



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Commissioner of Probation

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✓ PATTERNS OF CRIME AND DELINQUENCY

IN MASSACHUSETTS — 1978

by

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PATTERNS OF CRIME AND DELINQUENCY IN MASSACHUSETTS, 1978**ACQUISITIONS**

Criminal justice research has focused considerable attention on the etiology and trends of juvenile delinquency. This study was undertaken to assess the systemic linkage between age, sex and crime in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in 1978.

The Office of the Commissioner of Probation analyzed data based on court records received from 70 probation departments statewide during four sample weeks of 1978. A total of 12,870 defendants were charged with new offenses during the combined four-week sample, and all were included in the sample. Samples were drawn January 9-13, May 16-19, September 18-22 and December 4-8, 1978 and were spaced throughout the year to control for seasonal variations.

Inasmuch as the criminal justice system witnesses a high percentage of charges against young defendants, the age categories were established as follows:

- * juvenile defendants (7-16 years of age),
- * young adult defendants (17-25 years of age),
- * older adult defendants (26 years of age and older).

Though minor traffic offenses (ie. speeding) were included on the court records, they were not included in the study.

Methodology

Court records were counted daily as they were received by the Office of the Commissioner of Probation during four sample weeks of 1978. The OCP is unique in that all criminal and delinquency records statewide are centrally filed in Boston; six million records dating back to 1924 are stored in the OCP central file. Each day, probation departments across the state send in the records of cases heard in court on the previous day, including new charges, the status of continued cases and dispositional information. Only those records reflecting new charges were included in the sample.

The daily tabulations recorded specific offenses by age and sex of the defendant. Offenses in the analysis were then collapsed into six categories to facilitate interpretation of the data:

Crimes Against Person: murder, manslaughter, assault with a weapon, sexual assault, rape, assault and battery, robbery, threats, bribery, conspiracy, kidnapping.

Crimes Against Property: arson, breaking and entering, larceny, receiving stolen property, fraud.

Non-Assaultive Sex: commercial, prostitution, unnatural, illegitimacy, indecent exposure.

Major Motor Vehicle: operating under the influence of liquor, use of motor vehicle without authority, possession of master keys, counterfeit sticker/license, etc.

Public Order: setting up a lottery, carrying dangerous weapon, liquor laws, false fire alarm, disorderly conduct, non-support.

Controlled Substance: possession or distribution of various classes of drugs.

Each person was counted only once, regardless of the number of charges. Where charges included several offense categories, the most serious offense was counted.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Offense Categories

Property crimes accounted for the highest percentage of offenses -- 30 percent overall. Public order offenses were second in frequency (23.4 percent), followed by major motor vehicle violations (17.7 percent) and crimes against persons (17.1 percent). When these offense categories were considered by age and sex of the defendants, the percent distributions varied considerably from the aggregate averages. This perspective will be developed later in this paper.

(table 1 about here)

Age Distribution

The young adult population (17-25 years of age) ranked first in frequency of arraignments -- three times more than juveniles and nearly one and a half times more than older adults. Young adults represented 49.7 percent of the cases (n=6392), followed by older adults (n=4465) at 34.7 percent, and juveniles (n=2013) at 15.6 percent.

Age Distribution by Offense

Table 2 indicates the distribution of offense categories, by age of the defendant. The distributions show that young adults represent the highest percent of defendants across all offense categories.

(table 2 about here)

While 49.7 percent of all defendants were 17-25 years of age, several offense categories showed an even higher representation in that age group, notably: sex offenses (57.6 percent), public order crimes (52.1 percent) and controlled substance violations (59.8 percent).

The older adult defendants (26+ years of age) appear to be over-represented in several offense categories: crimes against persons (38.6 percent), sex (39.4 percent), motor vehicle (46.6 percent) and public order (35.3 percent), when compared to their overall 34.7 percent representation in the sample.

Juveniles accounted for 15.6 percent of defendants in the study: only property crimes (25.8 percent) showed juveniles to be disproportionately represented.

Age/Offense Linkage

Inasmuch as 65 percent of the defendants in the study were 25 years of age or younger, this study analyzed the systemic linkage between age and offense categories.

When data for age groups 7-16 and 17-25 were combined (see 7-25 column, table 2), two offense categories showed a disproportionately high representation among young defendants: property offenses (73.7 percent) and controlled substance violations (74.4 percent).

The apparent overrepresentation of young people in these two offense categories is underscored by the rapid drop off in frequency between the young adult and older adult age groups. For property offenses, a 42 percent reduction factor was evident between the two age groups; for drug crimes, the drop off was even more rapid: 57 percent. Other offense categories declined less rapidly.

Property Offenses

The significance of the high reduction factor for property offenses points to socioeconomic forces that may be related. Unlike crimes against persons, property crimes usually involve some deliberation, weighing the cost benefits of theft. For juveniles and young adults, the incidence of property offenses may be linked to parents' ability to provide the appropriate level of material resources. Given that the level may increase with higher economic class, this phenomenon does not appear to be a class issue.

Where parents can not provide resources compatible with that required by the youth's peer group, property crimes may appear to be a viable alternative. The incentive is clearly reduced when parents can adequately provide for the young people's material and entertainment needs, or where the young people themselves can meet their financial needs.

The economic basis of property crimes among juveniles and young adults may be related to the lack of economic alternatives for those age categories. Child labor laws, combined with the high rate of unemployment among young people, underscores this theory.

Where television and other media advertising increasingly aims commercials at the under 25 age group, young people are often not in a financial position to achieve the coveted goals.

Shut out of the prevailing economic system; juveniles and young adults may make a rational choice to steal.

Drug Defendants

Nearly three quarters of the drug defendants (74.4 percent) were 25 years of age or younger, and the frequency of controlled substance violations dropped 57 percent from the young adult to the older adult age groups.

While the majority of drug defendants were charged with possession of marijuana across all age categories, the data does not support the theory that drug users graduate to more serious classes of drugs. The high reduction factor indicates that the stabilization factor of adulthood probably has more to do with the drop in frequency than any other variable.

Crimes Against Persons

According to Table 1, crimes against persons accounted for 17.1 percent of all cases in the sample. While the economically-related property offenses involve some measure of deliberation, crimes against persons are less a considered "cost-benefit" issue. One would therefore expect a less rapid decline with the older age group, and the data bears this out. The reduction factor for crimes against persons was only 22 percent, compared to the overall 30 percent drop in frequency between the 17-24 and 26+ age groups.

Though 49.7 percent of the defendants charged with crimes against persons were 17-25 years of age, the older adult population represented a substantial percentage (38.6 percent) of the defendants charged in this category. Juveniles accounted for only 11.6 percent of the defendants. This serious crime category does not appear to be age linked; that is, the data does not reflect any significant drop in frequency with increased age.

Major Motor Vehicle Violations

Table 1 shows that major motor vehicle offenses accounted for 17.7 percent of the cases in the sample. Crimes in this category primarily included "use of a motor vehicle without authority" (ie. joyriding) and "driving under the influence of liquor". As table 2 illustrates, older adults accounted for the highest percentage of the defendants (46.6 percent), with young adults and juveniles accounting for 44.9 and 8.4 percent of the cases respectively. The frequency of major motor vehicle offenses showed a steady increase by age, and was the only category of offense where older adults reflected the highest frequency.

(table 3 about here)

Not surprisingly, the incidence of use without authority was higher among juvenile and young adult defendants than older adults. Apparently, when a person's financial condition makes a motor vehicle legitimately available, the associated delinquent "joyriding" is a less attractive alternative. On the other hand, driving under the influence of liquor was more prevalent in the older age group, with 55 percent of the DUIL defendants 26 years of age or older.

Inasmuch as nearly 80 percent of the major motor vehicle charges were for drunk driving offenses, it is not surprising that adults show the highest percent of crimes in this category.

Sex Distribution

Males represented 86.3 percent of the defendants overall, while females represented 13.7 percent. When male and female cases were considered by age of the defendants, juvenile females appear to be somewhat over-represented in their age category, accounting for 16.6 percent of the juvenile defendants, as shown in table 4.

(table 4 about here)

Sex Distribution of Offense Categories

Table 5 lists the sex distribution of the six offense categories. Two offense groups show females to be overrepresented: crimes against property and sex offenses.

(table 5 about here)

Offenses by Age and Sex

For males, once the socioeconomic climate of adulthood makes significant work available (and often necessary to support a family), the incidence of property crimes appears to decrease, as is evident in Table 6.

(table 6 about here)

However, the percent of female arrests for property offenses remains relatively high. Given the well documented inequitable availability of significant jobs for women workers, one would expect the economic need to persist into adulthood. The data in Table 7 confirm this perspective.

(table 7 about here)

While the incidence of property crimes by males drops 46 percent between the young adult and older adult age categories, the reduction factor for female defendants is only 17 percent. Males still account for the majority of property offenses in all age categories, but property crimes account for a higher percent of female arrests.

Sex Offenses

Predictably, females in the 1978 Massachusetts study were over-represented (49 percent) in the incidence of sex offenses. Females were most frequently charged with prostitution, while males were charged with indecent exposure and unnatural acts. The data in Table 7 reflects a 77 percent reduction in the incidence of sex offenses by females between the 17-25 and 26+ age groups. This confirms the posture that prostitution is most common among young adult women, and that by the mid to late twenties, many prostitutes drop out of "the life".

The high percentage (79 percent) of the females who are charged with sex offenses were 17-25 years of age, and this age link may be rooted in an economic base. The financial rewards of prostitution have been well documented, and young women who lack other economic alternatives find prostitution a financially attractive occupation.

Male sex offenses, primarily indecent exposure and illegitimacy, are highest in the older adult age group, and appear to have little age-linked relationship.

Major Motor Vehicle

The study showed major motor vehicle offenses to be a predominantly male offense category: 92 percent (versus 87 percent male overall, per table 4) of those charged with major motor vehicle offenses were male, and only 8 percent were female. However, while the incidence of motor vehicle offenses for males was equal in the young adult and older adult age groups, females showed a 24 percent increase between the 17-25 and 26+ age groups. However, males still accounted for the overwhelming majority of motor vehicle crimes. For males and females, "joyriding" was the popular motor vehicle offense in the younger age groups, while driving under the influence of liquor occurred more frequently in the older adults.

Crimes Against Persons

The incidence of crimes against persons points to a significant difference between male and female defendants. Males account for 91 percent of the crimes against persons, and females 9 percent. However, a higher percentage of juvenile girls (20 percent) versus juvenile boys (11 percent) were charged with crimes against persons. Additionally,

males showed a 25 percent reduction in frequency between the young adult and older adult age groups, compared to only 9 percent reduction for females.

While it has already been proposed in this paper that crimes against persons reduce in frequency slower than most other classes of offenses, it appears that the male reduction factor of 25 percent is substantially higher than the female factor of only 9 percent. However, both male and female older adults account for 38 percent of the crimes against persons. A higher percent of the females charged with crimes against persons are juvenile than is the case with males similarly charged; however, the reverse occurs with the young adult population.

Conclusions

Though the data reflects a high concentration (65 percent) of criminal/delinquent activity in the under 26 age groups, it does not necessarily follow that young people are, therefore, more criminal than adults. The degree of sophistication of the crimes may change, as adults have a greater opportunity for white collar crimes, which go largely undetected. The cost of apprehension is also different for "street crimes" versus white collar offenses, with differing degree of law enforcement concentration.

Inasmuch as economically related crimes such as property, sex and some motor vehicle offenses accounted for about half the crimes in the Massachusetts 1978 study, economic downturns in the future may reflect higher criminal activity by the growing legions of unemployed and unemployables.

Age appears to be a critical link to some classes of offenses. With the older age groups, property crimes and controlled substance violations in particular, appear to drop in frequency; given the high percentage of criminal defendants who are 25 years of age or younger, any demographic shifts in population may have a profound effect on the future arrest rate.

Table 1: Cumulative Volume of Sample Weeks: Percent Distribution by Class of Offense

Class of Offense	4-week total volume	percent
Against persons	2,198	17.1%
Against property	3,957	30.7%
Non-assaultive sex	321	2.5%
Motor Vehicle	2,272	17.7%
Public Order	3,019	23.4%
Controlled substances	1,103	8.6%
TOTAL	12,870	100.0%

Table 2: Age Distribution by Offense

Class of Offense	7-16	17-25	7-25 combined	26+	reduction factor	TOTAL
Against persons	11.6%	49.7%	61.3%	38.6%*	-22%	99.9%
Against property	25.8%	46.9%	73.7%*	27.2%	-42%	99.9%
Non-assaultive sex	2.5%	57.6%*	60.1%	39.4%	-31%	99.5%
Motor vehicle	8.4%	44.9%	53.3%	46.6%*	+ 4%	99.9%
Public order	12.6%	52.1%	64.7%	35.3%*	-32%	100.0%
Controlled substance	14.6%	59.8%*	74.4%*	25.5%	-57%	99.9%
TOTAL	15.6%	49.7%	65.3%	34.7%	-30%	100.0%

* represents an overrepresentation from the overall average in each age group.

Table 3: Motor vehicle violations by age

Offense	7-16		17-25		26 +		Total	
	Row%	Col. %	Row%	Col.%	Row%	Col.%	Row%	Col.%
Operating under infl. liquor	1%	11%	44%	75%	55%	95%	100%	79%
Use without authority	39%	89%	53%	21%	8%	3%	100%	19%
Counterfeit sticker/ license	4%	1%	68%	3%	28%	1%	100%	2%

Table 4: Frequency and Percent Distribution by Age and Sex of Defendants

	7-16	17-25	26+	TOTAL
Male	1,679 (83.4%)	5,569 (87.1%)	3,865 (86.6%)	11,113 (86.3%)
Female	334 (16.6%)	823 (12.9%)	600 (13.4%)	1,757 (13.7%)
TOTAL	2,013	6,392	4,465	12,870

Table 5: Sex Distribution of Offense Categories

	Percent Male	Percent Female
Crimes against persons	91%	9%
Crimes against property	81%	19%*
Non-assaultive sex	51%	49%*
Major motor vehicle	92%	8%
Crimes against public order	89%	11%
Controlled substance violations	88%	12%
OVERALL AVERAGE	86.3%	13.7%

* indicates offense category where females are overrepresented

Table 6: Offense Distribution by Age - Male Defendants

	7-16	17-25	(7-25 comb.)	26+	reduction factor	total
Against persons	11%	51%	62%	38%	-25%	100%
Against property	26%	48%	74%	26%	-46%	100%
Non-assaultive sex	2%	28%	40%	60%	+57%	100%
Major motor vehicle	8%	46%	54%	46%	-	100%
Public order	12%	52%	64%	36%	-31%	100%
Controlled substance	14%	61%	75%	25%	-59%	100%
OVERALL AVERAGE	15%	50%	65%	35%	-30%	100%

Table 7: Offense Distribution by Age - Female Defendants

	7-16	17-25	(7-25 comb)	26+	reduction factor	Total
Against persons	20%	42%	62%	38%	- 9%	100%
Against property	25%	41%	66%	34%	-17%	100%
Non-assaultive sex	3%	79%	82%	18%	-77%	100%
Major motor vehicle	15%	38%	53%	47%	+24%	100%
Public order	17%	50%	67%	33%	-34%	100%
Controlled substance	13%	55%	73%	27%	-51%	100%
OVERALL AVERAGE	19%	47%	66%	34%	-28%	100%

END