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# Impact of a Youth Service Center

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*The influences of a Youth Service Center are assessed in two South Philadelphia police districts and two pairs of selected comparison districts, using Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) and the Youth Center's caseload arrest data. UCR data indicate a slight change in arrest rates within the selected target districts and fluctuating rates within comparison districts. Data for Youth Center Clients show a 26% decrease in arrests during a one-year period, particularly for white youths, but analysis of other important factors that may have an impact on arrest rates suggests that it is impossible at this time to demonstrate that the Youth Service Center is significantly decreasing official juvenile delinquency.*

## **IMPACT OF A YOUTH SERVICE CENTER**

### *Does Diversion Work?*

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This study evaluates the impact of a Youth Service Center (YSC) in South Philadelphia, using methods which consider both the Center's goals and relevant developments within its target area. The YSC is a delinquency-prevention program housed in the South Philadelphia Community Center (SPCC), a general recreation facility which evolved from the Philadelphia Boys' Club in 1974. The YSC program was added in June 1975 to "prevent and limit youth from becoming involved in the Juvenile Justice System, police courts, and institutions" (Youth Service Center, n.d.: 2). Program referrals comprise

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area youths between the ages of 10 and 18 who have been arrested and are in the process of entering the juvenile justice system, or are deemed troublesome by other agencies or their families.

Upon admittance, youths are assigned a paraprofessional caseworker and a treatment regimen tailored to their present problems, such as drug and alcohol use, contact with the police, truancy, or "lack of motivation." Treatment emphasizes caseworker counseling, although the services of specialists (e.g., psychologists, lawyers) and outside agencies are available, as well as services from other parts of the SPCC. Assessment of the client's progress is made periodically during YSC staff meetings. The client can terminate program participation at any time. Other terminations occur when a client is judged to be uncooperative or rehabilitated.

Generally, the YSC posits two impact goals: (1) a decrease in arrests for program youths; (2) a decrease in arrests in the two police districts which constitute the Center's target area. The purpose of this article is to assess the YSC's success in achieving the latter goal.

Overall, program influence was judged by an estimated decrease in the rates of juvenile arrests after the implementation of the Center in the two police districts within the target area. Two pairs of neighboring police districts were selected as comparison areas. One pair served as demographically similar nontreatment control districts; the second pair indicated arrest levels in a lower-class area. Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) and the Youth Center's caseload data were used to determine arrest fluctuations. Philadelphia census tract data described the demographic characteristics of the area and their changes and also identified possible intervening ecological factors affecting arresting rates.

The examination of ecological factors which possibly affect arrests, and the selection of comparison districts are methods reminiscent of Shaw and McKay's (1942) studies of juvenile delinquency and of Lander's (1954) more recent work. Because

of the weaknesses of using census tracts as units of study (Rosen and Turner, 1967), this article employs census data simply as a descriptive tool to help substantiate arrest data. Shannon's (1967) research on the spatial and temporal distribution of delinquency in Wisconsin shows the advantages of analyzing police-report data in light of a description of the characteristics of unit areas selected.

### **SELECTION AND CHARACTERISTICS OF POLICE DISTRICTS**

For this study, police districts 1 and 4 (target districts) were selected because they encompass the area for referrals to the Youth Service Center. The central area of these districts is mostly Italian working class; the west segment, Wilson Park, is predominantly black. The YSC is located in the heart of the central area. Districts 3 and 17 (poverty districts) which lie directly above 1 and 4, were selected to indicate arrest levels in a lower-class area. Districts 15 and 24 (control districts) were selected as comparison districts demographically similar to the target districts (1 and 4). The problems encountered in comparing arrest rates between police districts were mitigated by incorporating city and Census Bureau census tracts into police district boundaries.<sup>1</sup>

An overview of median age, sex ratio, percentage nonwhite, percentage nonmover, median income, and total number of persons in these police districts allows an analysis of variables assumed to be related to social disorganization and crime. These indicators reflect the weighted averages of the percentages of the Philadelphia subsections which form each police district, as described in note 1.

Median age of household is a crude indication of the youthfulness of a district. It states only the median age of individuals living in households, omitting all others. However, the figure does reflect age fluctuations over time, an important

matter since research shows that fluctuations in criminality relate to fluctuations in birthrate. The sex ratio indicates the number of males per hundred females. The percentage nonwhite, in addition to a high sex ratio, usually specifies areas where arrest rates are high, since the literature demonstrates that minorities and males have a degree of contact with the criminal justice system which is greater than their proportions in the total population. The percentage nonmovers indicates the percentage of individuals in a population who have lived in the same residence for the past five years. This percentage serves as a measure of residential stability. Median income represents the median salaries of families and of individuals living alone or with others to whom they are not related.

Examination of these five measures indicates that districts 15 and 24 are adequate control areas for districts 1 and 4, the target areas. Although the median age is higher by 3 years in the control districts (age 35 compared to age 32), the sex ratios, percentage nonmover and median income figures are similar. The two control districts (15 and 24) and the two target districts (1 and 4) both have 10% more females than males, a majority (70%) population which is residentially stable, and a salary range which reflects the middle-income level. However, the target districts (1 and 4) have slightly more (7%) nonwhites, although the median nonwhite composition in both the control and target districts is less than 10% of their total populations. All six police districts experienced an increase in nonwhite population from 1960 to 1970 (Philadelphia City Planning Commission, 1972: 14-15). However, district 1 (one of the target districts) and particularly both of the poverty districts (3 and 17) have shown the most pronounced increase. The percentage of nonwhites in district 4 (the other target district) and both of the control districts (15 and 24) was fairly stable from 1960 to 1970. Additionally, both of the poverty districts (3 and 17) have the lowest percentage of nonmovers, which may reflect a concomitant decrease in the white population as the black population increases (Philadelphia City Planning

Commission, 1972: 14-15). However, these nonmover percentages do not differ greatly from those in the remaining districts. The fact that district 17 also has the lowest sex ratio and highest median age may be attributed to an estimated 13% undercount in the young, black male population of the city (Philadelphia City Planning Commission, 1972).

Median income corresponds closely with the percentage of nonwhites. District 17 has the lowest income level for 1970 (less than \$4000) and is part of the lowest income area of the city. District 3 is in the second lowest of the five income levels of the city. However, the YSC target districts (1 and 4) and the control districts (15 and 24) share the middle-income level (\$7000 to \$9999).

According to much of the criminological literature and the assumptions made by the YSC, delinquent activity is related to the number of legitimate success opportunities made available to youths. This report considers how much impact a service center has in an area of middle-income families, where opportunities for "legitimate" activities may be more plentiful as opposed to those in poverty areas. Since the Philadelphia census data indicate that the greatest differences between the three pairs of districts are reflected in the percentage of nonwhites and in median family income, an analysis of arrest statistics may show some correspondence between district characteristics, delinquent activity, and YSC impact.

## ANNUAL ARREST STATISTICS

Uniform Crime Report arrest data have definite limitations. Many theories of crime causation rely primarily on officially published statistics (Hood and Sparks, 1970) which describe offenders who have had contact with the system but do not include those who have not been caught or deemed "offensive enough" by the arresting officer (Wolfgang, 1963). Perhaps the most serious problem in relying on official sources is that

criminal statistics reflect fluctuations in the administration of the law as well as the actual incidence of criminal behavior. Crime rates are vulnerable to manipulation for political purposes (Quinney, 1977: 8).

A complete assessment of the YSC in future studies will incorporate self-reported delinquency data. However, the present study focuses on official report and demographic data using an area-analysis method.<sup>2</sup> Both arrest and remedial rates are included in this examination, since it is presumed that their respective effects are not mutually exclusive. A remedial disposition indicates that the juvenile was apprehended by the police, but not officially arrested. The offense may have been minor or the offender may not have had previous contact with the police. Also, evidence of alternative methods for handling the juvenile, either by parents or by diversion agencies, may encourage the police to a remedial disposition (Wolfgang et al., 1972: 15, 16). Thus, a decrease in arrest rates may indicate an increase in remedial rates, in which case diversion effects possibly attributable to the YSC may be influential.

The percentage of juveniles arrested for major crimes in Philadelphia since 1970 demonstrates the nature of recent juvenile delinquent activity. Most notable is the considerable fluctuation in the majority of categories. Homicide rates indicate a general downward trend, unlike the annual rates for other crime categories. Rape rates are highest in 1971 and decline thereafter. Robbery rates are nearly constant from 1971 to 1977. Aggravated assaults show a consistent decline since 1970. Burglary declines in 1971 and 1972, but rises in 1973-1977.

The increase in larceny rates in 1973 is most likely due to a nationwide change in arrest collection policy. Prior to 1973, arrests for larcenies under \$50 were excluded from reports of juvenile arrests. The inclusion of larcenies under \$50 presumably inflated arrest data for the years following the policy change.

Excluding the year 1970, when the rates for every crime category except rape were highest, the greatest decline over the seven-year period appears in the major crimes of personal violence: homicide, aggravated assault, and (to a lesser degree) rape. Robbery rates remain stable, while the major property crimes—burglary, larceny, and auto theft—rise. The increase for those offenses and the decline in violent crime, are considered in analyzing arrest rates in the selected districts.

### ARREST RATES IN DISTRICTS

Arrest rates for the selected target districts (1 and 4), control districts (15 and 24), and poverty districts (3 and 17) correspond to the arrest breakdown described in the preceding analysis of citywide police statistics. However, police provided data on larcenies under \$50 for the years 1971 and 1972 in these six selected districts; such data are included in the present analysis for these two years.

Because Uniform Crime Reports present only arrests and not arrest rates for particular districts, it was necessary to compute arrests according to the annual estimated population in each district. Thus, arrest data are the number of arrests per total population by police district of residence. Arrests and remedials for boys and girls are combined because an earlier analysis of the UCR data demonstrated that arrests and remedials for girls were so much lower than for boys that their effect was negligible.

Excluding the 1970 figures, for which larcenies under \$50 were not available, the figures for 1971 and 1972 are the highest for nearly all districts for the six years. In each district there is a drop in boys' and girls' arrest rates from 1971 to 1972. Such a drop indicates a true decline in arrests or a change in police policy. The major drop in rates from 1972 appears for those districts with the lowest base crime rate and the lowest percentage nonwhite (target district 4 and both control districts, 15 and 24).



Emphasis in the analysis was given to those years before, during, and after the implementation of the YSC (1974-1976). Considering those districts which comprise the YSC target area, it is evident that arrests show contradictory reactions to the establishment of a treatment center. District 1 is marked by a steady .02 increase in crime rate from 1974 to 1976; district 4 shows a slight .005 decrease. When these districts are considered in isolation, it appears that the implementation of the YSC had little or no effect on arrest rates.

Control districts 15 and 24 appear to show similarly conflicting trends. Although the district 15 rates rise slightly in 1975, they return to their 1974 rate in 1976; district 24 maintains a slight increase from 1974 to 1976. This increase makes it possible to argue that since target district 4 is most similar in demographic characteristics to control district 24, the YSC may have had some impact on contributing to a decrease in district 4 rates. The argument is tempered, however, by the increase in arrest rates for poverty districts 3 and 17 in 1975, and a decrease in rates for both in 1976, since neither district is influenced directly by the YSC.

An examination of remedial rates may provide some explanation for the fluctuations in arrest rates, particularly since there is some indication that the most serious offenses have declined since 1974, and homicides have declined since 1970. For the years 1974 through 1976, district 1 shows a steady increase in arrests that is accompanied by a steady decrease in remedials. In district 4, however, arrests and remedials indicate a corresponding decrease. It appears that arrest and remedial rates in these districts are differentially influenced by police policy or other effects.

It is difficult to draw conclusions using a district base population which does not permit a comparison of juvenile arrests with the total number of juveniles in a district. However, demographic data indicate that median age varies little between target districts 1 and 4, so that the data interpretation problem is consistent for both of them. The

primary difference between districts is not age but district 1's larger nonwhite population, which suggests that the YSC affects mostly the predominantly white district 4, decreasing both arrest and remedial rates.

Although control districts 15 and 24 both experience declining remedial rates in 1974 through 1976, both also experience fluctuating arrest rates, so that in these districts there appears to be no consistent relationship between remedial rates and arrests. The contrast between this pattern and that demonstrated in target districts 1 and 4 is further evidence that the YSC may have some impact on part of its target area. Poverty districts 3 and 17 both show a decrease in remedial rates accompanied by an increase in arrest rates in 1975, but a drop in arrests in 1976. In these districts, as with control districts 15 and 24, there appears to be no direct relationship between arrest and remedial rates.

Overall, a relationship between arrest and remedial rates does exist in target districts 1 and 4, but not in the control districts (15 and 24) or the poverty districts (3 and 17). However, the nature of the arrest-remedial rate relationship between districts 1 and 4 remains unexplained by the UCR data. In district 1, arrest rates increase while remedial rates decrease, whereas both arrest and remedial rates decrease in district 4. The following section examines another source of data—the YSC's arrest statistics on referred clients—as a possible explanation for the rate discrepancies in the target districts.

#### **AN EXAMINATION OF YOUTH SERVICE CENTER DATA**

Juvenile arrests in Philadelphia, excluding some dependency cases and cases transferred to the adult court, are referred by the police to the Philadelphia Youth Study Center. In turn, the Youth Service Center (YSC) under examination

gathers the arrest data for its particular area from the Youth Study Center's city juvenile arrest rates. The YSC focal area is limited to only that segment of target districts 1 and 4 which encompasses a ten-block radius surrounding the Center. However, a portion of the YSC caseload youth comes from a peripheral area of about three blocks beyond this radius, as well as from the predominantly black Wilson Park area in the west of district 1. It is to be emphasized, then, that the YSC data are only a portion of the UCR arrest data which were analyzed in the previous section for target districts 1 and 4.

Arrest data collected by the YSC for its focal area are available for 1976 and 1977 but YSC offense categories and demographic breakdowns differ from those of the UCR categorization. Further, offense categories for the YSC itself differ somewhat from 1976 to 1977. Comparative analysis between the UCR and YSC arrest data is therefore difficult, but YSC data breakdowns within each year are nonetheless informative. In particular, the 1976 figures show a total of 455 arrests, 208 (46%) of which are represented by black youths (as with the UCR data, these do not distinguish between repeat offenders and single arrests). A race breakdown by areas indicates that the focal and peripheral locales are predominantly white, as compared to Wilson Park. The largest category of offenses (44%) consists of thefts, committed fairly equally by blacks and whites; the violence/weapons category represents about 19% of the crime categories with a disproportionate number (52%) of black offenders. Drug, status, and lesser offenses are predominantly committed by whites. Overall, it appears that blacks are slightly more representative in the serious offenses, and in theft.

One problem with these data is that there are no control areas other than the same area a year later represented by slightly different offense categories. For example, there is a marked decline in arrested youths referred to the YSC in 1977, although this decrease may be evident throughout the entire city, irrespective of the impact of an area-specific treatment

program. Minor offenses composed 99 (24%) of the 420 cases, which may account for the 87-case decrease between 1976 and 1977. According to an official of the Philadelphia police, general crime in the city decreased 15% in the first nine months of 1977. Further, UCR arrest data indicate that about 40% of this decrease may be attributable to a decline in juvenile delinquency specifically.

The YSC's most recent report provides 1977 YSC arrest data. In addition to a decrease in the total number of arrests, the data indicate a 5% decrease in black youth representation in arrests, although blacks make up an increased proportion (62%) of violent crime as compared to 1976 YSC arrest data. Consistent with recent police policy, minor offenses decrease. Furthermore, whites (60%) dominate the theft category. As in the 1976 YSC data, the largest offense category in the 1977 YSC data is theft (54%) which shows a 10% increase over 1976. Violent offenses drop by only 1% in 1977 (from 19% to 18%). Nearly 13% of the cases comprise drug offenses, a decrease of 4% since 1976. Again, because some offenses are combined in the 1977 YSC arrest data, several minor offenses may be inflating the minor offense categories. However, the total number of arrests among YSC referrals declines 26% from 1976 to 1977.

In attempting to determine YSC's overall impact in districts 1 and 4, and within its focal area specifically, it is necessary to consider, in addition to the criminological literature related to assessing treatment effects, other factors that may have contributed to the apparent decrease in arrests.

#### **A SUMMARY ASSESSMENT OF THE YOUTH SERVICE CENTER IMPACT**

Generally, it is questionable whether the YSC can be credited with a 26% decrease in the number of arrests in its focal area from 1976 to 1977. Numerous factors besides the

YSC's existence may account for an arrest decline. For example, the current policy of the city police and the Philadelphia Youth Study Center limiting arrests of some status offenders, particularly runaways, would presumably effect a decrease in YSC caseload. Moreover, the 15% decrease in overall city crime rates indicates an assumed decline in arrests for the entire city, regardless of the influence of a youth service agency.

More general factors may also affect arrest rates. According to one Philadelphia Youth Study Center official, the lowered crime rate may be attributable to a crackdown by police on gang fighting. In 1976 there were 47 deaths from gang fighting; there was only one such death in 1977. The current political policy of the department may be reflected in the numbers and kinds of arrests. A decreasing arrest rate can be attained easily through manipulating discretionary arrest procedures. The recent decline in violent crime, for example, may be the result of an attempt to ease fears that police are not "protecting the streets."

Furthermore, an arrest decline may also be a reflection of the YSC's selective referral system. As mentioned, the Center does not cover police target districts 1 and 4 entirely. Although it does accept referrals from Wilson Park and the lower-class peripheral area, the area it excludes contains a large percentage of the lower-class persons in these two districts, and past research indicates disproportionately high crime rates for lower-class individuals.

Another confounding factor is that a one-year period does not include enough time to prove that an arrest rate decrease is attributable to treatment. Individuals may cooperate while in a program because they realize they are under scrutiny, but may recidivate later. Long-term prevention trends are necessary to indicate full effectiveness.

Still another difficulty lies in interpreting the relationship between arrest rates and remedial rates. For some districts (particularly for district 4), UCR data indicate that an increase

in the number of remedials is related to a decrease in arrests, suggesting that the YSC has an effect on police discretionary arrest activities, especially for white youths. Police may be encouraged to refer juveniles to YSC if it is apparent that they will receive an informal sanction or treatment. But, this same relationship may also be indicative of the general decrease in violent crime reflected by official data, in which case the explanation would be that there is simply less juvenile activity which warrants arrest.

Additional difficulty related to using only official data is that the interactive effects of age tend to be ignored. Williams and Gold (1972) suggest that having an arrest record is more closely related to age than is actual delinquent behavior. Police expect that older adolescents should "know better," particularly if they are repeat offenders. Demographic data beyond 1970 are not available for comparing fluctuations in arrests with fluctuations in age in Philadelphia police districts. It can only be assumed that the 1970 median ages remain stable, although survival rates may allow crude predictions of age fluctuations. As Hirschi and Selvin (1973) note, qualitative techniques may clarify or expand upon the structural analysis of census tracts.

The impact of the YSC may also be related to the presence of other youth service agencies. Therefore, this study examined those social agencies in the sections of the city encompassing the six selected police districts. The Philadelphia Youth Referral Directory contains a list and description of such agencies, which responded to a 1975 survey requesting an outline of their social function. The directory showed that the six selected districts contain numerous youth service agencies, some of which specifically emphasize delinquency prevention. Thus, it is difficult to attribute an apparent arrest-rate decrease to any one agency.

This assessment of the impact of the South Philadelphia Youth Service Center suggests that improvement in urban delinquency may be associated with a number of factors. There

is no reason to attribute this improvement to a single source, even though the YSC may demonstrate improvement in certain individual cases.

Despite the stated weaknesses in analyzing arrest rates in the target area and comparison areas, the methodology appears to be useful for examining a service center's area impact on official arrests. Future evaluation efforts should emphasize more accurate means for assessing the effects of demographic factors upon arrest rates. For example, denominators for arrests should incorporate only the juvenile age population to control for annual age fluctuations. Accordingly, inclusion of victimization survey data can substantiate official arrest data as well as control for the effects of changes in police administration. Specification of service centers in demographically similar police districts would also allow for impact comparisons between several service centers.

Generally, this evaluation effort was directed toward only some of the stated goals and objectives outlined by the YSC administration; accordingly, program success was determined by measuring the degree to which the YSC met these goals. However, it is also recognized that this approach, particularly the emphasis on areawide influences, can overlook unstated goals, unintended consequences, and other impact effects, especially those related to the particular YSC treatment regimen. By incorporating this study's findings with other research on the YSC reflecting a variety of investigative approaches and methodologies, some degree of confidence in the final program assessment may be achieved.

## NOTES

1. Police districts do not correspond to city or census tract divisions. It was necessary in some cases to count separate block populations for areas that overlapped a police district boundary and to add or subtract as needed. If the overlap corresponded to grosser tract divisions, the Philadelphia census tracts and the Bureau

of the Census were used. The Philadelphia tract system consists of 87 tracts which are aggregates of the 364 tracts outlined by the Bureau. The Philadelphia tracts (called planning analysis subsections—PASS) were preferable because the city census data are more recent: The Bureau collects data every ten years, but the Philadelphia census collects data every five years and has extrapolated expected populations until 1990. Initially, the 22 police district outlines were superimposed over the 1970 PASS tracts, which incorporated 1970 Bureau tracts and blocks. This comparison allowed three separate units to be counted in determining a police district population: (1) the PASS tracts, (2) the census tracts, and (3) the separate blocks within each census tract. Those proportions of PASS and census tracts within each police division were determined so that post-1970 population bases could be estimated. Thus, interpolations were made for those years between 1970 and 1980. The 1975 PASS population was an actual figure and the 1980 population was an estimate. In turn, percentaged proportions of planning analysis subsections that comprised police districts 1 and 4, 3 and 17, and 15 and 24 were calculated. Proportions of each section were combined to acquire base populations for each police district. The final analysis was based on the overlapping of police districts onto the 87 Philadelphia census tracts and the 364 Bureau tracts.

2. According to Martin et al. (1968), an area analysis method incorporates techniques of demography, ecology, urban history, and social-work community organization. Several of these techniques are used in assessing the Youth Service Center's impact.

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