



OJJDP FACT SHEET

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Female Delinquency Cases, 1997

by Meghan C. Scahill

Counts and trends

Juvenile courts in the United States processed an estimated 1,755,100 delinquency cases in 1997. Delinquency cases involve juveniles who are charged with acts that would constitute a crime (such as aggravated assault or drug offenses) if committed by an adult. Nearly one-fourth (23%) of the delinquency cases processed in 1997 involved a female offender, compared with 19% in 1988. Between 1988 and 1997, the number of delinquency cases involving females increased 83%.

Characteristics of female offenders

The majority (62%) of females charged with delinquent acts in 1997 were under age 16. Between 1988 and 1997, the number of delinquency cases involving females under age 16 increased 89%, while the number of cases involving females age 16 or older increased 74%.

In 1997, white females accounted for 67% of all juvenile delinquency cases, black females accounted for 30%, and females of other races accounted for 4%. Between 1988 and 1997, the number of cases involving females increased for all racial groups: white, 74%; black, 106%; and other races, 102%.

Offenses

In 1997, the most serious offenses referred in almost half (49%) of the juvenile delinquency cases involving females were property offenses, 25% were person offenses, 20% were public order offenses, and 7% were drug offenses. In 1988, more than half (58%) of the delinquency cases involving females were property offenses, 18% were person offenses, 19% were public order offenses, and 5% were drug offenses.

Detention

When processing a delinquency case, one of the first decisions to be made is whether the juvenile should be detained in a secure facility. Female juvenile offenders were securely detained in 15% of the delinquency cases processed in 1997. Detention was used

in 21% of public order offenses, 18% of person offenses, 16% of drug law violations, and 10% of property offenses. The number of cases in which female juveniles were detained increased 65% (23,700) between 1988 and 1997, from 36,300 cases to 60,000 cases. The increase was greater for black (123%) than for white (41%) females during this period.

Intake decision

After the details of a case are reviewed, a decision is made to dismiss, divert, or refer a case for formal court action. Thirteen percent of the delinquency cases involving females in 1997 were dismissed at this stage. Another 40% were diverted, with the juvenile voluntarily agreeing to a recommended disposition (for example, probation). The remainder (47%) of cases were referred for formal court action involving either an adjudicatory hearing or a hearing to consider waiver of jurisdiction to the criminal (adult) court.

Property offense cases (42%) accounted for the largest share of the formally processed court caseload in 1997. Slightly more than one-fourth (27%) were person offenses, slightly less than one-fourth (24%) were public order offenses, and 7% were drug offenses.

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 may be tried as if he or she were an adult. Waiver decisions are based on a number of factors, including the seriousness of the offense, the juvenile's prior record, and the juvenile's amenability to treatment.

In 1997, juvenile court judges waived 400 delinquency cases involving female offenders to adult criminal court; this was 37% more than in 1988 but 19% less than in 1994, the peak year. Of the cases waived in 1997, 42% involved a person offense as the most serious charge, 41% involved a property offense, 8% involved a drug law violation, and 9% involved a public order offense.

Court processing of juvenile female offenders, 1997

Cases 412,100	Petitioned	195,500	47%	Transferred	400	0.2%	Placed	22,700	22%
	Nonpetitioned	216,600	53%	Adjudicated	104,000	53%	Probation	62,200	60%
Not adjudicated				91,100	47%	Other	15,300	15%	
				Placed	1,300	1%	Dismissed	3,800	4%
				Probation	70,700	33%			
				Other	90,600	42%	Placed	1,200	1%
				Dismissed	54,000	25%	Probation	20,000	22%
							Other	18,800	21%
							Dismissed	51,000	56%

Note: Detail may not add to 100% because of rounding.

Adjudication and disposition

Adjudicatory hearings are used to establish a juvenile's responsibility for an alleged delinquent act (analogous to determining guilt or innocence in criminal court). If the juvenile is adjudicated delinquent, a dispositional hearing is held to decide what consequence will be imposed (analogous to a sentence in criminal court). More than half (53%) of the cases involving females that were formally processed in 1997 resulted in a delinquency adjudication.

Female offenders who were adjudicated delinquent received probation in the majority (60%) of cases. In 22% of the cases, female offenders were placed out of the home in a residential facility. Between 1988 and 1997, the number of cases in which the court ordered delinquent females to be placed in a residential facility increased 105%, while the number of probation cases increased 129%.

For further information

This Fact Sheet is based on the Report *Juvenile Court Statistics 1997*. Copies are available from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's (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, Pittsburgh, PA, 412-227-6950. This software can also be downloaded from OJJDP's home page: www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org.

Meghan C. Scahill, Esq., is a Research Assistant with the National Juvenile Court Data Archive, which is supported by an OJJDP grant.

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