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A Study of Selected Characteristics of Committed Juvenile Delinquents in Omaha, Nebraska, 1955 and 1956

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A STUDY OF SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS OF
COMMITTED JUVENILE DELINQUENTS IN
OMAHA, NEBRASKA, 1955 AND 1956

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Department of Sociology
University of Omaha

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Patrick C. Kroll

June 1957

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CHAPTER I

THE STUDY AND ITS SCOPE

Introduction

Any study dealing with the human variable is a difficult one. With all of his accomplishments in science and technology, man still remains one of the most unpredictable, least understood beings on this earth. It is the endeavor of this paper to shed a little more light on one aspect of human behavior, namely that of juvenile delinquency.

Statement of the Problem

Formally stated the problem with which this paper is concerned is as follows: what factors seem to be characteristic of those children who are regarded as flagrantly delinquent? By delinquency of flagrant proportions, the reference is to those children whose deviant behavior patterns have reached that degree of seriousness at which they have exceeded the tolerance limit of the community, and have subsequently been committed to state juvenile correctional institutions.

Purpose

The basic objective of this study is to distinguish some factors that seem to be symptomatic of delinquent behavior. The conclusions will not identify the causes of delinquency or elicit a definite, unequivocal solution to the problem of juvenile delinquency. Rather, they will point out those conditions and circumstances that appear to be characteristic of

a selected group of delinquents, a group which, because of their extreme degree of disapproved behavior, is regarded as the hardened core of a delinquent population. Through the investigation of this group of juvenile delinquents, some generalization relative to the problem of delinquency will be formulated.

Expected Findings

Before presenting a detailed analysis of the results of this study, certain expected findings can be anticipated that are based on previous research in the area of juvenile delinquency. It was discovered that most of the work done in this field includes either a general consideration of the overall problem of delinquency, or a rather detailed treatment of a specific delinquent population. Consequently, no research was discovered that would be precisely comparable to this study. However, some expected general characteristics can be derived from both popular notions about delinquency and previous research and literature in the field.

Some of the more relevant findings discovered are referred to more specifically in the body of the paper in conjunction with the discussion of the particular characteristics under investigation.

With regard to the location of the homes of these children, the most expected pattern would be to discover that most are located in areas of the city characterized by overcrowded conditions, a lack of playground supervision and facilities, in general, those areas regarded as being a poor environment in which to rear children.

Relative to age, sex, and race, certain factors tend to remain relatively stable. In most states, by legal definition, the juvenile must be under 18 years of age. All of the literature reviewed for this study indicated a preponderance of male delinquents over females. It is generally accepted that boys seem to get into more difficulty than girls. Most studies that have considered the factor race, seem to indicate implicitly that children from minority groups cause more than their share of trouble. True

Consistent with the expected location of homes in the poorer areas of the city, one would expect to find that the family income of these children would be lower than average. Along this same line, in all probability, abnormal home situations of one kind or another would be the rule rather than the exception.

Relative to school status, it is almost impossible to think of a delinquent child who does not have some difficulty in the school situation. With regard to I. Q., the general consensus seems to be that delinquents constitute an accurate sample of the total population.

Since one of the criterion for commitment is habitual misbehavior, the complaints filed against these children would certainly be expected to be numerous, while the types of offenses in many cases could be just as serious as adult crimes.

The precise nature of these factors for 99 juvenile delinquents committed to state training schools from Omaha, Nebraska, in 1955 and 1956, are presented in the following pages.

Justification

Probably one of the most valid arguments to justify a study of this nature would be to quote some recent statistical figures on juvenile delinquency and crime. A current edition of Uniform Crime Reports, issued by J. Edgar Hoover of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, revealed that 42.3 per cent of the major crimes of 1955, which were reported by 1,477 cities with populations of 2,500 or over, were committed by young persons under 18; that 47.9 per cent of the offenders were less than 15; and that there was a rise of 11.4 per cent in the number of juvenile delinquent arrests in 1955 as compared to 1954.¹

In May of 1956, Dr. Martha M. Elliot, Chief of the Children's Bureau, United States Department of Health, Education and Welfare, announced that about half a million children were arraigned in juvenile courts for delinquency during 1955.²

In another pamphlet issued by the Children's Bureau of the United States Department of Health, Education and Welfare, it was estimated that between \$175 and \$200 million are now being spent annually in this country by the police, courts, detention facilities, and institutions for the care and handling of juvenile delinquents or alleged delinquents.³

1. United States Department of Justice, Uniform Crime Reports, Vol. 26, No. 1, (United States Government Printing Office: 1956).

2. Some Facts About Public State Training Schools for Juvenile Delinquents, Children's Bureau Statistical Series, No. 33, (Children's Bureau: 1956).

3. Some Facts About Juvenile Delinquency, Children's Bureau Statistical Series, No. 340, Revised, (Children's Bureau: 1955).

The problem of behavior excesses by children and adolescents is a plain one, and in view of the problem, it would seem that research in the area of juvenile delinquency is certainly warranted, particularly those aspects of delinquency that relate to the symptomatic factors considered in this study.

Scope of the Study

For purposes of this study, juvenile delinquent cases were selected from the Douglas County Juvenile Court, Omaha, Nebraska. Since all of the children handled by the court during this period of time made a comprehensive study of the total population prohibitive, it was further decided that the study would be exclusively concerned with those delinquent children committed to the state training schools at Geneva and Kearney, Nebraska, during the years 1955 and 1956.

Upon investigation of the court records, it was found that 99 boys and girls were committed to the state training schools during the time period mentioned above. In dealing with this selected group, a sample is not being treated, but rather a total population in so far as these 99 boys and girls are all of the juvenile delinquents committed to state training schools during the years of 1955 and 1956.

Definitions

The law of the State of Nebraska states:

Delinquent child shall mean any child under the age of 18 years; (a) who has violated any law of the state, or any city or village ordinance; (b) who by reason of being wayward or habitually disobedient is uncontrolled by his parents, guardian, or custodian; (c) who is habitually truant from school or home; or (d) who habitually so deports himself so as to injure or endanger the morals or health of himself or others.⁴

In accordance with official court procedure, once a child is found delinquent, the juvenile judge has several alternatives of final disposition with regard to the delinquent child. The only one relevant to this particular study is, "commitment to a state training school and the Board of Controls,"⁵ since this study is concerned only with those children who have been committed. The law further states "Upon such commitment, the Board of Controls becomes vested with the exclusive control of the minor."⁶ After a child has been committed to a training school, the law reads:

Every child committed to the state training school shall remain there until he arrives at the age of 21 years unless sooner paroled or legally discharged.⁷

It is these children who have been committed to state training schools who are considered "flagrantly delinquent." They are the subjects of this study.

4. Revised Statutes of the State of Nebraska, (as amended), 1943, Sec. 43-201.

5. Ibid., Sec. 43-210.

6. Ibid., Sec. 43-222.

7. Ibid., Sec. 83-472.

Procedure

Data were collected directly from the case files of the Douglas County Juvenile Court on ten factors common to the 99 boys and girls who were committed to the Nebraska state training schools in 1955 and 1956.

These factors and their meanings as used in this paper include:

1. Place of residence, an ecological distribution of the approximate location of the homes of these delinquent children.
2. Sex, a simple dichotomy of male and female. The Boys' Training School is at Kearney, and the Girls' Training School is at Geneva.
3. Race. Here, three categories, as recorded by the court, are used, white, Indian, and Negro, (the white category includes all not specifically classified as Negro or Indian, e. g. Mexican).
4. Age as recorded by the court at the time of commitment.
5. Home status is recorded as broken or non-broken. The non-broken home is defined as one in which the child with his natural parents resides in the same dwelling. The broken home includes all others; those broken by divorce, desertion, separation, and death, and children living with a step-parent, relatives, friends, or a guardian.
6. Income as used in this paper is the sum of all money coming into the home in support of the family. It includes wages and

salaries of all in the home, Aid to Dependent Children, social security, unemployment benefits, workman's compensation, alimony, and rents.

7. School status refers to the relation of the child to an educational institution at the time of commitment. Each child falls into one of four categories: those who quit school; those expelled; the habitually truant and; those regarded as having a normal school situation. All of those children in school and doing satisfactory work are considered normal.
8. Intelligence quotients were taken directly from the court records. Most of these scores were obtained through the Stanford-Binet Test of Intelligence, Terman-Merrill Revision Form L.
9. Number of complaints includes all of the reports to the court of mischievous behavior of the child by all law officers, parents, neighbors, and the schools.
10. The term offense refers to the type of misbehavior most common to the delinquent child.

The remainder of this thesis will be devoted to a consideration of the data, pertinent to these ten common factors, that were obtained from the court records. In this manner, an approach will be made to the thesis problem and will conclude in a fashion it is hoped will yield some tangible results.

CHAPTER II

PLACE OF RESIDENCE

This chapter is concerned with a geographic distribution of the population of committed juvenile delinquents and a subsequent consideration of the ecology of the distribution. Like any other organism, man is affected by, or reacts to, his environmental surroundings. Various ecological conditions tend to produce various patterns of behavior. Some situations seem to induce what are regarded as functional or favorable reactions, while others seem to evoke dysfunctional behavior patterns.

Sullenger, in studying the ecological aspects of a delinquent distribution, uses the term "neighborhood," and referring to it as a primary group says:

The neighborhood is an important geographical and cultural unit in determining delinquency. It is characterized by face-to-face association, and it illustrates most clearly, the psychology of individual interaction and group behavior.¹

In this study of a specific delinquent population, the home residence of each of the 99 delinquents as recorded by the court at the time of commitment was plotted on a map of the city of Omaha. This map shows how the population was distributed in the various areas of the city. Where delinquency appeared to be concentrated, special consideration

1. T. Earl Sullenger, Social Determinants in Juvenile Delinquency, (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1936), p. 74.

was given to the environmental aspects of these areas.

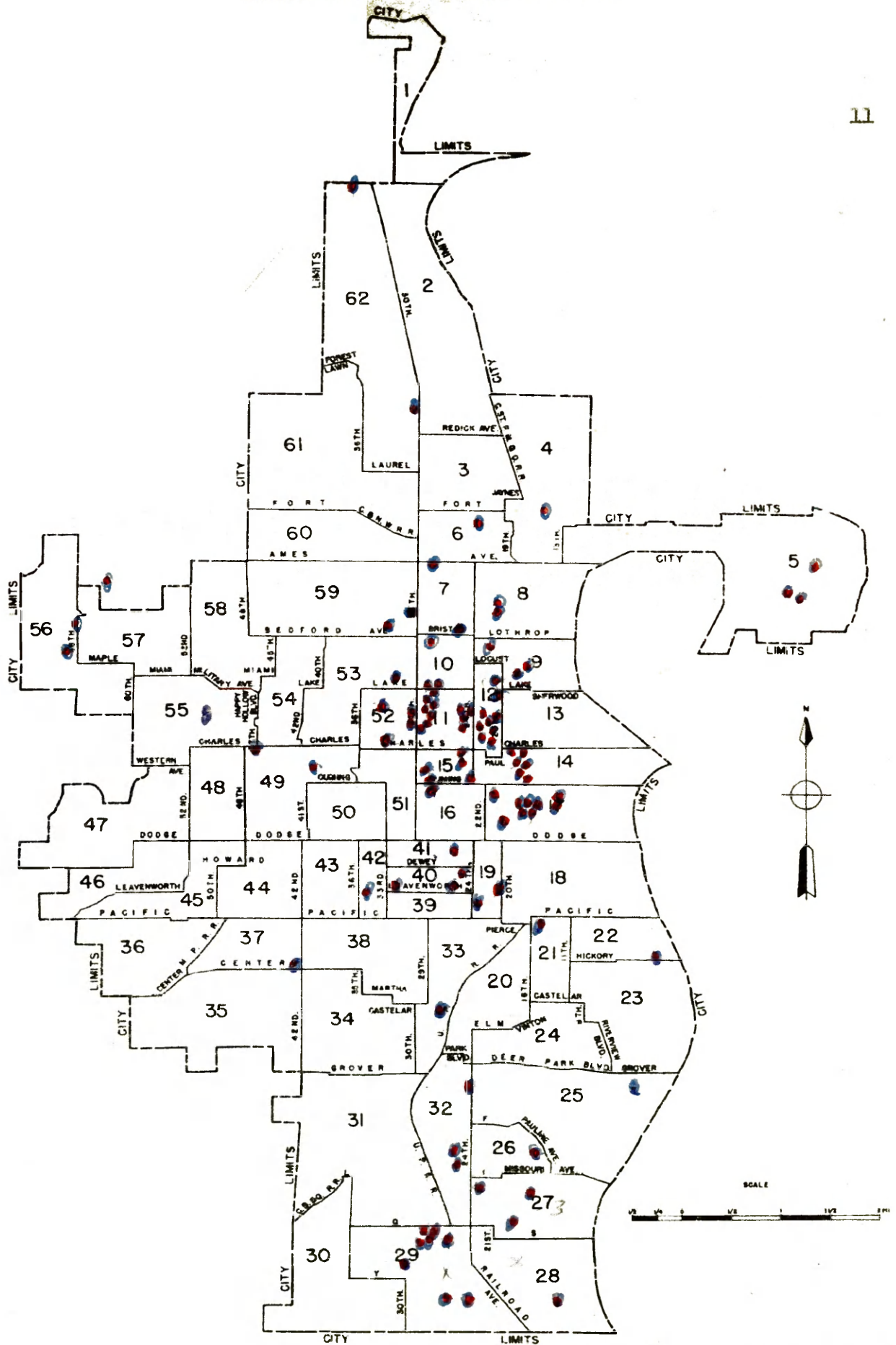
Probably the most extensive research conducted on this particular phase of delinquency was done by Clifford R. Shaw and Henry D. McKay. In their book, Juvenile Delinquency and Urban Areas, they report a detailed investigation of the ecology of a geographic distribution of male juvenile delinquents in Chicago. After plotting 8,411 different male delinquents by street and number, the following observations were made:

This distribution of delinquents is closely related to the location of industrial and commercial areas and to the composition of the population. In the first place, . . . the areas of heaviest concentration are, in general, not far from the central business district within the areas zoned for light industry or commerce. As one moves outward, away from these areas into the residential communities, the cases are more and more scattered until, near the periphery of the city, they are, in general, widely dispersed.²

The geographic distribution of the 99 delinquents of this study is shown on the map on page 11. The map is a copy of the map of Census Tracts for Omaha. From this map it is immediately evident that relatively few tracts contain a majority of the committed delinquents. The most pronounced concentrations occur in tracts 11, 12, 14, 15, 17, and 29. Fifty delinquents, or over half of the total, are included in these 6 tracts. The remaining 49 delinquents were distributed over 25 different

2. Clifford R. Shaw and Henry D. McKay, Juvenile Delinquency and Urban Areas, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1936), p. 51.

OMAHA, NEBR. BY CENSUS TRACTS



GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION BY CENSUS TRACTS OF NINETY-NINE
 COMMITTED JUVENILE DELINQUENTS FROM OMAHA, NEBRASKA,
 1955 AND 1956

tracts. This leaves 30 tracts out of the total of 61, that include no committed delinquents during this two year period.

Table I, page 13, shows in the order of frequency, the number of delinquents committed by census tracts.

Tracts 11, 12, 14, and 15, include 33 or about one-third of the total number of delinquents committed. These tracts are in the heart of what is called the "near north side" in Omaha. The 1950 census reveals that these tracts are predominantly Negro and are considerably above average in total population. The census figures are used hesitantly, however, since in a subsequent chapter it will be shown that the Negro population of Omaha is estimated to have almost doubled since 1950, and all apparent indications seem to be that most of the newcomers are concentrating in this same area. In a study done by Francis Weathers, which treated income, education, and occupation in Omaha, based on 1950 census figures, it was shown that tracts 11, 12, 14, and 15, were at the bottom of the scale on all three of these characteristics.³ In general, this area is characterized by highly overcrowded conditions, a very mobile population, a preponderance of older houses and dwelling units, few well organized recreational outlets, and a minimum of opportunity to improve existing conditions.

3. Francis A. Weathers, "A Study of the Ecological Distribution of Income Education and Occupation in Omaha, Nebraska," (unpublished Master's thesis, University of Omaha, Omaha, Nebraska, 1954).

TABLE I
 NUMBER OF DELINQUENTS COMMITTED BY CENSUS
 TRACTS FROM OMAHA, NEBRASKA
 1955 AND 1956

Tract	Delinquents Committed
11	13
12	9
17	9
29	8
14	6
15	5
52	4
5	3
9	3
10	3
27	3
32	3
40	3
7	2
8	2
19	2
49	2
56	2
59	2
62	2
4	1
6	1
21	1
22	1
26	1
28	1
33	1
37	1
41	1
42	1
53	1
59	1
Outside City Limits	99
Census tracts with Committed Delinquents: 32	Total No. of Committed Delinquents

In the light of these observations, it is quite apparent that this relatively small area of the "near north side" in Omaha is a rather predominant factor in contributing to flagrantly delinquent juvenile behavior.

Tract 17 includes 9 out of the total of 99 committed delinquents. This area borders the business district, and would be considered a slum, or zone of transition. Weathers found tract 17 to be in the lowest category on education and income.⁴ It includes Jefferson Square, which is often called "bums' park," some light industry, a number of old hotels, and extensive railroad yards. It, too, is above the average in total population, there is a high degree of mobility and anonymity, and the population is very heterogeneous. The general area is very rundown and deteriorated, recreational facilities are practically nil, and what would be considered a "normal" home situation is rare. The occurrence of extreme delinquent behavior in such an area is certainly not surprising.

The third area that shows a concentration is tract 29 with eight committed delinquent children. This tract is in South Omaha and constitutes the center of what is known as the packing house area. It includes extensive railyards and trucking agencies. A large proportion of the population is foreign born and there is an appreciable Negro section in this area, also. The area is characterized primarily by small and

4. Ibid.

rather old houses, and a superabundance of bars and taverns. Weathers found this area just below average in income and occupation, and at the bottom of the scale in education.⁵ According to the 1950 census, this area had the largest total population of all census tracts in the city, and there was an exceptionally large proportion of children 16 and under.

The remainder of the population of committed juvenile delinquents were distributed in a pattern quite consistent with the initial concentrations. The fringe area of the "near north side" accounts for 12. There are 8 more in four tracts surrounding the central business district. The remainder are scattered quite erratically throughout the city.

The findings of this study seem to coincide quite closely with those cited by Shaw and McKay. The 3 areas with the greatest concentration of committed delinquents included the heaviest concentrations of population in general, the area surrounding the central business district, and the most highly commercialized or industrialized residential area of the city. And as one moves away from these areas into what would be considered the more average residential sections, the cases are fewer and more widely dispersed.

5. Ibid.

CHAPTER III

AGE, SEX, AND RACE

Sociologists have often demonstrated various relationships between behavior and such biological characteristics as age, sex, and race. In this study the characteristic of age will be presented in order to show what proportion of this delinquent population was committed at the various age levels; which age group contained the most frequently committed delinquents; and which contained the fewest as related to sex and race. Since this population includes both boys and girls, proportions were worked out based on the factor of sex and as related to age and race. As pointed out in Chapter I, the court records revealed a significant number of children in three races; white, Negro, and Indian. Therefore, proportions according to race as related to sex and age were also shown. It is hoped that all of these cross-classifications will yield a more precise picture and a better understanding of this particular delinquent population.

Age

In an analysis of the factor of age in a delinquent population, Neumeyer reports that according to the cases handled by courts reporting to the United States Children's Bureau, the predominating interval in age distribution was that between 14 and 16.¹ These figures on age resemble quite closely the findings of this study. Table II, page 18, shows the

1. Martin H. Neumeyer, Juvenile Delinquency In Modern Society, (New York: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1949), p. 26.

distribution of the total population of this study according to age. The range of the age distribution of committed delinquent children is 8 years. The extremes are 10 to 17 years, and the median is 14.8 years. It is quite obvious from simple inspection of Figure 1, page 19, that this age distribution tends to form a relatively normal curve between the ages of 13 and 17. Fifteen is by a considerable margin the largest or modal category, followed by the 16 and 14 year age groups respectively, and then the 13 and 17 year age groups, in that order. Of the 99 delinquent children of this study, the age at which the most commitments occur is 15, and the rest seem to distribute themselves rather normally around this modal category. It would most certainly be inaccurate on the basis of this evidence to assume that most delinquents encounter their most serious difficulties at the age of 15. As will be seen in the chapter on complaints and offenses, most of the delinquent children committed seem to be habitual in their deviant behavior pattern. However, the distribution arrived at in this study indicates that most state training school commitments occur at age 15.

Sex

In a study issued by the Children's Bureau of the United States Department of Health, Education and Welfare, it was reported that on a national average 72 per cent of the committed delinquents were boys and 28 per cent girls.² The present study seems to correspond with this one in the area of the sex composition of committed delinquents.

2. Some Facts About Public State Training Schools for Juvenile Delinquents, Children's Bureau Statistical Series, No. 33, (Children's Bureau: 1956).

TABLE II
 DISTRIBUTION OF COMMITTED JUVENILE DELINQUENTS
 FROM OMAHA, NEBRASKA, ACCORDING
 TO AGE, SEX, AND RACE
 1955 AND 1956

Race and Sex	Age								Total
	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
White Male	0	1	0	4	11	14	10	2	42
White Female	0	0	0	1	4	1	1	1	8
Negro Male	1	0	2	5	2	12	4	2	28
Negro Female	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	1	6
Indian Male	1	0	0	0	1	3	2	0	7
Indian Female	0	0	0	0	2	2	3	1	8
Total	2	1	2	11	21	33	22	7	99

Number of Children

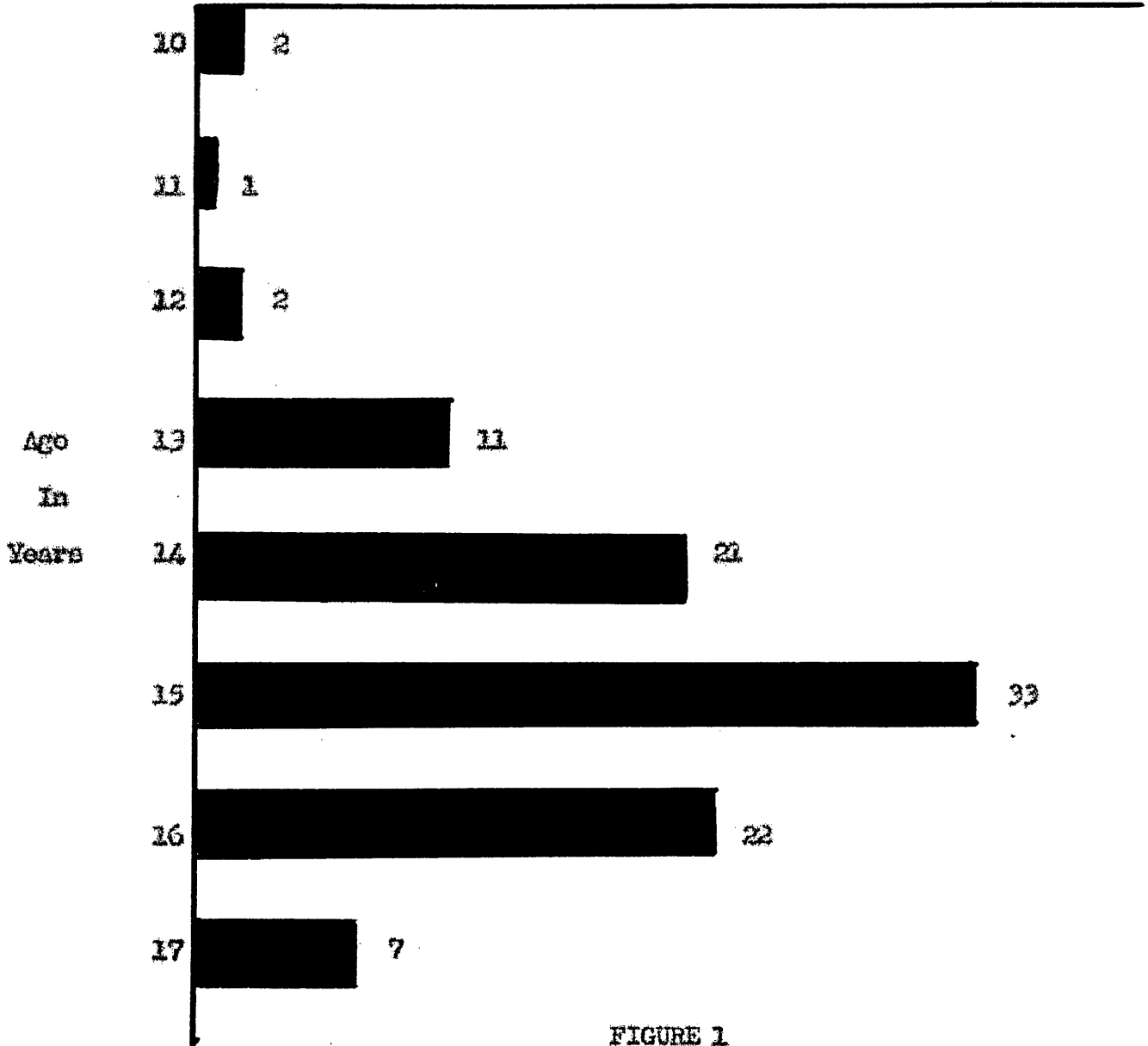


FIGURE 1
AGE DISTRIBUTION OF LIBERTY-BOND COLLECTED JUVENILE
DELINQUENTS FROM OMAHA, NEBRASKA,
1955 AND 1956

The preponderance of male delinquents is a commonly recognized occurrence.

Block and Flynn say:

On the basis of the actual volume of boys and girls involved in delinquent activities, the general trend, as can be expected, is for more boys than girls to commit offenses.³

Of the total population of committed delinquents in this study, 77 were male and 22 were female. In percentage figures, the males comprise about 78 per cent of the total, while the females account for approximately 22 per cent. In terms of a ratio, the total number of boys committed to the state training school outnumber the girls 3.5 to 1.

Race

On investigation of the court records in an effort to get information on the race of these committed delinquent children, it was discovered that delinquents are officially classified as white, Negro, Indian, and Mexican. After recording these data on the 99 committed delinquents, those children of Mexican descent were negligible in number. Therefore, in the classification of the delinquent population according to race, the trichotomy white, Negro, and Indian is used, with those few children of Mexican descent classified as white.

The numerical breakdown of these children according to race is as follows: 50 white; 34 Negro, and; 15 Indian. In reference to the

3. Herbert Block and Frank Flynn, The Juvenile Offender in America Today, (New York: Random House, 1956), p. 36.

estimated total population of Omaha,⁴ and the estimated totals per race,⁵ some rather interesting observations can be made. As shown graphically in Figure 2, page 22, the 50 white children regarded as flagrantly delinquent represent about 51 per cent of the total committed delinquent population, while the white population of Omaha makes up about 88 per cent of the total population of the city. Those 34 Negro children regarded as flagrantly delinquent represent approximately 35 per cent of the total delinquents, while the Negro population of Omaha represents only about 11 per cent of the total population of the city. The 15 Indian children, while accounting for about 15 per cent of the committed delinquents, account for only about .005 per cent of the total population of the city. There appears to be an inverse relationship represented by these figures; as the population of the race decreases, the number of committed delinquents (in proportion to the race) increases.

Age and Race

An age distribution of these children according to race reveals little, if any, new significant information. As can be seen on Table II, page 18, the age distribution as related to race differs very little from the age distribution for the total delinquent population. In each race, except the Indian, the 15 year age bracket is the modal category, while

4. Estimated total population of Omaha, 280,000. City Planning Commission.

5. Estimated population according to race: Negro, 30,000; Indian, 1,500; white, 248,500. Urban League of Omaha.

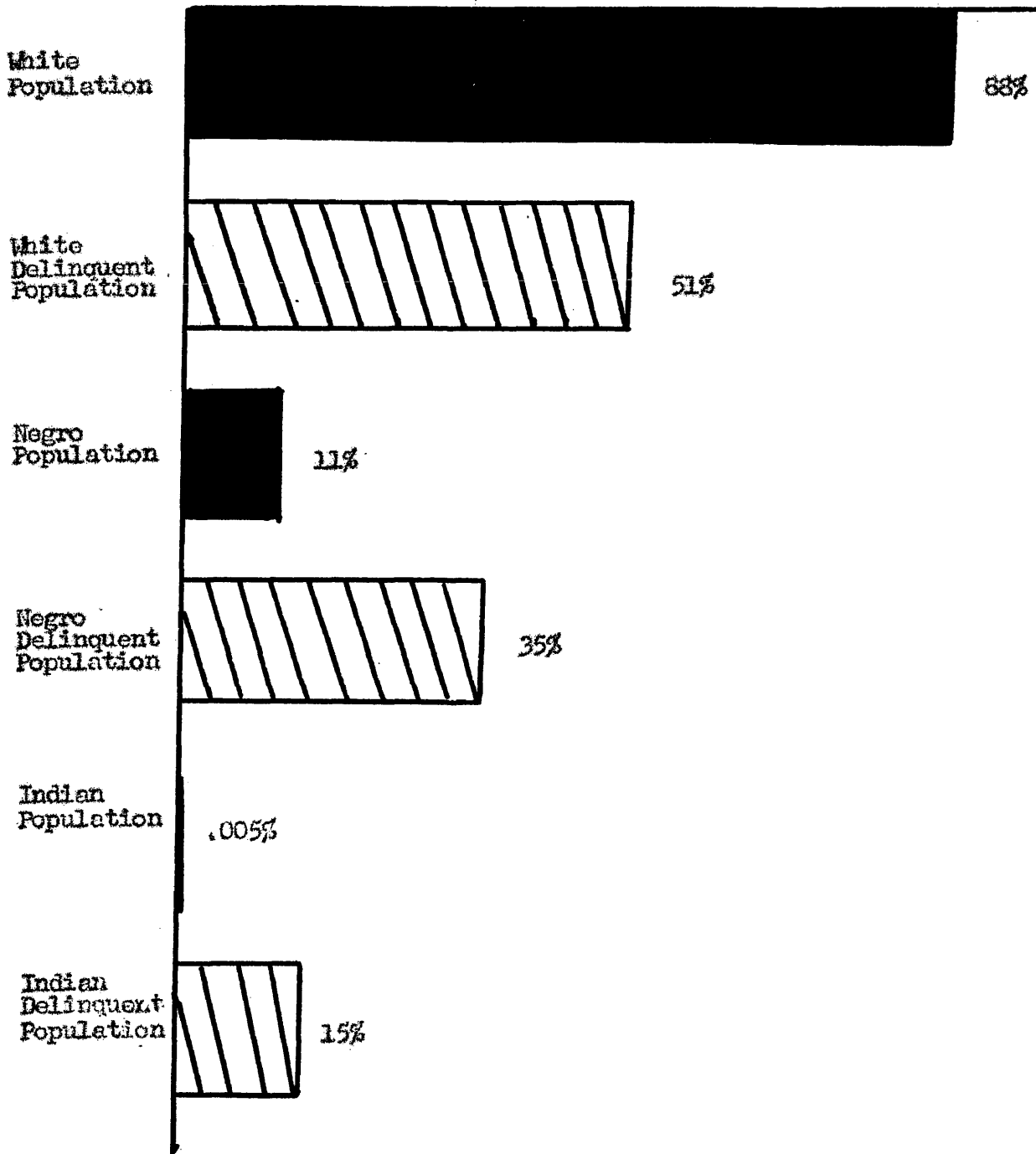


FIGURE 2
TOTAL POPULATION COMPARED TO COMMITTED DELINQUENT
POPULATION BY RACE IN OMAHA, NEBRASKA,
1955 AND 1956

the Indian children constitute a bimodal category, including ages 15 and 16. With this exception, the age and race distribution is similar to that of the city as a whole.

Age and Sex

Relative to the combined factors of age and sex, Block and Flynn, using Juvenile Court Statistics for 1951, report a median age for boys of 16.1, compared with a median of 15.6 for girls.⁶ In the present study, an interesting observation that can be made in relation to these combined characteristics is the apparent tendency of male delinquents to be committed at an earlier age than the females. As shown on Table II, page 18, 5 males were committed between the ages of 10 and 12, while not a single female was committed until the age of 13. Regardless of this apparent difference in commitment of boys and girls at younger age levels, the differences in median ages is rather insignificant. For the boys it is 15.63, and for the girls, 15.5.

Race and Sex

The comparison of the sex factor as related to the race of these committed delinquent children also offers a very interesting observation in regard to the female contingent of our population. The court records revealed the following data on the race of these children: white males 42, white females 8; Negro males 28, Negro females 6; Indian males 7, Indian females 8. These figures are represented graphically on Table II, page 18. Here it is immediately evident that as the population of the

6. Block and Flynn, op. cit., p. 35.

race decreases, the number of girl delinquents committed per number of boys increases. More precisely, in the white race 8 females represent about 16 per cent of the total. Of the Negro children committed, 6 females account for about 18 per cent of the total for that race. Now, the Indian race, the smallest in total population, contributes 8 females which constitutes approximately 53 per cent of the total number of Indian delinquents committed. The male delinquents as related to race distribute themselves in a more logical fashion. As the size of the population of the race increases, in a like manner, the number of committed male delinquents increases.

In reviewing these data on age and sex, the population of this study seems to distribute itself in a rather expected manner when compared to similar statistics based on a national sample. Actually, only one significant discrepancy exists; the boys of this population had a median age of six months less than the boys from the national sample. In this study the characteristic of race is a difficult one with which to make comparisons since this race composition is unique to Omaha. The inverse relation of an increase in the number of delinquents committed to state training schools (proportionately) as the population of the race decreases, is not a particularly surprising phenomenon. The very fact that a person is a member of a minority group immediately puts him at a disadvantage in most societies of the United States, since racial discrimination here is a reality. A detailed analysis of the discriminatory practices here in Omaha, just in relation to children, would require much more space than

is within the scope of this paper. One of the probable explanations for the disproportionate number of committed delinquents in the Negro population of this study is simply the lack of facilities other than state training schools for Negro children who must be placed in a new environment.

It is realized that the information on the characteristics of age, sex, and race, presented in this chapter is not sufficient evidence from which to draw general conclusions regarding all delinquents of a similar character. It is felt, however, that these findings have significant validity relative to this aspect of delinquency in Omaha.

CHAPTER IV

INCOME AND HOME STATUS

In this chapter the endeavor was to classify the committed juvenile delinquents of this study in relation to a home situation and according to an income category. This will not be an extensive analysis or evaluation of these two factors, due primarily to the limited amount of information that was available in the court records and the consequent amount of data with which there are to work.

Income

In considering the factor of income in this study of committed juvenile delinquents, the interest is primarily in showing which income brackets the families of these delinquents seem to concentrate. In constructing such an index it is hoped that another factor that reveals a characteristic common to our delinquent population will be discovered.

The court records were not 100 per cent complete on income information. Of the 99 cases under investigation, there were no figures available as to the amount of income on 17. The study will therefore include 82 per cent of the total population.

Income, as defined in the first chapter, is used in this study to denote all money coming into the home in support of the family. This includes wages, salaries, Aid to Dependent Children, social security, unemployment benefits, workman's compensation, alimony, and rents. These

income figures are based on a monthly rate and it must be taken into consideration when viewing these data, that the factor of income is an extremely variable thing. It can rise or fall or even cease with very little forewarning in many job situations.

In order to classify the cases by income, six income brackets were used: (1) under \$100 per month; (2) \$100 to \$199 per month; (3) \$200 to \$299 per month; (4) \$300 to \$399 per month; (5) \$400 to \$499 per month, and; (6) \$500 or more per month.

A breakdown of the sources of income include the following: 6 families were living on Aid to Dependent Children alone; 6 were living on Aid to Dependent Children plus "some work," and one family was receiving alimony only, while another was getting workman's compensation only; 2 families were living on unemployment alone; 2 were living on social security, Aid to Dependent Children, and "some work"; 2 families were living on social security plus work; 2 families had wages plus rents, and; all of the rest, or 79, were living on wages and salaries of one kind or another.

Classification of the cases according to income is shown graphically in Figure 3, page 28. The most obvious concentration is in the area between \$200 and \$299 a month with a few more than half above the midpoint of that bracket and few less than half below. These figures coincide quite closely with the average (median) income in Omaha as revealed in the 1950 census. It was reported at \$2,951 per year or about \$245 per month.

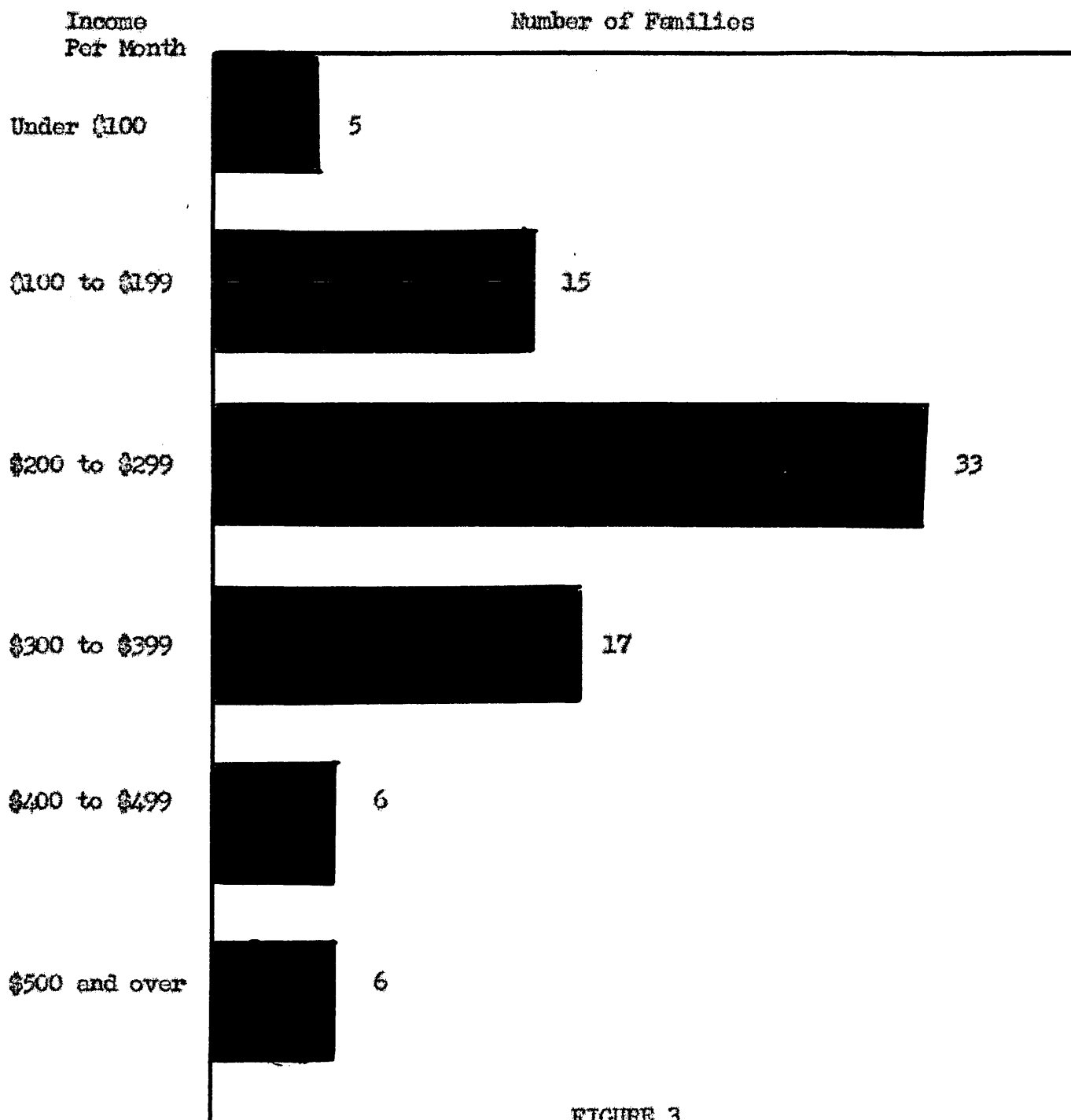


FIGURE 3
FAMILY INCOME PER MONTH FOR COMMITTED JUVENILE
DELINQUENTS IN OMAHA, NEBRASKA,
1955 AND 1956

It would appear from these figures that the amount of income received by the families of these delinquents was about average and furnishes no significant postulate as far as gross income is concerned.

From the observations made in Chapter II, it is felt that there is a very relevant aspect of income, namely that of allocation. This factor however, exceeds the delimitations of the present study, but would furnish a fruitful source for supplementary research.

Home Status

The home situation seems to be a most significant consideration in most literature dealing with the delinquent child. The Gluecks in a study of delinquent boys arrived at the following conclusion:

The law breakers, far more than the non-delinquents, grew up in a family atmosphere not conducive to the development of emotionally well-integrated, happy youngsters, conditioned to obey legitimate authority.¹

Mihanovich, evaluating principles of juvenile delinquency says:

In concluding this section, we are aware of the difficulty of assigning primacy to any factor. However if pressed to mention one, and only one factor, we would point to the home where in practically all cases some defect would be at the bottom of the delinquency.²

In this study, in an effort to use the available data on the home situation in the most expedient and comprehensive fashion, the population has been divided into broken and non-broken home groups. From these two have been constructed four catagorical home situations, into one of which.

1. Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck, Delinquents In The Making, (New York: Harper Brothers, 1952), p. 68.

2. Clement S. Mihanovich, Principles of Juvenile Delinquency, Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1950), p. 66.

each of these delinquents fall. The categories include: (1) the non-broken home in which the delinquent child resides with his natural parents; (2) the broken home in which there are two parents, one a step-parent; (3) the broken home in which there is only one parent; and; (4) habitation with a guardian, relative, or friend resulting from a broken home.

Using first the simple distinction of broken and non-broken homes, the total population of committed juvenile delinquents were distributed in the following manner: 33 or one-third come under the non-broken home group while 66 or two-thirds are included in the broken home class. This ratio appears to be rather high when compared to most findings relative to this factor in delinquency. For example, Healy and Bonner found that of some 4,000 delinquents they surveyed in Chicago and Boston, about half came from broken homes.³ In a like manner, Sullenger cites figures of 50.7 per cent from broken homes and 49.4 per cent from non-broken homes in a study of 1,145 delinquent children in Omaha.⁴ In An Introduction To Family Relationships by Smart and Smart, it is reported that in 1947, for every one thousand married couples in the United States, only 33 were broken by death or divorce.⁵ When comparing these figures, however, it must be kept in mind that the figures cited above were in reference to a general delinquent population, while this study includes just that hardened core of delinquent children who have been committed to state

3. William Healy and Augusta Bonner, Delinquents and Criminals, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1926), pp. 121-25.

4. T. Earl Sullenger, Social Determinants in Juvenile Delinquency, (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1936), p. 24.

5. Russell and Mollie Smart, An Introduction to Family Relationships, (Philadelphia and London: W. B. Saunders Co., 1953), p. 295.

training schools. If the postulate that the broken home is one of the paramount causal factors of delinquency is accepted, this could be a possible explanation for the preponderance of broken homes among this population of committed delinquents which is regarded as flagrantly delinquent.

Into the four home-status categories defined above, the committed delinquent population was distributed as follows: 33 are from non-broken homes; 25 are from broken homes that have two parents, one step-parent; 34 are from broken homes that have just one parent, and; 7 reside with a guardian, relative or friend as the result of a broken home. These data are presented in a graph on page 32, Figure 4.

Due to the disproportionate number of children from broken homes, a cross-classification of the data on income, school situation, and I. Q. was made in relation to home status. This was done in an effort to discover any significant differences that might exist in these areas. The results on the factor of I. Q. revealed little difference. I. Q. data on 52 children from broken homes revealed a range of 56 and a mean of 96.3, while the I. Q. data on 30 children from non-broken homes showed a range of 62 and a mean of 94.4. The final results indicate a slightly higher mean I. Q. (1.9) for those children from broken homes.

The school situation as related to home status revealed some rather interesting results. While 33 per cent of the children from non-broken homes were expelled from school, only about .09 per cent of those from broken homes were expelled. These results would seem to indicate that the

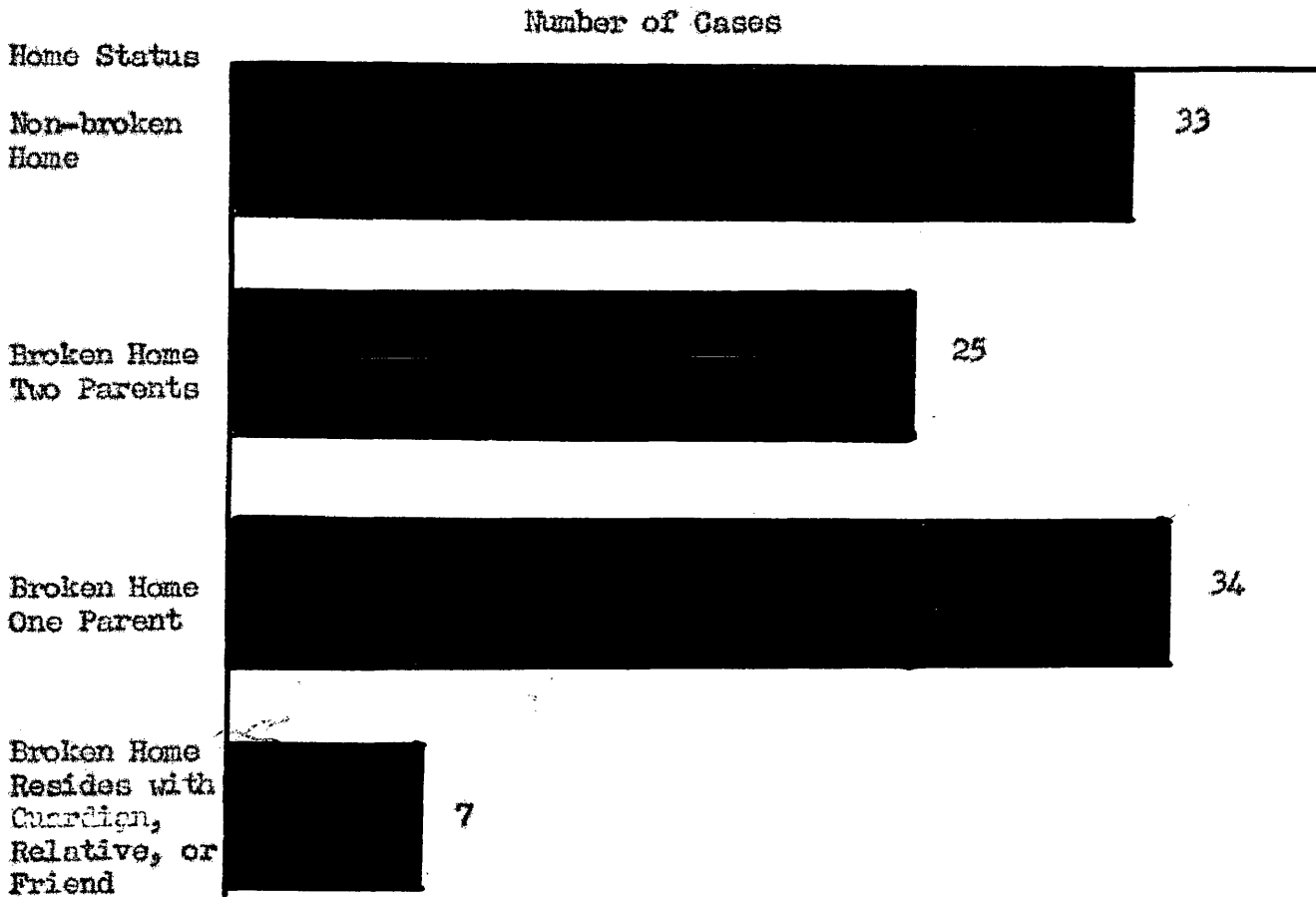


FIGURE 4
HOME STATUS OF NINETY-NINE COMMITTED JUVENILE
DELINQUENTS IN OMAHA, NEBRASKA,
1955 AND 1956

children from non-broken homes were more incorrigible in the school situation than those from broken homes. A more expected pattern developed in the truant classification according to home status. The amount of truancy included 30 per cent of the broken group and only 18 per cent of those children from non-broken homes. In a similar fashion, about 40 per cent from broken homes had quit school, while only about 30 per cent in the non-broken home group had quit. Finally, the "normal" school situation seemed to indicate some unusual results in so far as 18 per cent of those children from broken homes were regarded as normal in school while only 13 per cent from non-broken homes were so classified.

It is felt that these observations must be qualified by stating that classification of homes into broken and non-broken most certainly does not constitute unequivocal abnormality and normality for these respectively classified groups. But rather a profound understanding of any home situation is achieved through a detailed investigation of that particular habitation.

CHAPTER V

INTELLIGENCE QUOTIENT AND SCHOOL STATUS

Intelligence Quotient

The concept of intelligence quotient (I. Q.) has always been a somewhat illusive one as far as a consensus of opinion is concerned. The technical definitions used by psychologists are far too complex for the purposes of this paper. Therefore, I. Q. as used in this study will mean that number denoting the overall intelligence of a child.

From the case histories of the 99 committed delinquents of this study, I. Q.s were available for 82. This is approximately 83 per cent of the total population, which represents a sizeable majority.¹ The court receives I. Q. scores on delinquent children from three sources; the Douglas County Youth Center, the Omaha public schools, and a private testing bureau. On investigation, it was found that all three of these agencies most commonly use the Stanford-Binet Test of Intelligence, Terman-Merrill Revision, Form L, for children in this age group. On this test, anyone scoring between 90 and 110 is classified as normal and is regarded as having average intelligence.

The 82 I. Q.s available in this study ranged from a low of 62 to a high of 128 with a median of 95.5. More precisely, 53 of these children

1. The 15 children for whom I. Q. scores were not available were distributed quite evenly throughout the total population and this deficiency in the court records was due purely to chance.

out of the sample of 82 had scores between 90 and 110, and would therefore be considered of average intelligence. This is approximately 65 per cent. Twenty-five children, or approximately 30 per cent of the sample, had scores below 90 and therefore would be regarded as having subnormal intelligence. On the other hand, 4 children, or approximately 5 per cent of the sample, scored above 110 and would therefore be classified as above normal. Regarding this sample as adequate and using a simple dichotomous classification, approximately 70 per cent of these delinquent children are of average intelligence or above, while 30 per cent are below, according to I. Q. scores.

For quite some time in the past it was commonly held that juvenile delinquents were mentally deficient. In recent years, however, this contention has been demonstrated to be highly inconsistent. Cyril Burt, in a study of delinquent behavior, concluded that both the intellectually and temperamentally defective constituted less than 20 per cent of the total.² In a study of 4,000 juvenile delinquents appearing in courts in Chicago and Boston, over 70 per cent were found to be mentally normal.³ A study, reported in the American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, hypothesized that greater mental abilities enabled some delinquent children to avoid

2. Cyril Burt, The Young Delinquent, (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1933), pp. 569, 571.

3. William Healy, "The Devil's Workshop," The Century, CXX (Winter, 1930), pp. 124-125.

official classification as delinquent. However, research results yielded no significant difference in two controlled groups. On the revised Stanford-Binet, the "official" delinquents had scores ranging from a low of 59 to a high of 117, with a median of 93.25, while the "unofficial" delinquents had scores ranging from a low of 65 to a high of 149, with a median of 93.70.⁴

From the findings of this study, it is not intended to dismiss any connection between low intelligence and delinquent behavior. It is, however, believed that these findings tend more to corroborate the findings cited above and the contention that the mentally deficient do not constitute a preponderance of this delinquent population.

School Status

In the light of the findings on the intelligence quotients of these children, it would be safe to assume that 70 per cent have a sufficient amount of intelligence to carry on a normal school program. It is common knowledge that there are many factors besides intelligence that are of tremendous importance to success in the school situation. Sullenger, in discussing the school in his book on social determinants, says:

The child's adjustment to school is also dependent upon the attitudes that have been built up in the home concerning the school. . . . Companionship with others of the same age in the school entails innumerable conflicts which arouse in the child the indistinct desire to have his interests protected against others and also awakens

4. Fred J. Murphy, Mary M. Shirley, Helen L. Witmer, "The Incidence of Hidden Delinquency," American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, (October, 1946), pp. 686-696.

in him an understanding of the necessity of adapting himself to others, to his surroundings, and to society at large. . . . Physical disabilities frequently produce social situations in the school that lead directly to delinquency.⁵

It would appear, therefore, that in addition to intelligence, family, friends, and physical fitness are also imperative factors related to success in school.

Here again, it is not the purpose of this paper to make a detailed analysis of the factors that promote success in school, but rather to classify the delinquents of this study according to their school status at the time of commitment. In order to make this classification, each of these delinquent children were put into one of four categories: (1) in school, but reported truant; (2) those who quit school; (3) those who were expelled, and; (4) those in school who attended regularly.

Twenty-six delinquents, or approximately 26 per cent of the total number, fall into the first category. These children, who were registered in school but reported as truant, range all the way from one boy who attended school only 13 days out of a full semester, to one who was consistently truant a couple of days out of each week.

Of the total population, the second category includes 37 delinquents or approximately 37 per cent. In most of these cases, the children who

5. T. Earl Sullenger, Social Determinants in Juvenile Delinquency, (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1936), pp. 98, 99, 100.

had quit school were older since it is a state law in Nebraska that a child must attend school until he is 16 years of age. Many in this category were also children with subnormal intelligence, who simply could not keep the pace in school. One case in particular comes to mind of a boy who was 17 years old and in the fourth grade. His I. Q. was 68.

In the third category, those expelled from school, there were 17 delinquents or about 17 per cent of the total population. Most of these children were continual trouble-makers and were considered incorrigible by the school. Technically, if a child is expelled from school, this is a sufficient reason to declare him delinquent if he is under 16 years of age.

Those categorized in school and attending regularly account for 19 or about 19 per cent of the total number. Of these 19 children in a normal school situation, 3 were reported as doing "good," 11 as "fair," and 5 as "poor."

This breakdown is presented graphically in Figure 5, page 39.

These figures, regardless of one's point of view, hardly indicate school as one of the areas in which delinquents excel. Actually, the opposite position seems to be the case. In so far as only 3 of the total population of delinquents were regarded as "good" in their school situation, there seems to be a positive relationship between trouble in school and delinquent behavior. Sullenger, in his book, said, "Almost every juvenile delinquent has had trouble in school before becoming delinquent."⁶ It is felt that this study tends to substantiate this contention.

6. Ibid., p. 100.

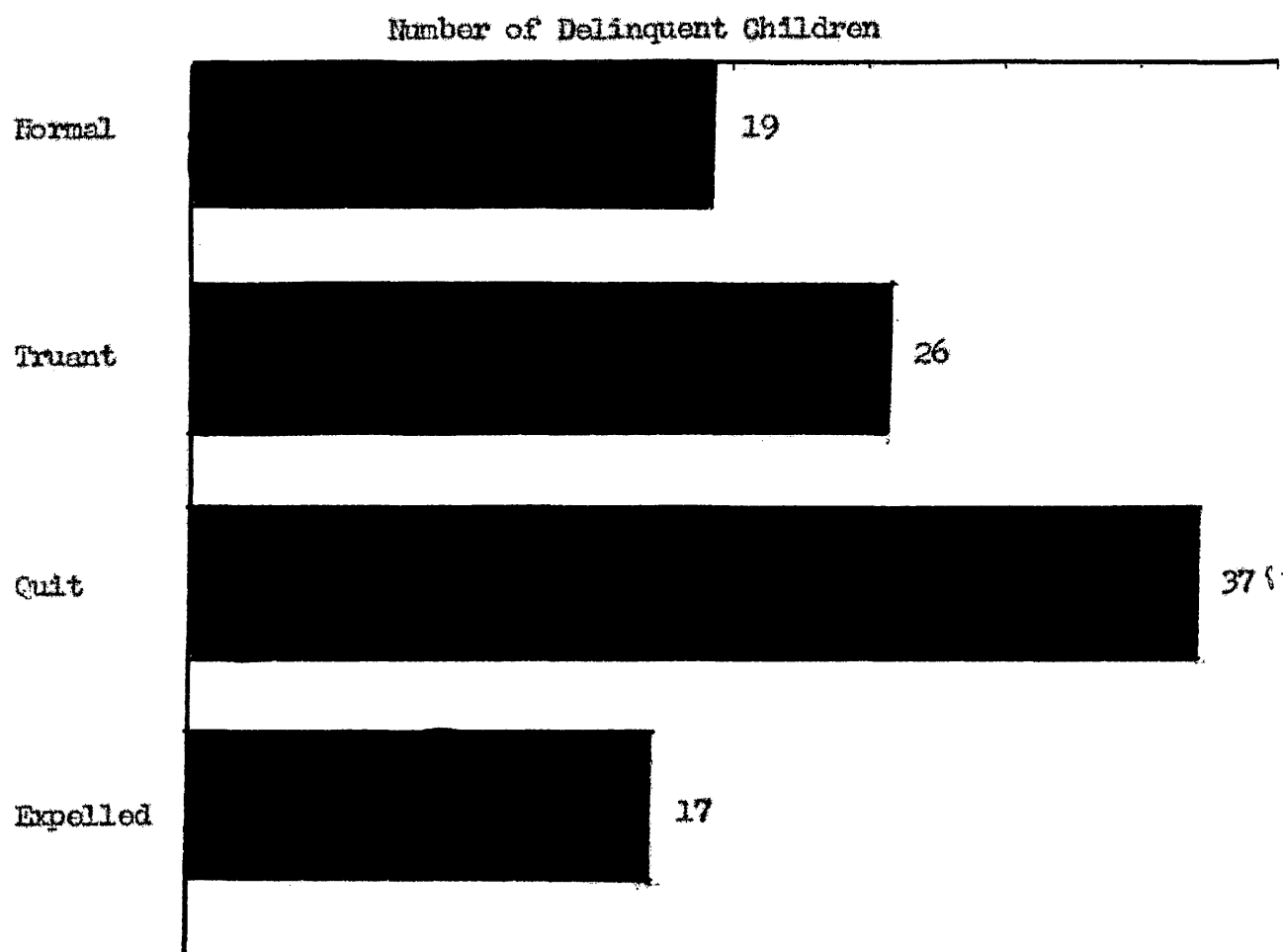


FIGURE 5
SCHOOL STATUS OF NINETY-NINE DELINQUENTS AT THE
TIME OF COMMITMENT FROM OMAHA, NEBRASKA,
1955 AND 1956

CHAPTER VI

COMPLAINTS AND OFFENSES

Complaints

As pointed out in Chapter I, the juvenile delinquent offender is not legally tried, convicted, and sentenced in the same way an adult criminal would be. Rather, once a child is found to be delinquent, the juvenile judge has several courses of action relative to final disposition. Normally, the commitment of a delinquent child to a state training school is the last resort. Rarely is a child committed for a first offense, in so far as one of the conditions that constitutes the delinquency of a child is the habit of misbehavior or being habitually disobedient. The primary function of the juvenile court is one of therapy rather than strict judicial administration. In other words, an effort is made to correct a delinquent child in his present environmental situation. Only if and when this objective fails to materialize is a child committed to a state training school.

Since this study deals with children who are regarded as flagrantly delinquent, one would expect to find that the number of complaints filed against them were quite numerous. In order to examine this particular characteristic, compilation was made of the number of complaints reported to the court by law officers, parents, neighbors, and the schools. With each complaint submitted, some action is taken by court personnel in an

effort to correct the apparent difficulty confronting the child. This action ranges all the way from a remedial conference between the child and/or the parents and a member of the court staff, to commitment to a state training school by the juvenile judge, depending in part, of course, upon the seriousness of the offense committed. Many complaints coming to the attention of the court are handled in a so-called unofficial fashion. This is generally the policy with children the first time they get into trouble, or when the offense is not regarded as serious. Juvenile Court Statistics reveal that of the juvenile courts reporting to the United States Children's Bureau in 1953, fifty-three per cent of all delinquency cases were dealt with unofficially.¹ Now taking into consideration the fact that this population is not only considered officially delinquent, but delinquent to the degree that commitment is deemed necessary, a multitude of complaints can be expected.

Since the legal framework of juvenile court procedure is set up according to the dictates of the individual states, the laws do not read exactly the same. However, the method of handling juvenile delinquency cases in most all states follows rather closely the design described above, with minor modifications.

There is no set number of offenses that automatically puts a child into a state training school. How many chances a juvenile delinquent should have is a difficult question dependent upon many factors. Since

1. United States Children's Bureau, Juvenile Court Statistics, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1954).

it is the purpose of this study to establish common patterns of behavior, the number of complaints have been arbitrarily divided into two categories: (1) those children against whom less than 5 complaints were recorded, and; (2) those against whom 5 or more complaints were recorded. The final analysis revealed 26 children with less than 5 complaints and 73 with 5 or more. Two boys were committed on the first offense recorded by the court. They were, however, older children and their offenses were quite serious. The most complaints recorded for any one child were charged against a youngster of just 13, who had accumulated 16 official court complaints before he was committed. In this instance, however, no single offense was regarded as serious, but the cumulative record resulted in commitment.

The fact that 73 per cent of all those children committed to state training schools during the years 1955 and 1956 had 5 or more official complaints filed against them, would seemingly indicate the pronounced characteristic of a repetitious pattern of delinquent behavior common to this committed delinquent population.

Offenses

As was pointed out in the preceding section, the complaints recorded against the delinquents of this study were quite numerous, and since each complaint is usually the result of some offense attributed to a child, it seems reasonable to assume that the offenses will also be quite numerous. In addition, since these children constitute the hardened core of a delinquent population and are regarded as flagrantly delinquent, one would expect to find that the offenses attributed to these children would be of a rather serious nature.

Block and Flynn report the following pattern in relation to the types of offenses committed:

Reports to the United States Children's Bureau confirmed by most local surveys and studies indicate that the primary offense among boys is stealing, followed by what tenuous wording of the statutes describes as "general acts of carelessness and mischief." Among the girls the principle infractions are ungovernable behavior and sex offenses, in that order.²

Due to the large number and extremely diverse types of offenses attributed to the delinquent population, the compilation of these data presented some difficulty. In recording offenses, therefore, that offense most frequently committed by each child, and that offense considered most serious, committed by each child, were counted. In many cases, these were the same act.

Probably the easiest way to express the seriousness of the offenses of these children, since seriousness is a matter of degree, would be to point out that all of the delinquent children of this population, by the mere fact of their commitment, have been found to be out of control and completely incorrigible. In other words, the offense most common and most serious among these children was that all of them flouted authority of any kind and habitually exhibited a complete disrespect for the rights of others. This is commonly regarded as an offense of a very serious nature. In practically all of these cases it is almost impossible to isolate one particular offense and say this is the crux of the problem. Rather, the problems seem to arise from a general, more than a specific, pattern of behavior.

2. Herbert Block and Frank Flynn, The Juvenile Offender in America Today, (New York: Random House, 1956), p. 41.

The types of offenses according to frequency as shown in Figure 6, page 46, occur in the following manner:

1. Stealing, excluding auto theft, was recorded 58 times. These offenses ranged all the way from petty theft to what would be considered grand larceny in an adult court.
2. Auto theft included 24 offenders. In practically all offenses of this nature the car is not kept or sold but merely used to "joyride," and then abandoned. One 14 year old boy had stolen the keys to all of the autos in a used car lot and over a period of a month had gone joyriding in 15 different cars. The peculiar thing about this case was that when the rides were over, he returned the cars to the lot and parked them in the same spot from which he had taken them.
3. Sex offenses were attributed to 23 of these children. The girls were by far the most frequent offenders in this category. The range is all the way from an unwed mother to reported immoral behavior. These findings tend to coincide closely with those cited above.
4. Malicious destruction of property with 16 serious offenders is next on the list. Most of these cases involved a complete disrespect for the property of others, from breaking windows to starting buildings on fire.
5. Assault was the most common and/or serious offense for 12 children of the delinquent population. In most cases, this

was usually a "bullying" type of behavior. In one case, however, the victim of one of these beatings died about a month after the assault had taken place.

6. Runaways were seventh in the offense category with 9. The majority of these cases included a preponderance of girls, most of whom were habitually staying away from home for days at a time.
7. Using alcohol was reported as the most common offense for 6 of these children. Four out of this group were girls. On several occasions complete inebriation was reported.
8. Carrying loaded fire-arms was attributed to 4 of these children. This offense is mentioned not because it was common but in view of its potential seriousness. A 9 year old boy was apprehended in the school room with a .45 caliber pistol, fully loaded.
9. One accidental killing was recorded among this group. Playing with a rifle led to the death of a 13 year old boy.

In presenting these facts, a pattern very similar to that reported by the Children's Bureau relative to types of offenses seems to be disclosed, with the possible exception of a more serious degree of offense on the part of the group under observation. Stealing was certainly most common among the boys while the girls were most frequently charged with sex offenses. Excluding the most serious cases in this study, most of the

Number of Times Recorded for All Delinquents

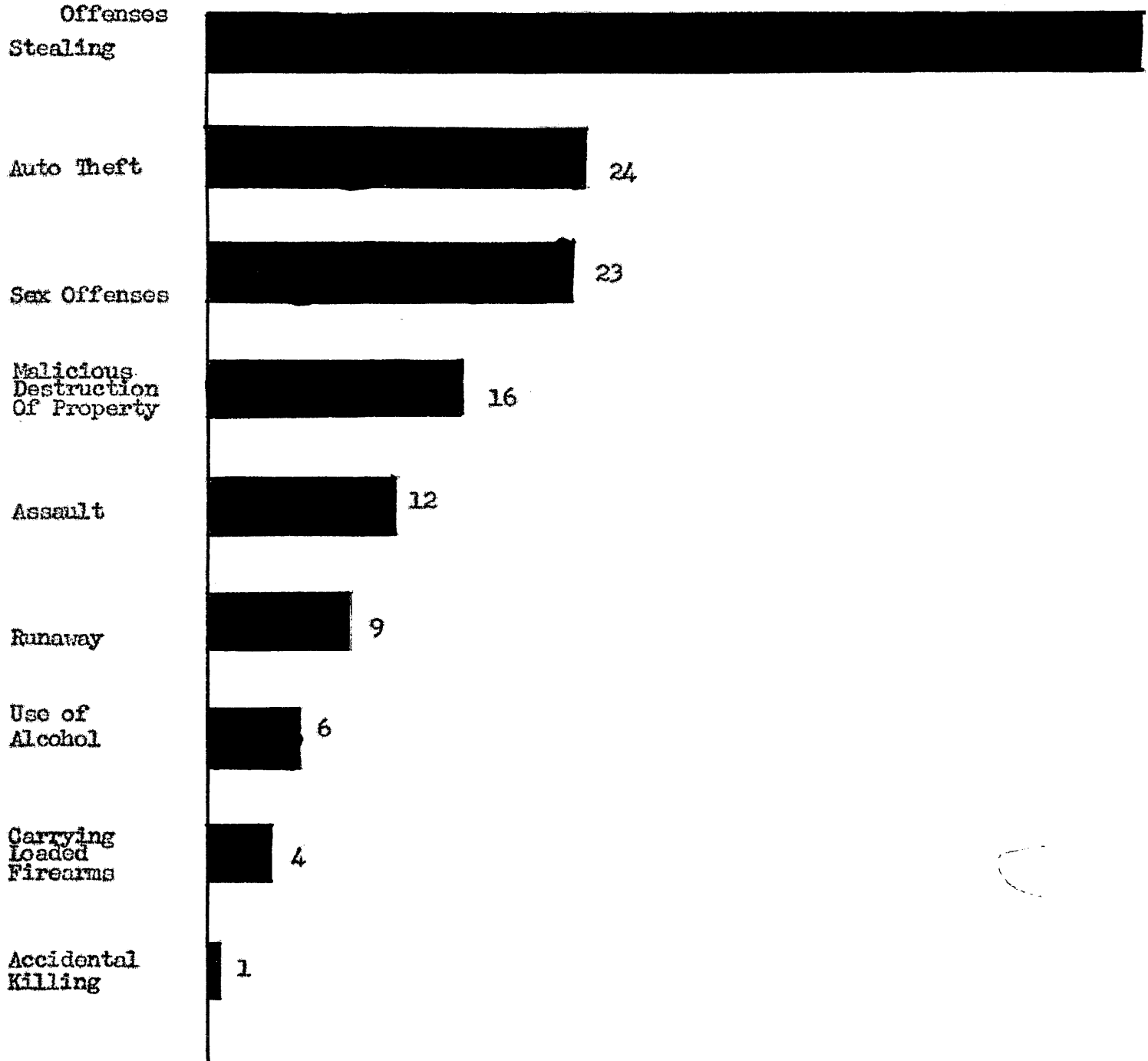


FIGURE 6
FREQUENCY OF OFFENSES RECORDED FOR THE JUVENILE
DELINQUENTS COMMITTED FROM OMAHA, NEBRASKA,
1955 AND 1956

other offenses could be classified as "general acts of carelessness and mischief," in accord with the findings of Block and Flynn.

CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This study was undertaken in an effort to discover some factors characteristic of a selected group of juvenile delinquents. The group is composed of 99 boys and girls who were regarded as flagrantly delinquent and were committed to the state training schools from Omaha, Nebraska, during the years 1955 and 1956.

Relative to the location of the homes of these children, major concentrations were discovered in three particular areas of the city. As had been anticipated, they were areas that are generally regarded as conducive to delinquent behavior. They are characterized by overcrowded living conditions, industrial plants, and a lack of adequate playground facilities. These findings coincide quite closely with the extensive research done in this field by Shaw and McKay.¹

The age distribution revealed a range from 10 to 17, and the most common age of commitment at 15. This rather large number of younger children being flagrantly delinquent is a somewhat surprising characteristic. As expected, a distribution of these delinquent children based on the factor of sex, showed a preponderance of male delinquents. The ratio was 3.5 to 1.

1. Clifford R. Shaw and Henry D. McKay, Juvenile Delinquency and Urban Areas, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1936).

Classification of these children according to race indicated a pattern similar to that of most delinquent groups from the same general urban composition. In this population, the Negro and Indian delinquents were in disproportion compared to the white delinquents.

Some rather unexpected developments resulted from the analysis of the factor of income. The average income of the families of these children were about equal to those of the city as a whole. This, however, is one of the areas that warrants a much more profound investigation than is permitted by the scope of this study. The data on the home status of these delinquent children revealed some rather surprising results. Two out of every three were from broken home situations. Actually, in the 33 cases that were included in the non-broken home category there was not one that could be regarded as an average, typical, or normal American family. This is consistent with the many observations relating family life to delinquency.

The information on the I. Q. scores of these children tends to aid in dispelling the contention that delinquents tend to have subnormal I. Q. scores. These children's I. Q. scores indicated a relatively normal distribution with an average of 95.5. The extremes were 62 and 128 with 70 per cent of the population scoring in the normal range or above. The school reports contained in the court records most definitely substantiated the expectations relative to this area of investigation. Final results showed less than 20 per cent in a normal school situation and over 80 per cent either expelled, truant or quit. These figures

indicate a definite relationship between trouble in school and trouble outside of the school situation.

One of the principle criteria used by the juvenile judge to determine whether or not a child should be committed to a state training school is the number of complaints filed against him. Consequently, one would expect to discover that the children of this study had elicited numerous complaints relative to their delinquent behavior. And this expectation was fulfilled. In the final analysis, 73 of the total of 99 had been charged with 5 or more complaints, while the remaining 26 had less than 5.

The offenses attributed to these children followed quite closely both in kind and frequency, the offenses most common to delinquents in general. They included stealing, auto theft, sex offenses, destruction of property, assault, runaway, using alcohol, carrying loaded firearms, and one accidental killing, in that order.

Conclusions

The evidence gathered in this study seems to warrant the following general conclusions with regard to factors characteristic of this particular flagrant population of committed juvenile delinquents.

Most of these children live in areas of the city regarded as blighted and in so far as one of the reasons for commitment is to change the environmental situation, these blighted areas must be regarded as characteristic of this delinquent population.

The fact that more boys than girls get into serious trouble is apparently a universal occurrence due strictly to the factor of sex. The age of 15 being the most common could undoubtedly be attributed to this mysterious stage of development called adolescence. The misconduct of these children is an inescapable characteristic of this population.

The factor of income per se indicates no significant difference as far as delinquency is concerned. However, the broken home must be seriously regarded as an aspect of this population since two-thirds were products of this circumstance.

In regard to I. Q., this population formed a relatively normal distribution. The school situation, however, indicates difficulty both in and out of school go together.

Habitual misbehavior is certainly characteristic of these children, while the offenses attributed to them include practically every offense in modern society.

Recommendations

On the basis of this and similar research, certain courses of action may be entertained. Adhering to the adage, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, it is believed constructive steps could be taken:

(1) the abolishment of blighted areas and alleviation of overcrowded conditions should be fostered; (2) more public and competent counseling services for financial, marital, and family difficulties should be made available; (3) divorce cases involving children should require sound

provisions for the future of the children; (4) both the schools and the court should be given every possible aid to work with and help these children who seem to be fortuitously placed at the bottom of the opportunity scale so early in life.

The research procedure of this paper is primarily descriptive in nature. It is believed, however, that analytical investigations in this same area would yield some fruitfull results. More extensive and exhaustive studies are absolutely essential if a better understanding and ultimate solution is to be found. The scope of this study, together with the limited amount of information contained in the court records, prevented an extensive analytical treatment of the problem in this paper. However, the purposes for which this study was intended seem to have been fulfilled quite adequately by the research methods used.

Those areas that warrant more extensive investigations include those of home status, I. Q., income, and the school situation. I. Q., it seems, would fall more appropriately into the field of psychology rather than sociology. An extensive study of income allocation might reveal that many difficulties attributed directly to income as such, are actually due to various other causes only discerned through highly analytical studies. In the light of the research done for this study, practically all serious delinquent problems, both in and out of school, seem to gain their greatest momentum through one or more aspects of the home situation. This, it is believed, is the principle area toward which future research on delinquency should be directed.

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