

The figures showing the rate of delinquency are probably of more interest than the actual totals. They reveal that last year a New Zealand child had only 1 chance in 212 (47 in 10,000) of appearing before a Children's Court for an offence, minor or serious, or, put in another way, that approximately 995 in every 1,000 children were unlikely to make acquaintance with the Court. Similarly, a child had only 1 chance in 294 (34 in 10,000) of being charged with a serious offence. Considering the fallibility of human nature and the usual presence in our community of some subnormal children defective in social or moral sense, we cannot reasonably hope that all juvenile delinquency will be entirely eradicated, and the present rates by that standard and by comparison with the rates for earlier years cannot be regarded as in any way excessive or alarming.

Recent public statements on the incidence of "crime" amongst the Maori people will no doubt lead those interested in problems of Maori welfare to look for some indication in this report of the extent of Maori juvenile delinquency. Separate statistics have not been kept in the past for Court appearances by Maori and European children. However, some information can be obtained from the annual reports which all District Child Welfare Officers furnish to their local Magistrate on the work of the Children's Courts in their districts. Occasionally officers in predominantly Maori districts have had cause to comment on a high proportion of Maori offenders, but there have been no such comments in recent years. What comments there have been on Maori offenders in recent reports have referred to a proportionate decline. It may be, of course, that some proportionate increases have occurred, but, if they have, they have not been serious enough to excite comment. Apart from the proportionate aspect, it would be safe to say that the total numbers of Maori children appearing before the Courts have dropped substantially. For instance, in North Auckland (where there is one of the greatest concentrations of Maori people) the peak year of the period 1938-49 was 1943-44, when there was a total of 206 Court appearances. Of this number, 146 or (70.8 per cent.) concerned Maori children, and the senior officer in that district made special comment on the high proportion of Maori to pakeha offenders that year. The latest figure shows a total of 83 appearances, both of Maori and of pakeha, in North Auckland, and there is no comment about the proportion of Maori offenders. On the East Coast the total figures similarly were respectively 192 and 96. In the Waikato district an exact comparison is not easy to make because of the creation of a sub-district at Rotorua in 1944 and because of altered boundaries, but for all practical purposes it can be assumed that the area now covered by the Waikato district and the Rotorua sub-district (excluding Taupo) coincides with the former Waikato district. This includes the Bay of Plenty, the Coromandel Peninsula, and a good part of the King-country. The figures are 229 in 1943-44 and 144 last year. In the Auckland district there was a decline from 593 in the peak year, 1942-43 (558 in 1943-44), to 339 last year. It will be seen that the decreases in total Children's Court appearances in those districts containing a preponderance of the Maori population are much greater comparatively than the over-all decrease for the whole Dominion. This factor coupled with the fact that the Maori juvenile population (seven to seventeen) increased by over 25 per cent. in the ten years up to 31st December, 1947 (the last date up to which official population figures are available), while the European population in the same age group decreased in the same period, does not support any suggestion that there has been any increase at all in delinquency amongst Maori children under seventeen years of age.

There are special problems attaching to the vocational placement and home life of Maori children. Child Welfare Officers in those districts where there is a substantial Maori population are devoting much time and thought to these problems. They are using the services of Maori honorary Child Welfare Officers and co-operating with Maori Welfare Officers, tribal committees, and other persons and organizations in an endeavour to ensure that children likely to drift into delinquency or actually offending are provided with opportunities of developing as useful citizens.