



OJJDP Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

Shay Bilchik, Administrator

Fact Sheet #53 February 1997

Drug Offense Cases in Juvenile Court, 1985–1994

by Jeffrey A. Butts, Ph.D.

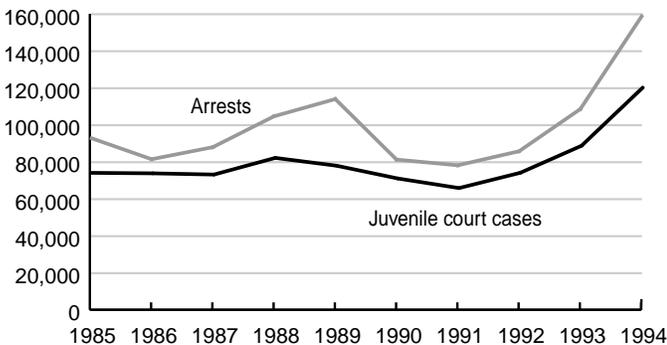
Drug offense cases up 82% from 1991

In 1994 juvenile courts in the United States handled an estimated 120,200 delinquency cases involving drug law violations. Drug offenses accounted for 8% of all delinquency cases in 1994, compared with 5% in 1991. Drug offenses include possession or sale of marijuana, cocaine, and other illegal drugs. The analysis in this Fact Sheet includes only cases in which a drug offense was the most serious charge, not cases involving juveniles charged with drug offenses in addition to more serious offenses.

The number of drug offense cases processed during 1994 was 35% greater than in 1993 and 82% more than in 1991. Juvenile courts experienced a decline in their drug offense caseloads from 1988 to 1991 but then saw a sharp increase from 1991 to 1994. The number of juvenile arrests followed the same pattern.

Juvenile arrests and juvenile court cases involving drug offenses doubled between 1991 and 1994

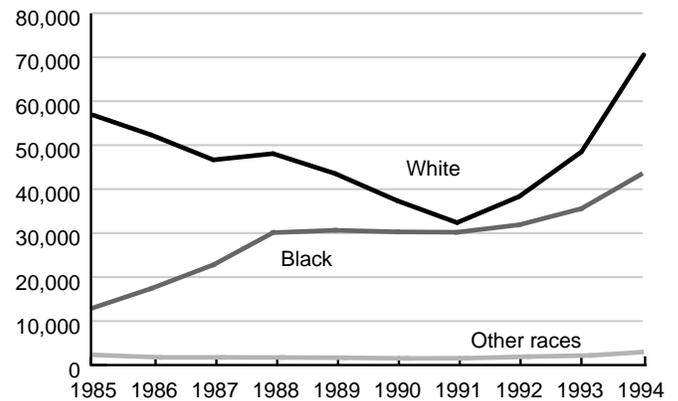
Drug violations



Note: Arrest data are from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crime in the United States* (annual). The FBI does not calculate national estimates of arrests involving juveniles. These estimates were developed by applying the proportion of drug arrests in the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) reporting sample that involved persons under age 18 to the UCR's national estimate of total drug arrests. This method was first demonstrated in "Arrests of Youth 1990" by Howard Snyder, *OJJDP Update on Statistics*.

Drug offense cases involving white youth climbed 118% between 1991 and 1994, compared with 44% for those involving black youth

Drug cases disposed



Sharp increase in drug cases of white youth

Between 1991 and 1994, the number of drug cases involving white juveniles increased sharply (118%). In each year between 1985 and 1994, at least half of all drug offense cases involved white youth. The proportion that involved black youth grew from 18% in 1985 to 44% in 1990 and then declined to 37% in 1994.

Males were involved in 86% of drug offense cases in 1994, compared with 82% in 1985. In 1994, 58% of drug offense cases involved juveniles age 16 or older, the same percentage that was found in 1985.

Use of detention down compared with 1990

More than a quarter (28%) of the drug offense cases that juvenile courts disposed in 1994 involved the use of secure detention at some point between referral and disposition. The use of detention was down compared with 1990 (37%) but was greater than in 1985 (21%).

Drug cases in juvenile court, 1985, 1990, and 1994

Gender	1985	1990	1994
Male	82%	86%	86%
Female	18	14	14
Age at Time of Referral			
Under 16 years	42%	40%	42%
16 or older	58	60	58
Race/Ethnicity			
White	79%	54%	61%
Black	18	44	37
Other	3	2	2
Predisposition Detention			
Detained	21%	37%	28%
Not detained	79	63	72
Manner of Handling			
Formal	43%	66%	61%
Informal	57	34	39
Outcome of Formal Handling			
Adjudicated	70%	61%	60%
Not adjudicated	30	39	40
Disposition of Adjudicated Cases			
Placed out of the home	23%	36%	28%
Probation or supervision	62	55	52
Other (fines, restitution, etc.)	10	7	14
Dismissed or released	5	3	5

Note: Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Less formal processing compared with 1990

In 1994 juvenile courts handled 61% of drug offense cases formally (that is, they filed a petition requesting a hearing). The use of formal processing was down from 1990 (66%) but was greater than in 1985 (43%). In 60% of all drug cases formally processed in 1994, the juvenile was adjudicated delinquent, while 39% were not adjudicated. Nearly 2% of formal drug cases were transferred to criminal court. Drug offenses accounted for 11% of the delin-

quency cases judicially transferred to adult court in 1994, a larger percentage than in 1985 (5%) but down slightly from 1990 (14%).

In 28% of adjudicated drug offense cases in 1994, the most severe disposition imposed by the juvenile court was placement out of the home. The courts used probation in 52% of the cases and imposed other sanctions, such as fines and restitution, in 14%. In 5% of adjudicated drug offense cases, the court released the juvenile with no further sanctions.

Most formally petitioned drug cases that were not adjudicated were dismissed (63%), but in 18% the youth agreed to informal probation and in 15% to other dispositions. About 4% of non-adjudicated cases resulted in voluntary out-of-home placement.

For further information

This Fact Sheet is based on the report *Juvenile Court Statistics 1994*. The report bases its national estimates of 1994 juvenile court cases on data from more than 1,800 courts with jurisdiction over 67% of the U.S. juvenile population. The unit of count is a case disposed during the calendar year, where each case represents one youth processed on a new referral regardless of the number of offenses contained in that referral. An individual youth can be involved in more than one case during the year.

Copies of *Juvenile Court Statistics 1994* are available from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's (OJJDP's) Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse, 800-638-8736. OJJDP also supports distribution of a PC-compatible software version of the data analyzed in *Juvenile Court Statistics*. For a free copy of the software, *Easy Access to Juvenile Court Statistics*, call the National Juvenile Court Data Archive at the National Center for Juvenile Justice, 412-227-6950. This software can also be downloaded from OJJDP's home page: <http://www.ncjrs.org/ojjhome.htm>.

Jeffrey A. Butts is Project Manager of the National Juvenile Court Data Archive, which is supported by an OJJDP grant.

FS-9753

BULK RATE
POSTAGE & FEES PAID
DOJ/OJJDP
Permit No. G-91

U.S. Department of Justice
Office of Justice Programs
Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
Washington, D.C. 20531
Official Business
Penalty for Private Use \$300