



OJJDP FACT SHEET

J. Robert Flores, Administrator

February 2008 #01

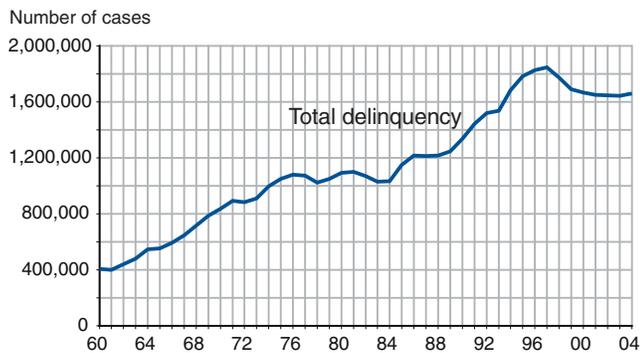
Delinquency Cases in Juvenile Courts, 2004

by Anne L. Stahl

Counts and Trends¹

In 2004, juvenile courts in the United States processed an estimated 1.66 million delinquency cases that involved juveniles charged with criminal law violations. In the 10 years between 1995 and 2004, the number of delinquency cases handled by juvenile courts decreased 7%. During this time, public order offense cases increased 41%, drug law violation cases increased 19%, person offense cases increased 2%, and property offense cases decreased 33%.

The 2004 delinquency caseload was four times the 1960 caseload, but has decreased in recent years



Gender

Between 1995 and 2004, the proportion of the delinquency caseload involving juvenile males decreased from 78% to 73%. In 2004, juvenile males accounted for 80% (155,100) of drug law violation cases, 73% (438,800) of property offenses, 72% (331,900) of public order offense cases, and 70% (282,400) of person offenses.

¹ Estimates are based on data from nearly 1,900 courts with jurisdiction over more than 77% of the Nation's juvenile population. 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. A youth may be involved in more than one case during the calendar year.

Delinquency cases, disposed by most serious offense, 2004

Most serious offense	Number of cases	Percent change		
		1995-04	2000-04	2003-04
Total	1,660,700	-7%	0%	1%
Person offenses	400,700	2	6	1
Criminal homicide	1,700	-42	-2	-9
Forcible rape	4,200	-27	-3	-7
Robbery	21,100	-50	-1	-1
Aggravated assault	44,600	-39	-8	1
Simple assault	284,300	23	10	2
Other violent sex offenses	15,800	34	22	-2
Other person offenses	29,000	12	1	3
Property offenses	603,200	-33	-10	-2
Burglary	95,500	-35	-11	-5
Larceny-theft	278,300	-34	-10	-1
Motor vehicle theft	33,900	-37	-7	-9
Arson	8,500	-26	-8	1
Vandalism	96,300	-23	-5	0
Trespassing	50,700	-25	-5	1
Stolen property offenses	19,400	-48	-23	-5
Other property offenses	20,700	-40	-20	-5
Drug law violations	193,700	19	0	2
Public order offenses	463,100	41	9	5
Obstruction of justice	216,500	70	5	3
Disorderly conduct	121,600	35	27	9
Weapons offenses	41,000	-12	8	9
Liquor law violations	29,000	78	4	3
Nonviolent sex offenses	13,800	48	4	0
Other public order offenses	41,000	5	-11	-1
Violent Crime Index	71,600	-42	-6	0
Property Crime Index	416,100	-35	-10	-3

Detail may not add up to totals because of rounding.

While the male delinquency caseload decreased 13% (from 1,385,700 to 1,208,200) between 1995 and 2004, delinquency cases involving juvenile females increased 14% (from 398,600 to 452,500). The increase in the number of drug and public order offense cases involving juvenile females (64% and 76%, respectively) outpaced that of their male counterparts (12% and 31%), and the decrease in the number of property cases involving male juveniles

(37%) was also greater than the decrease in the corresponding caseload involving female delinquents (19%). In addition, person offense cases involving juvenile females increased 22%, while person offense cases involving male juveniles decreased 5%.

Between 1995 and 2004, the juvenile delinquency caseload involving simple assault offenses increased for both males (15%) and females (41%), while the aggravated assault caseload decreased 41% for males and 32% for females. In the public order offense category, the greatest increase for both males and females was in liquor law violation cases (68% and 101%, respectively).

Age

Fifty-seven percent of juvenile delinquency cases processed in 2004 involved a juvenile younger than age 16 at time of referral, compared with 60% in 1995. Juveniles younger than age 16 were involved in 64% (255,700) of person offense cases, 60% (359,100) of property offense cases, 54% (251,800) of public order offense cases, and 43% (82,400) of drug law violation cases in 2004.

Race

In 2004, white youth made up 78% of the U.S. juvenile population; black youth 16%; Asian, Native Hawaiian, and other Pacific Islander (Asian/NHPI) youth 4%; and American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) youth 1%. Sixty-six percent (1,096,500) of the delinquency cases handled by juvenile courts involved white youth, 31% (513,800) black youth, 2% (26,100) AI/AN youth, and 1% (24,200) Asian/NHPI youth.

Detention

An important part of processing a delinquency case involves deciding whether to detain a youth in a secure facility prior to adjudication. Juveniles may be detained for a variety of reasons such as for their own protection, to protect the community, or to ensure the juvenile's appearance at court hearings. Juveniles were detained in 21% (341,300) of the delinquency cases processed in 2004. Detention was used in 24% (109,900) of public order offense cases, 24% (97,800) of person offense cases, 18% (35,100) of drug law violation cases, and 16% (98,500) of property offense cases.

Intake Decision

Justice system authorities must review each case and decide whether to dismiss the case, handle it informally, or formally process the case before a judge. About 17% (281,700) of all delinquency cases in 2004 were dismissed at intake, often for lack of legal sufficiency. Another 26% (438,200 cases) were processed informally, with the juvenile voluntarily agreeing to the recommended disposition (e.g., probation). More than half (57% or 940,800) of delinquency cases in 2004 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 may waive jurisdiction over a matter and transfer the case to criminal court so

the juvenile can be tried as an adult. Waiver decisions are often 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 2004, juvenile court judges waived 9,400 delinquency cases—18% fewer than in 1995 (11,500), and 21% more than in 2000 (7,800). Changes in State law in the 1990s, which expanded methods of transferring juveniles to criminal court, meant that this decrease did not necessarily reflect a reduction in the number of individuals under age 18 who were handled in criminal courts since 1985.

Forty-three percent (4,000) of the cases waived in 2004 involved a person offense as the most serious charge, 33% (3,100) involved a property offense, 15% (1,400) involved a drug law violation, and 9% (800) involved a public order offense as the most serious charge.

Adjudication and Disposition

Adjudicatory hearings establish responsibility for an alleged delinquent act. Disposition hearings are held to decide what sanctions should be imposed on a juvenile who has been adjudicated delinquent and whether the juvenile should be placed under court supervision. In 2004, juveniles were adjudicated delinquent in 67% (628,600) of the cases brought before a judge. Once adjudicated, juveniles in 63% (393,100) of the cases were placed on formal probation. In another 22% (140,700) of the cases, juveniles were placed in a residential facility, and 15% (94,900) of adjudicated cases resulted in other dispositions, such as referral to an outside agency, community service, or restitution. Between 1995 and 2004, the number of cases in which the court ordered an adjudicated delinquent to be placed in a residential facility decreased 7%, while the number of formal probation cases increased 28%.

For Further Information

This Fact Sheet is based on the report *Juvenile Court Statistics 2003–2004*, available on OJJDP's Web site (www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ojjdp).

To learn more about juvenile court cases, visit OJJDP's Statistical Briefing Book (www.ojjdp.ncjrs.gov/ojstatbb/index.html). Click on "Statistics" from OJJDP's home page and select "Juveniles in Court."

Anne L. Stahl is Manager of the National Juvenile Court Data Archive, which is supported by OJJDP grant 2005–JL–FX–0250.

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 Community Capacity Development Office; the National Institute of Justice; the Office for Victims of Crime; and the Office of Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering, and Tracking (SMART).