

THE EFFECT OF A CURFEW LAW ON JUVENILE CRIME IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

DANNY COLE†
University of Maryland

ABSTRACT: *Juvenile curfew laws were a popular intervention to combat juvenile crime during the 1980s and 1990s. An experimental replication design was used to examine the impact of the Washington, D.C. "Juvenile Curfew Act of 1995." Juvenile arrest data were analyzed using a two-standard-deviation-band approach, t-test, and trend analysis. The results, consistent with previous studies, revealed that the curfew law did not reduce total juvenile arrests. Several flaws inherent in curfew laws, as well as implications for research and policy, are discussed.*

INTRODUCTION

There is a major concern among the American people that juvenile crime is escalating out of control (Hemmens & Bennett, 1999). In the early 1990s, violent juvenile crime received extensive media coverage which, in turn, spurred the perception of a crime epidemic (Torbet & Szymanski, 1998). The current level of youth violence and juvenile crime makes delinquency a serious social problem in the United States (Heimer & De Coster, 1999). The topic of youth violence has gained so much local and national attention that now it is considered to be a major public health problem (Dahlberg, 1998). In response to the continuing problem of juvenile crime and violence, many cities have resorted to implementing juvenile curfew laws.

NATURE AND EXTENT OF JUVENILE CRIME

The nationwide growth in juvenile crime began in the late 1980s, peaked in 1994, and has declined since then (Snyder, 1998; Snyder, 2000). Law enforcement agencies made an estimated 2.5 million arrests of persons under 18 years of age in 1999, compared with an estimated 2.8 million similar arrests in 1997 (Snyder, 1998; Snyder, 2000). The juvenile population accounted for 17% of total arrests and 16% of vio-

† *Direct all correspondence to: Danny Cole, University of Maryland, School of Social Work, 10600 High Beam Court, Columbia, MD 21044. E-mail: rcole@ssw.umaryland.edu.*