



OJJDP Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

Shay Bilchik, Administrator

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Delinquency Cases in Juvenile Courts, 1994

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Counts and Trends

Juvenile courts in the United States processed an estimated 1,555,200 delinquency cases in 1994. Delinquency cases involve juveniles charged with criminal law violations. The number of delinquency cases handled by juvenile courts increased 41% between 1985 and 1994. Since 1985, cases involving offenses against persons increased 93%, while property offense cases increased 22% and drug law violation cases increased 62%.

These estimates of the cases handled by U.S. juvenile courts in 1994 are based on data from more than 1,800 courts that had jurisdiction over 67% of the U.S. juvenile population in 1994. (Not all jurisdictions were able to report comparable data.) The unit of count in this Fact Sheet is a case disposed during the calendar year by a court with juvenile jurisdiction, where each case represents one youth processed 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 year. For a full description of the methodology used in the calculation of national estimates, see *Juvenile Court Statistics 1994* (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), forthcoming).

Detention

One of the first decisions made in processing a juvenile delinquency case is whether the juvenile should be detained in a secure facility. Juveniles are sometimes detained to protect the community and sometimes to protect the juveniles themselves or to ensure their appearance at court hearings. Juveniles were securely detained in 21% of delinquency cases processed in 1994. Detention was used in 28% of drug law violations, 24% of person offense cases, and 17% of property offense cases.

Intake Decision

After the details of a case have been reviewed, a decision is made to dismiss it, handle it informally, or formally process the case by taking the matter before a judge. More than one-fifth (22%) of all delinquency cases in 1994 were dismissed at intake, often for

Table 1

Offenders in Juvenile Court, 1994

Note: Percent change calculated on unrounded estimates.

	Number of Cases	Percent Changes		
		1985-94	1990-94	1993-94
Total Delinquency	1,555,200	41%	20%	5%
Total Person Offenses	336,100	93%	38%	6%
Criminal Homicide	3,000	144%	19%	6%
Forcible Rape	5,400	25%	21%	-11%
Robbery	37,000	53%	31%	4%
Aggravated Assault	85,300	134%	41%	10%
Simple Assault	177,700	91%	42%	7%
Other Violent Sex Offenses	10,000	65%	34%	-9%
Other Person Offenses	17,800	91%	12%	-8%
Total Property Offenses	803,400	22%	7%	0%
Burglary	141,600	5%	-1%	-5%
Larceny-Theft	356,200	17%	9%	1%
Motor Vehicle Theft	59,300	69%	-16%	-3%
Arson	9,500	37%	35%	18%
Vandalism	118,600	46%	22%	2%
Trespassing	61,200	21%	22%	1%
Stolen Property Offenses	28,600	10%	1%	5%
Other Property Offenses	28,300	57%	-3%	-8%
Drug Law Violations	120,200	62%	69%	35%
Public Order Offenses	295,600	50%	27%	9%
Obstruction of Justice	108,400	59%	26%	13%
Disorderly Conduct	80,700	77%	44%	14%
Weapons Offenses	48,800	156%	63%	4%
Liquor Law Violations	12,700	-34%	-29%	-3%
Nonviolent Sex Offenses	9,600	-24%	-23%	-10%
Other Public Order Offenses	35,500	10%	15%	4%
Violent Crime Index	130,600	98%	37%	7%
Property Crime Index	566,700	17%	4%	-1%

lack of legal sufficiency. Another 23% were processed informally, with the juvenile agreeing to a voluntary disposition (for example, probation). More than half (55%) of delinquency cases in 1994 were processed formally and involved either an adjudicatory hearing or a hearing to consider transferring jurisdiction to the criminal (adult) court.

Transfer to Criminal Court

During a transfer (or waiver) hearing, a juvenile court judge is asked to waive jurisdiction over a matter and transfer the case to criminal court so that the juvenile may be tried as an adult. Transfer decisions are based on a number of factors, including the seriousness of the offense, the juvenile's prior record, and amenability to treatment. In 1994 juvenile court judges transferred 12,300 delinquency cases. Transfers increased 71% between 1985 and 1994. Of the cases transferred in 1994, 44% involved a person offense as the most serious charge, 37% involved a property offense, and 11% involved a drug law violation. Thus person offense cases, which made up 2.7% of all formally processed cases, were most likely to be transferred.

Adjudication and Disposition

Adjudicatory hearings are used to establish responsibility for an alleged delinquent act (analogous to determining guilt or innocence) and to decide whether to place a juvenile under court supervision. In 1994 juveniles were adjudicated in more than half (58%) of the 855,200 cases brought before a judge. Once adjudicated, juveniles in the majority of cases (53%) were placed on formal probation, while in 29% of the cases the juvenile was placed out of the home in a residential facility. Fifteen percent resulted in other dispositions, such as referral to an outside agency, community service, or restitution. Between 1985 and 1994, the number of cases in which the court ordered an adjudicated delinquent to be placed in a residential facility increased 51%, while the number of formal probation cases increased 41%.

Gender

Nearly four of every five (79%) delinquency cases involved a male juvenile in 1994, which was slightly less than in 1985 (81%). Males accounted for 77% of person offense cases, 79% of property offense cases, and 86% of drug law violations in 1994.

Age

Sixty-one percent of the juvenile delinquency cases processed in 1994 involved a juvenile under 16 years of age, compared with 60% in 1985. In 1994 juveniles under age 16 were responsible for 64% of all person offense cases, 64% of all property offense cases, and 42% of drug law violation cases.

Race

In 1994 approximately 80% of the juvenile population was white and 15% was black. Black juveniles, however, were involved in 32% of the delinquency cases handled by U.S. juvenile courts. White juveniles were involved in 64%, and youth of other races accounted for 4% of all cases. Black juveniles were involved in 40% of person offense cases, 28% of property offenses, and 37% of drug law violation cases.

For More Information

This Fact Sheet is based on the forthcoming report, *Juvenile Court Statistics 1994*. Copies of the report will be available from OJJDP's Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse by calling 800-638-8736. OJJDP also supports the distribution of a PC-compatible software version of the data files in *Juvenile Court Statistics*. The easy-to-use software can supplement educational and research programs. For a copy of the software, *Easy Access to Juvenile Court Statistics 1990-1994*, write to the National Juvenile Court Data Archive project at the Center for Juvenile Justice, 710 Fifth Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15219, or call 412-227-6950.

Jeffrey Butts is Project Manager of the National Juvenile Court Data Archive. The work was supported by an OJJDP grant. Joseph Moone, Social Science Program Specialist in OJJDP's Research and Program Development Division, served as the Program Manager.

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