



# OJJDP FACT SHEET

John J. Wilson, Acting Administrator March 2000 #04

## Delinquency Cases in Juvenile Courts, 1997

by Anne L. Stahl

### Counts and trends

Juvenile courts in the United States processed an estimated 1,755,100 delinquency cases in 1997. Delinquency cases involve juveniles charged with violations of the law that would be crimes if committed by adults. The number of delinquency cases handled by juvenile courts increased 48% between 1988 and 1997. During this time period, the number of drug law violation cases increased 125%, person offense cases increased 97%, public order offense cases increased 67%, and property offense cases increased 19%.

These estimates are based on data from more than 1,900 jurisdictions containing nearly 70% of the U.S. juvenile population (youth age 10 through the upper age of original juvenile court jurisdiction in each State). The unit of count used in this Fact Sheet is a case disposed during the calendar year by a court with juvenile jurisdiction. 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 can be involved in more than one case during the calendar year.

### Gender

Seventy-seven percent of delinquency cases in 1997 involved a male (more than three of every four), which was less than the 81% in 1988. In 1997, males accounted for 85% (155,200) of drug law violation cases, 76% of both property offense cases (640,700) and public order offense cases (259,000), and 74% (288,000) of person offense cases. However, between 1988 and 1997, the number of delinquency cases involving females increased 83% (from 225,100 to 412,100), compared with a 39% increase (from 964,800 to 1,342,900) for males. The growth in cases involving females outpaced the growth for males in all offense categories.

### Age

Fifty-eight percent of the juvenile delinquency cases processed in 1997 involved a juvenile under age 16 at the time of referral, compared with 57% in 1988. In 1997, juveniles under age 16 were responsible for 64% (248,700) of person offense cases, 62% (517,900) of property offense cases, 53% (179,400) of public order offense cases, and 40% (73,500) of drug law violation cases.

### Race

In 1997, approximately 79% of the juvenile population in the United States was white and 15% was black. However, black juveniles were involved in 31% (535,500) of the delinquency

### Delinquency Cases by Most Serious Offense, 1997

Most Serious Offense	Number of Cases	Percent Change		
		1988-97	1993-97	1996-97
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,755,100</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>0%</b>
<b>Person Offenses</b>	<b>390,800</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>2</b>
Criminal homicide	2,000	31	-27	-17
Forcible rape	6,500	48	-7	-5
Robbery	33,400	55	-3	-11
Aggravated assault	67,900	66	-6	-18
Simple assault	248,800	124	45	11
Other violent sex offense	10,200	59	-3	8
Other person offense	22,000	72	8	3
<b>Property Offenses</b>	<b>841,800</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>-3</b>
Burglary	135,900	2	-7	-4
Larceny-theft	401,300	23	11	-4
Motor vehicle theft	48,800	-11	-21	-6
Arson	9,300	44	20	4
Vandalism	114,800	41	0	-4
Trespassing	65,100	28	8	1
Stolen property offense	33,800	5	13	0
Other property offense	32,800	60	13	0
<b>Drug Law Violations</b>	<b>182,400</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Public Order Offenses</b>	<b>340,100</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>4</b>
Obstruction of justice	132,600	78	51	4
Disorderly conduct	92,300	107	38	3
Weapons offense	38,500	74	-19	-6
Liquor law violation	11,100	-31	-6	0
Nonviolent sex offense	11,100	-4	-1	7
Other public order	54,600	56	68	17
<b>Violent Crime Index*</b>	<b>109,800</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>-6</b>	<b>-15</b>
<b>Property Crime Index**</b>	<b>595,300</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>-4</b>

\*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 change calculations are based on unrounded numbers.

cases handled by juvenile courts and white juveniles were involved in 66% (1,162,700). Black juveniles were involved in 37% (144,400) of person offense cases, 33% (111,200) of public order offense cases, 32% (57,900) of drug law violation cases, and 26% (222,000) of property offense cases. White juveniles were involved in 70% (587,200) of property offense cases, 66% (120,800) of drug law violation cases, 64% (218,700) of public order offense cases, and 60% (235,900) of person offense cases.

## Detention

One of the first decisions made in processing a delinquency case is whether the juvenile should be detained in a secure facility during processing and prior to disposition. Juveniles were securely detained in 19% (326,800) of the delinquency cases processed in 1997. Detention was used in 22% of the following offense categories: drug law violations (39,800), person offense cases (87,000), and public order offense cases (75,700); and in 15% of property offense cases (124,300).

## Intake decision

About 19% (335,400) of all delinquency cases in 1997 were dismissed at intake, often because they were not legally sufficient. Another 24% (423,700 cases) were processed informally, with the juvenile voluntarily agreeing to the recommended disposition (for example, probation). More than half (57% or 996,000) of delinquency cases in 1997 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 is asked to waive jurisdiction over a matter and transfer the case to criminal court so that the juvenile can be tried as if he or she were an adult. Waiver decisions often are 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 1997, juvenile court judges waived 8,400 delinquency cases, 25% more than in 1988 but 28% less than in 1994, the peak year. Of the cases waived in 1997, 40% (3,300) involved a person offense, 38% (3,200) involved a property

offense, 15% (1,300) involved a drug law violation, and 7% (600) involved a public order offense as the most serious charge.

## Adjudication and disposition

Adjudicatory hearings are used to establish responsibility (analogous to determining guilt or innocence in criminal court) for an alleged delinquent act. A disposition hearing is held to decide if a juvenile adjudicated as a delinquent should be placed under court supervision and what disposition should be imposed. In 1997, juveniles were adjudicated delinquent in more than half (58%) of the 996,000 cases brought before a judge. Once adjudicated, juveniles were placed on formal probation in the majority of cases (55% or 318,700), while in 28% (163,200) of the cases juveniles were placed in a residential facility. Thirteen percent resulted in other dispositions, such as referral to an outside agency, community service, or restitution. Between 1988 and 1997, the number of cases in which the court ordered an adjudicated delinquent to be placed in a residential facility increased 56%, while the number of formal probation cases increased 67%.

## For further information

This Fact Sheet is based on the forthcoming Report *Juvenile Court Statistics 1997*. Copies will be available from 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, 412-227-6950. This software can also be downloaded from OJJDP's home page: [www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org](http://www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org).

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

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