



OJJDP FACT SHEET

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Detention in Delinquency Cases, 1990–1999

by Paul Harms

Detention caseloads increased 11% between 1990 and 1999

The increase in the delinquency caseload that juvenile courts handle drives the growth in the number of juveniles in the detention system. In 1990, juvenile courts handled 1.3 million delinquency cases. By 1999, this number had risen 27%, to nearly 1.7 million. The growth in the volume of cases entering the juvenile justice system resulted in an 11% increase in the number of delinquency cases involving detention at some point between referral and case disposition. In 1999, 33,400 more delinquency cases were detained than in 1990. As a result, the demand for juvenile detention bed-space has increased nationwide.

The most dramatic change in the detention population was the influx of female juveniles charged with person offenses

In general, the proportion of delinquency cases ordered to detention remained relatively steady between 1990 and 1999. Juveniles were detained in 23% of the cases processed in 1990, compared with 20% of the cases processed in 1999. However, the profile of the national detention population shifted during this period, with a greater proportion of youth charged with person and drug offenses and a greater proportion of females in the detention population by 1999.

During the 1990–99 period, there was a surge in the number of female delinquency cases entering detention (a 50% increase, compared with 4% for males). The large increase was tied to the growth in the number of delinquency cases involving females charged with person offenses (102%).

Detention caseloads increased more for white juveniles than black juveniles

Between 1990 and 1999, the number of cases involving detention increased more for white juveniles (17%, from 173,900 to 203,500) than for black juveniles (3%, from 116,200 to 119,900), in part because the use of detention in cases involving person and drug offenses increased more for whites than blacks.¹ The increase in

detention for juveniles charged with person offenses was 8 times greater for whites than blacks (57% versus 7%), and the increase for drug offenses was 6 times greater for whites than blacks (124% versus 21%).

In spite of this trend, black juveniles were more likely to be detained than white juveniles during every year between 1990 and 1999. This was true for all offense categories.

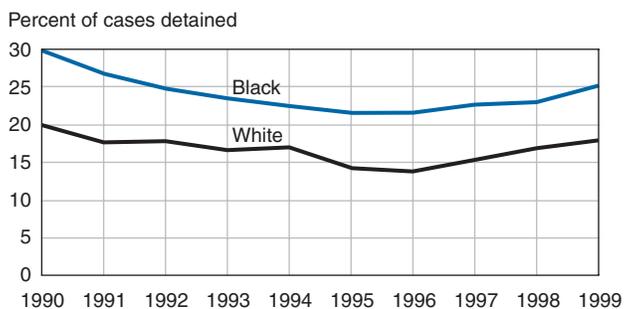
Delinquency cases involving detention, 1990–1999

Case type	Percent of all cases involving detention			Percent change in number of cases, 1990–99		Change in number of cases involving detention, 1990–99
	1990	1995	1999	All cases	Detained cases	
Total	23%	17%	20%	27%	11%	33,400
Person	27	22	23	55	32	21,700
Property	19	13	16	-9	-22	-31,800
Drugs	38	21	23	169	62	16,600
Public order	27	19	23	74	44	26,800
Male	24%	18%	21%	19%	4%	11,600
Person	29	23	25	42	20	11,600
Property	20	15	18	-14	-25	-32,300
Drugs	39	22	23	161	55	13,400
Public order	28	20	23	62	38	18,900
Female	18%	12%	16%	59%	50%	21,800
Person	20	17	19	107	102	10,100
Property	14	8	12	15	3	500
Drugs	28	16	20	219	121	3,300
Public order	26	15	20	122	69	7,900
White	20%	14%	18%	30%	17%	29,600
Person	24	19	21	72	57	18,800
Property	17	12	15	-9	-19	-17,900
Drugs	27	14	17	252	124	12,700
Public order	26	17	20	78	41	16,000
Black	29%	22%	25%	20%	3%	3,600
Person	31	25	25	32	7	2,200
Property	24	17	20	-8	-25	-12,100
Drugs	52	34	38	64	21	3,400
Public order	31	20	28	68	50	10,100

Percent change figures are based on unrounded numbers.

¹ Juveniles of Hispanic ethnicity can be of any race, but most are included in the white racial category.

The proportion of cases involving detention decreased more for black juveniles than white juveniles between 1990 and 1999



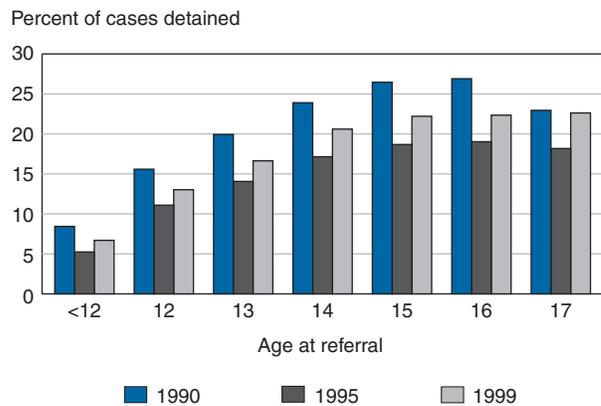
With the exception of drug offense cases, the use of detention remained relatively constant

Beginning in the late 1980s, the war on drugs coincided with a high rate of detention for drug offense cases. Since that time, however, the proportion of drug offense cases involving detention has declined. For example, the number of drug offense cases handled by juvenile courts increased 169% between 1990 and 1999, while the proportion of drug offense cases involving detention declined 15 percentage points (from 38% to 23%) during this period. The steady growth in the number of offenders and the limited number of available detention beds are factors that likely influenced decisions made by the courts regarding the use of detention.

For most age groups, the use of detention decreased slightly between 1990 and 1999

The number of cases handled by juvenile courts increased for all juveniles ages 12 through 17 between 1990 and 1999. Although the number of cases ordered to detention during this period increased slightly for these juveniles, the proportion of cases involving detention decreased for all ages except 17-year-olds. Delinquency cases involving juveniles under age 12 decreased slightly between 1990 and 1999 (1%), while the number of cases involving detention decreased substantially (22%).

Profile of detainees by age



For further information

This Fact Sheet is based on the forthcoming Report *Juvenile Court Statistics 1999*, which will be available on the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention’s (OJJDP’s) Web site (www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ojjdp). To learn more about juvenile court cases, visit OJJDP’s *Statistical Briefing Book* (ojjdp.ncjrs.org/ojstatbb/index.html) and click on “Juveniles in Court.” OJJDP also supports Easy Access to Juvenile Court Statistics, a Web-based application that analyzes the data files used for the *Juvenile Court Statistics* Report. This application is available from the *Statistical Briefing Book*.

Paul Harms, Ph.D., is a Research Associate with the National Juvenile Court Data Archive, which is supported by an OJJDP grant.

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention is a component of the Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Assistance, the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, and the Office for Victims of Crime.