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John J. Wilson, Acting Administrator

October 2000

JUVENILE JUSTICE BULLETIN

Offenders in Juvenile Court, 1997

Melissa Sickmund

Juvenile courts in the United States processed nearly 1.8 million delinquency cases in 1997. This number represents a 48% increase over the number of delinquency cases handled in 1988. Nearly 6 out of 10 cases processed in 1997 were handled formally (i.e., a petition was filed requesting an adjudicatory or waiver hearing). In nearly 6 out of 10 petitioned cases, the court adjudicated the youth delinquent. The juvenile court waived jurisdiction and transferred youth to criminal court in 1% of formally handled cases. The court ordered the youth placed in a residential facility in 3 out of 10 adjudicated delinquency cases.

These statistics are among the findings reported in *Juvenile Court Statistics 1997*, the latest in a series of Reports on cases handled by U.S. courts with juvenile jurisdiction. Although courts with juvenile jurisdiction handle a variety of cases, including abuse, neglect, adoption, and traffic violations, *Juvenile Court Statistics* Reports focus on the disposition of delinquency cases and formally processed status offense cases (see page 12 for a description of status offenses). Each Report includes national estimates of the number of cases handled by juvenile courts and an appendix that lists caseload statistics for individual States and jurisdictions within each State. This Bulletin highlights some of the important findings presented in the 1997 Report.

Findings from *Juvenile Court Statistics 1997* include the following:

- ◆ The number of criminal homicide cases processed by juvenile courts dropped 17% between 1996 and 1997.
- ◆ In 22% of delinquency cases processed in 1997, the most serious charge was a person offense. Person offenses accounted for 17% of all cases in 1988.
- ◆ Juveniles were held in secure detention facilities at some point between referral and disposition in 19% of all delinquency cases disposed in 1997, about the same proportion as in 1988.
- ◆ There were 25% more delinquency cases judicially waived to criminal court in 1997 than in 1988, but 28% fewer than in 1994.

These national estimates of juvenile court cases are based on data from nearly 2,000 courts that had jurisdiction over 71% of the U.S. juvenile population in 1997. The unit of count in *Juvenile Court Statistics* is a case disposed during the calendar year by a court with juvenile jurisdiction. It is possible for an individual youth to have been involved in more than one case during the year. Each case represents a youth processed by a juvenile court on a new referral, regardless of the number of offenses contained in that referral. Cases involving multiple offenses are categorized

From the Administrator

From 1988 to 1997, the number of delinquency cases handled by the Nation's juvenile courts rose 48 percent, with disproportionate increases in person offense, weapons offense, and drug offense cases.

In 1997, juvenile courts processed nearly 1.8 million delinquency cases, virtually the same number as the previous year. The 1997 offense profile also paralleled that of 1996.

Offenders in Juvenile Court, 1997 presents these and other findings from *Juvenile Court Statistics 1997*, the latest in a series of OJJDP Reports that provide data from the National Juvenile Court Data Archive. The Archive, which is maintained for OJJDP by the National Center for Juvenile Justice, is the only comprehensive source of data about youth referred to U.S. juvenile courts for delinquency and status offenses.

The estimates provided in this Bulletin are derived from data from nearly 2,000 courts that had jurisdiction over 71 percent of the U.S. juvenile population in 1997. The Bulletin, like the larger Report on which it is based, serves as a barometer of trends in juvenile crime. It is my hope that the information it provides will prove useful to juvenile justice professionals, public officials, policymakers, and others concerned about juvenile violence and delinquency.

John J. Wilson
Acting Administrator

according to the most serious offense. For example, a case involving both a charge of vandalism and a charge of robbery would be characterized as a robbery case. Similarly, cases involving multiple dispositions are categorized according to the most restrictive disposition. A case that resulted in both probation and placement in a residential facility would be coded as a residential placement.

Delinquency Cases

U.S. juvenile courts handled 4,800 delinquency cases each day

In 1997, U.S. courts with juvenile jurisdiction handled an estimated 1.8 million cases in which the juvenile was charged with a delinquency offense (i.e., an offense for which an adult could be prosecuted in criminal court).

An individual juvenile may be involved in more than one case during the year. The annual ratio of cases to juveniles is about 3 to 2. Therefore, juvenile courts handled about 1.2 million individual juveniles charged with delinquency offenses in 1997.

Juvenile court workloads have grown and changed

Changes in the juvenile court delinquency caseload in recent years have strained the court's resources and programs. The 48% increase between 1988 and 1997 in the volume of cases means that juvenile courts handled 1,600 more cases each day in 1997 than in 1988. Over this period, however, the courts were asked to respond not only to more cases, but also to a different type of caseload.

From 1988 through 1997, the juvenile courts saw disproportionate increases in violent and other person offense, weapons offense, and drug offense cases. The property offense share of the delinquency caseload declined from approximately 60% to approximately 50%. Courts have had to adapt their program resources accordingly.

The 1997 delinquency caseload of nearly 1.8 million was virtually the same in volume as the caseload for 1996. The offense profile for the 1997 caseload was also essentially the same as the profile in 1996.

Delinquency cases may be referred to juvenile court from a number of different

Youth were charged with a property offense in nearly half the delinquency cases handled by juvenile courts in 1997

Most serious offense	Number of cases	Percentage of total cases	Percent change	
			1988-97	1996-97
Total delinquency	1,755,100	100%	48%	0%
Person offenses	390,800	22	97	2
Criminal homicide	2,000	<1	31	-17
Forcible rape	6,500	<1	48	-5
Robbery	33,400	2	55	-11
Aggravated assault	67,900	4	66	-18
Simple assault	248,800	14	124	11
Other violent sex offense	10,200	1	59	8
Other person offense	22,000	1	72	3
Property offenses	841,800	48	19	-3
Burglary	135,900	8	2	-4
Larceny-theft	401,300	23	23	-4
Motor vehicle theft	48,800	3	-11	-6
Arson	9,300	1	44	4
Vandalism	114,800	7	41	-4
Trespassing	65,100	4	28	1
Stolen property offense	33,800	2	5	0
Other property offense	32,800	2	60	0
Drug law violations	182,400	10	125	4
Public order offenses	340,100	19	67	4
Obstruction of justice	132,600	8	78	4
Disorderly conduct	92,300	5	107	3
Weapons offense	38,500	2	74	-6
Liquor law violation	11,100	1	-31	0
Nonviolent sex offense	11,100	1	-4	7
Other public order	54,600	3	56	17
Violent Crime Index*	109,800	6	61	-15
Property Crime Index**	595,300	34	14	-4

◆ Person offense cases accounted for 22% of all delinquency cases handled by juvenile courts in 1997. Cases involving a Violent Crime Index offense accounted for 6% of all delinquency cases.

◆ Ten percent of all delinquency cases involved drug law violations as the most serious charge.

◆ Although much of the growth in court referrals is related to arrests, changes in juvenile court caseloads also depend on other forces. Between 1988 and 1997, the overall growth in juvenile court cases (48%) was greater than the growth in arrests of persons under age 18 (35%). Violent Crime Index arrests rose 49%, arrests for Property Crime Index offenses rose 1%, and drug arrests rose 125%.

*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 calculations are based on unrounded numbers.

sources, including law enforcement, social service agencies, schools, parents, probation officers, and victims. Law enforcement agencies refer the majority of delinquency cases to juvenile court (85% in 1997). The proportion of all cases that

were law enforcement referrals varied by offense: person (85%), property (90%), drugs (93%), and public order (67%).

Age, Sex, and Race of Delinquent Youth

Delinquency case rates rose substantially between 1988 and 1997 for most age groups

In 1997, juvenile courts handled 61.1 delinquency cases for every 1,000 juveniles in the U.S. population—i.e., youth subject to original juvenile court jurisdiction (see Note on page 14). The 1997 delinquency case rate was 30% greater than the 1988 rate.

Age at referral	Delinquency cases per 1,000 juveniles in age group		Percent change
	1988	1997	
All ages	46.8	61.1	30%
10	6.0	5.7	-5
11	9.7	11.5	18
12	19.2	24.6	28
13	35.3	47.4	34
14	56.7	73.6	30
15	73.1	97.8	34
16	87.0	120.7	39
17	87.7	118.3	35

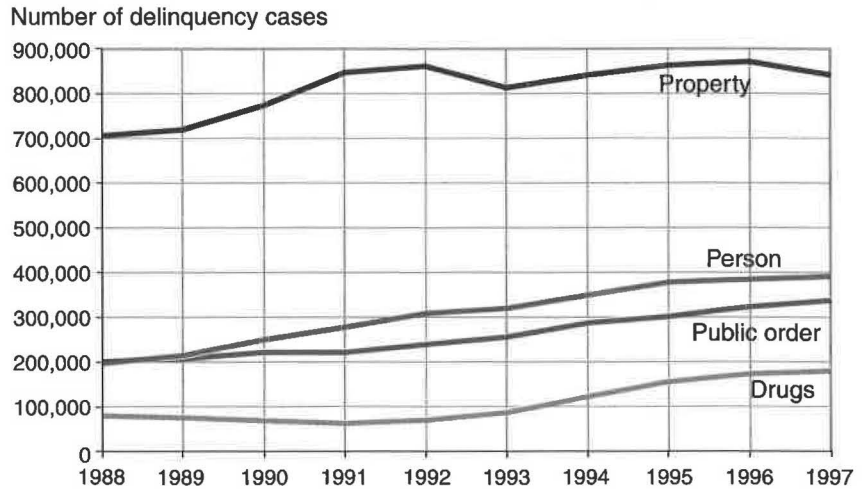
Juveniles age 15 and older accounted for more than 6 in 10 delinquency cases in 1997

Juveniles age 15 and older made up 63% of the delinquency caseload in 1997, juveniles ages 13 and 14 were involved in 26% of delinquency cases, and juveniles age 12 and younger accounted for 10%. There was some variation in age profiles across offense. Juveniles age 12 and younger accounted for greater proportions of person (13%) and property (12%) cases than of drug (2%) or public order (6%) cases. These proportions were not substantially different from those in 1988.

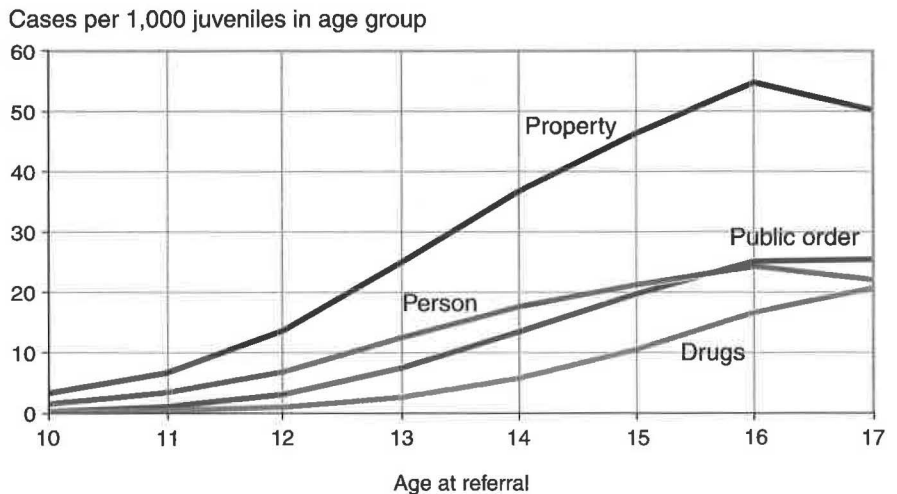
Why did juvenile courts handle more 16- than 17-year-olds in 1997?

Although comparable numbers of 17- and 16-year-olds were arrested in 1997, the number of juvenile court cases involving 17-year-olds (282,400) was lower than the number involving 16-year-olds (414,100). The explanation partly lies in the fact that, in 13 States, 17-year-olds are excluded from original juvenile court juris-

Caseloads generally increased between 1988 and 1997 across the four major offense categories



Across all ages in 1997, property offense case rates were highest, but drug offense case rates had the greatest percentage of increase with age



diction (see Note on page 14). In these States, all 17-year-olds are legally adults who face prosecution in criminal rather than juvenile court. Thus, far fewer 17-year-olds than 16-year-olds are subject to original juvenile court jurisdiction in the United States.

Even after controlling for this, the case rates for 16-year-olds were still slightly greater than the rates for 17-year-olds. One reason may be State legislation that

targets certain older juveniles for processing directly in criminal courts (via either statutory exclusion or concurrent jurisdiction provisions). In these situations, when a youth of juvenile age is arrested, the matter goes before a criminal court rather than before a juvenile court.

Males are involved in about 8 in 10 delinquency cases each year

Although they constitute only half of the juvenile population, males were involved in well over 70% of person, property, and public order offense cases and in 85% of drug law violation cases handled by the courts in 1997. The male proportions were somewhat higher in 1988.

Most serious offense	Percentage of cases involving males	
	1988	1997
Delinquency	81%	77%
Person	80	74
Property	81	76
Drugs	86	85
Public order	79	76

Compared with caseloads of males, female delinquency caseloads grew at a faster pace

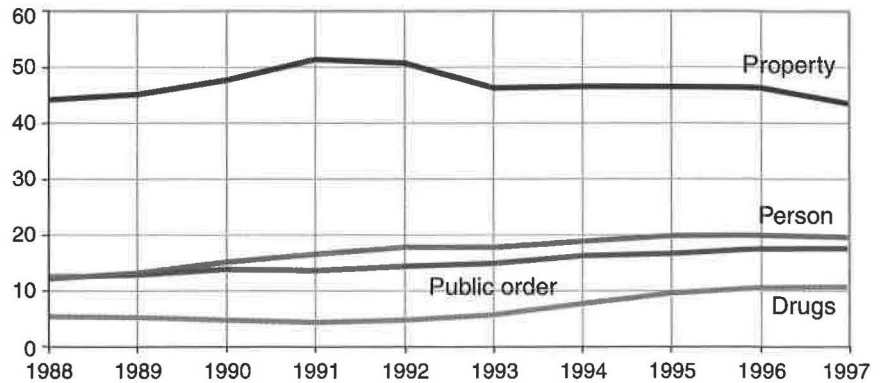
The number of delinquency cases involving females rose 83% between 1988 and 1997, compared with 39% for males. The growth in cases involving females outpaced the growth in cases involving males for all offense categories.

Most serious offense	Percent change 1988-97	
	Males	Females
Delinquency	39%	83%
Person	82	155
Property	11	54
Drugs	124	132
Public order	60	93

Case rates for females are much lower than those for males, but rate increases have been sharper for females

Male case rates

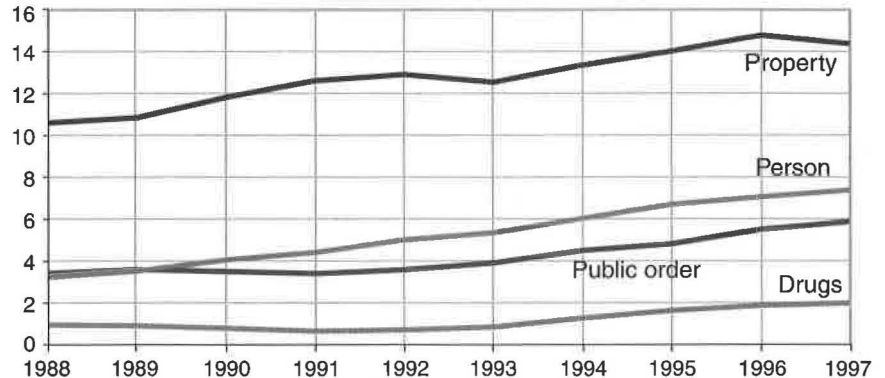
Cases per 1,000 male juveniles age 10 through upper age



- ◆ In 1997, for every 1,000 males between the ages of 10 and 17 (who were under juvenile court jurisdiction), the court handled 91 delinquency cases involving males. The delinquency case rate for females (30 cases per 1,000 females) was one-third the rate for males.
- ◆ Among males, drug offense case rates showed the greatest percent change (98%). The drug offense case rate for females rose 106%.

Female case rates

Cases per 1,000 female juveniles age 10 through upper age



- ◆ Among females, person offense case rates showed the greatest percent change between 1988 and 1997 (126%). In comparison, the person offense rate for males grew 61%.

The offense profiles of caseloads of white juveniles differed from caseloads of black juveniles

Caseloads of black juveniles contained a greater proportion of person offenses than did caseloads of white juveniles and those of other races. Property offense cases accounted for the largest proportion of cases for all racial groups, although among black juveniles, property cases accounted for fewer than half of the cases processed in 1997. For all races, drug offense cases accounted for the smallest proportion of the 1997 caseload.

Most serious offense	White	Black	Other races
1997			
Total	100%	100%	100%
Person	20	27	18
Property	51	41	57
Drugs	10	11	7
Public order	19	21	18

Most serious offense	White	Black	Other races
1988			
Total	100%	100%	100%
Person	14	24	14
Property	62	52	65
Drugs	6	9	4
Public order	18	15	16

Caseload offense profiles for 1997 differed from offense profiles for 1988 for all racial groups. Regardless of race, the proportion of cases involving person offenses was greater in 1997 than in 1988. Among black juveniles, person offenses increased by 3 percentage points. Among white juveniles, person offenses increased by 6 percentage points.

Black juveniles were involved in a disproportionate number of delinquency cases in 1997

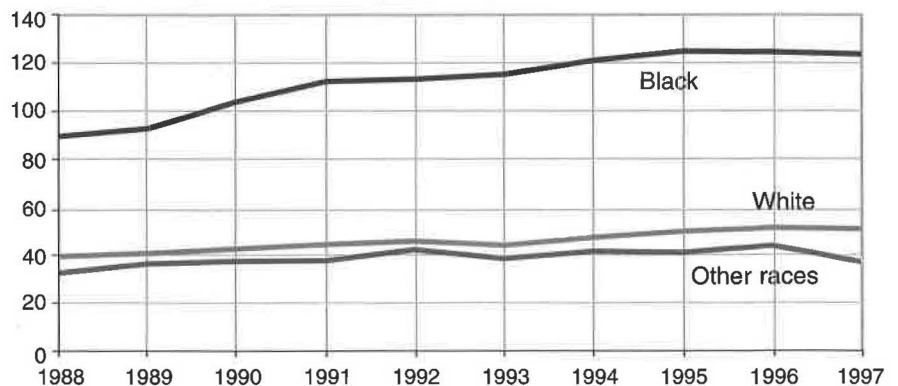
Most serious offense	White	Black	Other races	Total
Total				
Delinquency cases	66%	31%	3%	100%
Person	60	37	3	100
Property	70	26	4	100
Drugs	66	32	2	100
Public order	64	33	3	100
Male				
Delinquency cases	66%	31%	3%	100%
Person	61	36	3	100
Property	70	27	4	100
Drugs	63	35	2	100
Public order	64	33	3	100
Female				
Delinquency cases	67%	30%	4%	100%
Person	58	39	3	100
Property	70	26	5	100
Drugs	82	15	3	100
Public order	64	33	3	100
Juvenile population	80%	15%	5%	100%

◆ Although two-thirds of delinquency cases involve white youth, black youth are overrepresented in the delinquency caseload, given their proportion of the juvenile population (age 10 through upper age).

Note: Nearly all juveniles of Hispanic ethnicity are included in the white racial category. Detail may not total 100% because of rounding.

Delinquency case rates were higher in 1997 than in 1988 for all racial groups

Cases per 1,000 juveniles in race group



◆ Rates for black juveniles remain well above those for white juveniles and juveniles of other races.

Detention

When is secure detention used?

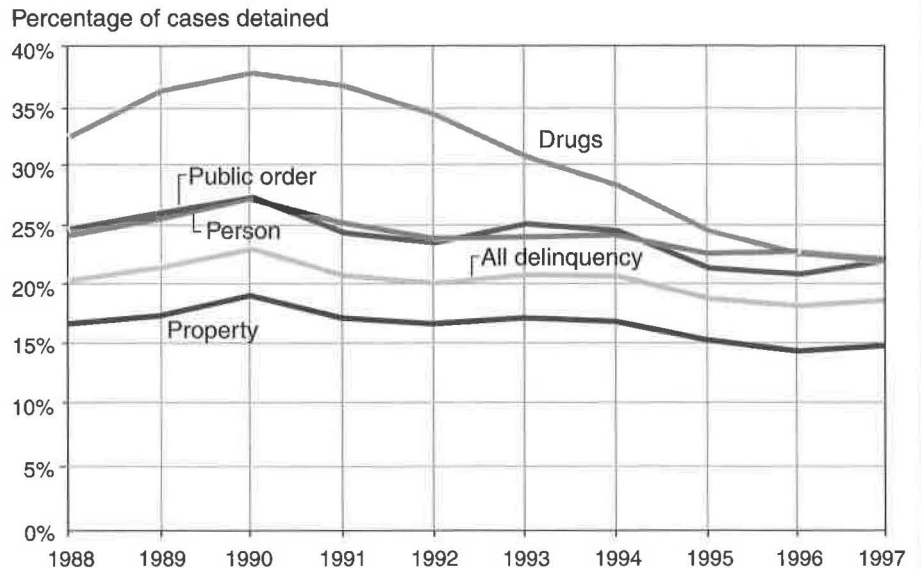
A youth may be placed in a secure juvenile detention facility at various points during the processing of a case through the juvenile justice system. Most delinquency cases, however, do not involve detention. Although detention practices vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, a general model of detention practices is useful.

When a case is referred to juvenile court, intake staff may decide to hold the youth in a detention facility while the case is being processed. In general, the youth will be detained if there is reason to believe the youth is a threat to the community, will be at risk if returned to the community, or may fail to appear at an upcoming hearing.

The youth may also be detained for diagnostic evaluation purposes. In all States, legislation requires that a detention hearing be held within a few days (generally within 24 to 48 hours). At that time, a judge reviews the decision to detain the youth and either orders the youth released or continues the detention.

Juvenile Court Statistics Reports count the number of cases that involve the use of detention during a calendar year. As a case is processed, the youth may be detained and released more than once between case referral and disposition. A youth also may have more than one case involving detention during the year. Juvenile court data do not count "detentions," nor do they count the number of youth detained. In addition, although in a few States juveniles may be committed to a detention facility as part of a disposition order, the court data do not include such placements in the count of cases involving detention.

In 1997, juveniles were detained between referral and disposition in 19% of all delinquency cases processed during the year



◆ For all offenses, the likelihood of detention was lower in 1997 than in 1990. The decline was greatest for drug offense cases.

Growth in the number of cases detained was less than the growth in overall caseloads

Compared with the increase in the overall delinquency caseload, the relative growth in the number of cases involving detention was smaller. Growth in the use of detention may have been limited by facility crowding.

Most serious offense	Percent change 1988-97	
	All cases	Detained cases
Delinquency	48%	35%
Person	97	82
Property	19	6
Drugs	125	51
Public order	67	51

The offense profile of detained delinquency cases has changed

Property cases continue to account for the largest volume of delinquency cases involving detention, but their share of total detained cases has diminished. The proportion of person offense cases in the detention caseload was greater in 1997 than in 1988.

Most serious offense	Percentage of detained cases	
	1988	1997
Delinquency	100%	100%
Person	20	27
Property	49	38
Drugs	11	12
Public order	21	23
Number of cases involving detention	241,700	326,800

Note: Detail may not total 100% because of rounding.

White youth were least likely to be detained in 1997

In 1997, secure detention was nearly twice as likely in cases involving black youth as in cases involving white youth, even after controlling for general offense category. Detention was least likely in cases involving white youth charged with property crimes and most likely in cases involving black youth charged with drug offenses.

Most serious offense	Percentage of cases that involved detention in 1997		
	White	Black	Other races
Delinquency	15%	27%	19%
Person	19	28	28
Property	12	23	16
Drugs	14	38	16
Public order	19	29	21

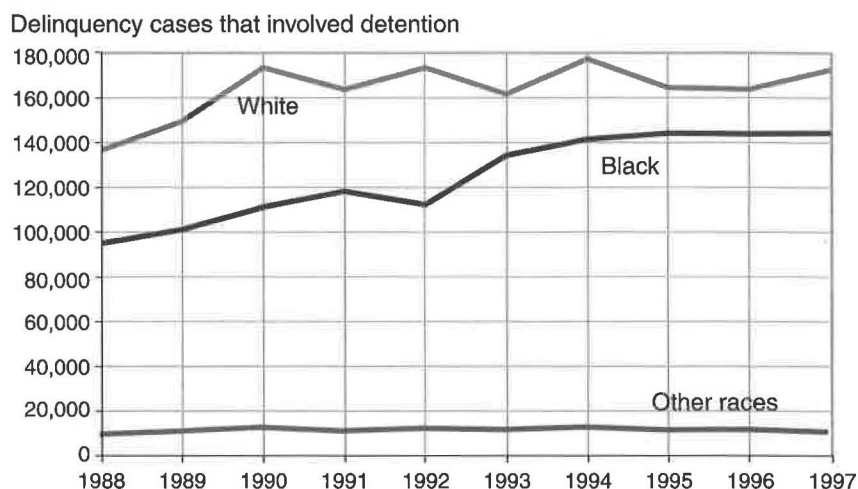
Black youth were overrepresented in detention caseloads in 1997

As a result of their greater likelihood of detention, as noted above, black youth were overrepresented in the detention caseload, compared with their proportions in the overall delinquency caseload. Although black youth made up 31% of all delinquency cases processed in 1997, they were involved in 44% of detained cases. This overrepresentation was greatest for drug offenses: black youth accounted for 32% of all drug cases processed but 55% of drug cases detained.

Most serious offense	Percentage of cases that involved black juveniles in 1997	
	All cases	Detained cases
Delinquency	31%	44%
Person	37	46
Property	26	41
Drugs	32	55
Public order	33	42

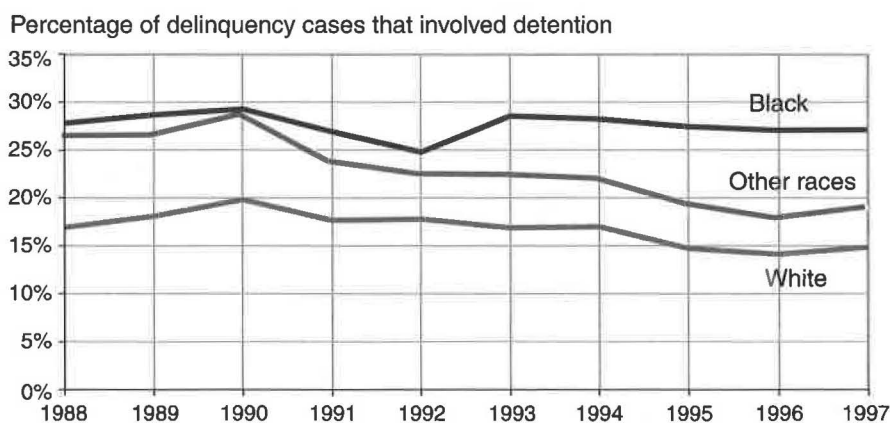
Across offenses, youth of other races accounted for less than 5% of all cases processed and of those involving detention.

For black juveniles, the relative increase in the number of cases involving detention was more than double the increase for whites



◆ For white juveniles, the number of delinquency cases involving detention increased 25% from 1988 to 1997. For black juveniles, the increase was 52%. For youth of other races, the increase was 12%.

Compared with 1988, the use of detention in delinquency cases in 1997 remained about the same for black juveniles but declined for white juveniles and juveniles of other races



Processing of Delinquency Cases

Informal processing involves the voluntary acceptance of sanctions and interventions

Soon after a case is referred to juvenile court, an intake officer or prosecutor decides whether to handle the case formally or informally. Informal processing is considered when the decisionmakers (police, probation officers, intake workers, prosecutors, other screening officers) believe that accountability and rehabilitation can be achieved without the use of formal court intervention. In these cases, an offender agrees to comply with one or more sanctions such as community service, victim restitution, or voluntary probation supervision. In many jurisdictions, before juveniles are offered informal sanctions, they must admit they committed the alleged act. Informal sanctions are voluntary. The court cannot force a juvenile to comply with an informal disposition.

When informally handled, the case may be held open pending the successful completion of the informal disposition. Upon successful completion of the informal disposition, the charges against the offender are dropped. If, however, the offender does not fulfill the court's conditions, the case is likely to be reopened and formally prosecuted.

Informal handling is less common than in the past but is still used in a large number of cases. In 1997, juvenile courts handled 43% of delinquency cases informally, compared with more than half in 1988. The decline in the use of informal processing was seen in all four general offense categories.

A substantial proportion of informal cases involved some sort of voluntary sanction

In 1997, juvenile courts dismissed 4 out of 10 informally handled cases. In the informal cases that were not dismissed, youth agreed to intervention services and/or

sanctions. In 57% of these cases, the youth agreed to a term of voluntary probation supervision. In 41% of the cases, the youth agreed to other sanctions such as voluntary restitution, community service, or referral to another agency. In a small number of the informal cases that were not dismissed, the youth and the youth's family agreed to a period of out-of-home placement as a sanction (2%).

Petitioners ask the court to order sanctions in petitioned cases

Formal case handling involves the filing of a petition requesting that the court hold an adjudicatory or waiver hearing. Compared with cases that are handled informally, formally processed delinquency cases tend to involve more serious offenses, older juveniles, and juveniles who have longer court histories. The juvenile court's formally processed delinquency caseload increased 75% from 1988 to 1997, from 569,000 to 996,000 cases annually.

In 1997, juveniles were adjudicated in 577,600 formally processed delinquency cases

A youth referred to juvenile court for a delinquency offense may be adjudicated delinquent after admitting to the charges in the case or after the court finds sufficient evidence to conclude, beyond a reasonable doubt, that the youth committed the acts alleged in the petition.

Delinquency adjudications grew 69% between 1988 and 1997. In 29% of adjudicated delinquency cases in 1997, the court ordered the youth to residential placement such as a training school, camp, ranch, drug treatment or private placement facility, or group home. Generally, if adjudicated delinquents were not placed out of their homes, they were placed on formal probation. In 55% of adjudicated delinquency cases, probation was the most severe sanction ordered. Overall, 83% of adjudicated delinquency cases resulted in either placement or formal probation.

Probation conditions typically incorporate items meant to control and to rehabilitate

Probation is the oldest and most widely used community-based corrections program. Probation may be used at either the "front end" or the "back end" of the juvenile justice system: for first-time, low-risk offenders or as an alternative to institutional confinement for more serious offenders. During probation, a juvenile offender remains in the community and can continue normal activities such as school and work. In exchange for this freedom, the juvenile must comply with a number of conditions.

This compliance may be voluntary. In other words, the youth agrees to comply with a period of informal probation in lieu of formal adjudication. Compliance also may be mandatory. Once the case is adjudicated and the juvenile is formally ordered to a term of probation, the juvenile must comply with the probation conditions established by the court. More than half (51%) of juvenile probation dispositions in 1997 were informal (i.e., enacted without a formal adjudication or court order).

A juvenile may be required to meet regularly with a probation supervisor, adhere to a strict curfew, and/or complete a specified period of community service. The conditions of probation may also include provisions for the revocation of probation should the juvenile violate the conditions. If probation is revoked, the court may reconsider its disposition and impose stricter sanctions.

Probation caseloads increased between 1988 and 1997

The total number of delinquency cases receiving probation (either formal or informal) as the most severe initial disposition climbed 48% between 1988 and 1997, from 435,300 to 645,600. The number of adjudicated delinquency cases placed on formal probation increased 67% during this period, from 190,900 to 318,700. The growth in probation caseloads was related to the general growth in juvenile court delinquency caseloads at referral (48%) and at adjudication (69%).

In 1997, juvenile courts formally processed 996,000 delinquency cases—most of these petitioned cases were adjudicated delinquent, and, once adjudicated, most were ordered to residential placement or formal probation

Most serious offense	Delinquency cases formally processed in 1997		Percentage of petitioned cases			Percentage of adjudicated cases	
	Number	Percentage of total	Adjudicated	Waived	All other cases	Residential placement	Formal probation
Total delinquency	996,000	57%	57%	1%	42%	29%	55%
Person offenses	228,200	58%	54%	1%	45%	30%	56%
Criminal homicide	1,700	86	38	31	31	63	29
Forcible rape	5,100	79	58	3	39	43	42
Robbery	29,300	87	61	4	36	44	45
Aggravated assault	48,900	72	57	2	41	31	55
Simple assault	121,000	49	51	0	49	25	60
Other violent sex offense	7,900	78	57	1	42	28	58
Other person offense	14,300	65	52	1	47	28	61
Property offenses	445,600	53%	58%	1%	41%	27%	57%
Burglary	104,300	77	64	1	35	33	56
Larceny-theft	166,200	41	56	0	44	24	57
Motor vehicle theft	36,200	74	65	1	33	41	50
Arson	5,400	58	60	1	39	26	62
Vandalism	58,200	51	54	0	46	19	61
Trespassing	27,800	43	49	0	51	22	55
Stolen property offense	24,200	72	59	1	40	30	49
Other property offense	23,200	71	57	0	42	17	64
Drug law violations	114,500	63%	58%	1%	41%	25%	55%
Public order offenses	207,600	61%	58%	0%	41%	34%	49%
Obstruction of justice	103,200	78	65	0	35	43	44
Disorderly conduct	36,500	40	47	0	53	15	58
Weapons offense	24,600	64	62	1	37	28	58
Liquor law violations	5,200	47	55	0	45	14	58
Nonviolent sex offense	6,100	56	63	1	36	40	52
Other public order	31,900	59	50	0	50	18	44
Violent Crime Index*	85,000	77%	58%	3%	39%	37%	50%
Property Crime Index**	312,100	52%	60%	1%	40%	29%	56%

- ◆ As a general rule, the more serious the offense, the more likely the case was to be brought before a judge for formal (court-ordered) sanctioning. For example, juvenile courts formally processed 41% of all larceny-theft cases in 1997, compared with 77% of all burglary cases.
- ◆ Cases involving youth adjudicated for serious person offenses, such as homicide, rape, or robbery, were most likely to result in residential placement. Cases involving youth adjudicated for minor offenses, such as vandalism or disorderly conduct, were least likely to result in residential placement.
- ◆ The relatively high residential placement rate for public order offense cases stems from the inclusion in that category of certain obstruction of justice offenses that have a high likelihood of placement (e.g., escapes from confinement and probation and parole violations).

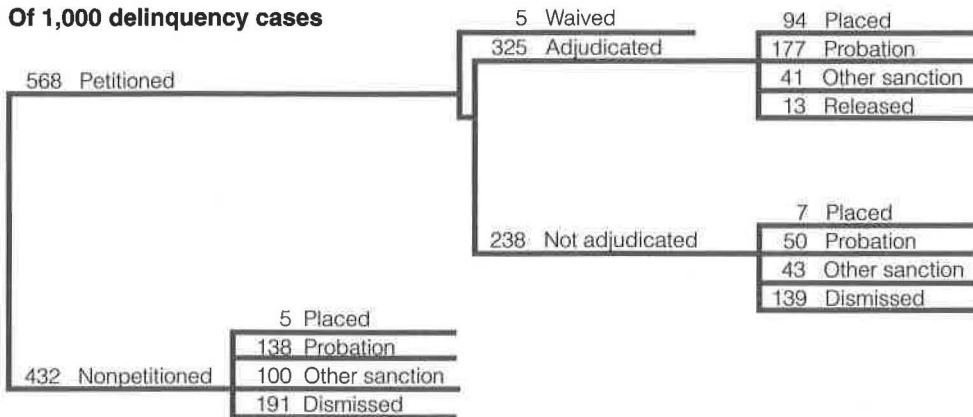
*Includes criminal homicide, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault.

**Includes burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson.

Note: Detail may not add to totals because of rounding.

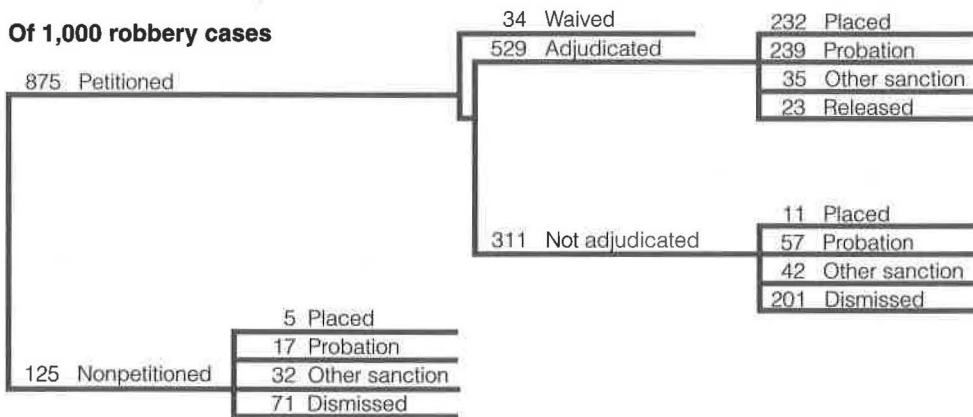
Compared with delinquency cases overall, juvenile courts were more likely to petition, adjudicate delinquent, and order sanctions in cases involving more serious charges such as robbery or aggravated assault

Of 1,000 delinquency cases



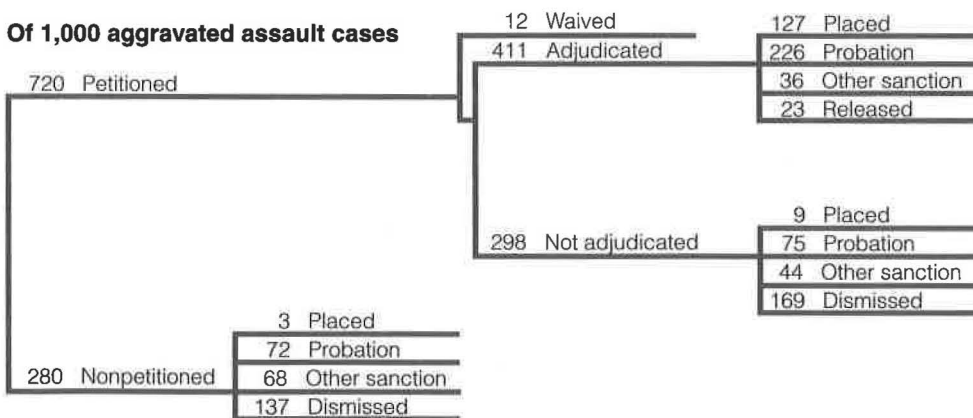
- ◆ Of every 1,000 delinquency cases handled in 1997, 177 resulted in formal probation and 94 resulted in residential placement following adjudication.
- ◆ In a small number of cases (13 of 1,000), the youth was adjudicated but the court closed the case with a stayed or suspended sentence or warned and released the youth. In such cases, the youth is not under any continuing court supervision.

Of 1,000 robbery cases



- ◆ In 1997, juvenile courts waived jurisdiction in 34 of 1,000 robbery cases and transferred them to criminal court.
- ◆ Juvenile courts ordered formal sanctions in more than half of robbery cases.
- ◆ Juvenile courts imposed some sort of sanctions (formal or informal) in 70% of robbery cases handled in 1997.

Of 1,000 aggravated assault cases



- ◆ Juvenile courts waived 12 in 1,000 aggravated assault cases to criminal court in 1997.
- ◆ Juvenile courts ordered formal sanctions in 39% of aggravated assault cases.
- ◆ More than two-thirds of aggravated assault cases resulted in some sort of sanction.

Note: Cases are categorized by their most serious offense and most severe or restrictive sanction. Cases are counted at the point at which initial disposition is made, not at the point at which sanctions are completed. Detail may not add to totals because of rounding.

Judicial Waivers to Criminal Court

In certain cases, juveniles may be tried in criminal court

Certain juveniles—those charged with serious offenses, those with lengthy records of prior offenses, or those who are unreceptive to treatment in the juvenile justice system—are sometimes transferred to criminal court. Most States have modified their laws in recent years to enable the transfer of more young offenders into the criminal justice system.

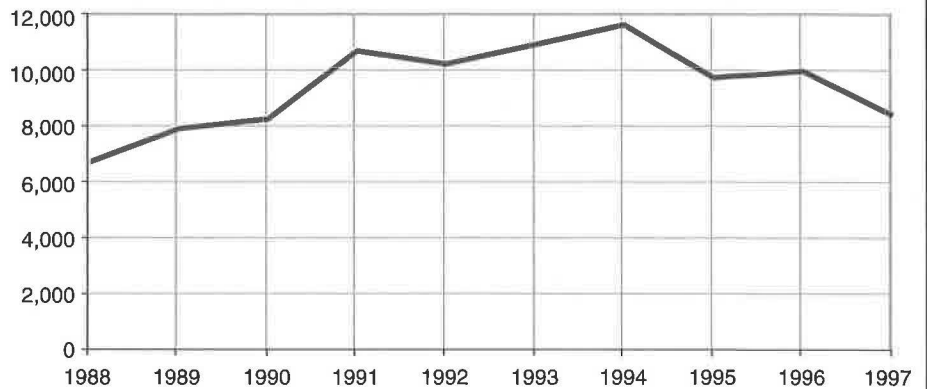
In a growing number of States, cases that meet certain age and offense criteria are excluded by statute from juvenile court jurisdiction and may be filed directly in criminal court. In some States, prosecutors have discretion to file certain juvenile cases directly in criminal court. In most States, laws also allow juvenile court judges to waive jurisdiction over cases meeting certain criteria. The criminal court then has responsibility to prosecute such cases. There are no national trend data on the number of young offenders moved into the criminal justice system directly via statutory exclusion or prosecutor decision (rather than by juvenile court waiver), but recent legislative trends suggest that the number is growing.

The offense profile of waived cases has changed

In 1988, property offense cases accounted for 53% of judicially waived delinquency cases and person offense cases accounted for 28%. By 1995, the offense profile of waived cases had changed, with person offense cases accounting for 47% and property offense cases for 34% of waived cases. By 1997, however, the numbers of waived person and property cases converged: person cases dropped to 40% of waived cases and property cases increased to 38%. In comparison, drug and public order cases have remained a small proportion of waived cases (15% and 7%, respectively, in 1997).

Juvenile courts waived 28% fewer delinquency cases to criminal court in 1997 than in the peak year 1994

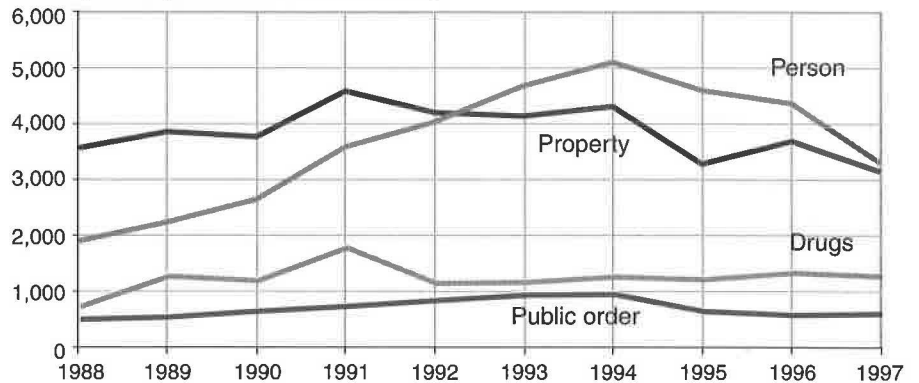
Delinquency cases judicially waived to criminal court



- ◆ Between 1988 and 1994, the number of delinquency cases judicially waived to criminal court grew 73% (from 6,700 to 11,700). By 1997, the number of cases waived was down 28% to 8,400.
- ◆ One reason for the decline in judicial waivers after 1994 was that a larger number of serious cases bypassed the juvenile justice system under newly enacted statutory exclusion and prosecutor discretion provisions.

Person offenses outnumbered property offenses among waived cases after 1992

Cases judicially waived to criminal court



- ◆ Waived person offenses increased 166% between 1988 and 1994, then dropped 35% by 1997. The result was an overall increase of 74% between 1988 and 1997.
- ◆ The number of waived drug cases peaked in 1991, 147% above the 1988 number. Between 1991 and 1997, waived drug cases declined 28%.
- ◆ There have also been declines since 1994 in the number of property and public order cases waived (26% and 36%, respectively).

Waived cases generally involve males age 16 or older

The demographic characteristics of judicially waived cases have changed somewhat over the past decade. The proportion of younger juveniles has increased. Despite this change, the vast majority of waivers involve males age 16 or older, although their proportion has diminished somewhat. These older males accounted for 88% of all waived cases in 1988 and 83% in 1997.

Case characteristics	Percentage of waived cases	
	1988	1997
Waived cases	6,700	8,400
Sex	100%	100%
Male	95	95
Female	5	5
Age at referral	100%	100%
15 or younger	7	13
16 or older	93	87
Race	100%	100%
White	55	50
Black	43	46
Other races	2	4

Judicially waived cases included a greater proportion of black youth in 1997 than in 1988.

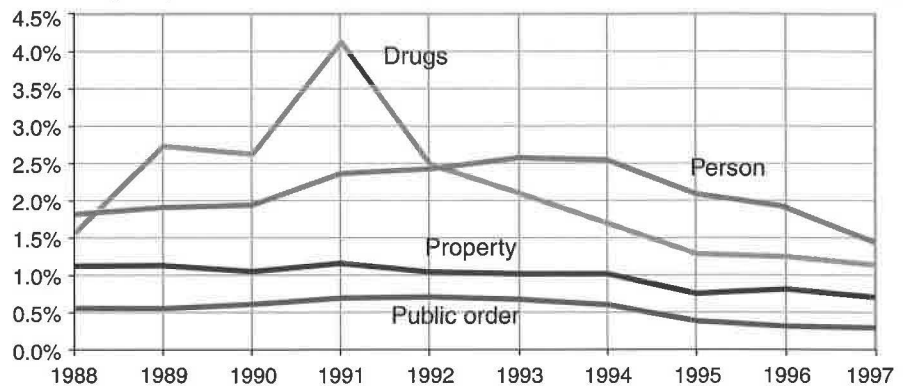
Waiver trends are related to trends in transfer provisions

Changes in the juvenile court's use of waiver and the characteristics and volume of waived cases reflect changes in transfer provisions. For example, as presumptive waiver for certain serious offenses has become more common across the country, such cases have had an increased likelihood of waiver. In addition, the recent decline in the volume of waived cases can be at least partially attributed to the proliferation of statutory exclusion provisions—many of the very serious cases that in the past came to juvenile court and were waived are now filed directly in criminal court.

Changes in the waiver caseload also result from changes in the delinquency caseload. For example, the growth in the

About 1% of formally processed delinquency cases are waived, but trends in the use of waiver vary by the most serious offense charged

Percentage of petitioned cases judicially waived to criminal court



- ◆ The overall proportion of formal delinquency cases waived to criminal court was 1.1% in 1988, peaked at more than 1.5% in 1991, and dropped to 0.8% by 1997.
- ◆ From 1989 through 1992, drug offense cases were more likely to be waived than were cases involving other offenses. The proportion of formally handled drug cases waived was more than 4% in 1991.
- ◆ Person offense cases were more likely to be waived in 1997 than were other types of cases (1.5% of formal person offense cases were waived in 1997).

total volume of the juvenile court's person offense caseload accounts for the growth in waived person offense cases.

In addition, changes in the waiver caseload result from changes in the system's response to certain types of crime. This effect is seen in the use of waiver in drug cases. Following the introduction of crack cocaine and the subsequent "war on drugs," there was a change in the perceived seriousness of drug offenses (particularly drug trafficking). The likelihood of waiver among formally processed drug cases rose from 1.6% in 1988 to 4.1% in 1991. In 1991, the number of waived drug cases peaked at more than 1,800, despite the fact that the total number of formal drug cases was at a 4-year low.

Petitioned Status Offense Cases

What are status offenses?

Traditionally, status offenses were those behaviors that were law violations only if

committed by a person of juvenile status. Such behaviors included running away from home, ungovernability (being beyond the control of parents or guardians), truancy, status liquor law violations (e.g., underage drinking, which also applies to young adults up to age 20), and other miscellaneous offenses that apply only to minors (e.g., curfew violations and tobacco offenses).

In some States, these behaviors are no longer law violations. Instead, juveniles who engage in the behaviors may be classified as dependent children, which gives child protective service agencies, rather than juvenile courts, the primary responsibility for responding to this population.

States vary in how they respond to status-offending behavior

The official processing of status offenders varies from State to State. For example, in some States, a runaway's entry into the official system may be through juvenile

court intake and, in other States, the matter may enter through the child welfare agency. This mixture of approaches to case processing has made it difficult to monitor the volume and characteristics of status offense cases nationally.

In all States, however, if informal efforts to resolve the status-offending behavior fail or if formal intervention is needed, the matter is referred to juvenile court. In 1997, roughly one in five status offense cases that came to the attention of juvenile court intake or child welfare agencies was formally processed by the courts.

Compared with caseloads for delinquency, status offense caseloads were small

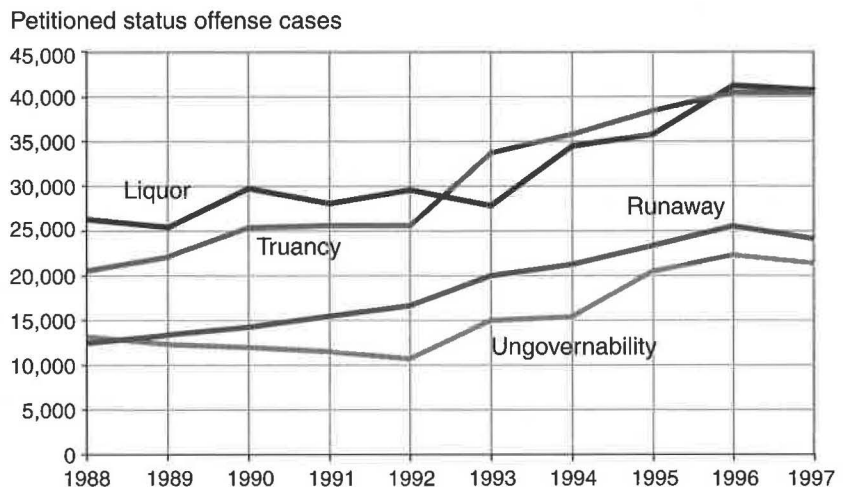
United States juvenile courts formally processed an estimated 158,500 status offense cases in 1997. These cases accounted for about 14% of the courts' formal delinquency and status offense caseload. Status liquor law and truancy offenses accounted for the greatest proportion of status offense cases. In 1997, juvenile courts formally processed approximately:

- ◆ 24,000 runaway cases.
- ◆ 40,500 truancy cases.
- ◆ 21,300 ungovernability cases.
- ◆ 40,700 status liquor law violation cases.
- ◆ 32,100 other miscellaneous status offense cases. (Due to the heterogeneity of these offenses, these cases are not discussed independently. They are, however, included in all totals.)

Status offense cases were less often referred by police than delinquency cases

Law enforcement agencies, the most likely referral source, referred 47% of the petitioned status offense cases processed in juvenile courts in 1997, compared with 85% of delinquency cases. Law enforcement agencies were more likely to be the referral source for status liquor law violation cases (94%) than for other status offense cases, including running away (40%), truancy (8%), and ungovernability (11%).

The number of status offense cases that juvenile courts formally handled increased 101% from 1988 through 1997



- ◆ The degree of growth in formally processed status offense cases from 1988 through 1997 varied across the major offense categories: truancy (96%), running away (93%), status liquor law violations (56%), and ungovernability (65%).
- ◆ In 1997, juvenile courts formally processed 5.5 status offense cases for every 1,000 juveniles age 10 through the upper age of juvenile court jurisdiction.

About the National Juvenile Court Data Archive

This Bulletin presents analyses of data that are the bases for the latest Report in OJJDP's Juvenile Court Statistics series. The *Juvenile Court Statistics* Report series was first published in 1929 and continues to be the Nation's primary source of information on the activities of juvenile courts. The data for the Reports are collected, analyzed, and stored by the National Juvenile Court Data Archive, which is operated by the National Center for Juvenile Justice (NCJJ) in Pittsburgh, PA. The Archive collects demographic, legal, and dispositional data on more than 1 million delinquency and status offense cases annually. In addition to producing *Juvenile Court Statistics* and other topical publications, the Archive can provide data files and special analyses for research and policy purposes. Additional presentations of *Juvenile Court Statistics* data can be found in the *Statistical Briefing Book* on OJJDP's Web site, www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org.

The Archive's national delinquency estimates are also available in an easy-to-use software package, Easy Access to Juvenile Court Statistics: 1988–1997. With the support of OJJDP, NCJJ distributes the software to facilitate independent analysis of Archive data while eliminating the need for statistical analysis software. All necessary data files and the NCJJ software can be downloaded from OJJDP's Web site, www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org, or a complimentary copy of Easy Access to Juvenile Court Statistics: 1988–1997 on CD-ROM can be ordered from NCJJ.

For further information about the National Juvenile Court Data Archive, contact:

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Juvenile courts were less likely to detain youth in status offense cases than in delinquency cases

In 1997, courts ordered the juvenile held in secure detention at some point between referral to court and case disposition in 6% of formally processed status offense cases. In comparison, youth were detained in 25% of formally processed delinquency cases. The proportion of cases involving detention varied by offense category. Juvenile courts detained youth in 11% of runaway cases, 7% of status liquor law violation cases, 7% of ungovernability cases, and 2% of truancy cases.

Of the 9,400 formally processed status offense cases that involved detention in 1997, liquor law violation cases (30%) and runaway cases (28%) accounted for greater proportions than ungovernability cases (16%) and truancy cases (7%).

Females were involved in approximately 4 in 10 status offense cases formally processed in 1997

Another major difference between delinquency and status offense cases is the proportion of cases that involve females. Although females were charged in only 20% of the delinquency cases formally processed in 1997, they were involved in 41% of status offense cases. The proportion of cases involving females varied substantially by offense. In fact, the majority of juveniles brought to court for running away from home in 1997 were female (60%).

Most serious offense	Males	Females
Status offense	59%	41%
Running away	40	60
Truancy	53	47
Ungovernability	55	45
Liquor	68	32

Juveniles age 15 and younger accounted for more than half of formal status offense cases

Juveniles age 15 or younger accounted for 55% of formal status offense cases processed in 1997. These younger juveniles

Youth received some sort of sanction (formal or informal) in 665 of every 1,000 petitioned status offense cases handled in 1997

Of 1,000 petitioned status offense cases

522 Adjudicated	73 Placed
	317 Probation
	119 Other sanction
	13 Released
478 Not adjudicated	1 Placed
	45 Probation
	109 Other sanction
	322 Dismissed

◆ Of every 1,000 petitioned status offense cases, 317 resulted in formal probation and 73 resulted in residential placement following adjudication.

Note: Cases are categorized by their most serious offense and most severe or restrictive sanction. Cases are counted at the point at which initial disposition is made, not at the point at which sanctions are completed. Detail may not add to totals because of rounding.

were involved in a greater proportion of truancy cases (74%) and ungovernability cases (71%) than runaway cases (62%) or status liquor law violation cases (27%). The difference between the offense profiles of younger and older juveniles reflects age-related differences in behavior.

Most serious offense	Age 15 or younger	Age 16 or older
Total	100%	100%
Running away	17	13
Truancy	34	15
Ungovernability	17	9
Liquor	12	42
Miscellaneous	19	21

Note: Detail may not total 100% because of rounding.

In 1997, youth were placed out of the home in 14% of all status offense cases adjudicated

Youth were adjudicated as status offenders in 52% of formally processed status offense cases in 1997. Of these cases, 14% resulted in out-of-home placement and 61% in formal probation. Another 23%, largely liquor law violation cases, resulted in other sanctions, such as fines, community service, restitution, or referrals to other agencies for services. The remaining 3% were released with no additional sanction.

Among status offense cases not adjudicated, 67% were dismissed, 23% resulted in informal sanctions other than probation or out-of-home placement, 10% resulted in informal probation, and less than 1% resulted in out-of-home placement.

Note

In this Bulletin, a juvenile court is any court having jurisdiction over matters involving juveniles. A juvenile is any youth at or below the upper age of original juvenile court jurisdiction. The upper age of jurisdiction is the oldest age at which a juvenile court has original jurisdiction over an individual for law-violating behavior. In 1997, the upper age of jurisdiction was 15 in 3 States (Connecticut, New York, and North Carolina), 16 in 10 States (Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, New Hampshire, South Carolina, Texas, and Wisconsin), and 18 in the remaining 37 States and the District of Columbia.

Methods

Data are provided to the National Juvenile Court Data Archive by State and local agencies responsible for the collection and/or dissemination of juvenile justice data. The information contributed by these agencies is not derived from a probability sampling procedure, nor is it the result of a uniform data collection effort. The national estimates described in this Bulletin and in *Juvenile Court Statistics* are developed using information from all courts able to provide compatible data to the Archive. Although at least some 1997 data were provided by juvenile courts with jurisdiction over 97% of the U.S. juvenile population, not all of the information contributed to the Archive could be used to generate the national estimates because of incompatibilities in the structure or content of the data files. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) and the National Center for Juvenile Justice (NCJJ) continue to work to increase the number of compatible contributors to the Archive.

Data are provided to the Archive in two forms: automated case-level data and court-level aggregate data. Automated case-level data for 1997, which describe each case's demographic and processing characteristics, were provided by 1,457 jurisdictions in 27 States (Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Jersey, New York, North Dakota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina,

South Dakota, Tennessee, Utah, Virginia, Washington, and West Virginia). Together, the contributing jurisdictions from these States contained 54% of the Nation's juvenile population (i.e., youth age 10 through the upper age of original juvenile court jurisdiction in each State). Compatible court-level aggregate data for 1997, which usually indicate the number of delinquency cases disposed in a calendar year, were provided by an additional 584 jurisdictions in 9 States (California, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, New York, Oklahoma, Texas, and Vermont) and the District of Columbia. In all, compatible 1997 data were provided to the Archive by 1,983 jurisdictions, containing 71% of the Nation's juvenile population.

The national estimates of juvenile court cases reported in this Bulletin and in *Juvenile Court Statistics 1997* were developed using the Archive's case-level and court-level data files combined with county-level juvenile population estimates (controlling for the upper age of original juvenile court jurisdiction in each State). The basic assumption underlying the estimation procedure is that the volume and characteristics of juvenile court cases are shaped by the same set of factors in reporting and nonreporting jurisdictions of similar size. The national estimates described in this Bulletin include revisions made after publication of previous *Juvenile Court Statistics* Reports. For interested readers, a complete description of the estimation procedure appears in the "Methods" section of each *Juvenile Court Statistics* Report.

Related Readings

All of the publications listed below are available in print and electronically.

Delinquency Cases in Juvenile Courts, 1997, 2000, FS 200004.

Delinquency Cases Waived to Criminal Court, 1988–1997, 2000, FS 200002.

Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 1999 National Report, 1999, NCJ 178257.

Juvenile Transfers to Criminal Court in the 1990's: Lessons Learned From Four Studies, 2000, NCJ 181301.

Juvenile Vandalism, 1997, 2000, FS 200010.

Juveniles Facing Criminal Sanctions: Three States That Changed the Rules, 2000, NCJ 181203.

Person Offense Cases in Juvenile Court, 1988–1997, 2000, FS 200006.

Self-Reported Delinquency by 12-Year-Olds, 1997, 2000, FS 200003.

State Legislative Responses to Violent Juvenile Crime: 1996–97 Update, 1998, NCJ 172835.

Trying Juveniles as Adults in Criminal Court: An Analysis of State Transfer Provisions, 1998, NCJ 172836.

The Youngest Offenders, 1996, 1998, FS 9887.

To obtain *Juvenile Court Statistics* Reports, other publications using Archive data, and other OJJDP publications that focus on juvenile justice statistics, visit OJJDP's Web site at www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org to browse or www.ncjrs.org/puborder to order materials, or contact the Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse by telephone at 800-638-8736 or by mail at P.O. Box 6000, Rockville, MD 20849-6000. To ask questions about materials, e-mail askncjrs@ncjrs.org.



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