

The Juveniles Taken Into Custody Research Program: Estimating the Prevalence of Juvenile Custody by Race and Gender

By Robert E. DeComo, Ph.D.

INTRODUCTION

What proportion of our nation's juvenile population will likely ever be taken into the custody of state juvenile corrections systems? How does the probability of being taken into state custody for juveniles differ for males and females and for different racial and ethnic groups, both within and across jurisdictions?

To answer these questions, NCCD has applied a measure of "prevalence" of juveniles taken into state juvenile corrections custody. As used in this research, prevalence refers to the estimated proportion of the at-risk population of juveniles based on several age, race, and sex population subgroups, who are likely to be committed to the custody of state juvenile corrections systems by age 18.

This research is significant on several levels:

1. It introduces a new social indicator that measures the use of the most severe sanction we can impose within the parameters of our juvenile justice systems.
2. When combined with one-day custody rates, it provides a comprehensive picture of our state juvenile corrections systems, in both static and dynamic terms.
3. When combined with prevalence measures of juvenile crime and responses to these crimes, estimates of the prevalence of state juvenile corrections custody can help provide a more complete portrait of delinquency and juvenile justice, from

offense and arrest through adjudication and commitment.

4. Prevalence estimates of state juvenile corrections custody can be directly compared with the probabilities of other significant and traumatic life events for juveniles, such as serious injury, illness, or accident.

5. These prevalence figures can be used with data from the National Correctional Reporting Program to estimate the lifetime probabilities of various groups' entrances into state custody.

6. Finally, this research is made possible for the first time by the recent availability of age, race, sex, and first occasion (e.g., commitment) data produced as part of a new national data collection system, referred to as the National Juvenile Corrections System Reporting Program (NJCSRP).

THE CONCEPT OF PREVALENCE

"Prevalence" should be distinguished from "incidence," which refers to the number of times (i.e., events) juveniles are taken into custody during a specified period (e.g., annually), and not the number of different juveniles. Data of such juvenile custody incidence, expressed in terms of admissions rates (e.g., per 100,000), have long been derived from the annual facility admissions counts collected from the biennial Children In

Custody (CIC) survey. The CIC also provided a prevalence indicator based on the 1-day census counts of juveniles in custody, expressed as a proportion of the juvenile population (i.e., 1-day count rate per 100,000 juveniles).

However, until recently, there was no national data reporting system that recorded on an individual basis, the number and characteristics of youths admitted to juvenile correctional facilities. This omission is now being addressed via the recently implemented NJCSRP. The first component of that system is designed to record all admissions and releases to state juvenile correctional facilities. Referred to as the State Juvenile Corrections System Reporting Program (SJCSRP), this statistical program allows a more precise measurement of the number of youth admitted to state training schools and other state-operated facilities by relevant demographic attributes (age, sex, and race).

NCCD has estimated that when the SJCSRP is implemented nationwide it will provide individual-level data on approximately 10 to 11 percent of all juveniles taken into custody each year. While many more juveniles are admitted to non-state-operated (e.g., locally-operated or privately-operated) facilities each year, the number of juveniles included in the SJCSRP comprises many of this nation's most troubled and troubling youths and reflects those youths who have been most

severely sanctioned by our juvenile court systems. In addition, prevalence estimates derived from the SJCSRP data must be considered conservative, as the overall probability of being taken into custody for a juvenile would be substantially greater if admissions to juvenile and adult facilities (both state- and locally-operated) were included in the estimations.

Nonetheless, the CIC 1-day count rate of juveniles in custody in state facilities together with the new SJCSRP indicator of the prevalence of juveniles taken into custody give a more comprehensive portrait of the nation's state juvenile corrections system, in both static (percent of juveniles in state custody on a single day) and dynamic (percent of juveniles who will likely experience state custody in their juvenile years) terms. In addition, using this important social indicator, this analysis explores the differences in prevalence between several sex and race population groups within and across state juvenile corrections systems. Finally, this analysis explores the possibility that, while the fraction of juveniles in custody on a single day may be quite small, over a longer period the proportion of juveniles that will likely experience state juvenile corrections custody may be substantial.

The calculation of prevalence rates of delinquency for juveniles is not in and of itself a new approach. Delinquency literature dating as far back as the 1960s contains a number of studies that present

prevalence rates for juveniles (see, for example, Monahan, 1960; Ball et al., 1964; and Snyder, 1988). However, the vast majority of such studies focus on the prevalence of juvenile crime. These studies typically employ criteria such as police contacts (Wolfgang et al., 1972), court appearances (Monahan, 1960), or self-reported delinquency (Elliott et al., 1983). There are very few studies that present prevalence rates using more severe juvenile justice system criterion, such as conviction (Farrington, 1981) or confinement in a training school (Gordon, 1973). This scarcity of research has been due to the absence of age, race, sex-specific, and first occasion (e.g., commitment) data produced by governmental agencies concerned with juvenile crime and corrections.

To overcome the limitations of official statistics, some of the most notable studies in the delinquency field employed longitudinal cohort designs (Wolfgang et al., 1972; Wadsworth, 1975; and Elliott et al., 1983). These ambitious studies involved following up a sample (e.g., a birth cohort) over a period of several years, compiling age, race, and sex-specific juvenile justice system event data (e.g., arrests) from official records and/or self-report surveys. If at the end of the period of observation, one has observed M first events, and if the original cohort has N members, the prevalence, P, of the event is given by the fraction:

$$P = M/N$$

Clearly, while longitudinal cohort studies produce the most accurate delineations of individual (delinquency) and system (corrections) behaviors, such studies are difficult to generate, require extensive time commitments, and are in danger of becoming obsolete by the time they are completed. To overcome the significant practical limitations of longitudinal studies, researchers such as Gordon (1974), Gordon and Gleser (1974), and Farrington (1981) have demonstrated alternative statistical methods for determining age, race, and sex-specific event rates that do not require waiting for a cohort to pass through the entire period during which they are defined to be at risk.

These researchers demonstrated a method of obtaining a cross-sectional estimate of prevalence from a single year's data. They determined the proportion of juveniles in each age group that met their criterion (e.g., conviction) for the first time in that year, and then added these figures over all age groups to show what the prevalence (of convictions) would be if the (conviction) rate for that year persisted over a long period.

In the most recent attempt to estimate prevalence using the cross-sectional method, the Bureau of Justice Statistics (1985) encountered some of the same data deficiencies with regard to the admissions of adults into state prisons. It found that the critical data on the number of first admissions to state prisons in a given year are not recorded in official statistics. Because the available national data could only provide a range within which the actual prevalence rate lies, the Bureau was forced to produce two estimates (an inmate survey estimate and an admissions census estimate), rather than a single estimate.

These attempts to estimate the prevalence of custody using cross-sectional analysis have another important limitation. Relying on data from a single year required researchers to assume that the first admission rate in future years would be the same as the rate computed for the year of the study. It is clear that changes in the number and types of juvenile crimes and juvenile justice system responses to them may make such an assumption in-

TABLE 1
CALCULATION OF ESTIMATED PREVALENCE
OF STATE CUSTODY FOR JUVENILES
AGE 10-17 IN NEW YORK

AGE AT ADMISSION IN 1991	NUMBER ADMISSIONS FOR FIRST TIME	1990 JUVENILE POPULATION	% 1990 JUVENILE POPULATION	CUMULATIVE % 1990 JUVENILE POPULATION
10 & 11	10	463,778	0.00	0.00
12 & 13	215	456,150	0.05	0.05
14	397	220,249	0.18	0.23
15	618	226,202	0.27	0.50
16	365	225,762	0.16	0.66
17	57	233,638	0.02	0.69

valid. Thus, these prevalence rates can be easily considered "hypothetical," since they do not apply to any cohort of real juveniles. They are also very likely to be unstable over time, and, thus, are limited in their usefulness in obtaining a picture of the true prevalence of custody for juveniles.

Individual-level data now available from the SJCSRP overcome many of these shortcomings. Of primary importance, the SJCSRP specifically collects the number of first admissions to state custody (i.e., no prior commitments) for juveniles at each age in a given calendar year. This is the essential statistic needed for the computation of prevalence rates.

In addition, the SJCSRP has been designed as an annual data collection system and, as such, state juvenile corrections custody prevalence rates can be computed each year to give a more dynamic and precise estimation. Further, the SJCSRP can generate separate prevalence estimates for a series of adjacent years, allowing for a comparison of the age and population-specific rates from year to year.

In the future, refinements in the data used to compute prevalence rates will not only improve their precision but also provide insight as to the sensitivity of these estimates. For example, expanding the quality control procedures (e.g., auditing) used with the SJCSRP would improve the accuracy of the data on first admissions. Similarly, working with state data providers to account for the portion of the first admissions in each age group that have been admitted to a state facility in another state will eliminate any overestimates caused by double counting of these juveniles.

Finally, adjusting population counts to account for the mortality rates of juveniles or the undercounting of certain population subgroups (e.g., minorities) would reduce or eliminate the underestimates of prevalence caused by these factors. For example, a more precise prevalence measure could be computed weighting age-specific first admission rates by the probability of surviving to age 18 for each age group.

**TABLE 2
CALCULATION OF ESTIMATED PREVALENCE
OF STATE CUSTODY FOR JUVENILES
AGE 10-17 IN NEW YORK BY SEX**

AGE AT ADMISSION IN 1991	NUMBER ADMISSIONS FOR FIRST TIME		1990 JUVENILE POPULATION		% 1990 JUVENILE POPULATION		CUMULATIVE % 1990 JUVENILE POPULATION	
	MALES	FEMALES	MALES	FEMALES	MALES	FEMALES	MALES	FEMALES
10 & 11	10	0	237,202	226,576	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
12 & 13	178	37	232,763	223,387	0.08	0.02	0.08	0.02
14	332	65	112,655	107,594	0.29	0.06	0.38	0.08
15	554	64	116,232	109,970	0.48	0.06	0.85	0.14
16	319	46	114,913	110,849	0.28	0.04	1.13	0.18
17	55	2	119,958	113,680	0.05	0.00	1.18	0.18

COMPUTATIONS AND FINDINGS

Tables 1 through 4 illustrate the computational methods and present the findings on the prevalence rates for state juvenile corrections custody in New York State. These same computations are then repeated for 15 other states and the comparison of prevalence rates is then discussed.

Table 1 presents the calculations of the estimated prevalence of state custody for all juveniles ages 10 through 17 in that state. The first column of this table shows the total number of juvenile admissions with no prior commitments for individual age groups in 1991. These first-admissions are combined for the age groups 10 to 11 and 12 to 13 to correspond with age groupings of the base population counts as reported by the Bureau of the Census (1991) and used for the computations. Column 2 shows the total number of juveniles in the state's population for the individual age groups as reported by the Bureau of the Census for 1990.

To estimate the prevalence of state custody for each age group, the number of first-admissions for each group (Table 1, column 1) is divided by the number of juveniles in the base population for that age group (Table 1, column 2). The resulting age-specific rates of first admission, expressed as percentages, appear in Table 1, column 3. Table 1 shows a steady increase of each successively

older group of admissions until age 15 (the upper age of juvenile jurisdiction in New York) and then a decline for the 16 and 17 year-old age groups.

Table 1, column 4 shows the result of the summation of the age-specific rates for first-admissions. Thus, the probability that a juvenile would be taken into state juvenile custody in New York by age 18 equals the probability that a juvenile was taken into custody for the first time at age 10-11, and the probability that the juvenile was taken into custody for the first time at age 12-13 and so on through the risk of first admission at age 17. The resulting prevalence figure of 0.69 percent for all juveniles in New York is a summation of their risk from age 10 through age 17 and indicates that a juvenile in the state of New York has a 0.69 percent (or 1 in 145) chance of being taken into state juvenile corrections custody at least once by the age of 18.

Table 2 shows the same computations for the prevalence of state juvenile corrections custody by sex. Males have a 1.18 percent (or 1 in 85) chance of being taken into state custody by age 18 in New York State, more than six times higher than the probability for females (0.18 percent or 1 in 555) in that state. These patterns can be seen most readily in the graphic representation of the prevalence of state custody, by age and sex as shown in Figure 1.

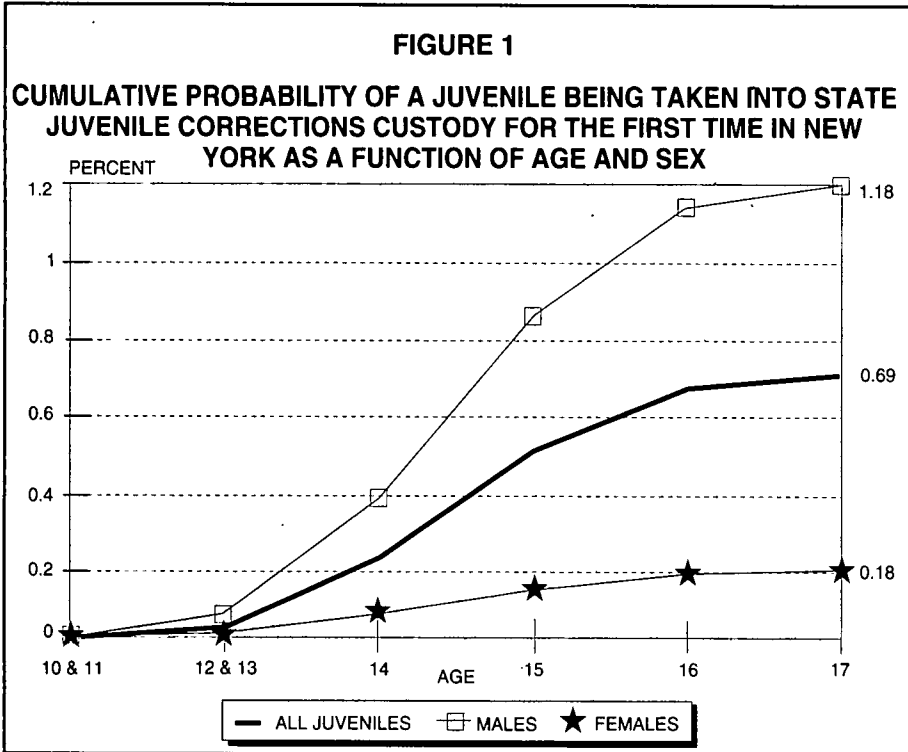


Table 3 shows the cumulative race-specific prevalence rates for New York. These rates were derived by using the separate first admission and population counts for white, black, Hispanic, and other race classifications. It should be noted that, in both the SJCSRP and the CIC population counts, Hispanic is considered an ethnic rather than a racial category. Thus, Hispanic juveniles are also counted in the white and black race groups in this analysis. The other race category reported here is a composite of juveniles identified as Native American, Asian-American, other, or unknown as to racial background.

Table 3 shows that black youths have a 2.2 percent (or 1 in 45) chance of being taken into state custody by age 18. This rate for black youths is almost twice that of Hispanic youths (1.18 percent or 1 in 85) and more than six times (0.35 percent or 1 in 285) that of white youths in that state (Figure 2).

Table 4 shows the cumulative sex and race-specific prevalence rates for the individual age groups 10 through 17. Black males have the greatest chance (3.88 percent or 1 in 25) of being taken into state juvenile corrections custody by age 18. The rate for black males was almost twice that of Hispanic males (2.09 percent or 1 in 48) and almost seven times that of white males, which was 0.58 percent (or 1 in 172). Black females have the greatest chance (0.53 percent, or 1 in 188) of being taken into state custody by age 18 among all females in New York State. Figure 3 illustrates the data presented in Table 4. These same computational methods were used to derive age, sex, and race-specific estimates of the prevalence of state juvenile corrections custody in 15 other states.

INTERSTATE COMPARISONS OF PREVALENCE

As shown in Table 5, the overall probability of being taken into state juvenile corrections custody by age 18 was highest in Ohio (1.55 percent or 1 in 64) and lowest in Massachusetts (0.56 percent or 1 in 178). The highest rate for all sex and race population segments was found for black youths in Utah, where the rate was

TABLE 3
CUMULATIVE ESTIMATED PREVALENCE OF STATE CUSTODY FOR JUVENILES AGE 10-17 IN NEW YORK BY RACE

AGE AT ADMISSION IN 1991	PERCENT				
	ALL JUVENILES	WHITE	BLACK	HISPANIC	OTHER
10 & 11	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.00
12 & 13	0.05	0.02	0.17	0.08	0.01
14	0.23	0.13	0.70	0.39	0.02
15	0.50	0.26	1.60	0.83	0.05
16	0.66	0.34	2.12	1.13	0.09
17	0.69	0.35	2.20	1.18	0.11

TABLE 4
CUMULATIVE ESTIMATED PREVALENCE OF STATE CUSTODY FOR JUVENILES AGE 10-17 IN NEW YORK BY RACE AND SEX

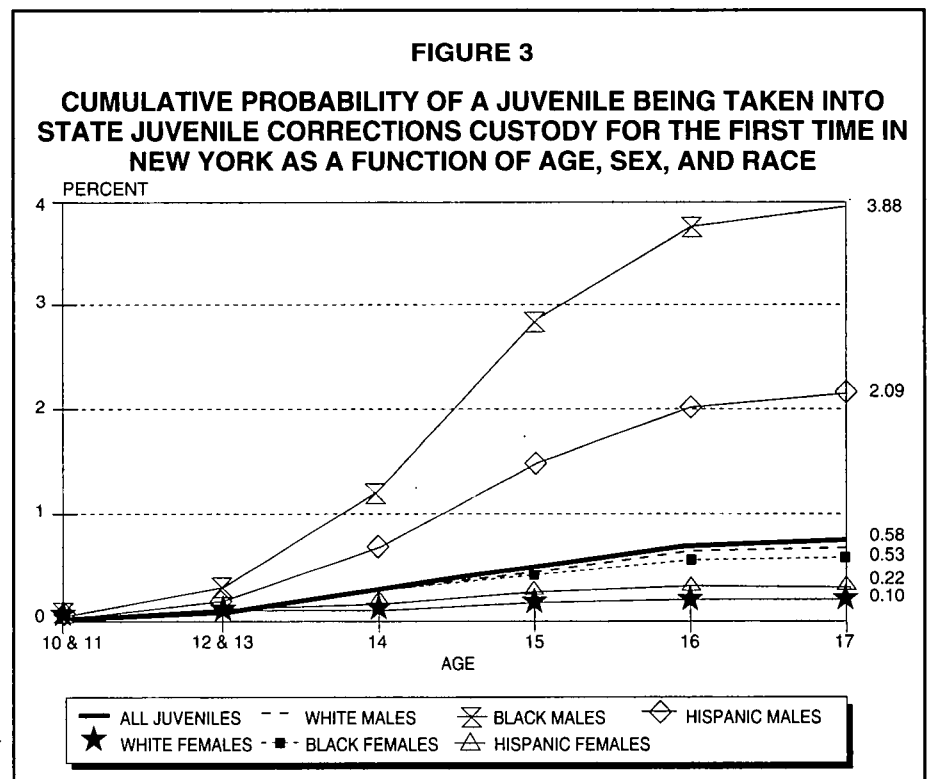
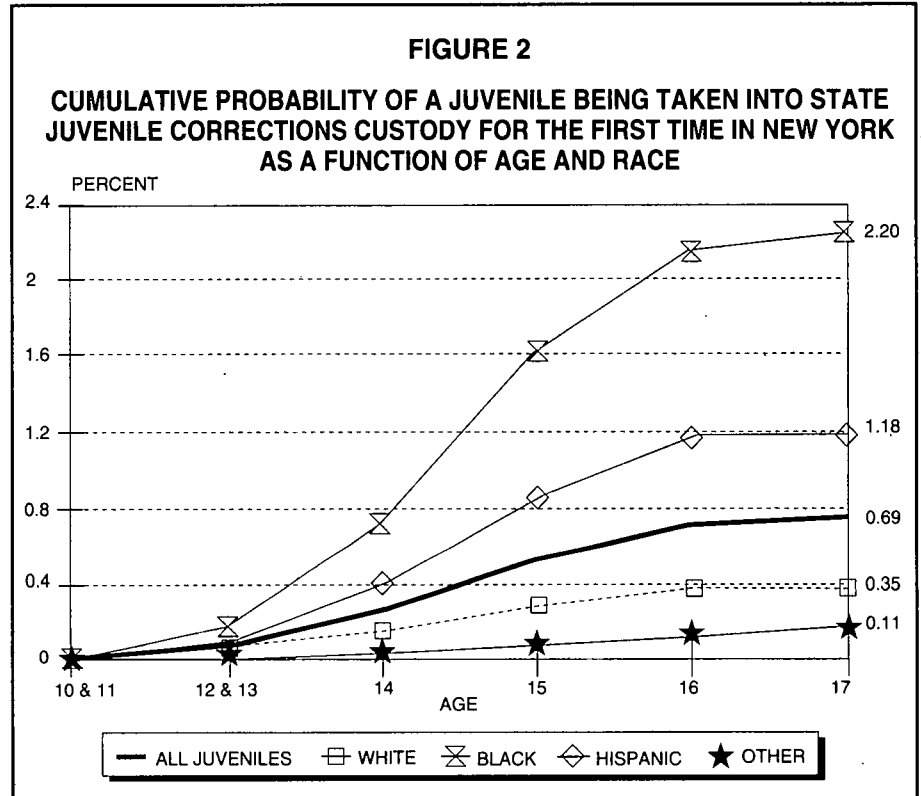
AGE AT ADMISSION IN 1991	PERCENT MALES			ALL JUVENILES	PERCENT FEMALES		
	WHITE	BLACK	HISPANIC		WHITE	BLACK	HISPANIC
10 & 11	0.00	0.02	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
12 & 13	0.04	0.27	0.15	0.05	0.00	0.06	0.02
14	0.21	1.17	0.67	0.23	0.04	0.24	0.09
15	0.43	2.82	1.45	0.50	0.08	0.39	0.19
16	0.57	3.72	1.99	0.66	0.10	0.52	0.22
17	0.58	3.88	2.09	0.69	0.10	0.53	0.22

estimated to be 8.32 percent (or 1 in 12). Other atypically high prevalence rates were found for males (2.75 percent or 1 in 36) in Ohio, for black youths (7.66 percent or 1 in 13) in Wisconsin, and for Hispanic youths (4.10 percent or 1 in 24) in North Dakota. These higher rates for certain race groups may be more a function of the limited size of that group's population in certain states than of other factors, such as its crime rates or the state's response to its crimes.

The data in Table 5 also reveal some interstate patterns in rates for these population segments. For males, prevalence rates tended to vary rather narrowly, generally in the range of 1 percent to 2 percent. Prevalence rates were unilaterally low across all the states for females. Rates for white youths were under 1 percent in all states, whereas prevalence rates varied widely across the states for the other racial groups. For example, the prevalence rates for black youths ranged from a high of 8.32 percent in Utah to a low of 1.91 percent in Louisiana.

Table 6 shows the estimated cumulative prevalence rates for the six race and sex subgroups. Black males have the highest prevalence rates of all segments of the population in 15 of the 16 states. Their rates were highest in Utah (13.92 percent or 1 in 7) and in Wisconsin (13.86 percent or 1 in 7). These data also estimate that Hispanic males have substantially higher rates than their white counterparts in most states. Among females, prevalence estimates were found to be highest for black youths in every state. A comparison of the prevalence rates for white females, compared to Hispanic females, found no consistent pattern across the states.

These interstate differences in rates reflect a combination of complex factors not only about the operations of state juvenile corrections and court systems, but also the nature of the juvenile offender and the at-risk populations in these states. Examples of the many factors that can effect these rates include but are not limited to: 1) the balance of state versus local juvenile custody dispositional options and uses; 2) the use of waivers between the adult and juvenile systems; and 3) the upper age of juvenile court



jurisdiction. The next important task for NCCD research on the prevalence of state juvenile corrections custody is to work cooperatively with the SJCSRP participants and other researchers and policy makers to understand better the sources of these differences.

CONCLUSION

With the newly-implemented SJCSRP, we can now generate estimates of prevalence rates for state custody, unprecedented in juvenile corrections research. The dynamic picture of state custody for

TABLE 5
CUMULATIVE ESTIMATED PREVALENCE BY STATE
FOR ALL JUVENILES (10-17)
AND FOR SEX AND RACE GROUPS REPORTED SEPARATELY

STATE	PERCENT						
	ALL	MALE	FEMALE	WHITE	BLACK	HISPANIC	OTHER
Ohio	1.55	2.75	0.28	0.83	6.53	1.20	0.26
Virginia	1.20	2.10	0.26	0.57	3.51	0.38	0.35
Missouri	1.08	1.86	0.27	0.74	3.32	NA	0.39
Tennessee ³	1.07	1.82	0.29	0.70	2.60	NA	0.24
Wisconsin ^{2,3}	1.07	1.88	0.21	0.46	7.66	2.78	2.86
Louisiana	0.87	1.60	0.11	0.25	1.91	0.00	0.20
North Dakota	0.85	1.55	0.11	0.64	2.13	4.10	3.44
Texas	0.85	1.55	0.11	0.72	2.52	0.93	0.03
Utah ²	0.79	1.40	0.14	0.73	8.32	2.40	1.03
Iowa	0.73	1.33	0.09	0.62	4.54	1.85	1.17
Illinois	0.67	1.23	0.07	0.37	2.04	0.81	0.06
California ²	0.69	1.27	0.06	0.69	2.66	0.88	0.18
New Jersey ¹	0.69	1.30	0.05	0.23	2.98	0.86	0.12
New York	0.69	1.18	0.18	0.35	2.20	1.18	0.11
New Hampshire	0.65	1.09	0.19	0.62	4.91	2.41	0.44
Massachusetts ²	0.56	1.05	0.04	0.28	2.73	1.68	1.95

1 Prior commitments unknown; used new commitments for estimates.
 2 Includes some cases that are unknown as to Hispanic origin.
 3 Includes some cases with unknown prior commitments.

TABLE 6
CUMULATIVE ESTIMATED PREVALENCE BY STATE
FOR ALL JUVENILES (10-17)
AND FOR COMBINED SEX AND RACE SUBGROUPS

STATE	ALL	PERCENT					
		WHITE MALE	WHITE FEMALE	BLACK MALE	BLACK FEMALE	HISPANIC MALE	HISPANIC FEMALE
Ohio	1.55	1.44	0.18	11.88	0.93	2.25	0.08
Virginia	1.20	0.96	0.16	6.34	0.60	0.46	0.30
Missouri	1.08	1.24	0.20	5.85	0.71	NA	NA
Tennessee ³	1.07	1.07	0.32	4.89	0.19	NA	NA
Wisconsin ^{2,3}	1.07	0.77	0.13	13.86	1.15	5.21	0.29
Louisiana	0.87	0.45	0.04	3.54	0.24	0.00	0.00
North Dakota	0.85	1.16	0.09	4.76	0.00	7.34	0.00
Texas	0.85	1.30	0.10	4.68	0.28	1.72	0.10
Utah ²	0.79	1.28	0.15	13.92	1.28	4.37	0.31
Iowa	0.73	1.16	0.06	7.71	1.21	3.59	0.00
California ²	0.69	1.27	0.06	4.92	0.24	1.63	0.05
New Jersey ¹	0.69	0.43	0.02	5.67	0.23	1.64	0.00
New York	0.69	0.58	0.10	3.88	0.53	2.09	0.22
Illinois	0.67	0.67	0.05	3.83	0.20	1.49	0.06
New Hampshire	0.65	1.05	0.18	7.64	1.72	3.71	1.08
Massachusetts	0.56	0.51	0.03	5.25	0.13	3.20	0.08

1 Prior commitments unknown; used new commitments for estimates.
 2 Includes some cases that are unknown as to Hispanic origin.
 3 Includes some cases with unknown prior commitments.

juveniles is dramatically different than the static picture that has been available from the CIC 1-day counts. For example, analysis of the SJCSR data found the highest overall prevalence rates for Ohio (1.55 percent or 1 in 64) and Virginia (1.2 percent or 1 in 83), providing a dramatic contrast to the 1-day count rates for these states, which, in 1991, were 1 in 599 and 1 in 971, respectively (see Table 7).

Even in states with much lower prevalence rates, such as Massachusetts (0.56 percent or 1 in 178) and New Hampshire (0.65 percent or 1 in 153), these rates far exceeded their CIC 1-day rates, which, in 1991, were 1 in 7,143 and 1 in 1,333, respectively. Still more dramatic and troubling are the even greater differences between prevalence rates for minority youths and their white counterparts revealed by the analysis. NCCD's previous analyses of CIC data presented in its annual reports (DeComo et al., 1993:35; Krisberg and DeComo, 1992:30; and Krisberg et al., 1991:22) repeatedly found 1-day rates two to four times higher for minority youths. The prevalence rates from the SJCSR data have revealed even greater differences, with estimates well over 10 times larger for minority youth in some states. These results clearly indicate that the problem of minority over-representation in our juvenile custody population is much greater than previously thought and intensifies the already urgent need to comprehend the problem and address this apparent disparity.

In future reports, NCCD plans to present more refined analyses on this important social issue. For example, the individual-level data from the SJCSR permit the kind of multivariate analysis needed to explore to what extent these differences in the use of custody for minorities are partly explained by differences in delinquent behavior (e.g., frequency and severity of offenses).

Also in future reports, NCCD plans to present results from the individual-level data on the "number of prior commitments" from the SJCSR to generate higher-order prevalence statistics, such as the prevalence of second-custody,

third-custody, etc. It is a short step, then, to envision the computation of a comparison or ratio of prevalence rates to form a recidivism rate for juvenile offenders. If successful, the SJCSRP can establish a national barometer of the effectiveness of state juvenile corrections.

The SJCSRP data have already shown their ability to provide a more complete picture of our nation's state juvenile corrections systems than has been previously available. The expansion and refinement of SJCSRP data submissions and analyses in future years can be expected to increase the value of this important social indicator, leading to a better understanding of the policies and operations of the nation's juvenile corrections systems.

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TABLE 7

COMPARISON OF STATIC (1-DAY) AND DYNAMIC (TO AGE 18) PREVALENCE RATES OF STATE CUSTODY FOR 16 STATES IN 1991

STATE	STATIC PREVALENCE ¹	DYNAMIC PREVALENCE
Ohio	1:599	1:64
Virginia	1:971	1:83
Missouri	1:1,042	1:92
Tennessee	1:1,030	1:93
Wisconsin	1:833	1:93
Louisiana	1:578	1:115
North Dakota	1:901	1:117
Texas	1:1,235	1:117
Utah	1:4,000	1:126
Iowa	1:1,149	1:136
California	1:507	1:144
New Jersey	1:735	1:144
New York	1:621	1:144
Illinois	1:885	1:149
New Hampshire	1:1,333	1:153
Massachusetts	1:7,143	1:178

¹Source: Bureau of the Census, 1991 Census of Public and Private Detention, Correctional and Shelter Facilities. Includes only juveniles committed to state-operated facilities excluding detention, shelter, halfway house, and group home facilities. Includes a limited number of juveniles 18 years of age and over. These rates could not be adjusted for these older juveniles due to the aggregate nature of the census data.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Robert E. DeComo, Ph.D., is the Senior Program Manager for the National Council on Crime and Delinquency.

**NATIONAL COUNCIL ON CRIME
AND DELINQUENCY**

Headquarters Office

685 Market Street, Suite 620
San Francisco, California 94105
(415) 896-6223

Midwest Office

6409 Odana Road
Madison, Wisconsin 53719
(608) 274-8882

East Coast Office

S.I. Newhouse Center at Rutgers
15 Washington Street, Fourth Floor
Newark, New Jersey 07102
(201) 643-5805

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