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ACQUISITION

Juvenile Offenders and Violent Crime

MAY 1994

Overview

A study recently conducted by the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority has found that the percentage of violent crime arrestees younger than 17 declined between 1985 and 1991 (figure one). The reason for the decline in that age group is not immediately clear.

In 1985, 17% of all violent crime arrestees were younger than 17. In 1991, 14% of all violent crime arrestees were younger than 17. The 3% decline translated into increases in both the 17-to-24, and the Over 24 age groups. The 17-to-24 age group accounted for 38% of all violent crime arrests in 1985 and 39% in 1991. The Over 24 age group accounted for 46% of all violent crime arrests in 1985 and 47% in 1991.

All four Illinois Uniform Crime Reports' (UCR) violent crime classifications (index crimes) were included in the study: murder, criminal sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated assault.

When adjusted for age group size (population), there were substantially more arrests for violent crime in 1991 than in 1985 across the entire age spectrum. Thus, while the proportion of violent crime arrests involving juveniles declined in 1991, the actual number of juvenile arrests for violent crime (per 100,000 juveniles) increased, as it did in each age group.

These data point in several directions. First, they add weight to the perception that violent crime has increased in recent years. The data also show that, relative to their numbers, juveniles were arrested for more violent crime in 1991 than in 1985. But, there were increases in all age groups and the juvenile arrest rate increase was modest compared to that for adults. Perhaps the most significant finding of the study is that arrests for violent crime grew rapidly after 1985 in the 17-to-24 age group.

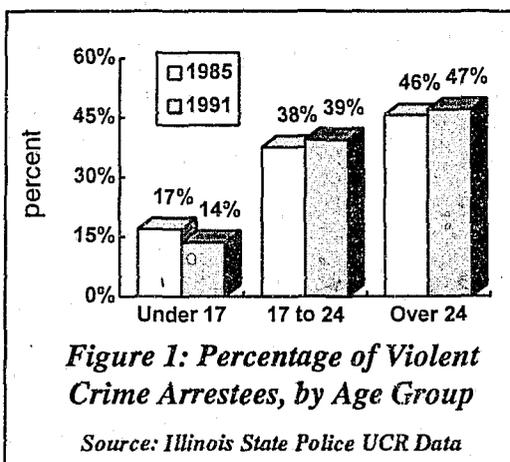


Figure 1: Percentage of Violent Crime Arrestees, by Age Group

Source: Illinois State Police UCR Data

"Juveniles" in Illinois

Illinois is one of two states that classify juveniles as individuals younger than 17. Most states classify juveniles as individuals younger than 18. The distinction is important in age-related crime analyses for two reasons. First, by defining 17-year-olds as adults, a smaller proportion of the state's overall population falls into the juvenile category. There were about 155,000 17 year-olds

in Illinois in 1991, representing approximately 1.4% of the state's population.

In addition, 17-year-olds are much more likely to become involved in, and subsequently arrested for, criminal offenses than are individuals in most other age groups. When 17-year-olds are defined as adults, not only is the size of the juvenile population reduced and the size of the adult population increased, adults as a group are somewhat more crime-prone overall.

For these reasons, it would be difficult or impossible to make meaningful age-related violent crime comparisons between states with different definitions for "juvenile." The scope of the study was therefore limited to violent crime in Illinois.

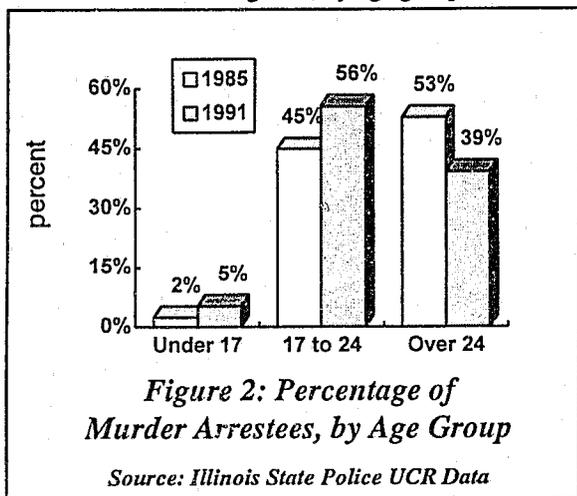
Why Age and Violent Crime?

Few subjects stimulate more debate than violent crime. The perception that juveniles are increasingly responsible for committing acts of violence has heightened the intensity of the discussion. This report, the first in a series on violent crime, was prepared to help inform policymakers and the public as the search for effective strategies continues. The baseline year, 1985, was selected because it pre-

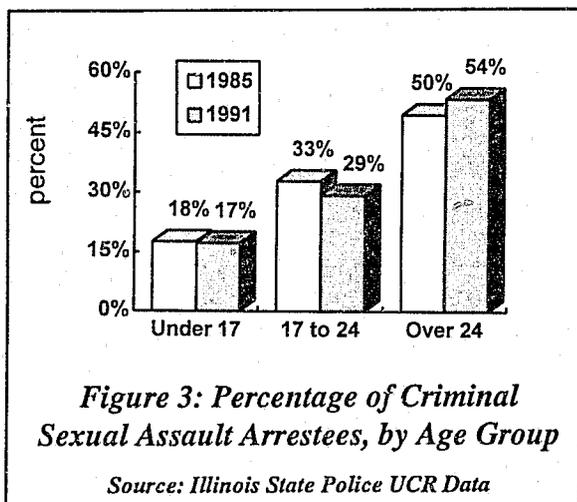
cedes major crime control initiative funding in 1986 and 1988. The comparison year, 1991, was selected because it precedes the transition to incident-based (NIBRS) reporting in 1992.

Violent Crime Arrests, by Age

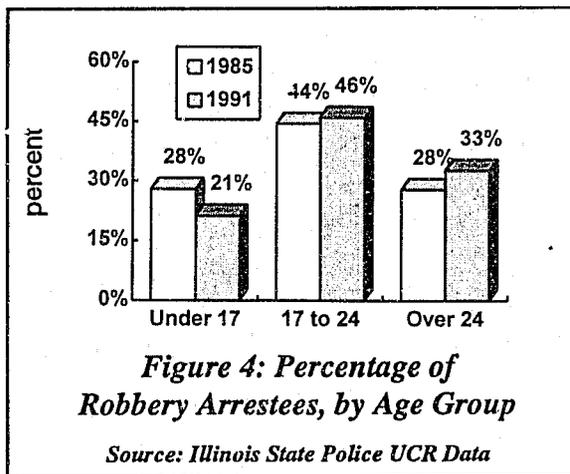
Figures two through five are similar to figure one on the previous page, showing the percentage of arrests for each of the four violent crime categories, by age group.



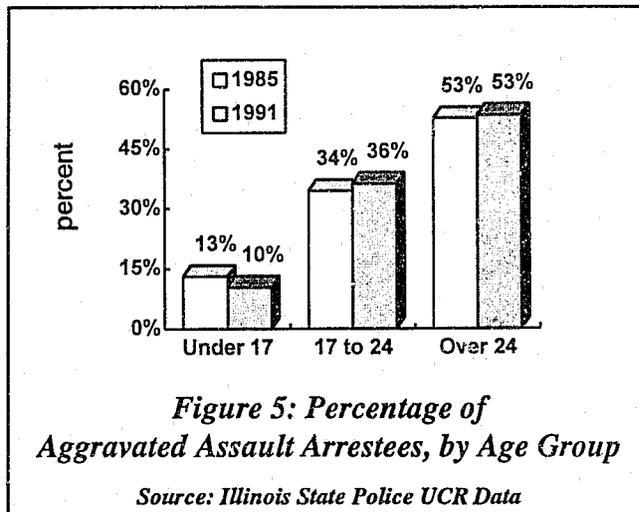
Contrary to the overall violent crime trend, the proportion of murder arrestees younger than 17 more than doubled between 1985 and 1991, rising from 2% to 5%. Nevertheless, by a substantial margin, the largest proportion of murder arrestees were in the 17-to-24 age group.



While the majority of all murder arrestees were in the 17-to-24 age group in 1991, the largest proportion of criminal sexual assault arrestees were in the Over 24 age group. That was also the only group to have an increase in arrests for criminal sexual assault in 1991.



Juveniles were the only age group with a decline in the proportion of arrests for robbery in 1991. Nearly half of all robbery arrestees were in the 17-to-24 age group in 1991. However, the largest increase over the six-year period occurred in the Over 24 age group.

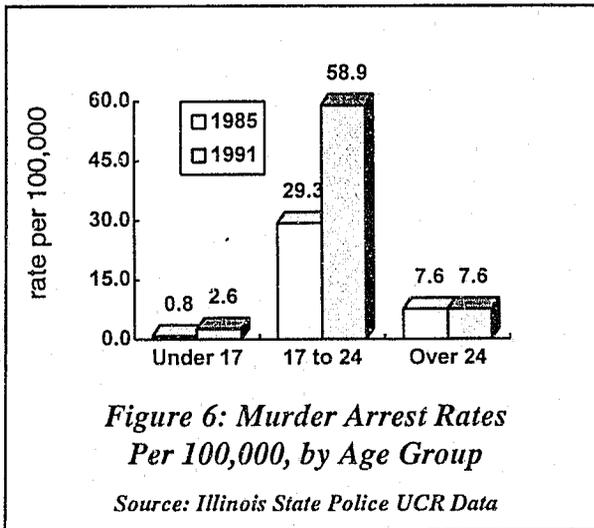


The Under 17 age group was the only group with a decline in the proportion of arrests for aggravated assault in 1991. More than half of all arrests for aggravated assault involved the Over 24 age group.

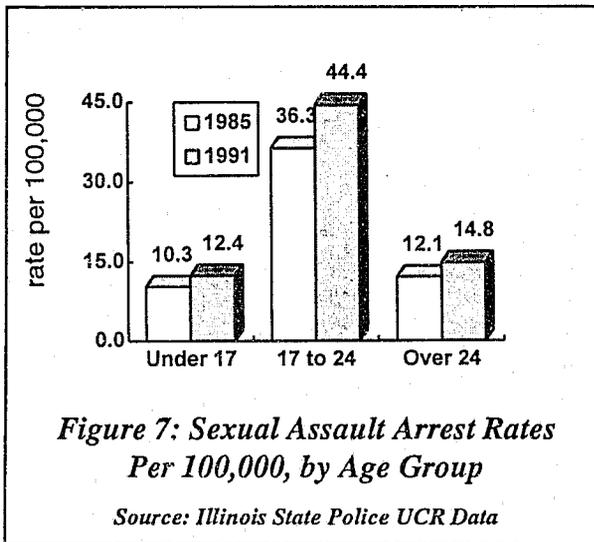
Three findings emerge from the data presented in figures one through five. First, violent crime arrestees are generally adults. Second, the majority of all sexual assault and aggravated assault arrestees are over the age of 24. And third, arrestees for murder and robbery tend to be between the ages of 17 and 24.

Violent Crime Arrest Rates, by Age

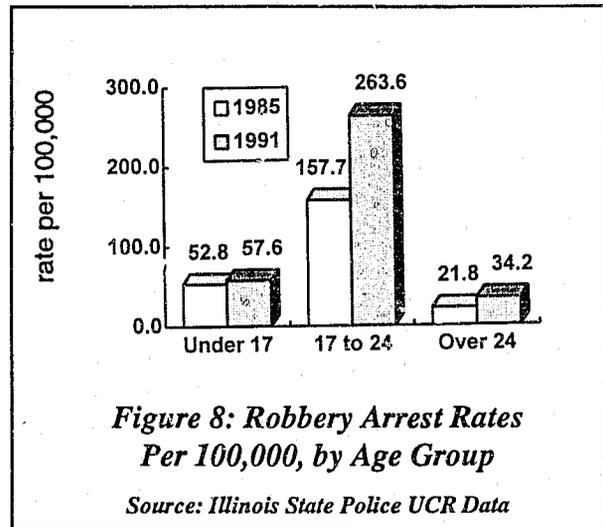
Figures six through 10 present age data somewhat differently, placing emphasis on violent crime arrest rates per 100,000, rather than on percentages. By way of illustration, figure six below shows that in 1991 there were 58.9 murder arrests, or almost 59 arrests, for every 100,000 Illinoisians between the ages of 17 and 24, inclusive.



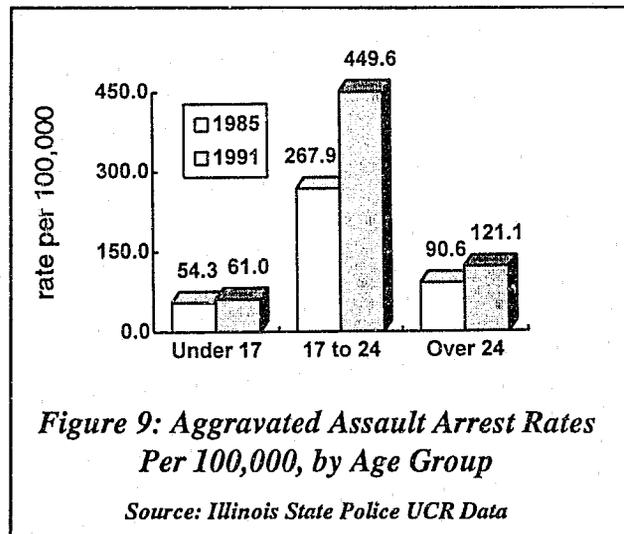
Relative to their numbers in the population, individuals in the 17-to-24 age group were the most likely to be arrested for murder in 1985 and 1991.



While figure three on the previous page revealed that most sexual assault arrestees were older than 24, figure seven shows that relative to their numbers in the population, individuals in the 17-to-24 age group were more likely to be arrested for a sexual assault in 1985 and again in 1991.



The arrest rate for robbery was lowest in the Over 24 age group. The robbery arrest rate for the 17-to-24 age group was more than 4.5 times greater than it was for the Under 17 age group.



As in each of the other violent crime categories, the arrest rate for aggravated assault was highest for the 17-to-24 age group in 1985 and in 1991.

It should be noted that one reason violent crime arrest rates are higher for the 17-to-24 age group is that each of the other groups contain large numbers of individuals, particularly the very young and the very old, who are not as likely to initiate violent crime. Regardless, this and other analyses have shown that those in the 17-to-24 age group, relative to their numbers, have a very high probability of violent crime involvement and arrest.

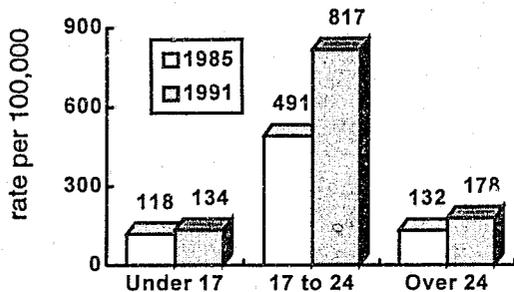


Figure 10: Overall Violent Crime Arrest Rates Per 100,000, by Age Group

Source: Illinois State Police UCR Data

Combining all types of violent crime, figure 10 shows that those in the 17-to-24 year old age group were more than six times as likely to be arrested for a violent offense in 1991 as an individual younger than 17.

To complement the data shown in figures six through 10, figures 11, 12 and 13 use actual arrestee ages, rather than age groupings, to summarize 1985 and 1991 Illinois violent crime arrest rates for those between the ages of 5 and 50.

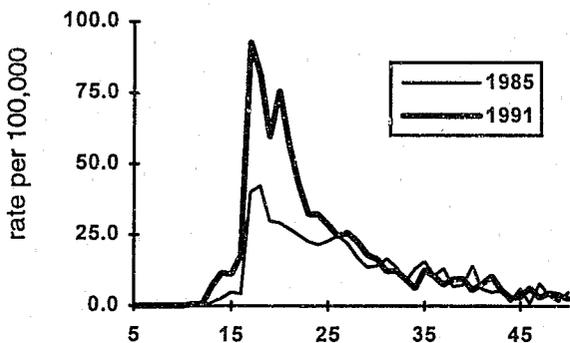


Figure 11: Murder Arrest Rates Per 100,000, by Age

Source: Illinois State Police UCR Data

Figure 11 shows that murder arrest rates rose rapidly after the age of 14, peaked during the late teens and early 20s, and then fell to substantially lower levels by the age of 35. Murder arrest rates began to rise at an earlier age in 1991 than in 1985, rose much higher than they did in 1985, and remained high for a longer period of time.

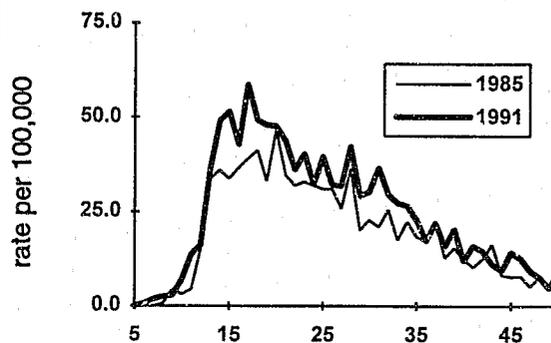


Figure 12: Sexual Assault Arrest Rates Per 100,000, by Age

Source: Illinois State Police UCR Data

Unlike murder arrest rates, sexual assault arrest rates began to accelerate at an earlier age, about 11, and continued much longer, well into the 40s.

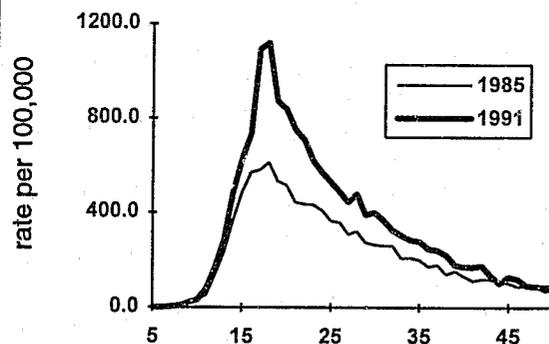


Figure 13: Overall Violent Crime Arrest Rates Per 100,000, by Age

Source: Illinois State Police UCR Data

Figure 13 helps underscore the magnitude of the increase in violent crime arrest rates in 1985 and 1991, particularly for the 17-to-24 age group.

Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority

120 S. Riverside Plaza, Chicago IL 60606-3997

Jim Edgar, Governor

Peter B. Bensinger, Chairman

For more information, or extra copies of this report, contact the Authority's Information Resource Center at 312-793-8550.

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