JUVENILE CRIME IN THE SPECIAL YOUTH PROGRAM AREA IN 1956

COMPARED TO OTHER AREAS

Compiled Primarily from Newspaper Data

Prepared by
Special Youth Program
Research Staff
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One way of seeking an answer to the question - "How effective has the Special Youth Program been in reducing delinquency in its area of operations in Roxbury?" - is to gather statistics that give some measure of juvenile delinquency - something extremely difficult to measure. There are various places to find such statistics - police station records, listings of appearances in court, listings of youngsters committed to the Youth Service Board. None of these sources of statistical data are very satisfactory, since each one records only particular kinds of information, and none furnishes information as to all the delinquency that occurred during any particular period. Another place to find such data is in the newspapers, which report a large proportion of the juvenile crimes that occur in the Boston metropolitan area.¹

In examining these figures it is important to keep in mind that Roxbury was chosen as the theater of operations of the Special Youth Program because it had the highest delinquency rates of any part of Boston; that the Orchard Park-Dudley Street-Warren Street sections of Roxbury were chosen for concentration because they had the highest rates within Roxbury, and that the Special Youth Program corner groups were chosen for intensive work because they were characterized by the highest delinquency, both actual and potential, within this high delinquency area.

The following material presents first, four general statements as to trends in delinquency in Roxbury and nearby areas, and second, some of the statistical data from which these generalizations were derived. Footnotes at the end discuss some of the technical considerations relating to the nature of the statistical data.

¹ Footnotes appear on pages 8-10.
Trends in Juvenile Crime in Roxbury and Nearby Areas:

Using newspaper reports as the principal source of information, and comparing this information with data from other sources during past years, the following four general conclusions as to trends in juvenile crime* in Roxbury and nearby areas have been obtained.

1. No teenager who was a member of a group worked with by Special Youth Program workers was mentioned by the newspapers as being involved in a crime during 1956.

2. Five crimes involving teenagers identified as living in the area of project operations (about 1/3 of Roxbury) were reported for 1956. None of these could be described as "gang" crimes.

3. Fourteen "gang" crimes were reported for Roxbury and nearby areas in 1956. None of these involved gangs identified as being made up of youths living or meeting in the project area. These results indicate that "gang" crime was not prevalent in the project area in 1956.

4. If we compare the juvenile crime rate of the project area with rates in Dorchester, Jamaica Plain, the South End and South Boston, we find that the project area rate in 1956 shows a substantial reduction over rates for 1948-1951.

Incidence of Juvenile Crime in the Special Youth Program Area and Other Areas:

The following statistics and tables are based primarily on data reported in Boston newspapers in 1956 (primarily the Boston Globe, afternoon edition), but data from other sources is introduced for purposes of comparing past with present trends. The two types of data are not directly comparable, and are used to present a clearer picture of general trends rather than as conclusive evidence.

During the year 1956, 82 crimes were reported in Boston newspapers which involved offenders under 20 years of age, and which occurred in a five-community area (Roxbury, Dorchester, Jamaica Plain, South End, South Boston) or were committed by individuals identified as residing in that area, or both.

Of these 82 crimes, information on residence of offenders was furnished for 60 crimes. For these 60 crimes, 64 residence areas were involved (some

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crimes involved several individuals from more than one community). The following table shows the distribution of residence areas of offenders for six categories of individuals:

1. Individuals belonging to groups being worked with by Special Youth Program workers.

2. Individuals living in the area designated as the Special Youth Program's area of operation, but not belonging to Special Youth Program groups.

3. Individuals living in parts of Roxbury outside the Special Youth Program's area of operations.

4. Individuals designated as living in Roxbury, but where specific location in Roxbury was not specified.

5. Individuals living in North and South Dorchester.

6. Individuals living in Jamaica Plain, South Boston, and the South End.

**TABLE I**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1956</th>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
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<td>(Jan,Feb,March)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Quarter</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(Jul,Aug,Sept)</td>
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<tr>
<td>4th Quarter</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(Oct,Nov,Dec)</td>
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<td>TOTALS</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>64</td>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

According to this table, no individual who was a member of a group worked with by a Special Youth Program worker was cited in the newspaper reports as being involved in a crime during the year 1956. One individual associated with the program was cited as being involved in a crime, along with two others not

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* Area boundaries used here are those defined by the Research Division of United Community Services of Metropolitan Boston, in "Boston House Numbers by Census Tracts", Research Div., United Community Services, 1953.
associated with the program. However, he does not fall under the conditions cited above in two ways: 1) He was aged 21 at the time of his arrest; 2) He was a member of a group whose full time worker had left the Program in March, and the crime occurred in December while his group was being serviced on a limited scale.

During 1956, Special Youth Program corner group workers worked with groups whose combined membership totalled about 250 - about 8% of the teenagers in the project area and roughly 60% to 70% of the project area teenagers who "hang out" on street corners. Available information on the delinquency records of group members shows that about 27% of these 250 boys and girls had been involved with official correctional agencies (police, courts, correctional institutions) prior to 1956. Another 30% were observed or reliably reported to have committed delinquencies not acted on by official agencies, giving a total of 56% of the members of Special Youth Program groups who had been involved in official or unofficial delinquency prior to 1956. Thus, the fact that not one of 250 youngsters, most of whom had been involved in delinquency, was cited in the papers as being involved in a crime in 1956 is impressive.

Of the 5 crimes involving individuals whose residence fell within the project area, four involved robbery and one narcotics selling. Two of the robberies were by single individuals (a 19 year old; theft from newsstand at Essex Street MTA station - a 17 year old; armed breaking and entering), two by groups of three (theft from person; an 18 year old, project area, with two other 18 year olds from Dorchester - store theft; one 17 year old, project area, with one 17 year old and one juvenile from Dorchester). The fifth crime involved implication of an 18 year old in a narcotics ring whose other members were adults.

None of these five can be described as crimes by "gangs" composed of Roxbury teenagers. If a "gang" crime is designated as one in which four or more individuals are involved, the newspapers reported 14 such crimes
in 1956 for the four areas. Seven of these were assaults by such gangs on individuals their own age, two involved vandalism or property destruction, two involved creating disturbances, and three involved theft. In none of these 14 cases were the gangs identified as being made up of individuals living or meeting in the project area. Thus, if the aim of the Special Youth Program can be stated to be the reduction of gang crime by teenagers living in the project area, newspaper data would appear to indicate that such crime was not prevalent during 1956.

The above figures do not show, however, that the incidence of juvenile crime of all kinds (individual, small group, and "gang") was lower to any appreciable degree in the project area as compared with other parts of Roxbury. Of the 15 crimes involving identified residents of Roxbury, one third involved project area residents, and the project area contains just about one third of the teenage population of Roxbury (project area, 3,080; total Roxbury, 10,043). Thus, the project area contributed just about its equal share of teenage crime in all of Roxbury. However, it must be borne in mind that the project area was originally selected precisely because its juvenile crime rate in the years from 1948 to 1954 was greatly in excess of rates in almost all other areas of the city. To put the above figures in perspective, it is necessary to look at the juvenile crime rates in these same areas in past years.

The following table shows the relative standing of the four areas for two periods: 1) 1948-1951, based on court appearances per 1,000 juvenile population; 2) 1956, based on newspaper-reported crimes per 1,000 teenage population.²

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²"Court Appearance Rates" show how many youngsters out of every 1,000 appeared in courts each year during the period 1948-1951. For example, the figure "31.7" in Table II means that an average of about 32 youngsters out of every thousand in the project area appeared in courts during the 1948-1951 period.
**TABLE II**
Comparison of Delinquency Rates for 1948-1951 with Rates for 1956
for Four Areas

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Court Appearances per 1,000 pop. 7-16, 1948-1951</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reported Crime Involv't. per 1,000 pop. 14-19, 1956</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>22.0 *</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>17.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These figures offer evidence that the striking difference in 1948-1951 crime rates between the project area and the other three areas had evened out substantially by 1956. The project area still has a higher proportion of reported crimes per 1,000 population than the other areas, but the degree of difference is much reduced.

Tables IIIa and IIIb show these results in bar charts. In examining these two tables it is important to keep in mind that while the heights of the bars in each table show consistent relationships among themselves, the heights of bars in Table IIIa are not directly comparable with those in IIIb, since each is based on a different index of delinquency. Table IIIa shows that for the 1948-1951 period project area rates were 14% higher than the next highest area, 24.4% higher than the lowest area, and 16.9% higher than the average of the other areas. Table IIIb shows that in 1956 project area rates were 2.6% higher than the next highest area, 11% higher than the lowest area, and 7% higher than the average of the other three areas. These figures represent a decrease of 43% between 1948-1951 and 1956 for the project area compared with the rest of Roxbury, and a decrease of 185% for the project area compared with the average for the other three areas. Thus, although

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* Roxbury figures are obtained by allotting the eight "Roxbury Unspecified" figures 1/3 to the project area and 2/3 to the rest of Roxbury. (See Footnote 1.)
the project was not set up so as to have any direct influence on non-gang crime in the project area, it is to be noted that the overall crime rate in the project area including both gang and non-gang crime, was substantially lower than in previous years. 3

**TABLE III**

Delinquency Rates in Four Areas; 1948-1951 and 1956

(Typed version of this chart in original copy)
1. Using newspaper reports as a source of data: All sources of data on the occurrence of juvenile crime (here used to include criminal acts by individuals under 20, rather than under 17) have limitations; none report all criminal acts committed by all juveniles. Of three major possible sources, each has important limitations.

1.) Police Blotter Records: These give data only on arrests and complaints brought to the attention of the police. Criminal acts which occur but which are not brought to official attention are not recorded; also, these records are scattered among numerous different police stations and are relatively inaccessible.

2.) Court Case Statistics: These generally include only cases where a conviction has been obtained or finding reached, and do not include instances where there has been detection and arrest but no conviction. In addition, data from this source is currently not available for from one to two years following the occurrence of the crime.

3.) Youth Service Board Commitment Records: These give data in almost all cases on individuals under 16; crimes by individuals over 17 are not included. These records also generally only record cases where a conviction occurred.

Newspaper reports have in some instances more and in some instances less data than other sources. Data is collected by reporters on twenty-four hour duty at police headquarters, as well as from other sources. All data collected does not appear in the newspapers; some items which appear to have lesser news value are omitted and other factors cause selection of some stories and not others. However, factors which govern such selection apply equally to all selections of the city; there is no consistent reason why reports should favor one area over another. Thus, data compiled on an area basis should involve similar selectivity for the various areas. In addition, due to the high public interest in juvenile crime, there is good likelihood of fairly complete coverage of such data.

Newspaper data has an advantage over other sources in that it reports crimes where the offenders are either not known or were not apprehended, such as a report by a woman that her purse was stolen by a 13-year-old who escaped. Such data does not appear either in court records or Youth Service Board Records. Newspaper reports have the further advantage that they are the only available source of data which comes in regularly on a day to day basis, and immediately following the events reported; a "lag" in reporting from other sources may be as much as two years. Thus, newspaper data makes it possible to keep statistics current and up to date. Newspaper reports have an additional advantage if one is interested in gang as against "non-gang" crime. Court and Youth Service Board records are in their usual form set up as records of single individuals and it is difficult to tell them if an individual involved in a crime was acting as part of a gang or not. Newspapers do specify the size of the group involved, making it possible to distinguish between gang and non-gang crime.

The figures and conclusions presented here are not intended as definitive, conclusive, or complete, but rather to indicate general trends which emerge from this particular kind of data, with its particular limitations. The principal drawback to the statistics compiled here lies in the fact that for eight of the reported crimes, the address of the offenders was given only as "Roxbury". What part of these eight crimes fall in or out of the
project area could make the difference between evidence for a substantial improvement in project area rates and a less impressive showing. The practice was followed, as the presentation shows, of allocating these eight "unknown residence" crimes to the project area and non-project area according to the relative proportion of juvenile population in each. The tentative nature of these findings results both from the fact that data from other sources to supplement these figures is not yet available, and that it is too early to use some available data for 1956. More complete data will be available later, following the termination of the service project in June 1957.

2. The two sets of figures are not directly comparable for a number of reasons. The 1948-1951 figures are taken from "Neighborhoods of Boston Ranks for Selected Factors", Third Edition, United Community Services, issued by the Research Division of the United Community Services of Metropolitan Boston in October 1953. These figures are based on the average annual rate of court appearances per 1,000 population, 7-16 years, and computed on the basis of 1950 census figures. The 1956 figures are based on newspaper-reported crime involvement of individuals under 20, using as a population base the percentage of individuals 14-19 in each area, also based on the 1950 census figures. Thus, there can be expected to be some difference both between "reported crime involvement" and "court appearance" rates and the relative proportion of individuals 7-16 to those 14-19.

The 14-19 group is used as a base figure for the newspaper data because this age group corresponds most closely to the age range of members of groups worked with by the Special Youth Program. Boys generally become part of street corner gangs at about 13, and leave at about 19. Girls usually join about 12, and leave at about 17 or 18.

The court appearance rates use the 7-16 age group as a baseline. This non-correspondence of age groups might be expected to make for non-comparability; but in fact percentages computed on the basis of the 7-16 group are virtually identical with those using the 14-19 group as a base - with differences on the order of two or three tenths of one percent. The similar magnitudes of the "court appearances" and "reported crime involvement" percentages show that these figures can provide at least a roughly comparable, if not entirely consistent index to "amount of delinquency".

Figures computed for 1956 on the same basis as the 1948-1951 statistics are not used because they are not yet available, and will not be for some time. The comparisons are based on what data is currently available, and future computations will use later statistics.

3. "Effects" and "Concomitant Change": The data in this report do not demonstrate a direct causal relationship between the activities of the Special Youth Program and the reduction of juvenile crime rates in Roxbury. Other forces in operation in the various communities - such as population shifts, intensity of police activity, operations of the Division of Youth Service and the city Recreation Department, programs of local settlement houses, churches, schools and other groups - undoubtedly have affected the total situation. The very difficult job of trying to sort out the effects of these various forces and attributing to various sources their proper share of the observed changes cannot be undertaken in this report. Material related to this question will be presented elsewhere. However, the one
set of forces operating deliberately and intensively in a part of Roxbury during 1955 and 1956 to effect gang delinquency that was absent in previous years was the Special Youth Program. The most cautious statement to be made in this connection would be that the changes reported here took place at the same time the Special Youth Program was in operation. However, the likelihood that the Special Youth Program was a major influence in bringing about such changes remains high.