



OJJDP FACT SHEET

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Delinquency Cases in Juvenile Courts, 1996

by Anne L. Stahl

Counts and trends

Juvenile courts in the United States processed an estimated 1.8 million delinquency cases in 1996. Delinquency cases involve juveniles charged with criminal law violations. The number of delinquency cases handled by juvenile courts increased 49% between 1987 and 1996. Since 1987, the number of drug law violation cases increased 144%, person offense cases increased 100%, public order offense cases increased 58%, and property offense cases increased 23%.

These estimates of cases handled by U.S. juvenile courts in 1996 are based on data from nearly 1,800 courts that had jurisdiction over 67% of the U.S. juvenile population. The unit of count used in this Fact Sheet is a case disposed during the calendar year by a court with juvenile jurisdiction. Each case represents one youth processed by a juvenile court 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 calendar year. For a full description of the methodology used to collect the data and generate the national estimates, see the forthcoming Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) Report, *Juvenile Court Statistics 1996*.

Gender

Approximately three of every four (77%) delinquency cases involved a male in 1996, which was slightly less than in 1987 (81%). Males accounted for 75% of person offense cases, 77% of both property offense cases and public order offense cases, and 86% of drug law violation cases in 1996. However, between 1987 and 1996, the number of delinquency cases involving females increased 76%, compared with a 42% increase for males. The growth in cases involving females outpaced the growth for males for all offense categories except drug violations.

Age

Fifty-nine percent of the juvenile delinquency cases processed in 1996 involved a juvenile under age 16, compared with 56% in 1987. In 1996, juveniles under age 16 were responsible for 64% of person offense cases, 62% of property offense cases, 54% of public order offense cases, and 42% of drug law violation cases.

Race

In 1996, approximately 79% of the juvenile population in the United States was white and 15% was black. However, black juveniles were involved in 30% of the delinquency cases handled by juvenile courts

Delinquency Cases by Most Serious Offense, 1996

Most Serious Offense	Number of Cases	Percent Change		
		1987-96	1992-96	1995-96
Total	1,757,600	49%	18%	3%
Person Offenses	381,500	100	24	2
Criminal homicide	2,400	74	11	-12
Forcible rape	6,900	60	8	2
Robbery	37,300	67	13	-5
Aggravated assault	89,900	135	14	-3
Simple assault	216,600	106	39	6
Other violent sex offenses	8,900	39	-6	-4
Other person offenses	19,400	51	-15	-3
Property Offenses	874,400	23	2	1
Burglary	141,100	6	-11	2
Larceny-theft	421,600	27	11	1
Motor vehicle theft	51,600	7	-27	-2
Arson	8,900	49	13	-21
Vandalism	119,800	39	1	0
Trespassing	65,000	18	9	1
Stolen property offenses	32,900	6	1	0
Other property offenses	33,400	57	1	12
Drug Law Violations	176,300	144	143	11
Public Order Offenses	325,400	58	34	7
Obstruction of justice	125,800	70	58	15
Disorderly conduct	90,200	95	40	7
Weapons offenses	41,200	109	-3	-12
Liquor law violations	10,300	-44	-10	-16
Nonviolent sex offenses	10,600	-17	-20	1
Other public order offenses	47,300	40	52	15
Violent Crime Index*	136,600	106	13	-3
Property Crime Index**	623,300	20	1	1

*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.

and white juveniles were involved in 66%. Black juveniles were involved in 38% of person offense cases, 33% of drug law violation cases, 32% of public order offense cases, and 26% of property offense cases. White juveniles were involved in 59% of person offense cases, 65% of drug law violation cases, 64% of public order offense cases, and 70% of property offense cases.

Detention

One of the first decisions made when 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 18% of the delinquency cases processed in 1996. Detention was used in 23% of drug law violations, 23% of person offense cases, 21% of public order offense cases, and 14% of property offense cases.

Intake decision

After the details of a case have been reviewed, a decision is made to dismiss, handle informally, or formally process the case before a judge. About 20% of all delinquency cases in 1996 were dismissed at intake, often because they were not legally sufficient. Another 24% were processed informally, with the juvenile voluntarily agreeing to the recommended disposition (for example, probation). More than half (56%) of delinquency cases in 1996 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 considers waiving jurisdiction over a matter and transferring the case to criminal court so the juvenile may be tried as if he or she were an adult. Waiver decisions often are based on a number of factors, including the seriousness of the offense, the juvenile's prior record, and the youth's amenability to treatment. In 1996, juvenile court judges waived 10,000 delinquency cases, 47% more than in 1987 but 18% less than in 1994, the peak year. Of the cases waived in

1996, 43% involved a person offense, 37% involved a property offense, 14% involved a drug law violation, and 6% involved a public order offense as the most serious charge.

Adjudication and disposition

Adjudicatory hearings are used to establish responsibility (analogous to determining guilt or innocence) for an alleged delinquent act. A disposition hearing is held to decide if the juvenile should be placed under court supervision and what disposition should be imposed. In 1996, juveniles were adjudicated delinquent in more than half (58%) of the 983,100 cases brought before a judge. Once adjudicated, juveniles in the majority of cases (54%) were placed on formal probation, whereas in 28% of the cases juveniles were placed in a residential facility. Thirteen percent resulted in other dispositions, such as referral to an outside agency, community service, or restitution. Between 1987 and 1996, the number of cases in which the court ordered an adjudicated delinquent be placed in a residential facility increased 51%, while the number of formal probation cases increased 58%.

For further information

This Fact Sheet is based on the forthcoming Report, *Juvenile Court Statistics 1996*. Copies will be available from 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.ojjdp.ncjrs.org.

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

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