

The Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice Juvenile Justice Alert

Sacramento's juvenile crime is not on the rise: A review of the numbers

On July 8, 2006, the Sacramento Bee published a report entitled, "County sees a startling spike in juvenile crime." While the reporter correctly covered the fact that 15 Sacramento youth have been charged with murder this year, the broader conclusion she used as a headline is contradicted by official number collected by the California Department of Justice's Bureau of Criminal Statistics.

The article leads the public to believe that juvenile crime is on the rise based on the acts of 15 youths among a Sacramento youth population of 170,000. The assumptions about rising youth crime reported in the article are not accurate. This research brief provides an overview of recent crime activity by youth in Sacramento based on official statistics.

Juvenile Crime Declines; Adult Crime on the Rise

The California Department of Justice reports precipitous declines in serious juvenile crime rates in Sacramento over the last 25 years.

Juvenile crime rates since 1980

Year	JUVENILE Felony Arrests	JUVENILE Felony Arrest Rate*	JUVENILE Violent Arrests	JUVENILE Violent Arrest Rate*	JUVENILE Population
1980	2449	2451.5	426	426.4	99,900
1990	2914	2644.3	562	510.0	110,200
2000	2572	1772.6	706	486.6	145,100
2004	2471	1454.4	616	362.6	169,900
Change 2004 v. 1980		-41%		-15%	

Contrary to the story's sources, juvenile crime has decreased – even while adult crime rates showed substantial increases.

Adult crime rates since 1980

Year	ADULT Felony Arrests	ADULT Felony Arrest Rate*	ADULT Violent Arrests	ADULT Violent Arrest Rate*	ADULT Population
1980	8253	1570.2	1986	377.9	525,600
1990	20539	2930.2	5565	794.1	700,800
2000	19632	2525.0	5038	648.0	777,500
2004	22374	2500.2	5193	580.3	894,900
Change 2004 v. 1980		+59%		+54%	

*The rate is calculated by number of arrests per 100,000 population. The juvenile population is for individuals aged 10-17. Source: Criminal Justice Statistics Center (http://stats.doj.ca.gov/cjsc_stats/prof04/34/3C.htm)

What do the numbers mean?

Sacramento's juvenile violent crime rates are at their lowest level in 30 years. The data show that juveniles have lower crime rates in 2006 than in 1980. In 1980, juveniles accounted for 18 percent of the violent crime arrests. In 2004,

juveniles were responsible for only 10 percent of the violent crime arrests.

In addition, in the last five years, the rate of arrests for serious violent crime among Sacramento juveniles has fallen by 25 percent. The most recent figures show that violent crime by Sacramento youth is at its lowest level in 30 years.

Who is committing crime?

Meanwhile, the crime rate among adults has surged. The arrest rate for Sacramento adults aged 40 through 59 rose by 20 percent in the last five years, including a 210 percent increase in homicides. From 2003-2004, the number of 40-59 year olds arrested for murder rose by 60 percent, reaching a record 52 individuals. This accounts for one murder per week committed by a graying population.

Wrapping up

Statistics can tell many different stories, but one thing is clear: Sacramento youth are not committing crimes as often or as violently as they did in the past. The crime rate among the county's youth has fallen and juveniles are responsible for only one-tenth of the crime in Sacramento.

The youth population in Sacramento is 170,000. The actions of 15 youths do not make a trend among that population, nor do they warrant unjustified assertions that impact public perceptions. CJCJ provides this information to assist in the development of sound public policy.

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