

The age of majority determines when a young person is considered an adult in the eyes of the law. Separate jurisdiction (juvenile and adult) for criminal prosecution of young people is premised on two assumptions: juveniles are less capable of mature judgement than adults and thus less culpable for offenses, and juveniles are more amenable to treatment. In most states, including Illinois, this jurisdictional age is set at 18 years – once you turn 18, you are prosecuted as an adult. Recently, some countries are exploring extending some “juvenile” alternatives to young adults.

This young adult expansion takes into account the differing ways and time frames in which young people mature and develop. Recent research ¹ shows that the adolescent brain does not fully develop until age 25 and that young adults age 18 – 24 continue to exhibit the same characteristics as people 13 – 17 in terms of increased risk taking, lack of understanding of consequences and being highly influenced by peer pressure. Moreover, these young people have a high capacity for reform and rehabilitation.

In order to explore this emerging adult population, Juvenile Justice Initiative looked at their arrests of young adults age 18 – 21 ² in Illinois, CY2013. We found that

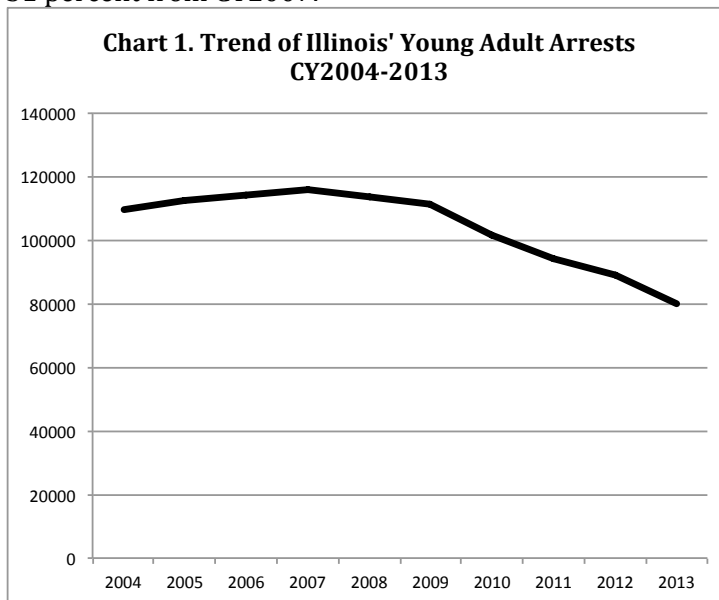
- Arrests of Illinois' young adults have been decreasing past five years;
- **Over 60 percent** of all the young adult arrests were of **misdemeanors** and **less than 25 percent** of all the young adults arrests were of **felonies** and **2 – 3 percent** were **Class X and murder** arrests.;
- Black young adults were 3.4 times more likely to be arrested than white young adults;
- Arrests **peaked at age 20** and decreased gradually.

Method

When an arrest is made, an arrest card is completed either electronically or on paper that includes the individual's fingerprints, offenses with which they are being charged, their race, gender, age, and other information. While some jurisdictions around the world keep juvenile and some young adult arrests confidential, especially for minor offenses, in Illinois the information is then submitted to the Illinois State Police's Criminal History Records Information (CHRI) system. The Juvenile Justice Initiative obtained aggregate data on arrests of young adults (age 18 – 21) in Illinois in CY2013 from the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority (ICJIA). The following is an analysis of the aggregate data provided on young adult arrests.

Arrests of Young Adults Have Been Decreasing

Over the course of past ten years, the arrests of young adults peaked in CY2007 (115,688) and the arrests have been decreasing since then. In CY2013, 79,926 arrests of young persons 18 – 21 were recorded in the CHRI,³ which is a 10 percent decrease from CY2012 and 31 percent from CY2007.



Over 60 Percent of the Arrests are Misdemeanors - Felonies accounted for less than 25 percent

Like their younger peers, over 60 percent of the young adult arrests were made for misdemeanors ⁴ statewide and in Cook County. ⁵ Felonies accounted for less than 25 percent of the entire arrests – arrests for murder and Class X combined were only 3 percent. See Chart 2 and 3.

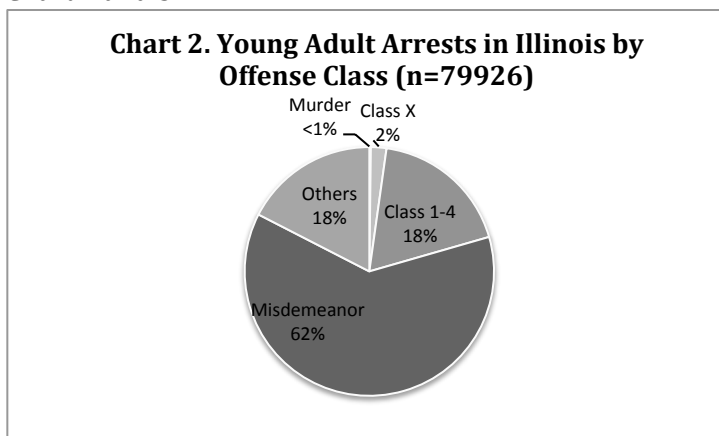


Chart 3. Young Adult Arrests in Cook County by Offense Class (n=40530)

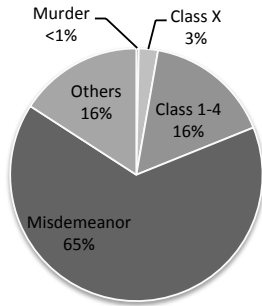
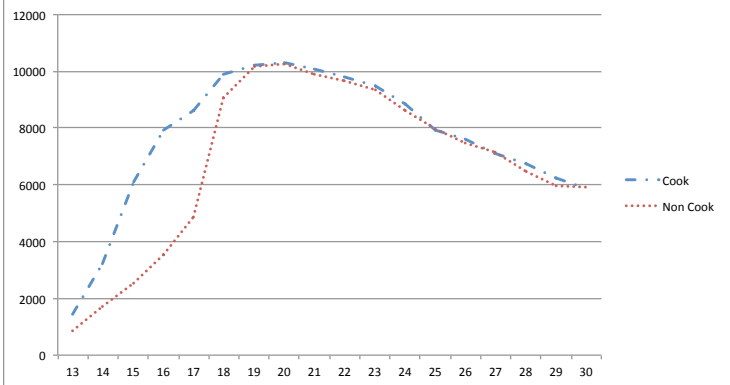


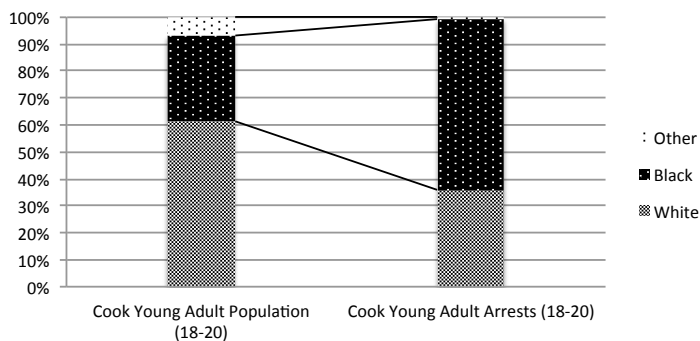
Chart 5. Age-arrest Curves, CY2013



Black Young Adults (18-20) are Arrested Over Three Times More Often than White Young Adults

Forty eight percent of statewide young adult arrests and 63 percent of Cook County arrests involved Black people. While there were less racial disparities among young adults in conflict with the law, compared to their younger counterparts, Black young adults age 18-20 were 3.44 times as likely to be arrested than their white peers in Cook County (RRI=3.44) and 3.59 times likely statewide (RRI=3.59).⁶ See Chart 4.

Chart 4. Cook Population and Arrests by Race



Young Adults Grow Out of Crimes

The age-arrest curves (Chart 5) show the changing age composition of arrests between Cook County and non Cook Counties. In Cook County, the number of arrests increased dramatically from age 13 to 14 and from age 14 to 15 (by 123% and 91% respectively). After age 16, the arrests increased gradually and peaked at age 20, and decreased since then. In non Cook counties, on the other hand, there was a gradual steady increase of arrests until age 17, and arrest of 18-year-olds were 86 percent higher than that of 17-year-olds. Like in Cook County, arrests in Non Cook Counties continuously decreased since the age 20.

Summary

This brief was prepared to develop insights on young adults in conflict with the law. In Illinois, a young person is arbitrarily deemed an adult in terms of criminal justice processing upon turning 18 without consideration of an individual’s maturity or the nature of their crime despite he or she is amenable to changes. Current analysis indicates that young adults do not commit any more serious offenses than their younger peers and they grow out of crimes as they age. It is time to take a closer look at this population and provide treatments and services that fit to their mental and cognitive capacity.

Acknowledgement

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- Christine Devitt Wesley (ICJIA)
- Mark Powers (ICJIA)

Contact Kanako Ishida (ki@jjustice.org) for questions.

1. Giedd, J. N., Lalonde, F.M., Celano, M.J., White, S. L., Wallace, G. L., Lee, N. R., et al. (2009). Anatomical Brain Magnetic Resonance Imaging of Typically Developing Children and Adolescents. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 48, 465-470. Included are people who are 18, 19, 20 and 21 years old.
2. http://www.jeffreyarnett.com/EmerAdul_Chap1.pdf
3. Arrest data was retrieved from the Criminal History Record Information (CHRI). Only the arrest records submitted by the local law enforcement to the Illinois State Police are included in the CHRI. CHRI does not have ethnicity coding – white includes white Hispanic and black includes black Hispanic.
4. Data only includes the most serious offense per arrest. If a person was arrested for Class 4 felony and Class A misdemeanor offense, only the class 4 felony is counted for the arrest.
5. Some homicide arrests are included in Class X felony, rather than “murder.” For instance, if a youth is charged with an attempted homicide, it’s a class X offense but its offense type would be homicide. Class X and Murder are mutually exclusive.
6. General young adult population data was retrieved from the OJJDP’s Easy Access to Juvenile Population. Because the OJJDP dataset does not have an age group 18-21, JJI used the population data and arrest data age 18-20.