Trends in Misdemeanor Arrests, Referrals, & Charges in Seattle

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Funding
The Laura and John Arnold Foundation
To examine trends in misdemeanor arrests, charges, and referrals as one of seven jurisdictions in the Research Network on Misdemeanor Justice to provide information of value to policymakers, criminal justice professionals, and researchers in Seattle and nationwide to replicate findings from the John Jay College of Criminal Justice.

Purpose of Research
The Research Network on Misdemeanor Justice
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## Data Partners and Stakeholders

### Acknowledgements

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Introduction and Background

Misdemeanors in Seattle

The majority of individuals processed through the criminal justice system nationally are arrested for misdemeanors. Misdemeanor are typically shelved as low-priority events with little research attention though misdemeanor sentencing trends have steadily risen nationwide (Natoli, 2012).

Lum et al (2017) examined national response to “Broken Windows Policing” in response to harms identified to communities of color finding Seattle is a “Middle Stable” city with respect to misdemeanor arrests with less than doubled misdemeanor arrests during the 1990-2013 time frame as compared to other cities labeled as “HighIncreasers,” “Middle Increasers,” “Middle Stable,” and “Low Stable.”

What Makes Seattle Unique as a RN MJ site?

- The Deprioritization and Legalization of Marijuana
- Innovative Community Initiatives
  - Seattle Police Department’s Micro-Community Policing Plans (SPD MCPP)
  - Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD)
  - Seattle Police Crisis Intervention Policy
Seattle Misdemeanor Case Process
PHASE 1 Misdemeanor Arrests, Referrals, & Charges
- Seattle Police Department
- Seattle City Attorney’s Office
- United States Census Bureau

PHASE 2 The Misdemeanor Case Process
- Seattle Police Department
- Seattle City Attorney’s Office
- Seattle Municipal Court
- King County Adult & Juvenile Detention

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- Misdemeanors arrests, referrals, and charges involving behavioral crisis
- Community perception of public safety and neighborhood quality of life and link to misdemeanor arrests, referrals, and charges by micro-community
- Person and place-based misdemeanor arrests, referrals, and charges
Arrests, Referrals, & Charges

**Arrests**
- Arrested (SPD Booking)
- Outside Agency Arrest
- Summons
- Citations
- SPD contacts with individuals that led to misdemeanor referrals

**Referrals**
- SPD arrests referred to SCA
- SPD cases referred to SCA

**Charges**
- Misdemeanors referred to SCA where charges files
• **Arrests, referrals, and charges for misdemeanors in Seattle have steadily declined from 2008 to 2016.** This general decline in arrests, referrals, and charges mirrors a similar decline for felonies.

• While arrests, referrals, and charges for misdemeanors are declining in Seattle, rates for arrests, referrals, and charges are higher for Black and Indigenous groups.

• The rate of felony and misdemeanor bookings has decreased while the rate of misdemeanor warrants has increased.

• Misdemeanor arrest rates have decreased steadily for all age categories. The 18-20 age category has seen the most significant decline dropping below 21-24 year olds since 2010 and 25-34 year-olds since 2013.

• There has been a decline in misdemeanor bookings for both males and females since 2009 with a greater decline for males.

• The arrest rate is highest for Black males followed by Indigenous males with some exceptions where the arrest rate for the Indigenous group exceeds Black males and females. For example, in 2013, Indigenous males age 35-65 were arrested at a higher rate than Black males and Indigenous females age 18-65 were arrested, referred, and charged at an increasing and higher rate than Black females across the study period (in particular in the 35-65 age group) while the referral and charge rate for Black females declined.
Discussion

Summary of Key Findings

- Arrest rates declined for person, property & theft-related, weapons, drugs, prostitution, and public order offenses from 2010 to 2016 while warrant arrests showed a corresponding increase. There was a particularly dramatic decrease in prostitution arrests from 2011 to 2012.

- The rate of misdemeanor dismissals was higher than convictions from 2008-2015. In 2016, conviction rate exceeded the dismissal rate for the first time during the study period. There was a decrease in the dismissal and convictions from 2008-2016 while acquittals, which occurred at a relatively low rate, remained steady across the study period.

- The rate and percentage of misdemeanors at Citywide, Precinct, and Micro-Community level declined and vary by precinct and micro-community. The East precinct shows the highest rate of misdemeanors, followed by the South, West, Southwest, and North precincts for most of the study period with some fluctuation in 2015-2016 (e.g., arrest rate in South exceeded East and North exceeded Southwest in 2016).
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Charging Rate

- Ballard North
- Ballard South
- Bitterlake
- Fremont
- Greenwood
- Lakecity
- Northgate
- Phinney Ridge
- Roosevelt/ Ravenna
- Sandpoint
- University
- Wallingford
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Charging Rate

Alaska Junction
Alki
Commercial Duwamish
Commercial Harbor Island
Fauntleroy
High Point
Highland Park
North Admiral
North Delridge
Pigeon Point
Roxhill/ Westwood/ Arbor Heights
South Park
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What percentage of misdemeanor arrests, referrals, and charges involve behavioral crisis?

- Initial analysis were conducted for the years in which consistent and detailed data was collected by SPD on behavioral crisis incidents (2015-2016).

- When the arrest, referral and charging data are aggregated to the most serious misdemeanor offense, preliminary analyses demonstrate that **5.4% of individuals who were referred to the Seattle City Attorney's office for a misdemeanor offense were identified as being in behavioral crisis when contacted by the Seattle Police Department.**
The literature examining person and place-based crime has historically focused on major crimes and not specifically on misdemeanors.

- 2-10% of locations are associated with over 50% of crime (Lee et al, 2017; Weisburd, 2012, 2018; Eck, et al, 2017).

Examining person and place-based crime at the misdemeanor level provides data to unpack prolific offending patterns and crime types that converge at hot spot locations. In other words, Is there something different going on with misdemeanors when it comes to person and place-based crime?

**Person-Based** – Preliminary analyses show that 12.9% of individuals arrested for at least one misdemeanor offense between 2008 and 2016 account for 50% of misdemeanor arrests; 18.6% of individuals referred for at least one misdemeanor offense between 2008 and 2016 account for 50% of misdemeanor referrals; and 21.2% of individuals charged with at least one misdemeanor offense account for 50% of misdemeanor charges.

**Place-Based** – Preliminary data analysis shows that 4.9% of locations in Seattle where at least one misdemeanor offense occurred between 2008 and 2016 are where 50% of misdemeanors offenses occurred.
Discussion

Summary of Key Findings

- Arrests, referrals, and charges for misdemeanors in Seattle have steadily declined from 2008 to 2016. This general decline in arrests, referrals, and charges mirrors a similar decline for felonies.

- While arrests, referrals, and charges for misdemeanors are declining in Seattle, rates for arrests, referrals, and charges are higher for Black and Indigenous groups.

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1) Misdemeanor Case Processing – What happens to individuals arrested for misdemeanors in Seattle as they process through the system?
   - A subsample of cases will be examined from arrest through case disposition.
   - Case processing of a subsample of case types will be examined across RNMJ cites in Seattle, Prince George Maryland, and Meridian, Mississippi.

2) Misdemeanor Crime and Community Perception of Public Safety in Seattle Micro-Communities – What is the relationship between misdemeanor arrest patterns and micro-community quality of life and community perceptions of public safety?
   - How do community perceptions of public safety and quality of life ratings compare with misdemeanor arrests, referrals, and charges in Seattle micro-communities?
   - Are misdemeanor arrests, referrals, and charges and community perception of public safety and quality of life associated with micro-community prevalence of homelessness and mental illness?

3) Misdemeanor Incidents involving behavioral crisis Randomized Controlled Trial – Does the Criminal Justice System Help or Harm Individuals in Behavioral Crisis?
   - HYPOTHESES:
     - H1 - Processing misdemeanors involving behavioral crisis increases public safety
     - H2 - Processing misdemeanors involving behavioral crisis increases opportunities for individuals who commit misdemeanors involving behavioral crisis helps those individuals connect with social and mental health services.
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