



Research Bulletin

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State juvenile justice trends can obscure rural county statistics

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Statewide juvenile crime trend studies tend to reflect conditions in highly populated urban areas but not in rural counties, according to a report published in March 2006 by Authority staff in cooperation with the Illinois Juvenile Justice Commission and the Illinois Department of Human Services.

Researchers found that highly populated urban county crime statistics often masked low density rural county crime trends. These findings were detailed in the *Juvenile Justice System and Risk Factor Data for Illinois: 2003 Annual Report*, compiled to assist juvenile justice policy makers and practitioners in determining overall Illinois crime trends.

This *Research Bulletin* highlights rural county crime trends and risk factors that differ from others recorded across the state between 1993 and 2003.

Risk factors

Juvenile justice system professionals measure conditions and behaviors that increase tendencies of young people toward delinquency. Risk factors are correlates, not causes, of delinquency, and may be present in a youth's environment or observed in a youth's behavior. By understanding the degree of risk in the environment and behavior of juveniles, policymakers and practitioners can more effectively address juvenile delinquency potential.

Research focused on four types of risk factors: individual, social, school, and environmental. Individual risk factors are traits that can lead to inappropriate behavior such as aggression, anti-social attitudes, hyperactivity, impulsiveness, attention deficits, and risk behavior. Medical or physical conditions that impact development and negative internalizing behaviors have also been identified as risk factors for future delinquency.

Social risk factors include poor parent-child relationships and relationships with anti-social or delinquent peers. School risk factors include truant behavior, dropping out, or poor academic performance. Environmental or community risk factors include living in areas of high poverty, in neighborhoods that are socially disorganized, or in places where high levels of drug or adult criminal activity are present.

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Risk factors in rural counties

The presence of risk factors and occurrence of risk-taking behavior in rural counties generally followed the same trends as those across Illinois from 1993 to 2003. Unemployment, domestic offense rates, reported sexual abuse rates, crimes against children, truancy, suspensions, and expulsions in rural counties either increased or decreased along with the statewide trend.

But because some trends were more pronounced in rural counties than statewide, and some rural county trends were the opposite of state trends, researchers concluded that urban county population numbers often shape statewide data and cause rural statistics to be obscured.

Examples of variances between statewide data and county data can be seen in the rate of reported child abuse, the high school dropout rate, and the rate of crimes against school personnel. Child abuse and dropout rates increased in rural counties but decreased statewide, while crimes against school personnel decreased in rural counties but increased across Illinois.

Social risk factors

Four social risk factor trends were examined to compare data: the reported rates of domestic violence offenses, child abuse cases, child sex abuse cases, and crimes against children.

Domestic offense rates both statewide and in rural counties declined from 1993 to 2003. In rural counties the rate of reported domestic offenses fell 7 percent while the rate in Illinois decreased 6 percent. But in any one year, Illinois maintained a rate more than twice that of rural counties.

Comparing the rates of reported child abuse between rural counties and statewide during the period studied, rural areas experienced a 4 percent increase in child abuse while statewide the rate decreased 25 percent. Only rural counties experienced an increase in this area.

Rates of reported child sexual abuse both in rural counties and statewide declined between 1993 and 2003, by 22 percent in rural areas and 36 percent statewide. Rural counties also reported child sexual abuse at rates higher than the state rate in those years.

Because data reporting crimes against children is voluntarily sent the Illinois State Police as part of the supplemental Illinois Uniform Crime Reporting program, the offense rate may be undercounted. Also, reporting practices of specific counties may reflect trends rather than detail accurate numbers of offenses. But this data is considered useful in that it provides another information source for juvenile justice practitioners in understanding youth in their jurisdictions.

The rate of reported crimes against children in rural counties decreased 29 percent, while across Illinois the rate decreased less than 2 percent. Decreases also occurred in Collar counties (43 percent) and other urban counties (17 percent), but Cook County's rate increased 13 percent. Cook County's statistics caused the statewide crimes against children reporting rate to drop only 2 percent, illustrating the impact higher population areas have on statewide trend analyses. And, over all the years of analysis, the statewide rate of reported crimes against children was more than twice that of the rural county rate.

School risk factors

While in many measurement areas state and rural trends differed, in four school risk areas—truancy, chronic truancy, suspensions, and expulsions—trends corresponded. From the academic years 1992-93 to 2002-03 the rates of truancy, expulsions, and suspensions both in rural counties and statewide increased. The chronic truancy rate in both rural counties and in Illinois decreased during that time.

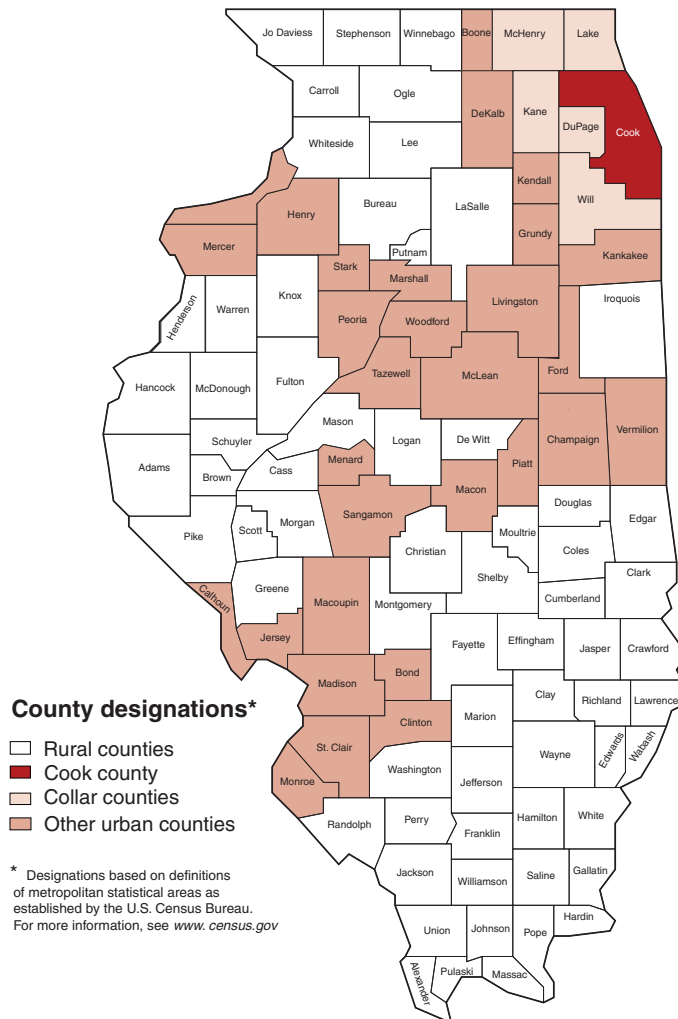
Rural county and state trends did differ in the area of dropout rates, with rural counties recording an increase of 38 percent and the state recording a decline of only 14 percent.

Environmental/community risk factors

Rural counties experienced a larger decrease in unemployment, which is defined as an environmental or community risk factor for delinquency, than in the rest of Illinois from 1993 to 2003. Even though the unemployment rate fell 22 percent in rural counties, twice as much as the statewide rate of 11 percent, the rural trend was not noticeable in statewide statistics.

Census data for 1999 indicated differences in trends for other environmental risk factors, such as poverty

Figure 1
Comparison of county designations



rates, income, and educational attainment among rural, urban, collar counties, Cook County, and the state as a whole.

In 1999, poverty rates in 36 percent of rural counties (24 of 66 counties) were higher than the state poverty rate, and Cook County’s poverty rate was 37 percent higher than the statewide rate. However, the overall state poverty rate dropped below the combined poverty rate for Cook County and the rural counties. This occurred because all Collar counties and 23 percent of all other urban counties (7 of 30 counties) had low poverty rates.

In 1999 the median household income in Illinois was \$46,590. Every rural county in Illinois had a lower median household income, and every Collar county had a

higher median household income. The lowest median income in rural counties was 27 percent lower than the level in urban counties other than Cook. As a result of more populated counties having higher incomes, the statewide median income rose above that of all rural counties which averages \$34,750.

In comparing educational attainment between counties, 80 percent of rural county residents 25 years and older had at least a high school diploma in 1999. Among the same age group, 78 percent of Cook County residents, 87 percent of Collar county residents, and 84 percent of other urban county residents had at least a high school diploma. Statewide, 81 percent of those over 25 had at least a high school diploma. This statistic seemed to indicate that percentage-wise, fewer

rural county residents had a high school diploma than statewide, which was not accurate.

Juvenile justice data in rural counties

Juvenile arrest rates compiled by the Illinois Criminal History Record Information System for 2003 provided an example of how trends in highly populated areas generate statewide statistics that can mask results in areas of smaller populations. The Cook County arrest rate per 100,000 population of youth ages 10 to 16 was 5,573. Rural counties had the lowest arrest rate for that population group at 1,546, followed by Collar county and then other urban county rates. Cook County's high rate brought the statewide arrest rate per 100,000 population of youth ages 10 to 16 to 3,561,

Delinquency petitions filed statewide between 1993 and 2003 on youths ages 10 to 16 per 100,000 population decreased 25 percent, and delinquency petitions for Cook County decreased 50 percent. Rural county youth delinquency petition filing rates, which increased 31 percent at that time, were not reflected in the statewide trend.

The rate of juveniles ages 10 to 16 adjudicated delinquent between 1993 and 2003 decreased statewide by 26 percent, driven by a 64 percent drop in the number of juveniles adjudicated delinquent in Cook County. The rural county juvenile adjudication rate however, increased 21 percent.

The statewide rate of youth ages 10 to 16 on probation increased 27 percent from 1993 to 2003. Because rural counties tend more frequently to sentence youth to probation than other counties, the rural probation rate increased 36 percent and was higher than all other counties.

In Illinois, the use of secure detention for youth ages 10 to 16 dropped 24 percent from 1993 to 2003, driven by a decrease of 23 percent in Cook County. The use of secure detention increased in all other counties: 58 percent in Collar counties, more than 50 percent in all other urban counties, and 95 percent in rural counties.

While the rate of youth ages 13 to 16 committed to the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) statewide increased 27 percent between 1993 and 2003, the rural youth IDOC commitment rate in that age range jumped 91 percent. During 2003, 40 of 66 rural counties had

commitment rates higher than the statewide rate, while only 17 of 30 urban counties outside of Cook had rates higher than the statewide rate. The rates in Cook County and in Collar counties were lower than the statewide rate in 2003.

A last trend involves statewide efforts to measure the extent of over-representation of minority youth in the juvenile justice system. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention uses formulas to determine minority over-representation levels at given stages of the juvenile justice system, utilizing a "one percent rule" designed to account for small rural populations. The rule stipulates that if any one of a county's minority populations is less than one percent of county's total population, that minority's over-representation is not analyzed.

Arrest data for 2003 therefore did not include calculations for 48 of 66 rural counties. Of the 18 counties examined, African-American youth were over-represented by a small margin in 16 of them. The extent of over-representation of African-American youth at the arrest stage appeared much higher than the level found in other parts of the state.

In two areas—the number of juvenile transfers to adult court and the number of female juvenile commitments to IDOC—rural county and statewide data trends corresponded. Rural transfers of juveniles to adult court decreased 85 percent between 1993 and 2003, and statewide transfers decreased by 73 percent. Also, commitments to IDOC of rural county female juvenile delinquents rose from 15 in 1993 to 35 in 2003. The rate across Illinois also increased, from 67 female juvenile commitments in 1993 to 153 in 2003.

Conclusion

Statewide data analyses describing juvenile justice system activity and risk factors enable researchers to determine overall trends. But as this *Research Bulletin* indicated, state-level trend analyses do not always represent events in areas of smaller populations. Juvenile justice professionals should examine data in all regions for a clearer, more accurate picture of what is happening across the state.

Visit the Authority's website at www.icjia.state.il.us to obtain a copy of the "Juvenile Justice System and Risk Factor Data for Illinois: 2003 Annual Report."