

PopBites

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Demographic characteristics are strong predictors of arrest rates

Recent news reports have focused on falling crime rates in Minnesota, but arrest rate trends show a somewhat different story. Arrest data from the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension show that rates for the more serious Part I offenses (such as murder, robbery and rape) have fallen slightly during the 1990s, but arrest rates for the less serious Part II offenses (for example, liquor law and narcotics violations and vandalism) and for juvenile status offenses (runaway, curfew violations) have escalated. Arrest rates

have risen more for females than for males, more for juveniles than for adults, and more for Asians than for people in other racial and ethnic groups.

The probability of being arrested in Minnesota varies greatly depending on age, gender, race and ethnicity and place of residence. In 1998, young people age 15 to 19 are 100 times as likely to be arrested as people over 65. Males are arrested more than three times as often as females. Residents of Mille Lacs County are 28 times as likely to be arrested as residents of Norman County.

Arrest data should be interpreted with caution. An arrest rate 28 times higher in Mille Lacs County than in Norman County, for example, does not necessarily mean 28 times as much crime. The accuracy of arrest rate data depends on the quality of both the arrest data (the numerator) and the population data (the denominator). Arrests can go unreported or be reported

incorrectly. Population may be overestimated or underestimated.

Varying population estimates make a big difference in calculating the arrest rates for racial and ethnic groups. Use of alternative, higher estimates for minority populations in Minnesota reduces their arrest rates considerably, though it does not erase the racial and ethnic differences. For example, using the U.S. Census Bureau estimates, the African American arrest rate is almost seven times as high as the white arrest rate. Using the alternative population estimates, the African American arrest rate is about five times as high.

Differences in reporting and law enforcement practices are probably important in explaining differences among counties. Some jurisdictions are more thorough in their reporting than others. State patrol arrests do not appear in the county data and are more significant in some areas than in others.

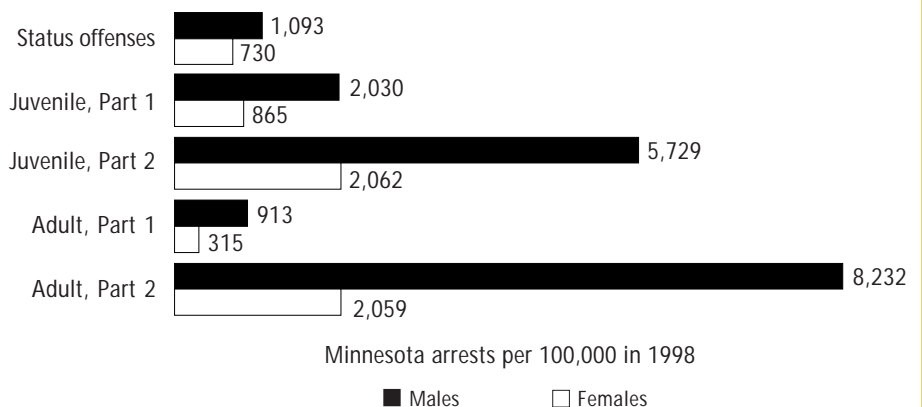
Published by the State Demographic Center at Minnesota Planning, This issue of PopBites summarizes findings from "Minnesota Arrest Rates: 1990 and 1998," a working paper by Martha McMurry that describes how arrest rates vary by demographic characteristics and how these rates have changed during the decade. Upon request, *PopBites* will be made available in alternate formats, such as Braille, large print or audio tape. For TTY, contact Minnesota Relay Service at 800-627-3529 and ask for Minnesota Planning. For more information contact:



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Juvenile males have highest arrest rates for Part 1 (more serious) offenses; adult males have highest arrest rates for Part 2 (less serious) offenses



Arrest data from Criminal Justice Statistics Center at Minnesota Planning. Population estimates from U.S. Census Bureau. Juveniles are under age 18; adults are 18 or older. See text for definitions of offense types. Only juveniles are arrested for status offenses.