



OJJDP FACT SHEET

John J. Wilson, Acting Administrator November 2000 #19

Juvenile Delinquency Probation Caseload, 1988–1997

by Meghan C. Scahill

More than one-third of delinquency cases resulted in probation in 1997

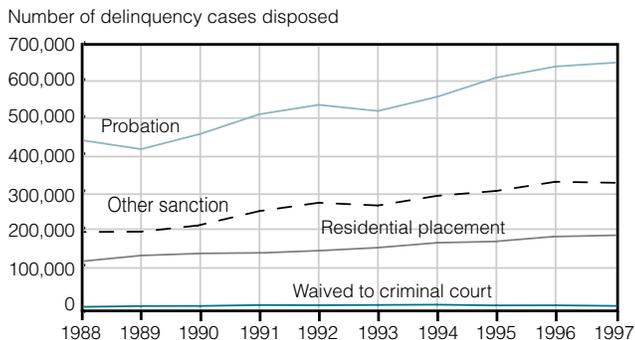
Courts with juvenile jurisdiction handled nearly 1.8 million delinquency cases in 1997. Probation supervision was the most severe disposition in almost 37% (645,600) of all delinquency cases. The number of cases placed on probation grew 48% between 1988 and 1997. During that time, the overall delinquency caseload also increased 48%. These findings are based on national data on delinquency cases processed by juvenile courts from 1988 through 1997. The national estimates were generated using information contributed to the National Juvenile Court Data Archive. The analysis is based on data from more than 1,900 jurisdictions containing more than 70% of the U.S. juvenile population (youth age 10 through the upper age of original juvenile court jurisdiction in each State).

Probation can be court ordered or voluntary

Some youth are ordered to probation after being adjudicated delinquent (analogous to being convicted in criminal court). In contrast to court-ordered probation, some youth who are not adjudicated delinquent voluntarily agree to abide by certain probation conditions, often with the understanding that if they successfully complete their probationary period, their case will be terminated without any formal processing.

In 1997, adjudicated delinquents ordered to probation accounted for nearly half (49%) of all delinquency cases placed on probation (nearly 318,700 cases). In the remaining delinquency cases (51%), the youth agreed to voluntary, or informal, probation. The number of cases that resulted in court-ordered probation rose 67% from 1988 through 1997. In comparison, the number of cases that resulted in informal probation increased 34%, reflecting the trend toward more formal processing of delinquency cases.

Probation was ordered in 56% of the slightly more than 1 million cases that received a juvenile court sanction



Probation cases accounted for 51% of the increase in delinquency cases that received a juvenile court sanction (those that were not dismissed or otherwise released).

Probation was the most likely disposition for cases in which the youth was adjudicated delinquent

Most Severe Disposition	Percent of all cases in which the juvenile was adjudicated delinquent		
	1988	1993	1997
Total	100%	100%	100%
Probation	56	54	55
Residential placement	31	29	28
Other sanction	10	13	13
Released without additional sanction	4	4	4

Note: Detail may not add to 100% because of rounding.

The demographic profile of probation cases changed little since 1988

In 1997, 69% of cases placed on probation involved white juveniles, 28% involved black juveniles, and 3% involved juveniles of other races. Between 1988 and 1997, the probation caseload of black juveniles grew 50% (from 119,500 to 180,000), compared with a 46% increase in the probation caseload of white juveniles (from 305,400 to 446,200). Most cases (76%) placed on probation in 1997 involved males (about 492,700 cases). However, the female share of the probation caseload has grown in the last decade—from 18% in 1988 to 24% in 1997. Juveniles who were 14 to 16 years old accounted for 62% (about 403,000 cases) of the probation caseload in 1997, up slightly from 60% in 1988.

Property offense cases made up the greatest proportion of the probation caseload

The offense profile of the probation caseload changed somewhat since 1988. Property offense cases continued to account for the majority of cases placed on probation, but their share of the probation caseload declined. For example, the proportion of adjudicated cases that involved property offenses and received formal probation as the most severe disposition declined 12 percentage points between 1988 and 1997 (from 59% to 47%). As a result, the types of offenses resulting in probation contained greater proportions of person, drug, and public order offense cases in 1997 than in 1988.

Offense profile of cases in which the juvenile was adjudicated delinquent and placed on probation

Most Serious Offense	1988	1993	1997
Total	100%	100%	100%
Person	16	21	22
Property	59	54	47
Drugs	8	7	12
Public order	16	18	19

Note: Detail may not add to 100% because of rounding.

Across offenses, the likelihood of probation for cases in which the youth was adjudicated delinquent changed very little from 1988–97

Most Serious Offense	1988	1993	1997
Total	56%	57%	55%
Person	55	53	56
Property	57	56	57
Drugs	57	52	56
Public order	50	50	49

For further information

This Fact Sheet is based on the Report *Juvenile Court Statistics 1997*. Copies 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, Pittsburgh, PA, 412-227-6950. This software can also be downloaded from OJJDP's home page: www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org.

Meghan C. Scahill, Esq., is a Research Assistant with the National Juvenile Court Data Archive, which is supported by an OJJDP grant.

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