



OJJDP

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Offenders in Juvenile Court, 1995

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Juvenile courts in the United States processed more than 1.7 million delinquency cases in 1995. This number represented a 7% increase over the 1994 caseload and a 45% increase over the number of cases handled in 1986. More than half (55%) of the delinquency cases processed by U.S. courts with juvenile jurisdiction in 1995 were handled formally (that is, a petition was filed charging the youth with delinquency). Of the cases that were formally petitioned and scheduled for an adjudicatory or waiver hearing in juvenile court, 56% were adjudicated delinquent and 1% were judicially waived to criminal (adult) court. Waivers to criminal court were more common in cases involving person offenses (2.1%) and drug offenses (1.3%). Of all delinquency cases adjudicated in juvenile court in 1995, 28% resulted in residential placement and 53% were placed on the probation caseload.

These statistics are among the findings to be published in *Juvenile Court Statistics 1995*, the latest in a series of annual reports on cases handled by U.S. courts with juvenile jurisdiction. Although courts with juvenile jurisdiction handle a variety of cases, including abuse, neglect, adoption, and traffic violations, the *Juvenile Court Statistics* series focuses on the disposition of delinquency cases and formally processed status offense cases. Each report includes national estimates of the number of cases handled by juvenile courts with

an appendix that lists caseload statistics for individual States and jurisdictions within each State.

Findings from *Juvenile Court Statistics 1995* include:

- ◆ The number of criminal homicide cases processed dropped 6% between 1994 and 1995.
- ◆ In 22% of delinquency cases processed in 1995, the most serious charge was a person offense. Person offenses accounted for 16% of all cases in 1986.
- ◆ The number of cases involving drug offenses in 1995 was 145% greater than the number of cases in 1991.
- ◆ Although property offense cases still accounted for the greatest proportion of delinquency cases in 1995 (51%), the proportion was smaller than in 1986 (60%).
- ◆ The number of delinquency cases involving female juveniles increased 68% between 1986 and 1995, while cases involving males increased 40%.
- ◆ Juveniles were held in secure detention facilities at some point between referral and disposition in 19% of all delinquency cases disposed in 1995, compared with 21% in 1986.
- ◆ Delinquency cases were more likely to be processed formally with the filing of a petition in 1995 than in 1986—55% compared with 47%.

From the Administrator

From 1986 to 1995, the number of delinquency cases handled by America's juvenile courts rose 45 percent, with juvenile courts processing more than 1.7 million delinquency cases in 1995 alone. The 1995 delinquency caseload involved the largest number of person offense cases seen by U.S. juvenile courts in the past decade (more than 377,000).

Offenders in Juvenile Court, 1995 presents these and other findings from *Juvenile Court Statistics 1995*, the latest in a series of reports providing data from the National Juvenile Court Data Archive. Archive data are maintained and analyzed by the National Center for Juvenile Justice in Pittsburgh, PA. The National Juvenile Court Data Archive is the only comprehensive source of data about youth referred to juvenile courts for delinquent and status offenses.

The *Juvenile Court Statistics* series focuses on delinquency cases and formally processed status offense cases. *Offenders in Juvenile Court, 1995* and the larger report on which it is based present important information about the youth seen by the Nation's juvenile courts. These publications serve as useful guideposts for the public; elected officials; and juvenile justice professionals in law enforcement, the courts, and corrections.

Shay Bilchik
Administrator

◆ In 1995, there were 33% more delinquency cases judicially waived to criminal court than in 1986, but 10% fewer than in 1994.

These national estimates of juvenile court cases are based on data from nearly 1,800 courts that had jurisdiction over 67% of the U.S. juvenile population in 1995.¹ The unit of count in each *Juvenile Court Statistics* report is a case disposed during the calendar year by a court with juvenile jurisdiction. It is possible for an individual youth to have been involved in more than one case during the calendar year. Each case represents a youth processed by a juvenile court on a new referral, regardless of the number of individual offenses contained in that referral. Cases involving multiple offenses are categorized according to the most serious offense. For example, a case involving both a charge of vandalism and a charge of robbery would be characterized as a robbery case. Similarly, cases involving multiple dispositions are categorized according to the most restrictive disposition. A case that resulted in both probation and placement in a residential facility would be coded as residential placement.

Delinquency Cases

Delinquency offenses are acts committed by a juvenile that, if committed by an adult, could result in criminal prosecution. Juvenile courts handled an estimated 1,714,300 delinquency cases in 1995 (table 1). The most serious charge was a property offense (such as burglary, larceny, motor vehicle theft, or vandalism) in 51% of these cases, a person offense (such as aggravated or simple assault, robbery, violent sex offenses, or homicide) in 22%, a public order offense (such as disorderly conduct, weapons offenses, or obstruction of justice) in 18%, and a drug offense (including trafficking or possession of controlled substances or paraphernalia) in 9%.

Number of Cases

Between 1986 and 1995, the total number of delinquency cases handled by juvenile courts in the United States increased 45%. There was a greater percent change over 1986 numbers for person and drug offense cases than for property and public order offense cases. The growth in person offense cases was relatively steady over the time period. In comparison, the growth in the number of drug offense cases occurred after 1991 (figure 1).

Table 1: Delinquency Cases by Most Serious Offense, 1995

Most Serious Offense	Number of Cases	Percent Change		
		1986-95	1991-95	1994-95
Total	1,714,300	45%	21%	7%
Person offense	377,300	98%	36%	8%
Criminal homicide	2,800	84	20	-6
Forcible rape	6,800	47	19	4
Robbery	39,600	53	27	6
Aggravated assault	93,200	137	33	6
Simple assault	205,500	103	47	12
Other violent sex offense	9,300	50	9	-3
Other person offense	20,100	72	-2	-4
Property offense	871,700	23%	3%	3%
Burglary	139,900	-2	-9	-2
Larceny-theft	418,800	28	10	10
Motor vehicle theft	53,400	23	-26	-13
Arson	10,400	78	42	10
Vandalism	121,700	40	9	-2
Trespassing	64,400	18	9	1
Stolen property offense	33,100	10	9	2
Other property offense	29,900	46	-5	6
Drug law violation	159,100	120%	145%	28%
Public order offense	306,300	48%	37%	6%
Obstruction of justice	110,100	53	45	8
Disorderly conduct	85,100	82	46	9
Weapons offense	47,000	132	38	-9
Liquor law violation	12,200	-39	-1	2
Nonviolent sex offense	10,500	-21	-8	-4
Other public order	41,300	19	31	17
Violent Crime Index*	142,400	99%	30%	5%
Property Crime Index**	622,500	20%	1%	5%

* Includes criminal homicide, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault.

** Includes burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson.

Note: Detail may not add to totals because of rounding. Percent change calculations are based on unrounded numbers.

Figure 1: Delinquency Cases Processed in Juvenile Court, 1986-1995

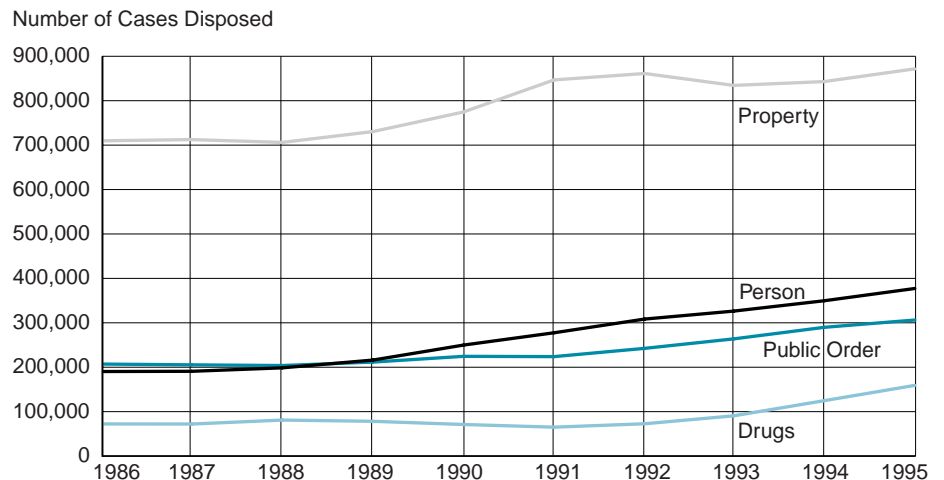


Table 2: Percent Change in Delinquency Case Rates, 1986–1995

Most Serious Offense	Cases per 1,000 Youth at Risk			Percent Change	
	1986	1991	1995	1986–95	1991–95
Delinquency	45.5	54.2	60.7	33%	12%
Person	7.3	10.6	13.4	82	26
Property	27.4	32.5	30.9	13	-5
Drugs	2.8	2.5	5.6	102	126
Public order	8.0	8.6	10.8	36	26

Note: Detail may not add to totals because of rounding. Percent change calculations are based on unrounded numbers.

Case Rates

To examine changes in juvenile court caseloads while controlling for changes in the size of the juvenile population, researchers calculate a case rate that represents the number of delinquency cases processed by juvenile courts for every 1,000 youth at risk of referral to a juvenile court.² Between 1986 and 1995, the total delinquency case rate increased 33%, from 45.5 to 60.7 cases disposed per 1,000 youth at risk (table 2). During the same time period, the case rate for juveniles charged with person offenses increased 82%, as property offenses grew 13%, drug offenses increased 102%, and public order offenses increased 36%.

Age of Youth

Of all delinquency cases processed by the Nation's juvenile courts in 1995, 60% involved a juvenile younger than the age of 16. These younger juveniles were involved in 64% of person offense cases, 64% of property offense cases, 42% of drug law violations, and 54% of public order offense cases. Compared with older juveniles (16 and older), the caseloads of younger juveniles involved a smaller proportion of drug law violations and public order offenses, but somewhat larger proportions of person offenses and property offenses (table 3).³

Delinquency case rates generally increase with age (figure 2). For example, the delinquency case rate for 15-year-olds in 1995 was 29% higher than the rate for 14-year-olds. Similarly, the case rate for 16-year-olds was 20% greater than that for 15-year-olds. The case rate for 17-year-olds was an exception to this pattern, as it was 3% lower than the rate for 16-year-olds.

Sex of Youth

In 1995, juvenile courts disposed 1,338,600 delinquency cases involving males, compared with 375,800 cases

involving females (table 4). The number of delinquency cases involving females increased 68% between 1986 and 1995, while cases involving males increased 40%. The relatively greater increase in cases involving females was due to changes in person offense cases (up 146% for females versus 87% for males) and property offense cases (up 50% among females compared with 17% among males). Drug violation cases increased more among males than among females between 1986 and 1995, although between 1991 and 1995, the growth in cases involving females outpaced males.

Between 1986 and 1995, the delinquency case rate for males increased 28%, to 92.4 cases per 1,000 male youth. Among female juveniles, the delinquency case rate grew 54% to 27.3 cases per 1,000 female youth. The person offense case rate for females

Table 3: Offense Profile of Delinquency Cases by Age at Referral, 1995

Most Serious Offense	Age 15 or Younger	Age 16 or Older
Person	23%	20%
Property	54	46
Drugs	7	13
Public order	16	21
Total	100	100

Note: Detail may not total 100% because of rounding.

was 126% higher in 1995 than in 1986, while the person offense case rate for males grew 71%. Still, the 1995 person offense case rate was nearly three times greater for males than for females (19.7 versus 6.7 cases per 1,000).

Race of Youth

Between 1986 and 1995, the number of delinquency cases involving white youth increased 34%, the number of cases involving black youth increased 72%, and the number involving youth of other races increased 105% (table 5).⁴ In 1995, the number of delinquency cases involving white youth exceeded the number involving black youth by a margin of 2.2 to 1, compared with a ratio of 2.8 to 1 in 1986.

Figure 2: Delinquency Case Rates by Age at Referral, 1995

Cases per 1,000 Youth in Age Group

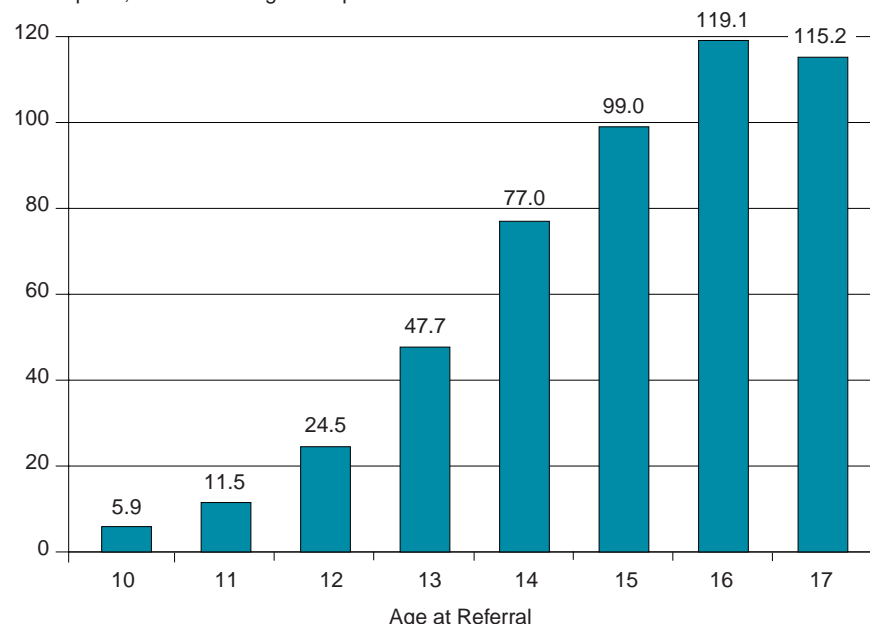


Table 4: Percent Change in Delinquency Cases and Case Rates by Sex, 1986–1995

Most Serious Offense	1986	1991	1995	Percent Change	
				1986–95	1991–95
Number of cases					
Male	955,900	1,146,900	1,338,600	40%	17%
Person	152,900	221,700	285,400	87	29
Property	580,100	686,900	676,300	17	-2
Drugs	60,000	57,200	137,000	128	140
Public order	163,000	181,100	239,900	47	32
Female	224,100	266,300	375,800	68%	41%
Person	37,400	55,900	91,900	146	64
Property	129,900	159,800	195,400	50	22
Drugs	12,400	7,900	22,200	80	180
Public order	44,400	42,700	66,300	49	55
Cases per 1,000 youth at risk					
Male	71.9	85.8	92.4	28%	8%
Person	11.5	16.6	19.7	71	19
Property	43.6	51.4	46.7	7	-9
Drugs	4.5	4.3	9.5	109	121
Public order	12.3	13.5	16.6	35	22
Female	17.7	21.0	27.3	54%	30%
Person	3.0	4.4	6.7	126	52
Property	10.3	12.6	14.2	38	13
Drugs	1.0	0.6	1.6	65	159
Public order	3.5	3.4	4.8	37	43

Note: Detail may not add to totals because of rounding. Percent change calculations are based on unrounded numbers.

The delinquency case rate for black youth was nearly 2.5 times the rate for white youth in 1995 (123.7 compared with 50.0 per 1,000). The person offense case rate for black youth was more than 3.5 times greater than the corresponding rate for white youth. Similarly, the drug offense and public order case rates for black youth were nearly three times the rates for whites. The property offense case rate for blacks was nearly double the rate for whites. In all offense categories, the case rate for juveniles of other races was lower than the corresponding rates for either black or white juveniles.

Property offense cases accounted for 54% of all 1995 delinquency cases involving white youth, 43% of those involving black youth, and 59% of those involving youth of other races. The black caseload involved a higher proportion of person offense cases (28%) than either the white (19%) or other race caseloads (20%). Drug law violations accounted for a somewhat larger proportion of delinquency cases involving black youth (10%) and white youth (9%) than cases involving youth of other races (6%).

Source of Referral

A number of sources—law enforcement agencies, social services, schools, parents, probation officers, and victims—referred delinquency cases to juvenile courts. Although there were variations across offense categories, 86% of all 1995 delinquency case referrals made to juvenile courts were by a law enforcement agency (table 6). Law enforcement agencies referred 87% of person offense cases, 91% of property offense cases, 94% of drug law violation cases, and 70% of public order offense cases.

Use of Detention

In some cases, juveniles are held in secure detention facilities before adjudication and disposition. This serves to protect the community and the juvenile, ensure his or her appearance at scheduled hearings, and allow for evaluation if needed. In the 1,714,300 delinquency cases disposed by U.S. juvenile courts in 1995, 19% of the juvenile offenders were detained. Because of their large volume, property offense cases accounted for 41% of cases in which the juvenile was detained, despite

the fact that the likelihood of detention was lower for property offense cases (15%) than for other types of cases (21% to 24%).

The number of delinquency cases involving detention increased 31% between 1986 and 1995 (table 7). During the same 10-year period, the number of drug offense cases involving detention increased 110%, the number of person offense cases involving detention increased 75%, and the number of public order cases involving detention increased 22%. The number of juveniles detained in property offense cases in 1995 was 7% greater than in 1986, although property offense cases involving detention fell 9% between 1991 and 1995.

The probability of detention for delinquency cases changed little between 1986 and 1995 (table 8). Overall, the use of detention gradually rose and fell between 1986 and 1995, ranging from 19% to 23% of delinquency cases, with the peak year being 1990. The same pattern was seen in each of the four major offense categories. For drug offense cases, however, the probability of detention was greater and the range in the use of detention was broader (from 24% to 38%). In general, the use of detention was greater for males than for females (20% versus 14%) in 1995. This was true for all offenses.

In 1995, the likelihood of detention in delinquency cases involving white juveniles was 15%, while it was 27% for those involving black juveniles and 20% for juveniles of other races (table 9). Compared with 1986, the use of detention in 1995 was slightly lower for all racial categories and all offense categories within racial groups.

Case Processing

When a delinquency case is referred to juvenile court, an intake officer or prosecutor determines whether to handle the case formally or informally. Formal handling involves the filing of a petition requesting that the court hold an adjudicatory or waiver hearing. Informal case handling is conducted entirely at the juvenile court intake level, without a petition and without an adjudicatory or waiver hearing.

In 1995, more than half of all delinquency cases were handled formally (figure 3). Formal processing for delinquency referrals increased from 47% to 55% between 1986 and 1995. The increased number of cases referred to juvenile court intake and the greater likelihood of formal handling of these cases resulted in a 69%

increase in the number of petitioned delinquency cases disposed by U.S. juvenile courts between 1986 and 1995 (table 10). The largest percentage increase was in the number of petitioned drug offense cases, which increased 176% from 1986 to 1995. The number of petitioned person offense cases increased 110%, petitioned property offense cases increased 38%, and petitioned public order offense cases grew 91%.

Waiver to criminal court. One of the first actions taken during the juvenile court intake process is determining whether a case should be processed in the criminal justice system rather than in juvenile court. Most States have more than one mechanism for transferring cases to criminal court. In an increasing number of States, cases that meet certain age and offense criteria are excluded by statute from juvenile court jurisdiction and are thus filed directly in criminal court. In some States, statutes give prosecutors discretion to file certain juvenile cases directly in criminal court. In most States, cases referred to juvenile court that meet certain criteria may be transferred to criminal court upon the authorization of the juvenile court judge. In such cases, the judge may waive the juvenile court's jurisdiction over the case, thus referring it to criminal court for prosecution. This Bulletin analyzes only those cases transferred from juvenile court to criminal court by judicial waiver.

The number of delinquency cases judicially waived to criminal court grew 60% between 1986 and 1994 and then declined 17% in 1995. Compared with 1986, there were substantially more person and drug offense cases waived to criminal court in 1995 (table 11). In comparison, there were fewer property cases waived in 1995 than in 1986, and there was only a slight increase in public order cases.

Table 6: Percentage of Delinquency Cases Referred by Law Enforcement, 1986, 1991, and 1995

Most Serious Offense	Year		
	1986	1991	1995
Delinquency	84%	84%	86%
Person	81	81	87
Property	90	89	91
Drugs	91	88	94
Public order	67	69	70

Table 5: Percent Change in Delinquency Cases and Case Rates by Race, 1986–1995

Most Serious Offense	1986	1991	1995	Percent Change	
				1986–95	1991–95
Number of cases					
White	844,300	927,900	1,127,800	34%	22%
Person	109,900	156,700	219,600	100	40
Property	524,400	594,600	609,500	16	3
Drugs	53,700	32,100	102,100	90	218
Public order	156,300	144,600	196,600	26	36
Black	304,700	439,300	522,900	72%	19%
Person	76,000	112,400	145,000	91	29
Property	165,700	223,100	224,900	36	1
Drugs	17,100	31,600	53,500	214	69
Public order	46,000	72,300	99,600	116	38
Other races	31,000	46,000	63,600	105%	38%
Person	4,400	8,500	12,700	187	50
Property	19,900	29,100	37,300	87	28
Drugs	1,600	1,400	3,500	120	155
Public order	5,100	7,000	10,100	98	44
Cases per 1,000 youth at risk					
White	40.0	44.4	50.0	25%	13%
Person	5.2	7.5	9.7	87	30
Property	24.9	28.4	27.0	9	-5
Drugs	2.5	1.5	4.5	78	195
Public order	7.4	6.9	8.7	18	26
Black	79.3	112.0	123.7	56%	10%
Person	19.8	28.7	34.3	73	20
Property	43.2	56.9	53.2	23	-6
Drugs	4.4	8.1	12.7	185	57
Public order	12.0	18.4	23.6	97	28
Other races	30.7	37.2	44.0	43%	18%
Person	4.4	6.9	8.8	100	28
Property	19.7	23.6	25.8	31	9
Drugs	1.6	1.1	2.4	54	118
Public order	5.0	5.7	7.0	39	23

Note: Detail may not add to totals because of rounding. Percent change calculations are based on unrounded numbers.

Table 7: Percent Change in Detained Delinquency Cases, 1986–1995

Most Serious Offense	Number of Cases			Percent Change	
	1986	1991	1995	1986–95	1991–95
Delinquency	244,000	293,900	320,800	31%	9%
Person	48,400	69,800	84,900	75	22
Property	123,800	145,400	132,300	7	-9
Drugs	18,400	23,900	38,600	110	61
Public order	53,300	54,800	64,900	22	18

Note: Detail may not add to totals because of rounding. Percent change calculations are based on unrounded numbers.

Table 8: Percentage of Delinquency Cases Detained by Sex, 1986, 1991, and 1995

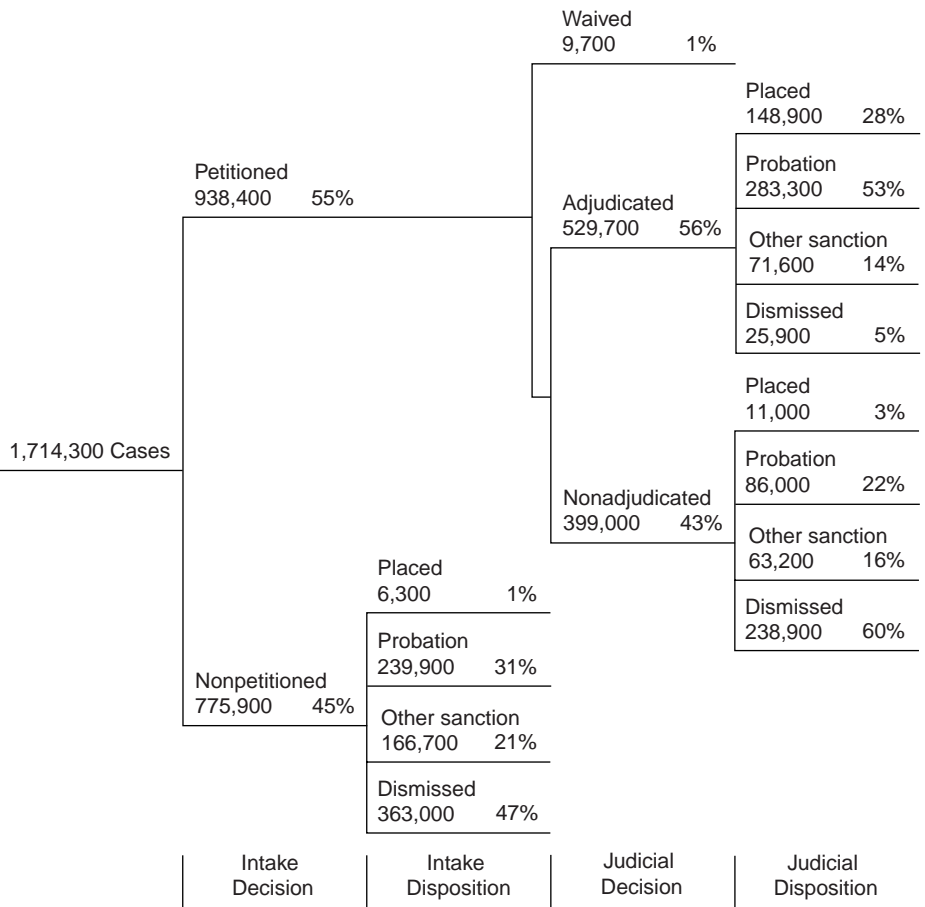
Most Serious Offense	1986	1991	1995
Delinquency	21%	21%	19%
Person	25	25	23
Property	17	17	15
Drugs	25	37	24
Public order	26	24	21
Male	22%	22%	20%
Person	27	27	24
Property	18	18	17
Drugs	26	38	25
Public order	25	25	22
Female	17%	15%	14%
Person	19	18	17
Property	13	12	10
Drugs	21	27	18
Public order	27	22	18

Table 9: Percentage of Delinquency Cases Detained by Race, 1986, 1991, and 1995

Most Serious Offense	1986	1991	1995
White	18%	18%	15%
Person	21	22	19
Property	15	15	12
Drugs	20	25	15
Public order	24	23	17
Black	28%	27%	27%
Person	31	30	28
Property	24	22	23
Drugs	43	49	42
Public order	32	27	29
Other races	25%	24%	20%
Person	34	29	26
Property	21	21	17
Drugs	20	34	17
Public order	32	27	21

Cases waived to criminal court in 1995 represented 1.0% of all petitioned delinquency cases (table 12). In 1986, the proportion was 1.3%, and it reached 1.5% in 1991 before dropping to the 1995 level. Generally, the cases most likely to be waived were those involving person offenses. However, from 1989 through 1992, drug offense cases were most likely to be waived. In fact, the proportion of petitioned drug offense cases waived reached 4.1% in 1991.

Figure 3: Juvenile Court Processing of Delinquency Cases, 1995



Note: Detail may not add to totals because of rounding.

Table 10: Percent Change in Petitioned Delinquency Cases, 1986-1995

Most Serious Offense	Number of Cases			Percent Change	
	1986	1991	1995	1986-95	1991-95
Delinquency	554,000	702,700	938,400	69%	34%
Person	104,300	152,000	219,100	110	44
Property	320,500	396,200	443,000	38	12
Drugs	35,300	43,800	97,400	176	122
Public order	93,800	110,800	178,800	91	61

Note: Detail may not add to totals because of rounding. Percent change calculations are based on unrounded numbers.

The offense profile of cases waived to criminal court changed considerably between 1986 and 1995 (figure 4). Prior to 1992, property offense cases made up the largest share of waived cases. For example, in 1987, property offense cases made up 55% of waived cases and person offense cases made up the next largest share (28%).

In 1992, the tide began to turn, with person and property cases waived in nearly equal numbers. Since 1992, person offense cases have been the largest group of cases waived. In 1995, person offenses accounted for nearly half of all delinquency cases waived to criminal court (47%) and property offense cases dropped to their lowest proportion ever (34%).

Table 11: Percent Change in Petitioned Delinquency Cases Waived to Criminal Court, 1986–1995

Most Serious Offense	Number of Cases			Percent Change	
	1986	1991	1995	1986–95	1991–95
Delinquency	7,300	10,800	9,700	33%	-10%
Person	2,300	3,600	4,600	100	27
Property	4,000	4,600	3,300	-18	-29
Drugs	400	1,800	1,200	180	-32
Public order	600	800	700	8	-13

Note: Detail may not add to totals because of rounding. Percent change calculations are based on unrounded numbers.

Table 12: Percentage of Petitioned Delinquency Cases Waived to Criminal Court, 1986, 1991, and 1995

Most Serious Offense	1986	1991	1995
Delinquency	1.3%	1.5%	1.0%
Person	2.2	2.4	2.1
Property	1.2	1.2	0.7
Drugs	1.2	4.1	1.3
Public order	0.7	0.7	0.4

Figure 4: Delinquency Cases Waived to Criminal Court, 1986–1995

Number of Cases Judicially Waived to Criminal Court

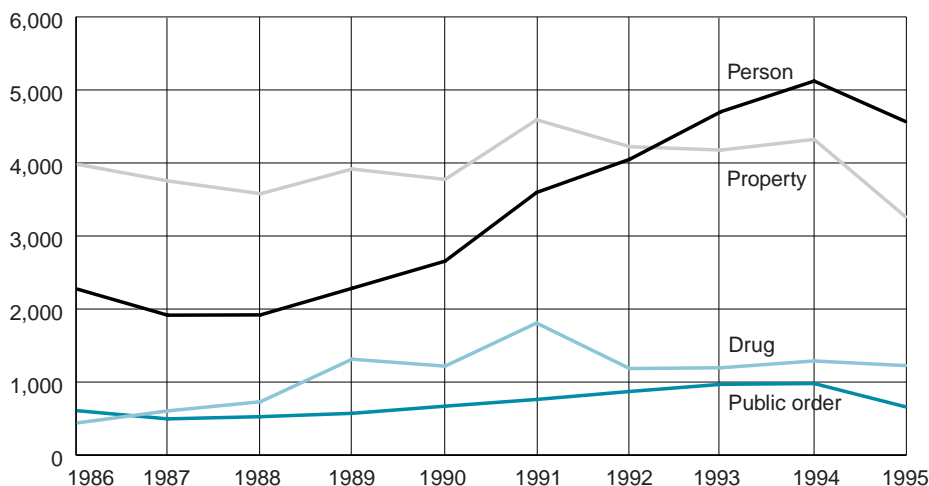


Table 13: Percentage of Petitioned Delinquency Cases Adjudicated, 1986, 1991, and 1995

Most Serious Offense	1986	1991	1995
Delinquency	64%	59%	56%
Person	58	54	53
Property	66	60	58
Drugs	68	58	57
Public order	66	60	57

Table 14: Percentage of Adjudicated Delinquency Cases Placed Out of Home, 1986, 1991, and 1995

Most Serious Offense	1986	1991	1995
Delinquency	30%	30%	28%
Person	33	34	31
Property	28	27	26
Drugs	30	36	25
Public order	37	36	33

Adjudication and disposition. Generally, an adjudicatory hearing is held in all formally petitioned delinquency cases not judicially waived to criminal court.⁵ During the hearing, the court determines whether a youth will be adjudicated as a delinquent. If so, the court then makes a dispositional decision that may include a fine, restitution, probation, commitment to a residential facility, referral to a treatment program, and/or community service.

In 1995, 56% of all formally processed delinquency cases resulted in adjudication (table 13). In 28% of these cases, the youth was placed out of the home in a residential facility (table 14). More than half (53%) of all formally adjudicated delinquency cases resulted in the juvenile being placed on formal probation (table 15). In 14% of formally adjudicated delinquency cases, the court ordered some

other sanction, such as requiring the juvenile to pay restitution or a fine, participate in some form of community service, or enter a treatment or counseling program. In a small number of cases (5%), the juvenile was adjudicated, but the case was then dismissed or the youth was otherwise released.

In 43% of the formally handled delinquency cases in 1995, the juvenile was not subsequently adjudicated delinquent. Most (60%) of these cases were dismissed by the court, but in 22% of the cases, the juvenile agreed to some form of probation. Approximately 3% of all nonadjudicated delinquency cases resulted in voluntary out-of-home placement. In 16% of nonadjudicated cases, the juvenile agreed to another informal disposition such as restitution, community service, or referral to an agency for services.

Table 15: Percentage of Adjudicated Delinquency Cases Placed on Formal Probation, 1986, 1991, and 1995

Most Serious Offense	1986	1991	1995
Delinquency	55%	56%	53%
Person	55	53	53
Property	57	59	56
Drugs	58	51	53
Public order	49	52	48

Petitioned Status Offense Cases

Status offenses are acts that are law violations only for individuals of juvenile status. The four major status offense categories analyzed here are running away, truancy, ungovernability (sometimes known as incorrigibility or being beyond the control of one's parents), and liquor law violations (minor in possession of alcohol, underage drinking).

Number of Cases

In 1995, U.S. juvenile courts petitioned and formally disposed an estimated 146,400 status offense cases (table 16).⁶ In 37,400 of these cases, the most serious charge was truancy. A liquor law violation was the most serious charge in another 37,400 cases, running away in 23,900 cases, and ungovernability in 18,300 cases. Other miscellaneous status offenses (such as curfew violations, tobacco offenses, violations of court orders in status offense cases, and any status offenses coded as "other" in a jurisdiction's original data) accounted for the remaining 29,300 cases.⁷

Between 1986 and 1995, the number of petitioned status offense cases seen in U.S. juvenile courts increased 77%. Status cases involving truancy climbed 80%, liquor law violation cases increased 54%, and the number of cases involving charges of running away grew 59%. The largest proportionate increase in formally processed status offense cases during that 10-year period was in the miscellaneous category, probably reflecting an increase in referrals for curfew violations, but possibly indicating growth in the other status violations as well.

Case Rates

The Nation's juvenile courts processed 5.2 petitioned status offense cases for every 1,000 youth at risk of referral in 1995 (table 16). The total status offense case rate was 63% higher in 1995 than in 1986. Between 1986 and 1995, the truancy case rate increased 65%, the rate for cases of running away increased 46%, and the rate of status liquor law violation cases increased 41%. The case rate for cases involving ungovernability was virtually the same in 1986 and 1995.

Age of Youth

Juveniles younger than 16 accounted for a somewhat smaller proportion of status offense cases in 1995 than in 1986. In 1995, 56% of the petitioned status offense

Table 16: Percent Change in Petitioned Status Offense Cases and Case Rates, 1986–1995

Most Serious Offense	1986	1991	1995	Percent Change	
				1986–95	1991–95
Number of cases					
Status offense	82,600	89,700	146,400	77%	63%
Running away	15,000	15,500	23,900	59	54
Truancy	20,800	25,700	37,400	80	46
Ungovernability	16,000	11,500	18,300	14	59
Liquor law violation	24,300	28,200	37,400	54	33
Miscellaneous	6,400	8,800	29,300	355	233
Cases per 1,000 youth at risk					
Status offense	3.2	3.4	5.2	63%	51%
Running away	0.6	0.6	0.8	46	43
Truancy	0.8	1.0	1.3	65	34
Ungovernability	0.6	0.4	0.6	5	47
Liquor law violation	0.9	1.1	1.3	41	23
Miscellaneous	0.2	0.3	1.0	318	207

Note: Detail may not add to totals because of rounding. Percent change calculations are based on unrounded numbers.

cases disposed by juvenile courts involved a youth under age 16, compared with 59% of the 1986 caseload. For truancy cases, the proportion of juveniles younger than 16 dropped from 87% to 77%, and among cases of running away, the proportion dropped from 67% to 64%. However, among petitioned status liquor offense cases, juveniles younger than 16 made up a larger proportion of cases in 1995 (25%) than in 1986 (23%); among ungovernability cases, the proportion of younger juveniles remained approximately 70%.

In 1995, the most common status offense for youth younger than 16 was truancy (35%). Among older youth, the most common status offense was a liquor law violation, which accounted for 44% of all cases involving a youth age 16 or older (table 17).

Sex of Youth

Male juveniles were involved in 59% of the petitioned status offense cases handled by juvenile courts during 1995. Nearly 7 in 10 liquor law violation cases involved males. On the other hand, 6 in 10 cases of running away involved females. Males and females were more equally represented in truancy and ungovernability cases. In 1995, 54% of truancy cases and 55% of ungovernability cases involved male juveniles. These patterns in status offense cases did not change much between 1986 and 1995.

Table 17: Offense Profile of Petitioned Status Offense Cases by Age at Referral, 1995

Most Serious Offense	Age 15 or Younger	Age 16 or Older
Running away	18%	14%
Truancy	35	14
Ungovernability	16	9
Liquor law violation	11	44
Miscellaneous	20	21
Total	100	100

Note: Detail may not total 100% because of rounding.

Race of Youth

White youth were involved in 78% of the petitioned status offense cases disposed by juvenile courts during 1995. White youth were involved in 90% of status liquor law violation cases, 76% of cases of running away, 76% of ungovernability cases, and 74% of truancy cases. Truancy was the most common status offense for black youth (32%), while a liquor law violation was the most common status offense for white youth (29%) and youth of other races (38%).

Source of Referral

Law enforcement agencies referred 43% of the petitioned status offense cases handled by juvenile courts in 1995. However, the source of referral varied according to the offense involved. Law enforcement agencies referred 93% of status liquor law violation cases, 28% of cases of running away, 11% of ungovernability cases, and 5% of truancy cases.

Use of Detention

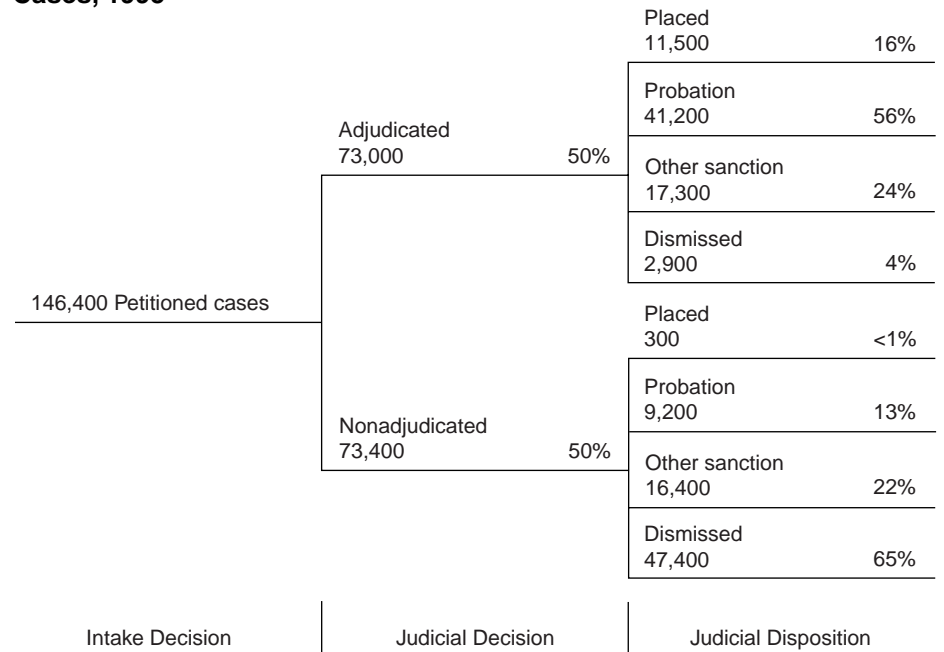
Detention was used in 9,900 petitioned status offense cases in 1995 (table 18). There were 22% fewer status offense cases involving detention in 1995 than in 1986, but 37% more than in 1991. Similar drops in the number of cases involving detention were seen in cases of running away, truancy, and ungovernability. The number of cases involving detention was greater in 1995 than in 1986 for cases involving liquor and miscellaneous status offenses.

Cases of running away were the most likely status offense matters to involve detention in 1995. Detention was used in 12% of these cases, 7% of ungovernability cases, 6% of status liquor law violations, and 2% of truancy cases. Of the estimated 9,900 petitioned status offense cases that involved detention in 1995, 29% were cases of running away, 25% involved liquor law violations, 13% involved ungovernability charges, 7% were truancy cases, and the remaining 26% involved miscellaneous status offenses.

Case Processing

During 1995, half of petitioned status offense cases resulted in adjudication (figure 5). Adjudication was more likely in cases involving ungovernability (54%),

Figure 5: Juvenile Court Processing of Petitioned Status Offense Cases, 1995



Note: Detail may not add to totals because of rounding.

truancy (53%), and liquor law violations (53%) than in cases of running away (42%). Probation was the most common disposition for adjudicated status offenders. Among adjudicated status offense cases, 56% resulted in probation; 16% resulted in out-of-home placement; 24% resulted in other sanctions, such as restitution or community service; and 4% were dismissed.

Endnotes

1. For information on the estimation procedure, see the methods section of this

Bulletin or in *Juvenile Court Statistics 1995*. The national estimates for 1986 through 1994 described in this Bulletin include revisions made after publication of previous *Juvenile Court Statistics* reports.

2. The population at risk of referral to juvenile court is controlled for State variations in the upper age of original juvenile court jurisdiction. Juveniles at risk are defined as youth ages 10 or older who were at, or under, the upper age of original jurisdiction of the juvenile court according to the laws of their State. In most States, the upper age of original jurisdiction is 17, but the age ranged from 15 to 17 in 1995. (See *youth population at risk* and *upper age of original jurisdiction* in the glossary.)

3. Care should be exercised when interpreting age, sex, or racial differences in the handling of juvenile delinquency cases; reported statistics do not control for the seriousness of the behavior leading to each charge or the extent of a youth's court history.

4. Nearly all youth of Hispanic ethnicity are included in the white racial category.

5. In a small number of cases, the petition is withdrawn before an adjudicatory hearing is held.

Table 18: Percent Change in Detained Petitioned Status Offense Cases, 1986–1995

Most Serious Offense	Number of Cases			Percent Change	
	1986	1991	1995	1986–95	1991–95
Status offense	12,700	7,200	9,900	-22%	37%
Running away	5,600	2,400	2,900	-48	21
Truancy	1,400	700	700	-51	0
Ungovernability	3,200	900	1,300	-60	45
Liquor law violation	1,700	1,500	2,400	47	63
Miscellaneous	900	1,800	2,600	196	49

Note: Detail may not add to totals because of rounding. Percent change calculations are based on unrounded numbers.

Acknowledgments

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Related Readings

The Youngest Delinquents: Offenders Under Age 15, September 1997, NCJ 165256. Also available electronically.

Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 1997 Update on Violence, August 1997, NCJ 165703. Also available electronically.

The National Juvenile Court Data Archive: Collecting Data Since 1927, August 1995, FS9766. Also available electronically.

Female Offenders in the Juvenile Justice System, June 1996, NCJ 160941. Also available electronically.

Juvenile Offenders and Victims: A National Report, August 1995, NCJ 153569.

To obtain *Juvenile Court Statistics*, other publications using Archive data, or OJJDP publications that focus on juvenile justice statistics, visit OJJDP's Web site, www.ncjrs.org/ojjhome.htm, or contact the Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse by telephone at 800-638-8736; by mail at P.O. Box 6000, Rockville, MD 20849-6000; or by e-mail at askncjrs@ncjrs.org.

6. In many communities, social service agencies, rather than the juvenile courts, have assumed responsibility for screening and diverting alleged status offenders. Because of great differences in intake and screening procedures for informally handled status offense cases, national estimates are not calculated. The national estimates presented here and in *Juvenile Court Statistics* focus on formally handled, or petitioned, status offense cases.

7. Due to the homogeneity of offenses contained in the miscellaneous category, these cases are not always discussed independently. All totals in the tables and figures, however, include miscellaneous status offenses.

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About the National Juvenile Court Data Archive

This Bulletin presents information from the latest report in OJJDP's *Juvenile Court Statistics* series. The *Juvenile Court Statistics* report series started in 1929 and continues to be the Nation's primary source of information on the activities of juvenile courts. The data for the reports are collected, analyzed, and stored by the National Juvenile Court Data Archive, which is operated by the National Center for Juvenile Justice (NCJJ) in Pittsburgh, PA. The Archive collects demographic, legal, and dispositional data on more than 800,000 delinquency and status offense cases annually. In addition to producing *Juvenile Court Statistics* and other topical publications, the Archive can provide data files and special analyses for research and policy purposes.

The Archive's national delinquency estimates are available to researchers in an easy-to-use software package, *Easy Access to Juvenile Court Statistics: 1986-1995*. With the support of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, NCJJ distributes the software to facilitate independent analysis of Archive data while eliminating the need for statistical analysis software. All necessary data files, as well as the NCJJ software, can be downloaded from OJJDP's Web site, www.ncjrs.org/ojjhome.htm, or a complimentary copy of *Easy Access to Juvenile Court Statistics: 1986-1995* on diskette can be ordered from NCJJ.

For further information about the National Juvenile Court Data Archive, contact:

National Center for Juvenile Justice
710 Fifth Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15219-3000
412-227-6950

Glossary

Adjudication: Judicial determination (judgment) that a youth is a delinquent or status offender.

Age: Juvenile's age at the time the case was referred to juvenile court.

Case rate: Number of cases disposed per 1,000 youth at risk. The population base used to calculate the case rate varies. For example, the population base for the male case rate is the total number of male youth ages 10 or older who are under the jurisdiction of the juvenile courts. (See *youth population at risk*.)

Delinquent act: An act committed by a juvenile for which an adult could be prosecuted in a criminal court, but which, when committed by a juvenile, is within the jurisdiction of the juvenile court. Delinquent acts include crimes against persons, crimes against property, drug offenses, and crimes against public order when such acts are committed by juveniles.

Detention: The placement of a youth in a restrictive facility at some point between the time of referral to court intake and disposition.

Disposition: Action taken or treatment plan decided upon or initiated in a particular case. Case dispositions are coded into the following categories:

- ◆ **Waiver to criminal court:** Cases that were sent to a criminal court as the result of a waiver or transfer hearing in the juvenile court.
- ◆ **Placement:** Cases in which youth were placed out of the home in a residential facility for delinquents or status offenders, or cases in which youth were removed from their homes and placed elsewhere.
- ◆ **Probation:** Cases in which youth were placed on informal/voluntary or formal/court-ordered probation or supervision.
- ◆ **Dismissed:** Cases dismissed, including those warned, counseled, and released, with no further disposition anticipated. Among cases handled informally, some may be dismissed by the juvenile court because the matter is being handled in criminal court. (See *manner of handling*.)

◆ **Other sanction:** Miscellaneous dispositions not included above, which may include fines, restitution, community service, referrals outside the court for services with minimal or no further court involvement anticipated, and dispositions coded as "other" in a jurisdiction's original data.

Juvenile: Youth at or below the upper age of original juvenile court jurisdiction. (See *upper age of jurisdiction* and *youth population at risk*.)

Juvenile court: Any court that has jurisdiction over matters involving juveniles.

Manner of handling: A general classification of case processing within the court system.

◆ **Petitioned:** Formally handled cases that appear on the official court calendar in response to the filing of a petition or other legal instrument requesting the court to adjudicate the youth a delinquent, status offender, or dependent child, or to transfer the youth to criminal court for processing as an adult.

◆ **Nonpetitioned:** Informally handled cases in which duly authorized court personnel screen the case prior to the filing of a formal petition. Such personnel include judges, referees, probation officers, other officers of the court, and/or staff of an agency statutorily designated to conduct petition screening for the juvenile court.

Petition: A document filed in juvenile court alleging that a juvenile is a delinquent or a status offender and asking that the court assume jurisdiction over the juvenile or asking that an alleged delinquent be transferred to criminal court for prosecution as an adult.

Race: The race of the youth referred, as determined by the youth or by court personnel.

◆ **White:** A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, North Africa, or the Middle East. (In both the population and court data, nearly all youth of Hispanic ethnicity were included in the white racial category.)

◆ **Black:** A person having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa.

◆ **Other:** A person having origins in any of the original peoples of North America, the Far East, Southeast Asia, the Indian subcontinent, or the Pacific Islands.

Unit of count: The unit of count is a case disposed by a court with juvenile jurisdiction during the calendar year. Each case represents a youth referred to the juvenile court for a new referral for one or more offenses. The term "disposed" means that during the year, some action was taken or some treatment plan was decided upon or initiated. Within this definition, it is possible for a youth to be involved in more than one case during a calendar year.

Upper age of original jurisdiction: The oldest age at which a juvenile court has original jurisdiction over an individual for law-violating behavior. For the time period covered by *Juvenile Court Statistics 1995*, the upper age of jurisdiction was 15 in three States (Connecticut, New York, and North Carolina) and 16 in eight States (Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, South Carolina, and Texas). In the remaining 39 States and the District of Columbia, the upper age of juvenile court jurisdiction was 17. It must be noted that within most States, there are exceptions in which youth at or below the State's upper age of jurisdiction can be placed under the original jurisdiction of the adult criminal court. For example, in most States, if a youth of a certain age is charged with an offense from a defined list of "excluded offenses," the case must originate in the adult criminal court. In addition, in a number of States, the district attorney is given the discretion of filing certain cases either in the juvenile or in the criminal court. Therefore, while the upper age of jurisdiction is commonly recognized in all States, there are numerous exceptions to this age criterion.

Youth population at risk: For delinquency and status offense matters, this term refers to the number of children from age 10 through the upper age of jurisdiction. In all States, the upper age of jurisdiction is defined by statute. Because most States consider individuals to be adults on their 18th birthday, the delinquency and status offense youth population at risk in these States equals the number of children ages 10 through 17 living within the geographical area serviced by the court. (See *upper age of original jurisdiction*.)

Methods

Data are provided to the National Juvenile Court Data Archive by State and local agencies responsible for the collection and/or dissemination of juvenile justice data. The information contributed by these agencies is not derived from a probability sampling procedure, nor is it the result of a uniform data collection effort. The national estimates described in this Bulletin and in *Juvenile Court Statistics* are developed using information from all courts able to provide compatible data to the Archive. While juvenile courts with jurisdiction over 96% of the U.S. juvenile population contributed at least some 1995 data to the Archive, not all information could be used to generate the national estimates because of incompatibilities in the structure or content of the data files.

Data are provided to the Archive in two forms—automated *case-level* data and

court-level aggregate data. Automated case-level data for 1995, which describe each case's demographic and processing characteristics, were provided by 1,323 jurisdictions in 28 States (Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Florida, Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Jersey, New York, North Dakota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Washington, and West Virginia). Together, these courts had jurisdiction over 53% of the Nation's juvenile population in 1995 (i.e., youth ages 10 through the upper age of original juvenile court jurisdiction in each State). Compatible court-level aggregate data for 1995, which usually indicate the number of delinquency cases disposed in a calendar year, were provided by 511 jurisdictions in seven States (California, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Montana, Texas, and Vermont) and the

District of Columbia. In all, compatible 1995 data were provided to the Archive by 1,775 jurisdictions, containing 67% of the Nation's juvenile population.

The national estimates of juvenile court cases reported in this Bulletin and in *Juvenile Court Statistics* were developed using the Archive's case-level and court-level data files combined with county-level juvenile population estimates (controlling for the upper age of original juvenile court jurisdiction in each State). The basic assumption underlying the estimation procedure is that the volume and characteristics of juvenile court cases are shaped by the same set of factors in reporting and nonreporting jurisdictions of similar size. For interested readers, a complete description of the estimation procedure appears in the methods section of each *Juvenile Court Statistics* report.