

YO! Impact on Arrests and Convictions

Executive Summary

A critical community issue is juvenile crime and its negative impact on Baltimore City. Because of the importance of addressing juvenile crime, it was decided to review the pre and post crime rates of youth who enrolled in the Baltimore Youth Opportunity System to ascertain if participation in the program had any impact on the level of criminal behavior. Because data for the youth 17 and younger were not available, the review focused on youth 18 and older at time of enrollment. Data from the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) were obtained for this review. Lacking a means for developing a formal control group that could be used to analyze the records of YO! youth to other similar youth in the community, a comparison group of non-participants was identified.

What the data revealed was important:

- Only 20% of the YO! Participant group was arrested and conviction after program enrollment as opposed to 30% of the comparison group – a positive difference of over thirty-three percent.
- The recidivism rate for the YO! Participant group was 14 percentage points lower than the comparison group (a 60% rate for the comparison group and a 46% rate for the YO! participants). This percentage difference translates to a 23% positive difference in terms of the YO! participants recidivism rate.
- The post enrollment arrest rates for the YO! Participant group was also significantly lower than the rate of the comparison group and the arrest rate for violent offenses was half the level of the comparison group's rate of arrest for violent crimes.

As the following report details, and as is highlighted above, YO! participation appears to have a very positive impact on youth avoidance of criminal activities. The YO! Participants were much less likely to be convicted of a crime, were arrested less frequently, and had a much lower recidivism rate. In that the YO! Participant group and the comparison group were very similar in terms of basic demographic and were youth from the identical neighborhoods, it is a strong indication of the positive influence of the YO! Program in terms of encouraging and fostering more positive youth behaviors.

Background

A key issue with all youth programs is what impact they have on stemming the serious issue of crime in urban neighborhoods. In order to gain some insight as to what impact the Baltimore YO! Program had on crime we asked the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) to assist us. Lacking a means for developing a formal control group that could be used to analyze the records of YO! youth to other similar youth in the community, A comparison group of non-participants was identified.

The US Department of Labor set as one of its guidelines that all YO! Programs would attempt to engage 100% of all youth in the target neighborhoods. Accordingly, Baltimore YO! recruitment efforts endeavored to entice all youth to try the program. As is to be expected, some youth opted to participate while others decided not to take advantage of the opportunities and responsibilities that were associated with YO!. This provided us with the prospect of using our YO! data base to identify youth who could serve as a comparison group. We identified all youth who were 16 or older (at the time of registration), and who registered at YO! centers between July 1, 2000 and October 31, 2003. The data were then divided into two groups; actual YO! Participants and a comparison group who did not meet the participation standards established by the US Department of Labor. In summary, participation was defined as youth who completed one or more pre-placement activity and had at least six participation months¹ during the time frame. Youth of the comparison group were defined as youth who did not complete a pre-placement activity and did not meet the monthly participation standard.

This two-tier data set was sent to DPSCS with the request to query their data system to identify youth who appeared in their system. We asked for the following information:

- Date of Arrest
- Maryland Annotate Code Criminal Law citations (with literal descriptions) for charges at arrest.
- Verdict
- Arrest Flag – an indicator of whether each arrest occurred before or after YO! enrollment. This field also flagged youth who had not had any adult interactions with DPSCS.
- Arrest Count – a numerical sequence for multiple charges stemming from the same arrest.

After considering the parameters that were a part of the adult DPSCS data system, we chose to analyze data only for youth 18 and older at their time of enrollment. While it is possible for youth under 18 to be included in the adult system, nationally, less than 1% of the juveniles arrested are confined to adult prisons² and of all the juveniles who are confined, only 5% are in adult prisons. These numbers caused the concern that including youth under 18 in our report would affect the data and artificially lower the rates, which would cause the overall picture to appear more positive than if an analysis were performed that included both the adult and the Juvenile Justice System data. Since data from the Juvenile Justice System were not available, it was determined that including partial and incomplete information on the under 18 year old group could skew the comparison and consequently skew our analysis focused on the 18 and older cohorts.

¹ A participation month is defined as a calendar month in which a youth completed at least 5 hours of the same pre-placement activity.

² From the National Criminal Justice Reference Service, Office of Justice Programs, US Dept of Justice <http://www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles1/bja/182503.pdf>

Demographics of the Youth

Before discussing what the data match indicated, a look at the basic demographics of the YO! Participants and the comparison group is in order to confirm our assumption that they were essentially similar groups – except for the fact that the YO! Participants were active in the program while the comparison group were not. What we found in this review of the demographics is that the two groups were very similar.

As the table below indicates, the race/ethnicity compositions of the two groups of youth who were 18 years of age and older at time of enrollment were distributed in almost equal proportions. A majority of youth reported being Black/African-American and less than three percent from other racial/ethnic groups.

Table 1: Ethnicity of Youth

	Participants	Comparison Group
Black	97.6%	97.6%
White	2.2%	2.2%
Asian/Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	0.1%	0.18%

The ages of youth (at the time of registration) in each group were also comparable. For the 18 and older youth, the majority from each group was in the age 18-19 cohort, and the age composition of each group had differed by less than five percentage points.

Table 2: Age of Youth at Enrollment

	Participants	Comparison Group
Age 18 – 19	64.5%	60.0%
Age 20 - 21	35.5%	40.0%

As can be seen on the following chart, when comparing the gender composition of the two groups, only slight differences were found. Females were the majority in both groups. The variance between the participant and comparison groups was less than 3%.

Table 3: Gender Distribution of Youth

	Participants	Comparison Group
Male	42.4%	45%
Females	57.6%	55%

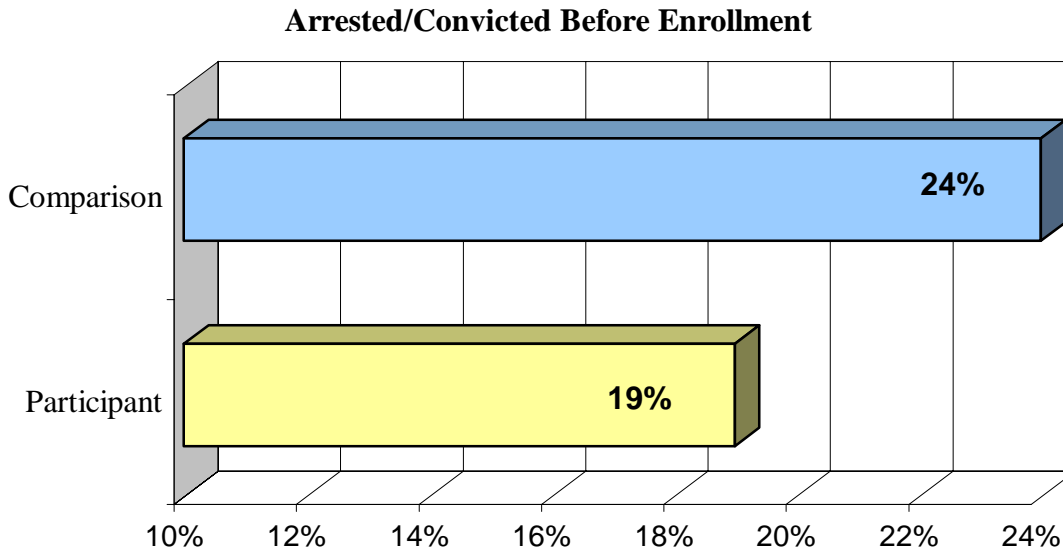
The educational levels of both groups are shown on the following chart. They were quite similar, with approximately a 3% variance in the groups with the comparison group having achieved slightly less education. Note that a GED was counted in the 12 or more category of educational grades.

Table 3: Grades of Education for Youth

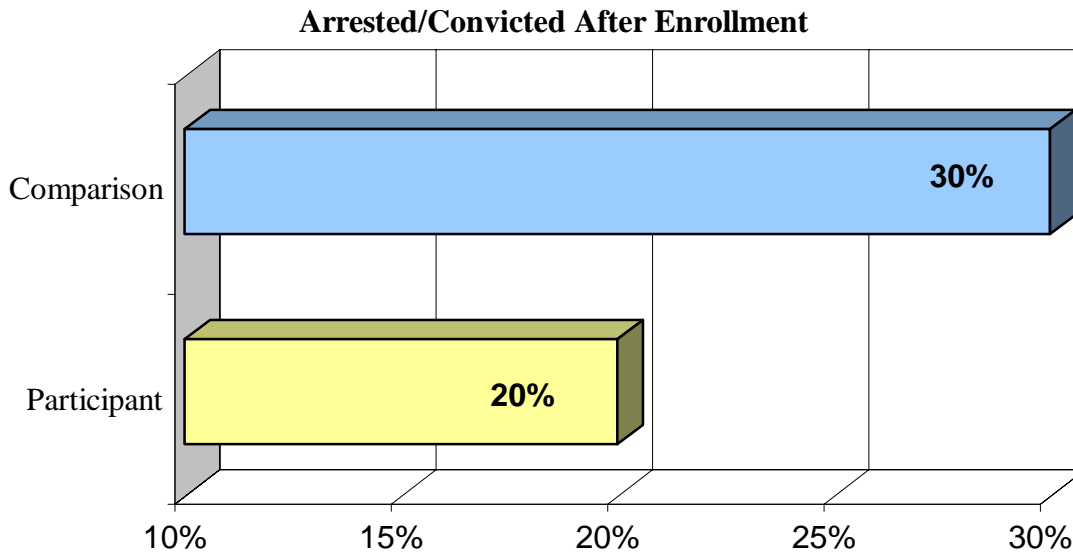
	Participants	Comparison Group
Less than 12	65.0%	68.1%
12 or More	35.0%	31.9%

The Impact

Of the 1,306 youth who were 18 and older at the time of YO! intake, 761 were YO! Participants, and 545 were part of our comparison group. As the following chart indicates, 19% of the YO! Participants were arrested and convicted³ of a crime as opposed to 24% of the members of the comparison group. This demonstrates that the YO! Participant group was somewhat less likely to enter the program with a criminal record.



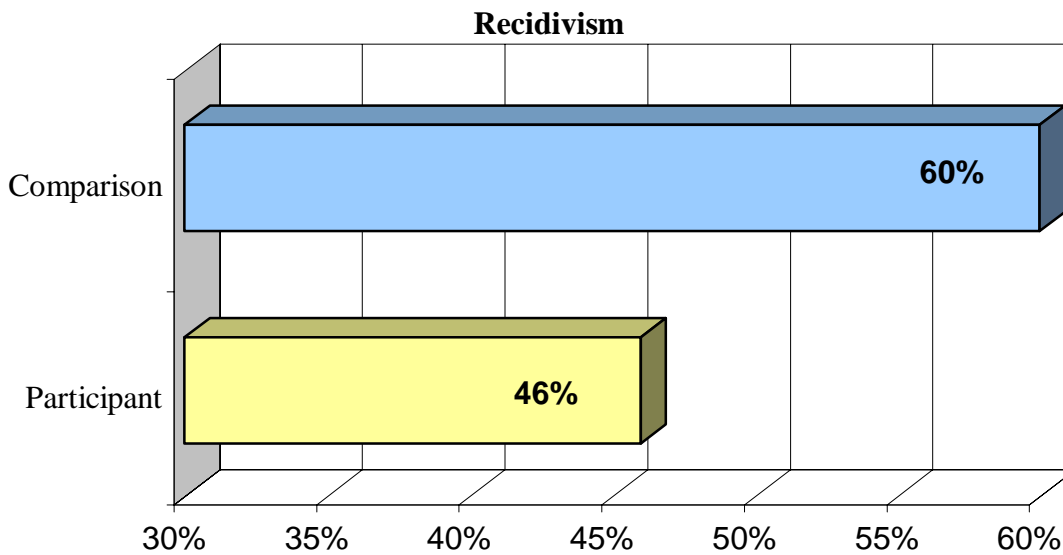
The post enrollment period for the participants and the comparison group is interesting in that the arrest and conviction percents for the YO! Participants went up slightly (1 percentage point) while the percentage for the control group jumped to 30%. This information is graphically displayed on the following chart.



³ For analyses convictions were counted for clients who received at least one of these verdicts for an arrest date: appeal, appeal withdrawn, guilty, probation before judgement, remanded to custody, remanded to juvenile jurisdiction, removed from appeal, and stet.

Recidivism

Another important factor in considering the impact of a program upon crime is the specific impact on recidivism. The data already presented does not differentiate as to which of the pre enrollment offender groups of youth committed a second offense after enrollment. Therefore, we decided to look at this aspect of the data. The recidivism rate, defined for our purposes, was the percentage of youth convicted before enrollment who were also convicted after enrollment. The information – as shown in the following chart – clearly shows that the YO! Participants Offender group experienced a considerably lower rate of recidivism than the comparison offender group. While 46% of the YO! offender participant group committed and were convicted of a crime, 60% of the comparison group who were offenders at time of enrollment were convicted of a second crime after enrollment.

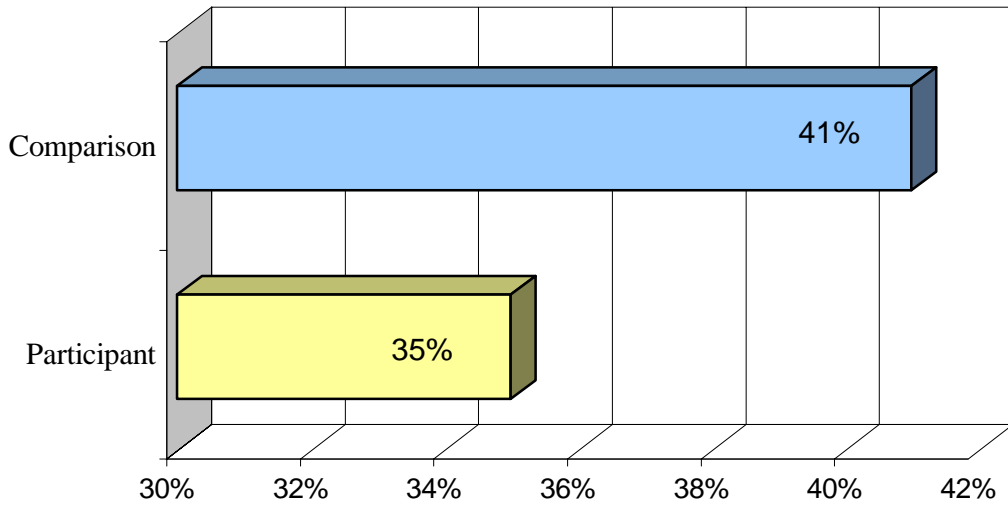


Arrests

We decided to include arrest information in our analysis of the overall YO! Program impact to provide another perspective on the YO! Program impact. While some experts would contend that arrest information – especially arrest information that is focused on residents of traditionally high crime neighborhoods – can be misleading, we believe that it offers a perspective on positive youth behaviors. While only a portion of arrests actually translate to a criminal record, all arrests speak to the environment and situations in which youth are choosing to engage.

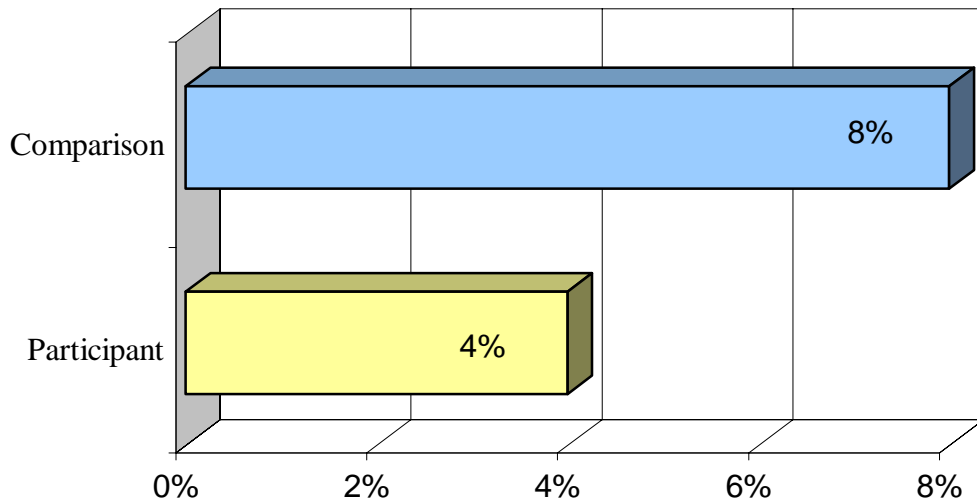
As the charts that follow indicate, after enrolling at YO!, the members of the YO! Participant group were arrested at a lower rate (35%) than comparison group youth (41%).

Arrested After Enrollment



This positive difference is even more pronounced when the arrest rates for violent offenses is considered. YO! Participants were arrested for violent offenses half as frequently (4%) than were youth in the comparison group (8%).

Arrested After Enrollment for Violent Offenses



Summary of Impact

In summary, the YO! Participants were much less likely to be convicted of a crime, were arrested less frequently, and had a much lower recidivism rate. In that the YO! Participant group and the comparison group were very similar in terms of basic demographic and were youth from the identical neighborhoods, it is a strong indication of the positive influence of the YO! Program in terms of reducing criminal activities, as well as encouraging and fostering more positive youth behaviors.

YO! Baltimore Comparison Group

In an effort to evaluate the YO! Baltimore program it was decided to ascertain if a control or a comparison group of youth could be identified, youth who were essentially similar to the young people who are engaged in the YO! Baltimore program but who did not participate in the program. In line with a traditional research and evaluation approach it was thought that comparing the status of the youth who participated in YO! Baltimore to the status of those who did not participate would yield important information that would provide insight to the overall effectiveness of the program. While the creation of a traditional control group typically takes place at the onset of program operations, this approach was not allowed by US Department of Labor. In fact, at the onset of the program, all of the Youth Opportunity programs were prohibited from using any of the allocated resources for any type of program evaluation or the creation of a control group.

While not as effective as a pre identified control group, it was decided to seek a comparison group of youth who could be used for a comparison study of the youth in YO! Baltimore who actively took part in the program and youth who did not participate in the program. After exploring available alternative data sources it was determined that the best data source for identifying a group of young people to compare the YO! Baltimore participants is the YO! Baltimore data source itself. This decision was based on a number of facts. First, the US Department of Labor insisted that all Youth Opportunity programs be considered an entitlement program. Furthermore, all Youth Opportunity programs were designed as community saturation programs. US DOL monitored and rated these programs based on their efforts to actively recruit ***all youth*** who resided in the target neighborhoods. Consequently, it is believed that the overwhelming majority of the all youth who lived in the targeted areas were aggressively recruited and offered YO! Baltimore services. This provides us the opportunity to construct a comparison group of similar youth to compare to the youth who participated in the YO! Baltimore program.

Because concerted efforts were made to engage all youth in the targeted neighborhoods, the unintended result was that some youth came to one of our Ports but did not continue to actively participate in YO! Baltimore. A review of the demographic information on this group of young people indicated that they share essentially the same demographic and socio-economic circumstances as the group of youth who did actually enroll in YO! Baltimore and actively participated in the program. Therefore, these circumstances offer the opportunity to use this group of young people – youth who initially enrolled in YO! Baltimore but did not actually follow through and obtain services – as a comparison group. We have identification data on these youth, permission to obtain information on them from other agencies and the capacity to track these individuals in a similar fashion as we can track our YO! Baltimore participants.