



# OJJDP FACT SHEET

Shay Bilchik, Administrator May 1998 #79

## Delinquency Cases in Juvenile Courts, 1995

by Anne L. Stahl

### Counts and Trends

Juvenile courts in the United States processed an estimated 1.7 million delinquency cases in 1995. Delinquency cases involve juveniles charged with criminal law violations. The number of delinquency cases handled by juvenile courts increased 45% between 1986 and 1995. Since 1986, cases involving offenses against persons increased 98%, property offense cases increased 23%, and drug law violation cases increased 120%.

These estimates of the cases handled by U.S. juvenile courts in 1995 are based on data from nearly 1,800 courts that had jurisdiction over 67% of the U.S. juvenile population in 1995. (Not all jurisdictions were able to report comparable data.) The unit of count in this Fact Sheet is a case disposed during the calendar year by a court with juvenile jurisdiction, in which each case represents one youth processed on a new referral, regardless of the number of individual offenses contained in that referral. An individual youth can be involved in more than one case during the year. For a full description of the methodology used in the calculation of national estimates, see *Juvenile Court Statistics 1995* (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, forthcoming).

### Detention

One of the first decisions made in processing a juvenile delinquency case is whether the juvenile should be detained in a secure facility. Juveniles are detained to protect the community, to protect the juveniles themselves, or to ensure their appearance at court hearings. Juveniles were securely detained in 19% of the delinquency cases processed in 1995. Detention was used in 24% of drug law violations, 23% of person offense cases, 21% of public order cases, and 15% of property offense cases.

### Intake Decision

After the details of a case have been reviewed, a decision is made to dismiss it, handle it informally, or formally process the case by taking the matter before a judge. More than one-fifth (21%) of all

### Most Serious Offense in Delinquency Cases, 1995

Offense	Number of Cases in 1995	Percent Change		
		1986-95	1991-95	1994-95
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,714,300</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>7%</b>
<b>Person Offenses</b>	<b>377,300</b>	<b>98%</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>8%</b>
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 offenses	9,300	50	9	-3
Other person offenses	20,100	72	-2	-4
<b>Property Offenses</b>	<b>871,700</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>3%</b>
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 offenses	33,100	10	9	2
Other property offenses	29,900	46	-5	6
<b>Drug Law Violations</b>	<b>159,100</b>	<b>120%</b>	<b>145%</b>	<b>28%</b>
<b>Public Order Offenses</b>	<b>306,300</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>6%</b>
Obstruction of justice	110,100	53	45	8
Disorderly conduct	85,100	82	46	9
Weapons offenses	47,000	132	38	-9
Liquor law violations	12,200	-39	-1	2
Nonviolent sex offenses	10,500	-21	-8	-4
Other public order	41,300	19	31	17
<b>Violent Crime Index*</b>	<b>142,400</b>	<b>99%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>5%</b>
<b>Property Crime Index**</b>	<b>622,500</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>5%</b>

\* Violent Crime Index includes criminal homicide, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault.

\*\* Property Crime Index 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.

delinquency cases in 1995 were dismissed at intake, often for lack of legal sufficiency. Another 24% were processed informally, with the juvenile agreeing to a voluntary disposition (for example,

probation). More than half (55%) of delinquency cases in 1995 were processed formally and involved either an adjudicatory hearing or a hearing to consider waiving jurisdiction to the criminal (adult) court.

### Waiver to Criminal Court

During a waiver hearing, a juvenile court judge is asked to waive jurisdiction over a matter and transfer the case to criminal court so that the juvenile may be tried as an adult. Waiver decisions are often based on a number of factors, including the seriousness of the offense, the juvenile's prior record, and amenability to treatment. In 1995, juvenile court judges waived 9,700 delinquency cases. Waivers increased 33% between 1986 and 1995. However, the number of cases waived in 1995 was 21% less than in 1994. Of the cases waived in 1995, 47% involved a person offense as the most serious charge, 34% involved a property offense, and 13% involved a drug law violation. Thus person offense cases, which made up 23% of all formally processed cases, were most likely to be waived.

### Adjudication and Disposition

Adjudicatory hearings are used to establish responsibility for an alleged delinquent act (analogous to determining guilt or innocence). Disposition hearings are held to decide if any sanctions are to be imposed and whether a juvenile should be placed under court supervision. In 1995, juveniles were adjudicated delinquent in more than half (56%) of the 855,200 cases brought before a judge. Once adjudicated, juveniles in the majority of cases (54%) were placed on formal probation; in 28% of the cases, the juvenile was placed out of the home in a residential facility. In 14% the result was another disposition, such as referral to an outside agency, community service, or restitution. Between 1986 and 1995, the number of cases in which the court ordered an adjudicated delinquent to be placed in a residential facility increased 37%, while the number of formal probation cases increased 43%.

### Gender

Nearly four of every five (78%) delinquency cases involved a male juvenile in 1995. This rate was slightly less than in 1986 (81%). In 1995, males accounted for 76% of person offense cases, 78% of property offense cases, and 86% of drug law violation cases.

### Age

Sixty percent of the juvenile delinquency cases processed in 1995 involved a juvenile under 16 years of age, compared with 57% in 1986. In 1995, juveniles under age 16 were responsible for 64% of person offense cases, 64% of property offense cases, and 42% of drug law violation cases.

### Race

In 1995, approximately 80% of the juvenile population in the United States was white and 15% was black. Black juveniles, however, were involved in 34% of the delinquency cases handled by U.S. juvenile courts. White juveniles were involved in 63% of all cases, and youth of other races accounted for 4%. Black juveniles were involved in 38% of person offense cases, 26% of property offenses, and 34% of drug law violation cases.

### For Further Information

This Fact Sheet is based on the forthcoming report *Juvenile Court Statistics 1995*. Copies will be 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: [www.ncjrs.org/ojjhome.htm](http://www.ncjrs.org/ojjhome.htm).

Anne L. Stahl is the Manager of Data Collection for the National Juvenile Court Data Archive, which is supported by an OJJDP grant.

FS-9879