurance, pensions for disabled persons, and aid to people suffering from chronic diseases. Denmark's different forms of poor relief include unemployment insurance, old age pensions, relief to widows and widowers, and subsidies for funeral expenses.

The relatively high social stability of the population and the small size of the country make Denmark an ideal place for sociological and criminological research. The identification of a person is only in rare cases a problem. Because of a good demographic bookkeeping system, it is almost always possible to trace an individual.

The official Danish criminal statistics date back to 1828. The first four annual surveys were published in a governmental periodical; they covered the years 1828-31. The thirteenth volume of Collection of Statistical Tables (Statistisk Tabelværk) was published in 1847 and contained "detailed crime tables for the Kingdom of Denmark for the years 1832-40, with a general exposition of their content." Since 1933 they have been published in Statistical Reports (Statistiske Meddelelser) which is a direct continuation of the Tables.

Today information on offenses for public use is registered in two places: the local Penal Registers and the Central Police Register (Rigsregistraturen). The Central Police Register is mainly for

the use of the police but it contains information which goes far beyond an individual's conviction record. It is almost always possible to find an individual who at any point in his life has been dealt with officially as a result of violations of the penal code. From the Local Penal Registers is taken the major part of Denmark's annual "Criminal Statistics."

Since the total number of all crimes in Denmark cannot be computed, this article deals only with those crimes which have been registered with the police. Furthermore, because an empirical study of crime in Denmark must be based first and foremost on those crimes which are solved we shall direct our attention primarily to only one-third of all registered crimes. The criminal statistics on which this article is based date from 1841 to 1968. The official criminal statistics of today contain, among other things: (1) *police statistics* (information on offenses known to the police); (2) *statistics of sanctions* (information on penalties imposed on offenders by law enforcement agencies);<sup>1</sup> (3) *prison statistics* (information on imprisoned offenders); (4) *statistics of first offenders and recidivists*.<sup>2</sup>

These categories of crime statistics are based on different statistical units. The statistical unit for the police statistics is "the offense known to the police." For sanction statistics, the statistical unit is "the sanction used against an offender in consequence of one or more offenses." It should be noted that the statistics of sanctions express the number of convictions and other sanctions, not the number of persons convicted. A person registered in a given calendar year, for example, may have incurred more than one penal sanction.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The measuring unit is the sanction imposed, such as imprisonment, preventive detention, confinement in a mental hospital, conditional sentence or charge withdrawal after the accused is proven guilty. Data is available on the number of sanctions imposed, their nature, and personal information about the offender.

<sup>2</sup> Information on the recidivism rate is available from some of the annual reports of the Director of Prison Administration and the National Commissioner of Police. The latest available reports from these two sources cover 1967 and 1970 respectively.

<sup>3</sup> The Institute of Criminal Science in Copenhagen has found that the number of men sentenced is roughly 10% less than the number of sentences imposed, for this reason.

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There are three fundamental concepts in crime description: 1) *incidence*, 2) *prevalence*, and 3) *risk*. On the basis of such concepts, the distribution of crime in society can be numerically described in different ways. The *incidence* of crime may be defined by the number of persons per population group who are known to have committed criminal offenses within a given period of time. The *prevalence* of crime may be defined as that proportion of the total population that has committed a criminal offense up to a given point in time. The *crime risk* may be defined as the probability of occurrence of certain criminal activity in the future. It indicates the probability that a person chosen at random from a specified population will be recorded as a criminal within a particular period.

More precise meanings for these concepts will appear below. The following sections will be devoted to a survey of crime in Denmark based on 1) statistics of sanctions, 2) police statistics, 3) prison statistics and 4) the extent of criminality within the Danish population. Finally, we will

offer a few summarizing observations on the trend of crime in Denmark.

#### THE STATISTICS OF SANCTIONS

The first dozen years for which data on crime in Denmark are available demonstrate, as one should expect, the difficult statistical task which law enforcement authorities had undertaken. While we are tempted to begin our survey of crime in Denmark in 1866 when a new criminal code was introduced, it is difficult to avoid referring to some interesting facts reported during the two Danish-German wars in 1848-50 and in 1864.

Based on the incidence of prosecutions of men during the period 1841-65, we find that the first decade of this period was characterized by an irregular downward trend in the incidence of crime. This trend culminated in a very low rate of crime during the war years 1848-50. A subsequent increase in the crime rate after the war did not restore the crime rate to its 1841 level. In 1864, again a year of war, the crime rate once again declined appreciably. Part of the explanation for the de-

Number of persons prosecuted (in absolute figures)

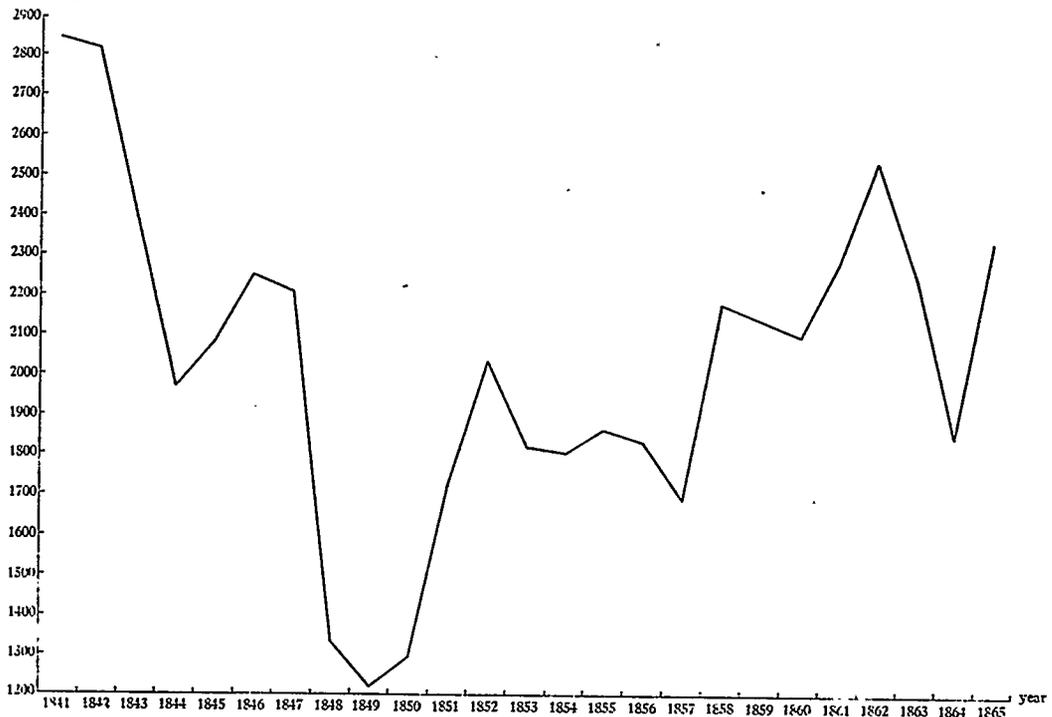


FIGURE 1.  
Number of persons prosecuted during the years 1841-1865.

The incidence of convictions per thousand

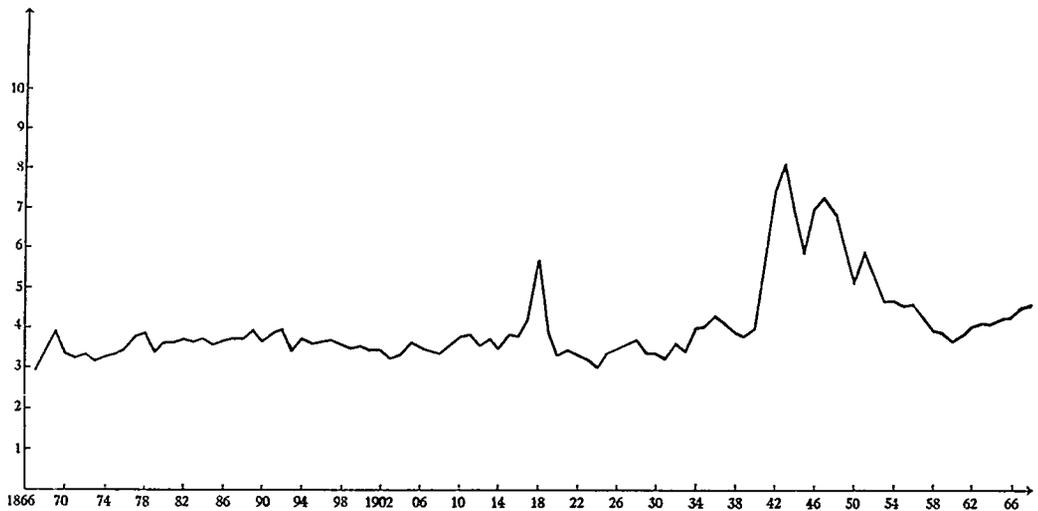


FIGURE 2.

The incidence of convictions of men during the years 1867-1968. (Convictions of men for offenses against the Criminal Code).

crease in crime during these war periods can be attributed both to the low price of rye during these years and to the removal of the socially most dangerous men into the army.

After the introduction of the Criminal Code of 1866<sup>4</sup> the crime rate rose to a significantly higher level than in the previous period. It is questionable whether this was a consequence of the new code or an expression of a real increase. This development is depicted in Figure 2, based on the incidence of convictions of men. The curve has been surprisingly constant over the last hundred years. The rate of male convictions has remained between 0.3 and 0.4% annually. Apart from the most recent years, only three exceptions from this static rate should be pointed out: there was a considerable increase in crime in 1918, a less pronounced increase in 1936, and a prolonged rise in the level of crime from 1940 to 1953-55. For the years 1944-45 the numbers do not reflect a real trend because of the dissolution of the Danish Police Corps in September 1944, which accounted for the rise in the level in crime in 1944. After 1946 the incidence of crime in Denmark declined markedly, reaching a post-war low of 0.37% in 1960. Recent years have witnessed another increase in the crime rate. In 1963 and 1964 the rate of incidence was 0.40%

<sup>4</sup>The Criminal Code of 1866 was in force until the end of 1932. At that time the Criminal Code of 1930 became effective.

and by 1968 it had climbed to 0.45%. It is noteworthy that the world economic crises of the late 1920's and early 1930's had a negligible effect on the Danish crime rates.

Three important components of this general trend of crime in Denmark from 1866 to 1968 are the number of male offenders, the number of crimes of violence committed and the age group composition of offenders. With respect to the composition of offenders according to sex, we find that the percentage of female offenders has declined from 25% in 1866-70 to 7% by 1968. This trend was upset for a brief period in World War II when the number of female convictions rose at a higher rate than the number of male convictions. Crimes of violence among men have shown a vascillating trend.

From 1867-70 to 1905 the rate of violent crimes increased from 0.25 to 0.75 per thousand. Thereafter the level of violent crime decreased markedly, and despite a considerable increase in the 1930's, the violent crime level in 1966 was the same as it had been one hundred years ago. Sexual offenses have exhibited a similar increase and decline, although some criminologists credit the most recent decline to the legalization of obscene literature and photographs in 1967 and 1969.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup>See B. KUTSCHINSKY, *STUDIES ON PORNOGRAPHY AND SEX CRIMES IN DENMARK: A REPORT TO THE UNITED STATES PRESIDENTIAL COMMISSION ON OBSCENITY AND PORNOGRAPHY* (1970).

TABLE 1

SANCTIONS IMPOSED ON MEN IN 1968 FOR OFFENSES AGAINST THE CRIMINAL CODE, ACCORDING TO THE NATURE OF THE SANCTIONS AND THE AGE OF THE OFFENDERS. ABSOLUTE AND RELATIVE FIGURES.

Age	Charge withdr. Abs. figures	Fine Abs. figures	More severe sanc. Abs. figures	Total of Absolute	Sanctions per 100,000
15 years old	413	183	3	599	1,562
16 " "	657	227	35	919	2,434
17 " "	624	251	144	1,019	2,668
18 " "	338	210	617	1,165	2,999
19 " "	239	178	705	1,122	2,799
20 " "	203	144	674	1,021	2,394
21 " "	165	117	570	852	1,901
22 " "	121	96	510	727	1,596
23 " "	95	78	524	697	1,580
24 " "	68	51	439	558	1,357
25-29 years old	236	234	1,273	1,743	1,028
30-39 " "	264	260	1,277	1,801	635
40-49 " "	134	183	649	966	325
50-59 " "	86	122	285	493	173
60 years and over	46	66	109	221	59
Total	3,689	2,400	7,814	13,903	763

The two most significant increases in the crime rate over the last hundred years occurred in 1918 and during the Second World War. The 1918 increase incorporated an increase of crime of 120% for men 15-20 years of age, 80% for men 21-24 years of age, and 30% for men 25-40 years of age. The increase in crime during the Second World War was the same for all age groups. War conditions affected criminality in younger and older men the same way.

The fact that the incidence of crime in Denmark over the last hundred years has remained within the rather narrow limits of 0.3% to 0.4%<sup>6</sup> is most remarkable in view of the corresponding violent expansion of industry. The explanation is not found in changes in the law. The rate of thefts, for instance, fluctuated over the period within narrow limits and did not show a long-term tendency to rise. It may be that the development of social welfare and security measures and a modern criminal policy was able to counteract or eliminate the crime factors which usually correlate with industrialization and urbanization.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup>This is not a statistical artifact. See CHRISTIE, *KRIMINALSOSIOLOGI* 51 (1965); Christie, *På kant med samfunnet*, in *DETTE ER NORGE* 235 (J. T. Ruud ed. 1963).

<sup>7</sup>Christie has interpreted the static nature of the Danish crime rate as an expression of a stable social attitude towards the severity of penalties. Christie, *Changes in Penal Values*, in *2 SCANDINAVIAN STUDIES*

With the advent in 1960 of the publication of a conspectus of statistics of sanctions, the criminal population has been broken down into yearly classifications of offenders by age up to age 24, at which time offenders are classified in age groups covering several years. Information has been provided about the number of sentences, fines, and charge withdrawals (where the accused is guilty) for offenses against the penal code. By adding together these various sanctions an aggregate expression of the crimes which engendered them is obtained.

The statistics for 1968 show that in this year a total of 15,430 sanctions were imposed, of which 13,903 were imposed on male offenders and 1,527

IN CRIMINOLOGY 161 (1968). At the same time, an increasingly higher regard for individual liberties may have created a reluctance to apply penal measures. Christie has also examined the problem from the viewpoint that the upper limit of the sanction rate indicates how many people a society feels it can safely punish. The lower limit would then show the society's minimum demand for punishment to serve the socially useful functions of singling out scapegoats, objects of aggression, and illustrations of socially disapproved behavior. These considerations are reminiscent of the theories in E. DURKHEIM, *DE LA DIVISION DU TRAVAIL SOCIAL* (1893); P. FAUCONNET, *LA RESPONSABILITÉ* (1928); S. RANULF, *THE JEALOUSY OF THE GODS AND CRIMINAL LAW IN ATHENS* (1933-34). See also V. AUBERT, *OM STRAFFENS SOSIALE FUNKSJON* (1954); Reiwald, *Verbrechensverhütung als Teil der Gesellschaftspsychohygiene*, in *Die Prophylaxe des Verbrechens* (H. Meng ed. 1948).

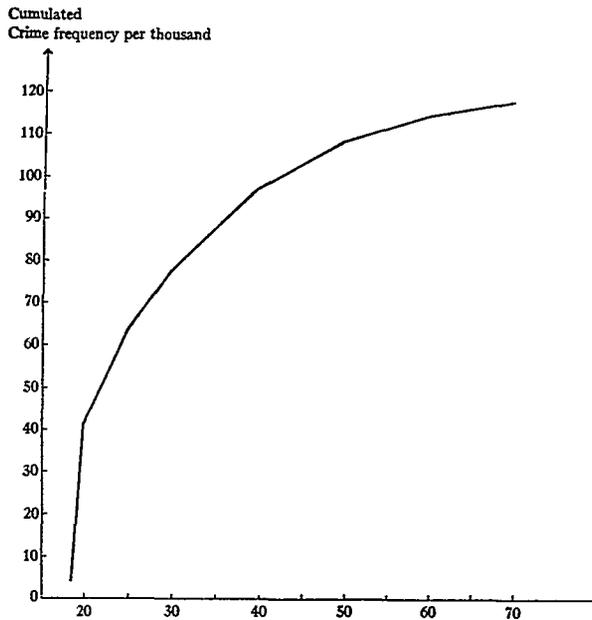


FIGURE 3.

The risk of being registered as criminal shown from the crime frequency for men (based on the statistics of sanctions) 1968.

on female offenders. Of the total, 8,447 of the penalties were more severe than fines. Female offenders, who have little numerical importance, are not considered below.

Table 1 immediately shows that the 15-24 year age group is criminally the most active. Of the 13,903 sanctions which were imposed on male offenders in 1968, the 15-24 year olds accounted for no less than 8,679, or 62.4%. As has so often been pointed out, the crime problem is to a great extent a problem of youth.

The table also shows the following distribution of sanctions: charge withdrawals: 26.5%; fines: 17.3%; more serious sanctions: 56.2%. More informative is the incidence of sanctions, measured as the number of sanctions in relation to the size of the age group involved. The sanction incidence is comparatively high at age 15, rises sharply the following year and culminates at age 18 with approximately 3,000 sanctions per 100,000 men. From age 20 the sanction incidence falls quickly, and by age 24 it is below that of the 15 year olds.

The crime prevalence defined above is a numerical expression of the distribution of criminals in the population. Christiansen and Nielsen<sup>8</sup> com-

<sup>8</sup> Christiansen & Nielsen, *Nulevende straffede maend i Danmark*, in *NORDISK TIDSSKRIFT FOR KRIMINALVIDENSKAB* 18 (1959).

puted that the crime prevalence in Denmark as of December 31, 1953, was between 7% and 8%. The calculations were based on the official criminal statistics for the period 1890-1953, which take into account population and mortality statistics and cover all men under age 72 who received sanctions greater than fines.

The crime risk, also defined above, is a third numerical expression of the extent of crime. The crime risk was calculated in a Danish study<sup>9</sup> which, using a procedure slightly different from that employed by Dahlberg,<sup>10</sup> examined the years 1937, 1939, 1949, 1951, 1953 and 1955. Some results of this study, supplemented by figures for the year 1968 are summarized below.

The figures for 1968 show the risk that a man who lives to age 70 will be punished for a criminal offense with a sanction more serious than a fine is about 12%. For a woman the corresponding risk has for a number of years been as low as 1-2%.

The risk for each age group for the years 1937, 1951, 1955 and 1968 is calculated from the inci-

<sup>9</sup> Christiansen, Møller, & Nielsen, *Kriminalitetsrisikoen i Danmark, før og efter krigen* in *NORDISK TIDSSKRIFT FOR KRIMINALVIDENSKAB* 300 (1960) and 73 (1961).

<sup>10</sup> Dahlberg, *A New Method in Crime Statistics Applied to the Population of Sweden*, 39 *J. CRIM. L.C. & P.S.* 327 (1948).

TABLE 2

RISK OF BEING CONVICTED OF AN OFFENSE AGAINST THE CRIMINAL CODE, WITH A SANCTION EXCEEDING A FINE.  
(MALES, BY AGE GROUP, FOR CHOSEN YEARS)

Year	Age Group	Basis of Calculation		Incidence Mean incidence per thousand of first-time offenders	Risks Cumulated incidence per thousand persons reaching the upper age limit
		Number of first-time offenders	Population		
1937	below 18 years	10	100,800	0.10	0.30
	18-20 years	674	99,200	6.79	20.67
	21-24 "	699	128,200	5.45	42.47
	25-29 "	457	163,200	2.82	56.57
	30-39 "	605	280,600	2.16	78.17
	40-49 "	292	225,100	1.30	91.17
	50-59 "	141	179,500	0.79	99.07
	60-69 "	61	123,400	0.49	103.97
1951	below 18 years	27	90,800	0.30	0.90
	18-20 years	821	87,500	9.38	29.04
	21-24 "	672	117,300	5.73	51.96
	25-29 "	516	153,200	3.37	68.81
	30-39 "	775	311,800	2.49	93.71
	40-49 "	527	291,700	1.81	111.81
	50-59 "	284	227,200	1.25	124.31
	60-69 "	88	162,100	0.54	129.71
1955	below 18 years	31	96,800	0.32	0.96
	18-20 years	795	91,000	8.74	27.18
	21-24 "	595	114,200	5.21	48.02
	25-29 "	401	144,700	2.77	61.87
	30-39 "	565	306,600	1.84	80.27
	40-49 "	392	302,800	1.29	93.17
	50-59 "	214	245,400	0.87	101.87
	60-69 "	94	172,500	0.54	107.27
1968	below 18 years	167	114,400	1.46	4.38
	18-20 years	1,498	121,800	12.30	41.28
	21-24 "	935	175,800	5.60	63.68
	25-29 "	478	169,600	2.82	77.78
	30-39 "	548	283,800	1.93	97.08
	40-49 "	331	296,900	1.11	108.18
	50-59 "	167	283,700	0.59	114.08
	60-69 "	78	216,900	0.36	117.68

dence, given in column 3 of Table 2. The risk for 15-17 year-olds is three times the incidence of crime for that age group. In column 4 the cumulated incidence is shown for all age groups. In 1937 the rate increased from 0.30 per thousand for 15-17 year-olds, to 20.67 per thousand for 18-20 year-olds, to 103.97 per thousand, or about 10%, for males living to age 70. It can be seen that the risk calculated on the basis of the annual incidence will vary from year to year. Thus a prediction based on risk figures will only hold true if the

incidence of crime remains at approximately the same level as that of the base year.

The risk for both sexes is higher in the towns than in the country. The risk for crimes against property and sexual crimes shows its highest increase at age 18-20, while that for crimes of violence increases strongly until age 25. The risk curves for crimes of violence and crimes against property follow the characteristic course of a sharp rise in the lower age groups and a falling off with age. In contrast, the risk of being registered for

TABLE 3

OFFENSES KNOWN TO THE POLICE IN 1968 CLASSIFIED  
ACCORDING TO KIND OF CRIME

	Absolute numbers	Percentages
Sexual offenses.....	3,060	1.6
Crimes of violence.....	3,309	1.7
Offenses against property:		
Thefts (including		
thefts of motorve-		
hicles).....	162,379	
Embezzlement, fraud,		
breach of financial		
trust and misappro-		
priation of funds. ....	12,894	
Other offenses against		
property.....	10,955	95.8
Other offenses.....	1,729	0.9
Total.....	194,326	100.0

sexual offenses remains more or less constant over the years.

#### THE POLICE STATISTICS CRIMINALITY IN 1968

Danish police began collecting statistics on crime in 1921. The unit used in police statistics is the offense, either reported directly to the police or brought to their attention in some other way. However, the statistics do not include all punishable offenses. Most recorded offenses include violations against the Danish Civilian Criminal Code of April 15, 1930. But of statutes outside the code only the 1950 animal protection statute and the 1956 statute on abortion<sup>11</sup> have their violations recorded. This is done to provide continuity in the yearly statements, since both cruelty to animals and illegal abortions were formerly criminal offenses.

Police statistics (*Kriminalstatistik 1968, Tabel 8*) for 1968 show 194,326 criminal offenses.<sup>12</sup> Of these, crimes of violence and sexual offenses comprised only 1.7% and 1.6% respectively. Crimes against property account for most of the offenses. Theft alone, including theft of motor vehicles,<sup>13</sup> totaled

<sup>11</sup> The act now in force dates from March 24, 1970.

<sup>12</sup> 260,073 offenses were recorded in 1970 according to the Annual Report of the National Commissioner of Police (POLITIETS ARSBERETNING).

<sup>13</sup> Thefts of motor vehicles in Denmark constitute a separate crime in most cases named *brugsstyveri*.

162,379 cases in 1968, more than 80% of the offenses which came to the knowledge of the police.

The police statistics also contain information on the number of crimes solved. By taking the number of crimes solved as a proportion of the crimes registered and reported, the percentage of crimes solved can be calculated. Although the figure is not exact in that it contains offenses committed the previous year, it is the best approximation available. However, it can at times be misleading. If for a category of crimes, many offenses are committed at the end of one calendar year and are solved the next year, the percentage of crimes solved in the second year may be excessively high, e.g., over 100%. In 1968 the overall percentage of crimes solved was 31%. In the capital the percentage was 24%, in the provincial towns 33% and in the rural districts 37%. In Denmark as in other countries, increasing urbanization is accompanied by a decrease in the percentage of crimes solved.

However, the percentage of crimes solved is a statistic of limited interest because it fluctuates greatly from one category of crimes to another. For the most serious crimes, which attract police resources and public support for the solution, the percentage solved will be high. For certain offenses against property it will be fairly low. Many thefts are only reported to the police because insurance companies demand it, and of these many result in little more action than the filing of a report. In 1968 there were 26 cases of homicide reported and 14 solved, 342 robberies reported and 107 solved, and 162,379 thefts (including thefts of motor vehicles) reported and 37,636 solved. Statistics from this and other years indicate solution of  $\frac{2}{3}$  of all violent crimes. Crimes solved include  $\frac{1}{2}$  of all homicides and sexual offenses,  $\frac{1}{3}$  of all robberies and  $\frac{1}{4}$  of all thefts.

#### CRIMINALITY 1933-66

The following section will examine the trend in crime during the period 1933-66 on the basis of published police statistics. 1933 is chosen as a starting point because the current criminal code came into force that year.

In 1933 a total of 78,078 criminal offenses were registered by the police. A crime index was calculated using this year as a basis (78,078 ~ 100). Figure 4 shows that the period falls into four clearly distinct subperiods.

In the years before World War II, the number of

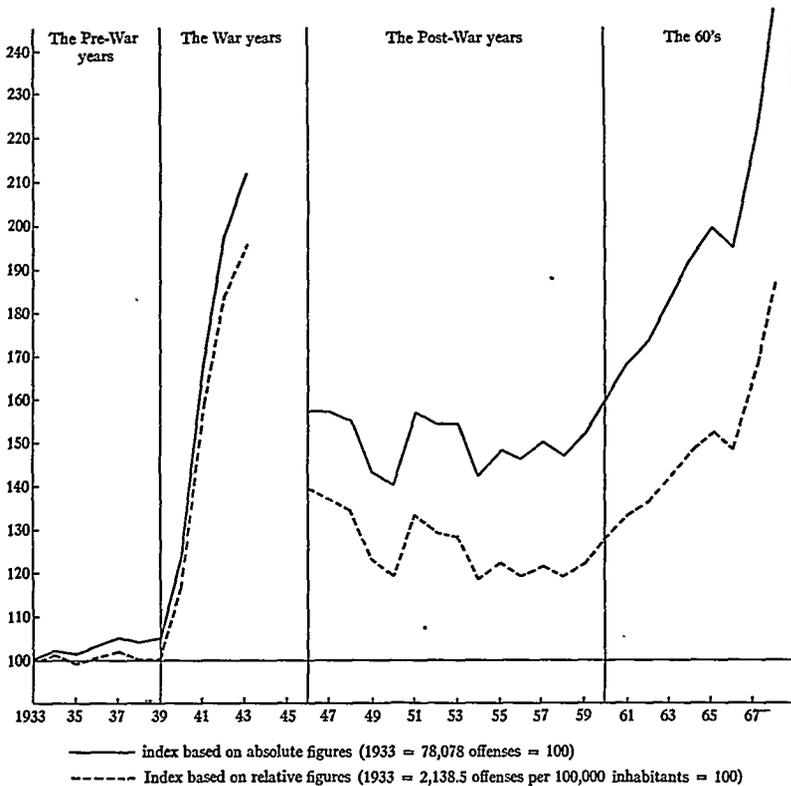


FIGURE 4.  
Offenses known to the police 1933-68 (absolute and relative figures).

offenses remained at about the same level as in 1933. For 1938 and 1939 the index numbers are slightly higher, 104 and 105 respectively. During World War II offenses known to the police increased markedly. For the first four years of the German occupation the respective index numbers are: 1940: 123; 1941: 168; 1942: 198; and 1943: 213. The last index number represents 165,906 criminal offenses, the largest number registered in a single year. For 1944 and 1945 no police statistics are available, because in September 1944 the Danish police force was dissolved by the German occupying power. It did not resume its duties until the liberation of Denmark in May, 1945. There are no grounds for assuming that the increase in crime was halted until well into 1945. This increase during the war years consisted mainly of increases in crimes of violence and offenses against property. These doubled from 1937-38 to 1943. Other offenses increased only by 40% and sexual offenses increased by only 18%.

After 1946 known offenses decreased markedly. In 1946 the index was 157, and it did not exceed

this level until 1960. In 1950 the index dropped to 140, and in 1959 it rose to 152. Thus post-war crime stabilized, but at a rate 33% to 50% higher than the pre-war level. The 1946 decrease was particularly due to a decrease of crimes of violence and offenses against property. The number of sexual offenses hardly varied.

Not until 1960 did the index increase above the level of the first post-war year. An increasing trend is visible in the index numbers of the following years: 1960: 162; 1961: 168; 1962: 173; 1963: 183; 1964: 192; 1965: 199; 1966: 195; 1967: 219; and 1968: 249.

Two factors must be kept in mind while examining these statistics. One is that offenses range from rape and murder to indecent exposure and disorderly conduct. Thus it is difficult to say what social phenomena are involved in a change in the raw data. The other factor is that during this period the population of Denmark increased by more than a million persons, and Danish society became more urbanized. Other demographic

factors like distribution of population by sex or age group may also have affected the trend.

No index has yet been constructed to take these factors into account. The nearest approach is the index of crime rates giving the number of known offenses per 100,000 inhabitants. Figure 4 shows an increase in both the absolute and relative offenses coming to police attention over the 1960's.

It is evident from Figure 4 that the relative figures of crimes per 100,000 population correspond to the trends of the absolute figures, although the numbers are smaller. Like the absolute figures, the relative figures divide the 1933-1968 period into four clearly distinct sub-periods, which differ only in that the third period stretches from 1946 to 1962, rather than to 1959.

During the 1933-39 sub-period, the relative index remained near 100. During the second sub-period it increased sharply from 117 in 1940 to 195 in 1943. In the third sub-period, 1946-62, the index was considerably lower than it had been during the second one. Starting at 139 in 1946, the index fell to a low of 119 in 1950 and remained around 120 until it began to increase at the end of the sub-period, rising to 128 in 1960, 133 in 1961, and 136 in 1962. In 1963, when the index climbed to 142, the fourth sub-period began. During this sub-period the crime index was higher than it had been in the first post-war year. The index rose to 165 in 1967 and 187 in 1968.

The above description shows an increase in crimes registered with the police which by 1968 was nearly 90% above the pre-war level.

#### THE PRISON STATISTICS

In addition to police statistics and statistics on sanctions, the official criminal statistics also contain a summary of data concerning prisoners. *Kriminalstatistik* 1968: Table 27 states that in 1968 a total of 2,133 persons, 2,061 men and 72 women, were sent to state prisons or other major penal institutions. This total, as before, includes only persons sentenced for offenses against the criminal code or for violations of the statutes on animal protection and abortion.

In 1967 2,029 persons, 1,953 men and 76 women, were sent to state prisons and other institutions. According to the Annual Report from the Danish Directorate of Prisons (*Beretning om faengselsvaesenet i Danmark*) for 1967, 86.4% of the male offenders in such institutions were convicted of crimes against property, 62.7% for theft, 10% for

embezzlement, 7.5% for forgery, and the remaining 5.2% for other property crimes. 5.7% of the male offenders were convicted of sexual crimes, 6.1% of crimes of violence, and 1.6% of other crimes.

Of the males imprisoned, 14.9% served sentences of less than 4 months, 18.6% served 4-6 months, and 29.3% served up to 1 year. Prisons for youth accounted for 11.0% of the sentences. Only 4% of the males had to serve more than 2 years. In contrast to many other countries, Denmark makes only moderate use of long-term imprisonment. 16% of the males imprisoned had never been convicted before, including 5.5% who had had earlier charges subsequently withdrawn. 19.3% had 5 or more previous convictions. About 15% of the imprisoned men were age 16-20, 50% age 21-29, 20% age 30-39 and 15.2% 40 or older.

#### THE EXTENT OF CRIMINALITY WITHIN THE DANISH POPULATION PREVALENCE OF CRIME

It would be of great interest to know what percentage of the Danish population has committed offenses against the criminal code. It is possible, however, only to know the percentage which has been convicted, and to recognize that an unknowable amount of criminality remains hidden.

In Denmark, as stated earlier, whenever a person obtains a waiver of prosecution or is convicted of a crime, the police district in which he was born is notified of this action by law enforcement authorities. The police authority then records this information in the local Penal Register. However, the Penal Register does not indicate whether persons listed therein are still alive or are still residing in Denmark. Such information must be obtained from the local Population Registers (*Folkeregistre*). These record everyone currently living in the district, and include age, date of birth, name at birth and place of birth.

To find the proportion of persons in any district who are entered on the Penal Registers, one must first select from the Population Registers those over age 15 and record their place of birth. One will then check the Penal Registers in the birthplace of each person. This method is an accurate and simple means of calculating the prevalence of registered criminals within a given district, but would be impractical for surveying the population of Denmark as a whole. An easier method would be to search the Central Police Register and its predecessors for mention of persons in a popula-

tion sample. In 1954, Wolf, Kaarsen, and Høgh,<sup>14</sup> using a stratified random sample of 3,032 Danish males age 21 and over, found a Penal Registration prevalence of 8.6%.

Christiansen and Nielsen,<sup>15</sup> on the other hand, have used a more indirect method, but on the entire population. Working with the official criminal statistics for the years 1890–1953, plus population and mortality statistics, they determined that the prevalence of sentences higher than fines was, as of December 31, 1953, between 7% and 8% for men under age 72. There is a good correlation between the penal prevalence found by the direct method on a representative sample, and the conviction prevalence within the entire population of Denmark, found by the more indirect method.

#### FIRST OFFENDERS AND RECIDIVISTS

From the official statistics of convictions (*Kriminalstatistik* 1968: Tabel 20) it can be seen that in 1968 a total of 4,739 first offenders, 4,252 men and 487 women, were sentenced to sanctions more severe than fines. The term first offender includes: 1) persons who have not been previously sentenced, 2) persons who have previously been fined but have received no other sanctions, 3) persons who were not registered for crime for 10 years after the date of their last offense and 4) foreigners with no convictions in Denmark. In the same year 3,708 recidivists, 3,562 men and 146 women, received sanctions which exceeded fines.

The annual reports of the prison service record those with previous convictions who are sentenced to one of the prison service institutions. The 1963 report shows that of the 2,025 men and 100 women released from prison service institutions in 1958, almost 50% of the men and 41% of the women returned to prison within 5 to 6 years.

Christiansen and Pål<sup>16</sup> examined male recidivism in Denmark from 1933–60, using criminal statistics and mortality tables from 1866 to 1960 and statistics on the number of men in various age groups for each year from 1933–60. Criminality was defined as offenses against the criminal code which resulted in penalties more serious than fines.

<sup>14</sup> Wolf, Kaarsen, & Høgh, *Kriminalitetshyppigheden i Danmark*, in *NORDISK TIDSSKRIFT FOR KRIMINALVIDENSKAB* 113 (1958).

<sup>15</sup> Christiansen & Nielsen, *supra* note 8.

<sup>16</sup> Christiansen & Pål, *Det mandlige recidiv i Danmark 1933–1960*, in *NORDISK TIDSSKRIFT FOR KRIMINALVIDENSKAB* 29 (1965).

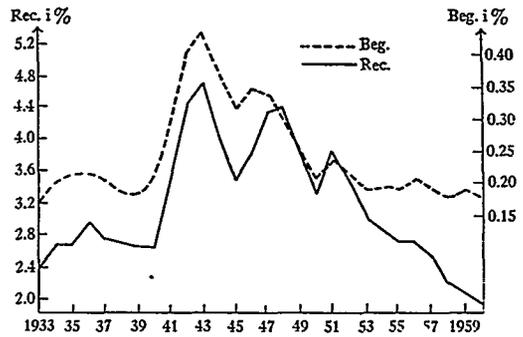


FIGURE 5.

The incidence of male first-time offenders and male recidivists 1933–60 per 100 of adult men and living male criminals respectively.

The figures on first offenders were related to the total number of men over age 15 as only this group was subject to criminal punishment. The figures on recidivists were related to the calculated number of convicted men alive during the year concerned. The main results of the study are the following.

At the beginning (1933–40) and at the end (1952–60) of the period, the incidence of first offenders was approximately 0.2%. During the war years it reached approximately 0.4%. The incidence of recidivism in the 1930's was 3% but fell in the late 1950's to about 2%. During the war years it was 5%. Thus for the previously convicted the possibility of a future conviction was for most of the period 10 to 15 times as great as it was for the unconvicted. Examination of Figure 5 shows that the first offender and recidivist curves varied in essentially the same way from year to year.

Over all years the majority of first offenders were in age group 21–24. If charge withdrawals were included in the statistics, the majority of first offenders would be younger than 21. The 50–59 age group contains only  $\frac{1}{3}$  as many first offenders as the 21–24 age group.

Over all but certain war years, the incidence of recidivism is highest for people under 21. Since the war the recidivism rate among the youngest group has been around 12–15% while for the 50–59 age group it has fallen from 1% in 1947 to barely  $\frac{1}{2}$ % in the late 1950's. This means that with advancing age the probability of recidivating becomes less than the probability of being punished the first time. Evaluated this way, age is more important as a determinant of recidivism than of crime.

## SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

## THE VOLUME OF CRIME IN DENMARK

The volume of crime in Denmark can be measured in different ways. Some results from this study may be summarized as follows:

1) In 1968, offenses known to the police amounted to nearly 200,000. Of these 30% were solved, 24% in the capital, 33% in the provincial towns, and 37% in rural districts. Of offenses known to the police, offenses against property made up almost 96%, sexual offenses 1.6%, and crimes of violence 1.7%. Compared with other countries there is a low frequency of crimes against the person.

2) In the same year, about 14,000 persons had sanctions imposed for offenses against the penal code, ranging from withdrawal of charge (despite guilt) to deprivation of liberty. The incidence of sanctions was 0.76% for males and 0.08% for females. Both the male and the female crime rates peak in the 16-19 year age group. Non-institutional treatment was utilized in about  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the male and 90% of the female cases.

3) The prevalence of male crime (*i.e.*, the frequency of living men who have been convicted before the age of 70 of at least one offense against the penal code) is between 7% and 8%. The increase in the incidence of male crime during the last years will only slowly make itself felt, so the prevalence is still likely to be at the 7-8% level.

4) The male risk of being convicted at least once for offenses against the penal code was about 12% based on 1968 statistics. The corresponding female risk was below 2%.

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF CRIME

The most salient feature of the long term trend of crime in Denmark is its surprising constancy. Except for the two world wars, the crime rate has rested between the narrow limits of 0.3% and

0.4% for over one hundred years. However, recent years have witnessed an increase in the conviction rate to more than 0.4% per year. The increase is greater for offenses known to the police (27%) than for sanctions (14%). This difference cannot be caused by a small drop in the percentage of offenses solved, but it can be seen as another illustration of how difficult it is for society to "allow" crime to move outside its "normal" area.

During recent years there has been marked upward trend in crime in Denmark, particularly in the younger age groups. In the 1960's the 15-17 year age group has accounted for approximately  $\frac{1}{5}$  of all sanctions imposed. The ratio has varied from 24% (1961 and 1962) to 17% in 1967 and 18% in 1968. If the number of offenders is related to the corresponding population figure, we find that in the same period 1.3% to 1.6% of all 15 year olds have been subject to sanctions. For the 16 year olds the percentage varied between 1.9% and 2.6%, and for 17 year olds between 2.3% and 2.9%.

During the 1966-68 period there has been a marked increase in the crime rate. However, sexual offenses declined 27%, a trend, as previously noted, which some attribute to a change in the laws on obscenity. Crimes of violence increased by 14%, but this is largely attributed to reckless driving offenses, which increased from 472 in 1966 to 586 in 1968, while more serious violent offenses remained at the same level, 1,114 and 1,111 for 1967 and 1968. The largest increase has come in crimes against property. Fraud and embezzlement increased 51%. This increase is attributed to bad check cases in the aftermath of a change in banking procedure. There has also been a 27% increase in theft, including theft of motor vehicles, a 49% increase in robbery and a 51% increase in receiving stolen goods. These increases are viewed by some criminologists as evidence of a movement toward more professional and organized crime, such as is found in the United States.