



OJJDP FACT SHEET

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The National Juvenile Court Data Archive: Collecting Data Since 1927

by Jeffrey A. Butts, Ph.D.

The National Juvenile Court Data Archive collects, stores, and analyzes data about young people referred to U.S. courts for delinquency and status offenses. Juvenile and family courts across the country voluntarily provide the Archive with demographic information about the juveniles involved in delinquency and status offense cases, the reasons for their referral to court, and the court's response (i.e., whether the youth was adjudicated, given probation, ordered to pay restitution, placed in a correctional facility, etc.). Every year, data on more than 800,000 new juvenile court cases are contributed to the Archive by jurisdictions containing 67% of the U.S. juvenile population.

A national resource since 1927

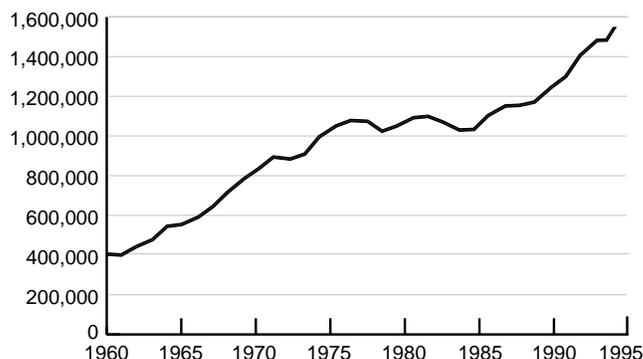
The National Center for Juvenile Justice has maintained the National Juvenile Court Data Archive for the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) since 1975. The roots of the Archive, however, reach back to work conducted in the 1920's by the U.S. Department of Labor. The first publication of national juvenile court data, *Juvenile Court Statistics 1927*, was published by the Children's Bureau within the Department of Labor. Responsibility for this work was transferred to the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare in the 1950's; it has been supported by the U.S. Department of Justice since the creation of OJJDP in 1974.

Low-cost, high-benefit data collection

Data collection for the Archive does not depend on uniform Federal regulations or reporting requirements. Rather than imposing Federal definitions and standardized data forms on thousands of local courts using widely varying terminology and data processing techniques, the Archive accepts data in the format and structure that each local court uses. The Archive then creates comparable versions of all data files, thereby enabling the calculation of national statistics. This approach reduces the administrative burden on State and local officials while producing a large reserve of data that can be used to analyze juvenile justice trends, policies, and programs.

Between 1960 and 1994, juvenile court delinquency caseloads increased 280%

Estimated delinquency cases



Data Source: *Juvenile Court Statistics* (annual reporting series).
Analysis by Melissa Sickmund, National Center for Juvenile Justice.

Archive data files are used in many ways

While *Juvenile Court Statistics* is the Archive's best-known product, the data files it collects meet many other needs. Archive data files are used to answer research questions that could never be addressed by a general-purpose national survey or statistics program. Examples include the following:

- ◆ A 1985 study used data from four States to model the judicial resources that would be required under various juvenile court structures being considered in Arkansas.
- ◆ A 1992 study of case records from Utah established that the use of restitution was associated with a significantly lower rate of recidivism among juvenile probationers.
- ◆ A 1996 study of data from 16 States indicated that the median time between referral and final disposition for delinquency cases increased 26% between 1985 and 1994.

- ◆ A 1997 study of delinquency cases from Arizona found that only one of every six youth charged with a violent offense returned to court for a new violent offense charge.

Nongovernment researchers often use Archive data

Virtually every college textbook on juvenile crime and delinquency relies on Archive data to describe the Nation's juvenile justice system. Using the Archive's data, academic and professional researchers have published a range of studies, including those listed below:

- ◆ Farrington, D., H. Snyder, and T. Finnegan. 1988. Specialization in juvenile court careers. *Criminology* 26(3):461-485.
- ◆ Feld, B. 1991. Justice by geography: Urban, suburban, and rural variations in juvenile justice administration. *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 82:156-210.
- ◆ Loeber, R., and H. Snyder. 1990. Rate of offending in juvenile careers: Findings of constancy and change in lambda. *Criminology* 28(1):97-109.
- ◆ McGarrell, E. 1993. Trends in racial disproportionality in juvenile court processing: 1985-1989. *Crime & Delinquency* 39(1):29-48.
- ◆ Sampson, R., and J. Laub. 1993. Structural variations in juvenile court processing: Inequality, the underclass, and social control. *Law & Society Review* 27(2):285-311.

Improving the quality of juvenile justice data

Because State and local information systems are the building blocks of national data, the Archive works with agencies across the country to improve their automated information systems. In recent years, Archive staff assisted with the development of juvenile justice information systems in California, Connecticut, Georgia, Montana, Nevada, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Utah, and West Virginia.

The Archive also hosts an annual workshop for the courts and agencies that contribute data to the project. These national conferences, which give juvenile justice data professionals the

opportunity to learn about innovations in other jurisdictions, have given rise to a national network of juvenile justice data professionals that can be called upon by agencies seeking to develop and improve their own information systems.

Using data to inform and improve policy

The National Juvenile Court Data Archive is the only source of national information about U.S. juvenile courts. Through the ongoing efforts of the Archive, detailed data generated every day by thousands of autonomous juvenile courts across the United States are compiled into a national data base. Seventy years of Federal support for the development and improvement of the Archive have resulted in the establishment of a large base of information that can be used to assess the scope and effectiveness of the Nation's response to juvenile crime.

Easy access to juvenile court data

The national delinquency estimates produced with the Archive's data files are made available in an easy-to-use software package, *Easy Access to Juvenile Court Statistics*. With the support of OJJDP, the Archive distributes this package to facilitate independent analysis of Archive data while eliminating the need for other analysis packages. The *Easy Access* software can be ordered directly from the Archive or downloaded from OJJDP's World Wide Web home page (see below).

For further information

To obtain research reports produced by the National Juvenile Court Data Archive, contact the Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse at 800-638-8736. For additional information, contact the National Center for Juvenile Justice, 710 Fifth Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15219, or call 412-227-6950. Information about these and other juvenile justice products may be obtained by viewing the OJJDP home page at: <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.

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