Section 3.—Juvenile Delinquents

The Juvenile Delinquents Act defines a child as "any boy or girl apparently or actually under the age of 16 years" Provision is made, however, by which the Governor General in Council may proclaim that in a province the definition of a child be a "person under the age of 18 years". This has been done in British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba and Quebec. For uniformity, the figures relating to juveniles compiled by the Dominion Bureau of Statistics refer to the younger ages of under 16 years only and deal primarily with cases disposed of by the courts.

In 1950, the practice was abandoned of dividing delinquents into major and minor offences. This division has always been arbitrary and open to question depending on the standards of behaviour in different communities, as a minor delinquency in one locality may be judged a major delinquency in another.

However, in August 1951, Alberta reduced the age of juvenile boys to under 16 years. Newfoundland considers a juvenile to be a girl or a boy of under 17 years of age.

The fact that juvenile court statistics furnish the most comprehensive figures collected on a country-wide basis makes it important that their possibilities and limitations be understood. This Section gives an account of juvenile delinquency in Canada from the viewpoint of legal action taken, for in the eyes of the law a *child is a delinquent only when he or she is adjudged before the court to have committed a delinquency.* To many people the term 'juvenile delinquent' has a broader interpretation but that adopted in this Section does not include those boys and girls whose misdemeanours have not been reported to the courts or who have been given the necessary advice and aid from their parents, their school, the police or a child-caring agency. Moreover, it does not include those cases that are handled unofficially by the court, where the judge or probation officer makes an adjustment without filing a legal record of the offence. The tendency to follow this practice and thus keep children's names from court records is growing and may account to some extent for the almost steady decrease in the number of recorded court cases in the past eight years. In 1950, approximately 9,482 cases were disposed of in this way.

These statistics represent cases of delinquency reported to the courts from the most trivial infractions to the most serious, that of murder. The number of cases brought before the courts is influenced by such factors as personnel and facilities of the court, community interest in and understanding of the function of a juvenile court, and by variations in the policies of the courts in the disposition of cases. As more courts are established, the additional returns may exaggerate an apparent increase in delinquency or may under-estimate a decrease. In some communities, the juvenile court is the only available agency to provide services to children; in others, there are well-established agencies serving children, of which the juvenile court is only one.

It should be noted, too, that the total figures do not represent the actual number of children charged and found guilty, but rather tend to exaggerate them, for a child referred to the court two or more times during the year for different offences is counted as a different case each time. Neither do the figures represent the number of offences committed by offenders, as, when a child is charged with more than one delinquency at a hearing, only the most serious offence is counted.

Reports of juvenile delinquents were received in 1951 from 154 of the 156 judicial districts. Nine of these had no cases to report. Separate reports were received in 1951 from 156 incorporated urban centres of 4,000 population or more.