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Study: Half of black males, 40 percent of white males arrested by age 23

First contemporary findings on how the risk of arrest varies across race and gender

Nearly half of black males and almost 40 percent of white males in the U.S. are arrested by age 23, which can hurt their ability to find work, go to school and participate fully in their communities.

A new study released Monday (Jan. 6) in the journal *Crime & Delinquency* provides the first contemporary findings on how the risk of arrest varies across race and gender, says Robert Brame, a criminology professor at the University of South Carolina and lead author of the study.

The study is an analysis of national survey data from 1997 to 2008 of teenagers and young adults, ages 18 , and their arrest histories, which run the gamut from truancy and underage drinking to more serious and violent offenses. The study excludes arrests for minor traffic violations.

Most striking are the race differences revealed in the study, Brame says. In particular, the research points to a higher prevalence of arrest among black males and little race variation in arrest rates among females.

"A problem is that many males – especially black males – are navigating the transition from youth to adulthood with the baggage and difficulties from contact with the criminal justice system," Brame says.

The negative impacts can be great, he says. "States vary on the age that adolescents are considered adults in the eyes of the criminal law, some as young as age 16 and 17," he says. "Criminal records that show up in searches can impede employment, reduce access to housing, thwart admission to and financing for higher education and affect civic and volunteer activities such as voting or adoption. They also can damage personal and family relationships."

Shawn Bushway, a criminal justice professor at the University at Albany who collaborated with Brame on the study, says they used data from the U.S. Department of Labor's National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, 1997 cohort (NLYS97).

"The study, which is the first to use nationally representative data to provide estimates of lifetime prevalence of arrest by race and sex, highlights the importance of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, 97 cohort," Bushway says. "The NLSY97 is the only survey collected by the U.S. government that includes longitudinal data on arrest for a cohort over time."

The study's key findings include:

- By age 18, 30 percent of black males, 26 percent of Hispanic males and 22 percent of white males have been arrested.
- By age 23, 49 percent of black males, 44 percent of Hispanic males and 38 percent of white males have been arrested.
- While the prevalence of arrest increased for females from age 18 to 23, the variation between races was slight. At age 18, arrest rates were 12 percent for white females and 11.8 percent and 11.9 percent for Hispanic and black females, respectively. By age 23, arrest rates were 20 percent for white females and 18 percent and 16 percent for Hispanic and black females, respectively.

In addition to Brame and Bushway, the research team included Ray Paternoster at the University of Maryland and Michael Turner at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

The study, a representative sample of the larger population, builds on a previous one by the team that was released in January 2012 in the journal *Pediatrics*. That study garnered national attention for providing the first look since the 1960s at arrest prevalence and for its key finding that one in three people are arrested by age 23.

Brame says the next step is to develop an understanding of the economic, social and law enforcement factors that can influence arrests and what role gender and race play.

"As a society, we often worry a great deal about the effects of children watching television, eating junk food, playing sports and having access to good schools," Brame says. "Experiencing formal contact with the criminal justice system could also have powerful effects on behavior and impose substantial constraints on opportunities for America's youth.

"We know from our two studies that these experiences are prevalent and that they vary across different demographic groups. Going forward it will be constructive to support systematic studies into the sources of these variations and to continue efforts to understand the effects of criminal justice interventions on sanctions on future behavior."

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About the journal *Crime & Delinquency*

Crime & Delinquency (CAD), peer-reviewed and published bi-monthly, is a policy-oriented journal offering a wide range of research and analysis for the scholar and professional in criminology and criminal justice. CAD focuses on issues and concerns that impact the criminal justice system, including the social, political and economic contexts of criminal justice, as well as the victims, criminals, courts and sanctions. <http://cad.sagepub.com/>

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