



OJJDP FACT SHEET

J. Robert Flores, Administrator

September 2003 #08

Drug Offense Cases in Juvenile Courts, 1990–1999

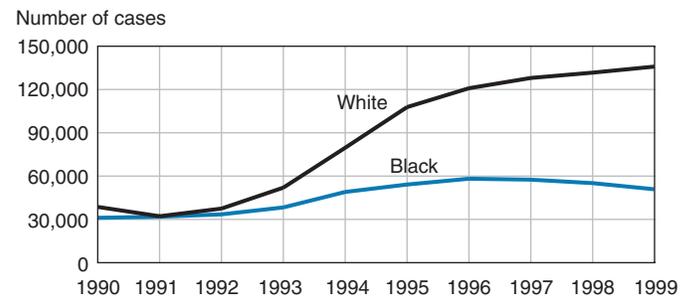
by Anne L. Stahl

The number of juvenile court cases involving drug offenses more than doubled between 1990 and 1999

In 1999, juvenile courts in the United States handled an estimated 191,200 delinquency cases in which a drug offense was the most serious charge. Drug offense cases accounted for 11% of all delinquency cases in 1999, compared with 5% in 1990. The number of drug offense cases processed in 1999 was 169% greater than in 1990.

Males have historically accounted for the majority of drug offense cases processed in juvenile courts. Between 1990 and 1999, males

Drug offense cases involving white youth increased 252% between 1990 and 1999, compared with 64% for those involving black youth



accounted for 84% to 88% of drug violation cases. Among white juveniles, males made up 81% to 84% of the drug offense caseload.¹ Among black juveniles, males accounted for 92% to 94% of the drug offense caseload.

The proportion of the drug offense caseload involving white youth increased from 54% in 1990 to 71% in 1999. For cases involving black juveniles, this pattern was reversed. The proportion decreased from 44% in 1990 to 27% in 1999.

The use of detention for drug offense cases declined since 1990

The proportion of drug offense cases involving detention at some point between court referral and case disposition was 38% in 1990, representing 26,800 cases. In 1999, this proportion was 23% but represented 43,500 cases, an indication of the increased drug offense caseload. Although the number of drug offense cases involving detention increased 62% between 1990 and 1999, the number of drug cases not involving detention increased 234% (from 44,200 to 147,700), possibly reflecting a limit of available juvenile detention bedspace.

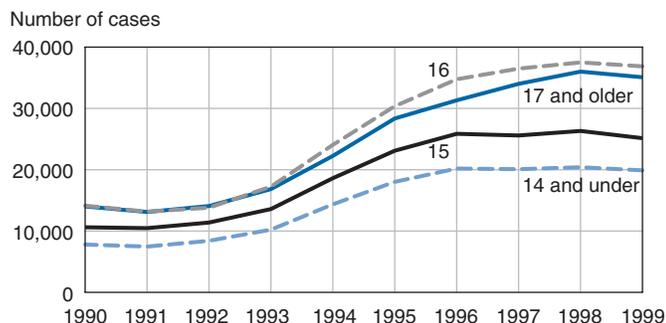
¹ Juveniles of Hispanic ethnicity can be of any race, but most are included in the white racial category.

Characteristics of drug offense cases in juvenile court

	1990	1995	1999
Gender			
Male	87%	86%	84%
Female	13	14	16
Age at referral			
14 or younger	18%	20%	19%
15	22	23	21
16	30	30	31
17 or older	31	28	29
Race			
White	54%	65%	71%
Black	44	33	27
Other	2	2	2
Predisposition detention			
Detained	38%	21%	23%
Not detained	62	79	77
Manner of handling			
Formal	66%	60%	61%
Informal	34	40	39
Outcome of formal handling			
Adjudicated	59%	58%	67%
Not adjudicated	38	40	32
Waived to criminal court	3	1	1
Disposition of adjudicated cases			
Placed out of the home	36%	24%	22%
Probation or supervision	54	54	63
Other (fines, restitution, etc.)	6	15	11
Dismissed or released	3	8	5

Detail may not add to 100% because of rounding.

The number of drug offense cases increased more than 150% for all age groups between 1990 and 1999



Despite the growth in the number of drug cases involving juveniles 14 or younger, they represented the smallest share of the caseload processed in 1999 (19%).

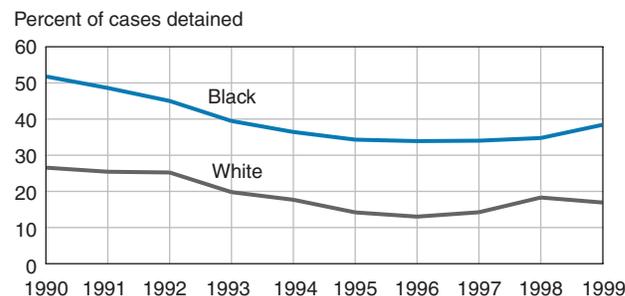
The number of drug offense cases handled formally more than doubled between 1990 and 1999

Although the juvenile courts formally processed (with the filing of a petition) a smaller proportion of drug offense cases in 1999 than in 1990 (61% versus 66%), the number of formally handled drug cases increased more than 150% (from 44,200 to 117,000). In 1999, about 1% of formally handled drug cases were judicially waived to criminal court, accounting for more than 16% of all the delinquency cases waived in that year.

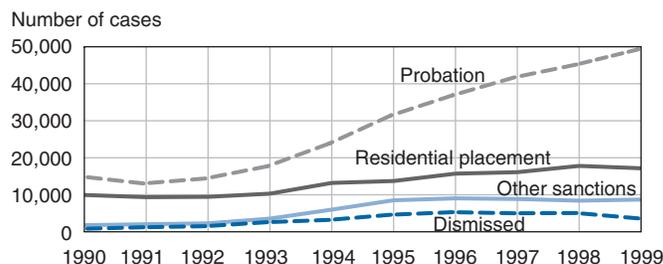
The majority of formally processed drug cases in 1999 (67%) resulted in the juvenile being adjudicated delinquent, and in 22% of these cases, the most severe disposition was residential placement. The courts ordered probation in 63% of the cases, other sanctions in 11%, and in 5% the juvenile was released with no further sanctions.

In 1999, most formally petitioned drug cases that were not waived or adjudicated were dismissed (67%). In 14% of the cases, the juvenile agreed to informal probation and in another 17% to other dispositions. About 3% of the cases resulted in voluntary out-of-home placement.

Drug offense cases involving black youth were more likely to be detained than those involving white youth



The number of adjudicated drug offense cases in which the court ordered probation as the most severe disposition increased 230% between 1990 and 1999



For further information

This Fact Sheet is based on the forthcoming Report *Juvenile Court Statistics 1999*, which will be available on the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention’s (OJJDP’s) Web site (www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ojjdp). To learn more about juvenile court cases, visit OJJDP’s *Statistical Briefing Book* (ojjdp.ncjrs.org/ojstatbb/index.html) and click on “Juveniles in Court.” OJJDP also supports Easy Access to Juvenile Court Statistics, a Web-based application that analyzes the data files used for the *Juvenile Court Statistics* Report. This application is available from the *Statistical Briefing Book*.

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

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention is a component of the Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Assistance, the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, and the Office for Victims of Crime.