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OJJDP Update on Statistics

Robert W. Sweet, Jr., Administrator

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Juvenile Court Property Cases

by Ellen H. Nimick

Property offenses are a major part of the juvenile crime problem. Youth are charged with these offenses in more than 30 percent of all juvenile arrests and 50 percent of all delinquency cases referred to the Nation's juvenile courts. To develop a picture of these youth and the court's response to property cases, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) asked the National Center for Juvenile Justice (NCJJ) to study the automated case records in the National Juvenile Court Data Archive. The analysis of nearly 800,000 court records describing delinquency referrals in 1985 and 1986 in 529 jurisdictions in 10 States revealed that:

- The annual rate at which youth were referred to court for property offenses increased through age 16 and decreased for 17-year-olds.

- Shoplifting was the most common offense referred to court for youth under age 15, while burglary was most common for older youth.

- Female youth were more likely to be involved in shoplifting than other types of property offenses, while male youth were most likely to be involved in burglary cases.

- Juveniles referred to court for motor vehicle theft were more likely to be detained than youth referred for other property offenses.

- Burglary and motor vehicle theft cases were more likely than other property offenses to result in the youth being placed out of the home.

The category of property offenses includes a large number of activities

varying greatly in frequency and seriousness. In exploring the variations in court processing, this study focused on the more common property offenses of burglary, shoplifting, larceny (excluding shoplifting), motor vehicle theft, and vandalism.

The nature of property cases

Burglary and shoplifting cases each accounted for 25 percent of all property offense referrals to juvenile court (figure 1). Differences exist in property offense proportions across counties. For example, the percentage of burglary cases dropped as county size decreased while the proportion of vandalism cases increased. Large counties had the lowest proportion of shoplifting cases.

From the Administrator

Juvenile courts frequently handle cases of shoplifting, burglary, and larceny, since these and other property crimes make up more than half of all juvenile delinquency cases referred to juvenile court. They are a cause of significant concern for all who care about the welfare of our young people.

To find out more about how juvenile courts deal with property cases, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention asked the National Center for Juvenile Justice (NCJJ) to analyze the automated case records stored in the National Juvenile Court Data Archive.

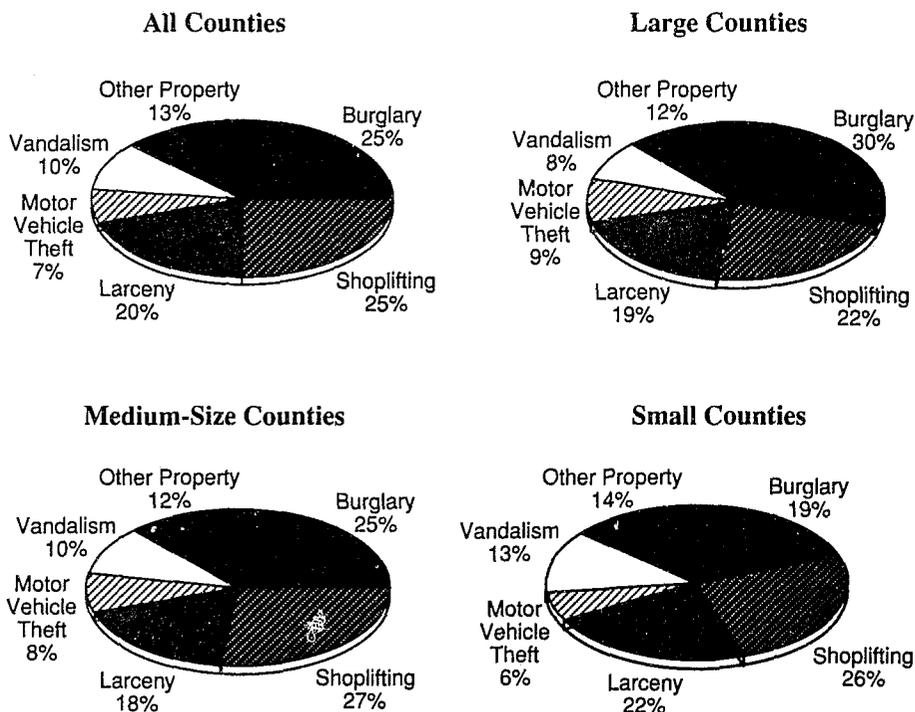
NCJJ examined 1985 and 1986 data from jurisdictions in 10 States. The 800,000 records it analyzed represent nearly a third of the juvenile population at risk at that time. The analysis presented in this *Update* offers insight into which young people are referred to court for which crimes. It tells us that boys are charged with burglaries more than girls and that girls are involved with shoplifting more than any other property offense. And it tells us which crimes are treated more severely by the court. For instance, of all the property offenses, motor vehicle theft is the most likely to lead to detention.

These and other findings help us understand the dimensions of juvenile property crimes. Policymakers can use this information to assess the adequacy of the resources to treat young property offenders and to reduce the incidence of such crimes.

Robert W. Sweet, Jr.
Administrator

Figure 1

Distribution of Property Offenses Across County Size



Demographics of juveniles referred for property offenses

The annual rate of referral (the number of cases per 1,000 youth) for property offenses increased up to age 16 and declined for 17-year-olds (table 1). While shoplifting was the most common offense for youth below age 15, burglary was the most common offense in older age groups.

The annual referral rates for nonwhite youth were higher than for white youth for all property offenses except vandalism. For example, the larceny rate for white youth was half of that for nonwhite youth. For white youth, the highest annual rate was for burglaries, but the nonwhite youth burglary rate was nearly 40 percent higher. Among nonwhite youth the highest annual case rate was for shoplifting.

Male youth were responsible for the majority of referrals for all types of property offenses (figure 2). However, there were variations in the extent of female youth involvement in different property crimes. For example, female youth were involved in fewer than 1 in 10 burglary cases compared to 3 in 10 of the shoplifting cases. Shoplifting was the most common property offense among female youth—making up 50 percent of all female youth property offense referrals. Burglary was the most common property offense for males.

The distribution of property offenses varied across race and sex groups (figure 3). Nonwhite male youth had a higher proportion of referrals for larceny and motor vehicle theft than white male youth. White male youth referrals contained a greater proportion of burglaries. White female youth were more likely than nonwhite female youth to be referred to court for burglary, motor vehicle theft, and vandalism.

Detention

In jurisdictions reporting detention information, nearly 25 percent of all youth charged with property offenses

Figure 2

Offense Characteristics of Property Cases by Sex

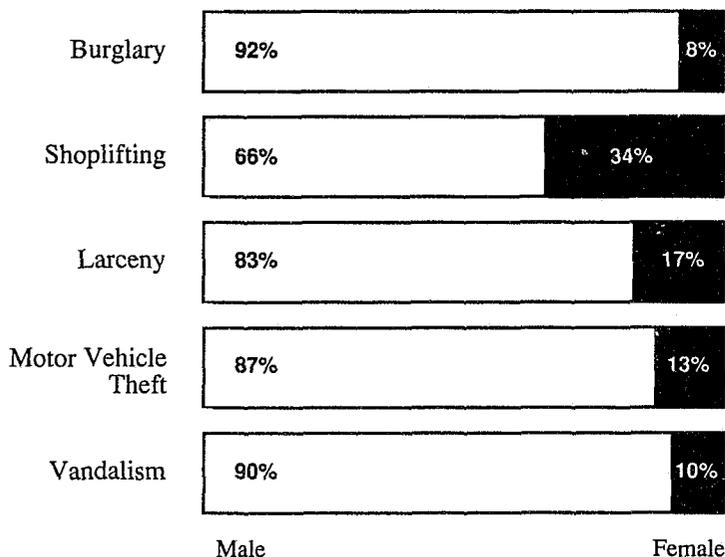


Table 1

Property Offense Case Rates

	Burglary	Shoplifting	Larceny	Motor Vehicle Theft	Vandalism	Total
Total	6.7	6.7	5.3	2.0	2.7	23.5
Age						
10	0.9	1.4	0.6	0.0	0.7	3.6
11	1.4	2.3	1.1	0.1	1.1	6.0
12	2.7	4.1	2.1	0.3	1.6	10.8
13	5.0	6.3	4.0	1.0	2.4	18.8
14	7.7	8.0	5.9	2.2	3.1	26.9
15	10.3	9.3	7.8	3.6	3.7	34.7
16	11.0	9.8	8.9	4.1	3.9	37.8
17	10.5	8.6	9.0	3.6	3.5	35.2
Race						
White	6.1	5.7	4.3	1.7	2.7	20.6
Nonwhite	8.3	9.3	8.5	3.1	2.5	31.8
Sex						
Male	11.5	8.2	8.3	3.3	4.5	35.7
Female	1.1	4.6	1.8	0.6	0.6	8.5
Race/Sex						
White Male	10.9	7.3	7.1	2.8	4.7	32.8
Nonwhite Male	15.2	11.9	13.8	5.6	4.4	50.9
White Female	1.1	4.0	1.5	0.6	0.6	7.7
Nonwhite Female	1.2	6.5	3.0	0.5	0.5	11.8

Note: Case rate is defined as the number of cases per 1,000 youth aged 10 through 17 in the population, or cases per 1,000 youth in each age group. Detail may not add to total because of rounding.

were detained. Juveniles charged with motor vehicle theft were the most likely to be detained. Nearly half of these youth were detained compared to 3 in 10 for burglary, 2 in 10 for larceny, and 1 in 10 for shoplifting and vandalism. Although large counties were more likely to detain youth, this relative detention pattern was found in small, medium, and large counties. There were wide variations across States in the proportion of cases detained. In some States as few as 1 in 20 property offense cases were detained, compared to 1 in 3 in others.

Court processing of property cases

There were substantial differences in the way courts processed property

cases. More than 50 percent of the burglary, larceny, and motor vehicle theft cases were formally processed, while less than half of the shoplifting and vandalism cases were processed formally (figure 4). For example, 70 percent of the burglary referrals were formally handled at an adjudicatory or transfer hearing compared to only 28 percent of the shoplifting cases.

There were also variations across States in the proportion of formally processed cases. Some States petitioned more than half of their shoplifting cases while others petitioned as few as 1 in 10. At least half of the burglary cases in each State were handled formally; in some States as many as 90 percent were petitioned. The range in formally handled cases was greatest for vandal-

ism. Of these cases, 16 percent were petitioned in one State compared to 74 percent in another.

Informally handled cases were usually dismissed, although a substantial number received a disposition of informal probation. Shoplifting and vandalism cases were the property offenses most likely to involve some type of informal probation. Other informal dispositions involved referrals to outside agencies, fines, or restitution.

Burglary cases were the most likely to be placed on formal probation, with burglary and motor vehicle theft cases the most likely to result in the youth being placed out of the home. These cases were also the most likely to be transferred to criminal (adult) court.

Juvenile court processing

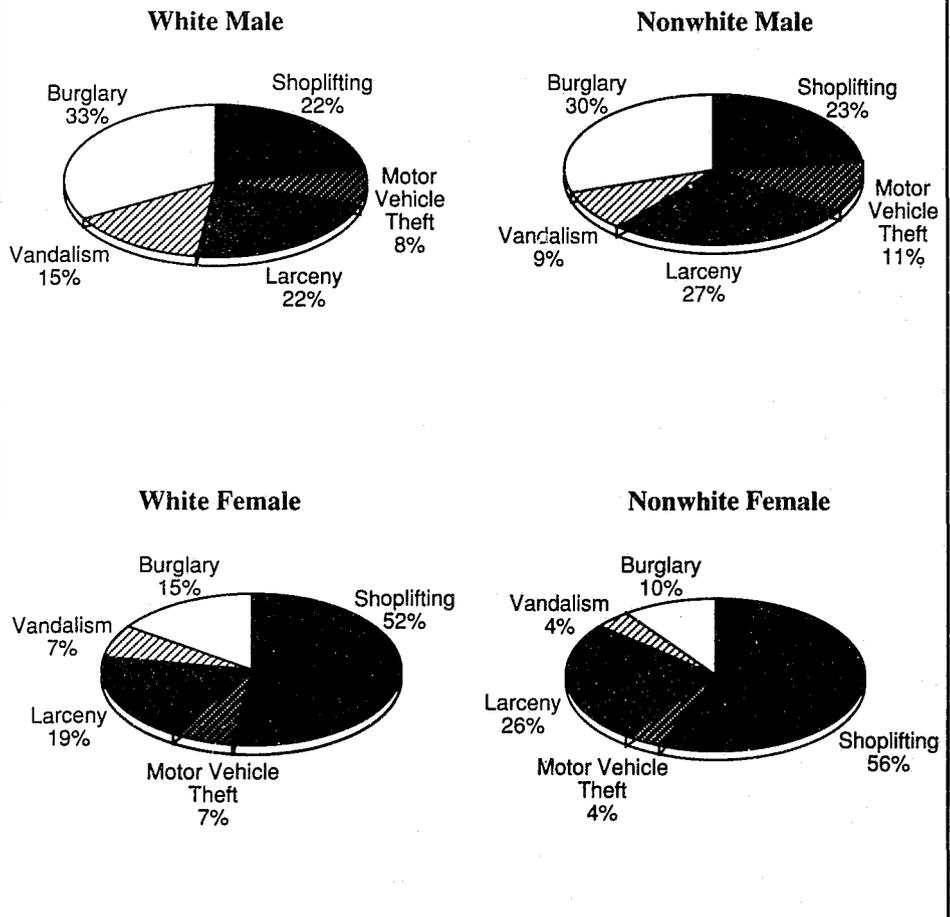
One of the first decisions to be made once a property case is referred to juvenile court is whether the case will be handled informally or formally (petitioned). Informal cases are handled at the intake level without an adjudicatory or transfer hearing. Many of these cases are dismissed; others can result in referral to another agency, informal probation, payment of fines or restitution, or (occasionally) voluntary placement outside the home.

In formal cases a petition is filed and the case is placed on the court calendar for an adjudicatory or transfer hearing. At the adjudicatory hearing, the case can be dismissed or the youth can be released or adjudicated. Following the adjudication decision, the judge can commit the youth to an institution, group or foster home, or other residential placement facility; place the youth on formal probation; refer the case to another agency or treatment program; or order the youth to pay fines or restitution. The juvenile court can also transfer some cases to criminal court.

States also differed in the dispositions they ordered in formally handled cases. For example, some States transferred fewer than 1 percent of their burglary cases to criminal court while others transferred slightly more than 10 percent. Formal probation was ordered in fewer than 25 percent of shoplifting cases in some States and in more than 75 percent of others. On average, 26 percent of petitioned motor vehicle theft cases were placed out of the home; however, that proportion was as low as 14 percent in some States and as high as 34 percent in others.

Figure 3

Offense Characteristics by Race/Sex Groups



Methods

This report is based on 1985 and 1986 automated case-level data provided to the National Juvenile Court Data Archive by State and county agencies that collect or report information on the processing of youth referred to courts with juvenile jurisdiction. County jurisdictions were selected for this study if (1) the upper age of juvenile court jurisdiction was 17; (2) the data represented the complete reporting of both petitioned and nonpetitioned cases handled in the jurisdiction; and (3) the data distinguished between burglary,

shoplifting, larceny, motor vehicle theft, and vandalism offenses. Data from 529 jurisdictions in 10 States (Alabama, Arizona, California, Florida, Iowa, Maryland, Mississippi, Pennsylvania, Utah, and Virginia) met these criteria. These jurisdictions contained 30 percent of the U.S. population at risk in 1985. However, they were somewhat overrepresentative of larger counties compared to the Nation as a whole, and they had a slightly larger proportion of nonwhite youth.

Counties with 100,000 or more youth aged 10 through 17 were classified as

Figure 4

Processing of 100 Typical Cases of Different Property Offenses

Burglary

100 Cases	Petitioned 70		Transfer 2	
	Not Petitioned 30		Placement 16	
		Probation 9	Probation 37	
		Dismissal 14	Dismissal 10	
		Other* 7	Other* 5	

Shoplifting

100 Cases	Petitioned 28		Transfer 0	
	Not Petitioned 72		Placement 4	
		Probation 16	Probation 15	
		Dismissal 37	Dismissal 5	
		Other* 18	Other* 4	

Larceny

100 Cases	Petitioned 57		Transfer 1	
	Not Petitioned 43		Placement 9	
		Probation 9	Probation 27	
		Dismissal 21	Dismissal 13	
		Other* 13	Other* 7	

Motor Vehicle Theft

100 Cases	Petitioned 63		Transfer 2	
	Not Petitioned 37		Placement 16	
		Probation 7	Probation 27	
		Dismissal 23	Dismissal 11	
		Other* 8	Other* 6	

Vandalism

100 Cases	Petitioned 40		Transfer 0	
	Not Petitioned 60		Placement 4	
		Probation 13	Probation 18	
		Dismissal 35	Dismissal 12	
		Other* 13	Other* 5	

* Referrals to other agencies, fines, restitution, etc.

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

large counties. Those with 40,000 to 100,000 youth aged 10 through 17 were considered medium-size counties. Counties with fewer than 40,000 youth aged 10 through 17 made up the small county group.

Acknowledgments

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NCJJ gratefully acknowledges the cooperation of the many State and local agencies that contribute their data to the Archive. Their patience with our requests for data and documentation makes this work possible.

For more information on juvenile court property cases, contact the Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse, 1600 Research Boulevard, Rockville, MD 20850, or call 800-638-8736. For more information about the Archive, contact the National Center for Juvenile Justice, 701 Forbes Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15219, or call 412-227-6950.

The Assistant Attorney General, Office of Justice Programs, coordinates the activities of the following program Offices and Bureaus: the Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Institute of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, and the Office for Victims of Crime.