



# OJJDP FACT SHEET

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## Delinquency Cases in Juvenile Courts, 1999

by Anne L. Stahl

### Counts and trends

In 1999, U.S. juvenile courts processed an estimated 1,673,000 delinquency cases that involved juveniles charged with criminal law violations. The number of delinquency cases handled by juvenile courts increased 27% between 1990 and 1999. During this time, the number of drug law violation cases increased 169%, public order offense cases increased 74%, person offense cases increased 55%, and property offense cases decreased 9%.

These estimates are based on data from nearly 2,000 courts with jurisdiction over 70% of the U.S. juvenile population. In this Fact Sheet, 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

More than three of every four (76%) delinquency cases in 1999 involved a male, a decline from 81% in 1990. In 1999, males accounted for 84% (160,800) of drug law violation cases, 76% (537,900) of property offense cases, 75% (293,000) of public order offense cases, and 73% (282,800) of person offense cases. However, between 1990 and 1999, the number of delinquency cases involving females increased 59% (from 250,100 to 398,600), compared with a 19% increase (from 1,066,900 to 1,274,500) for males. The growth in cases involving females outpaced the growth in cases involving males in all offense categories. For both males and females, simple assault cases increased more than any other person offense (136% for females and 80% for males). In the public order offense category, the greatest increase for both males and females was in the obstruction of justice caseload (148% for females and 105% for males).

### Age

Fifty-seven percent of the juvenile delinquency cases processed in 1999 involved a juvenile younger than 16 years old at the time of referral, compared with 60% in 1990. In 1999, juveniles younger than 16 years old were responsible for 64% (247,600)

of person offense cases, 61% (427,400) of property offense cases, 54% (208,200) of public order offense cases, and 40% (76,600) of drug law violation cases.

### Delinquency cases by most serious offense, 1999

Most serious offense	Number of cases	Percent change		
		1990-99	1995-99	1998-99
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,673,000</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>-5%</b>	<b>-5%</b>
<b>Person offenses</b>	<b>387,100</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>-4</b>
Criminal homicide	1,800	-21	-34	-5
Forcible rape	4,200	-19	-38	-29
Robbery	25,100	-9	-38	-15
Aggravated assault	55,800	-5	-36	-16
Simple assault	255,900	95	17	-2
Other violent sex offense	11,600	52	12	10
Other person offense	32,700	95	54	18
<b>Property offenses</b>	<b>706,200</b>	<b>-9</b>	<b>-20</b>	<b>-11</b>
Burglary	113,900	-22	-20	-11
Larceny-theft	322,100	-6	-24	-13
Motor vehicle theft	38,500	-45	-28	-12
Arson	8,600	28	-20	4
Vandalism	111,400	12	-12	-6
Trespassing	58,700	12	-12	-8
Stolen property offense	26,300	-11	-24	-22
Other property offense	26,800	-4	-10	-15
<b>Drug law violations</b>	<b>191,200</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Public order offenses</b>	<b>388,600</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>8</b>
Obstruction of justice	171,800	115	42	14
Disorderly conduct	90,600	67	0	-1
Weapons offense	39,800	32	-15	-1
Liquor law violation	19,900	21	21	2
Nonviolent sex offense	13,700	10	36	26
Other public order	52,700	75	29	10
<b>Violent Crime Index*</b>	<b>86,900</b>	<b>-7</b>	<b>-37</b>	<b>-16</b>
<b>Property Crime Index**</b>	<b>483,100</b>	<b>-14</b>	<b>-23</b>	<b>-12</b>

Detail may not add to totals because of rounding. Percent change figures are based on unrounded numbers.

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

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

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## Race

In 1999, approximately 79% of the juvenile population in the United States was white, and 15% was black.<sup>1</sup> Black juveniles were involved in 28% (476,500) of the delinquency cases that juvenile courts handled, and white juveniles were involved in 68% (1,140,500). Black juveniles were involved in 34% (133,300) of person offense cases, 28% (109,500) of public order offense cases, 27% (50,900) of drug law violation cases, and 26% (182,700) of property offense cases. White juveniles were involved in 71% (135,900) of drug law violation cases, 70% (494,600) of property offense cases, 69% (267,400) of public order offense cases, and 63% (242,500) 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 prior to adjudication. Juveniles are detained to protect the community, to protect the juveniles themselves, or to ensure their appearance at court hearings. Juveniles were securely detained in 20% (336,200) of the delinquency cases processed in 1999. Detention was used in 23% (43,500) of drug law violation cases, 23% (89,500) of person offense cases, 23% (88,100) of public order cases, and 16% (115,200) of property offense cases.

## Intake decision

After reviewing the case, justice system authorities decide whether to dismiss, informally handle, or formally process the case before a judge. About 17% (279,100) of all delinquency cases in 1999 were dismissed at intake, often for lack of legal sufficiency. Another 26% (432,000 cases) were processed informally, with the juvenile voluntarily agreeing to the recommended disposition (for example, probation). More than half (57% or 962,000) of delinquency cases in 1999 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 the juvenile can be tried as though he or she were 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 1999, juvenile court judges waived 7,500 delinquency cases. The number of cases waived in 1999 was 9% less than in 1990, 7% less than in 1998, and 38% less than in 1994, the peak year. Of the cases waived in 1999, 34% (2,500) involved a person offense, 40% (3,000) involved a property offense, 16% (1,200) involved a drug law violation, and 11% (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 if a juvenile adjudicated as delinquent should be placed under court supervision and what disposition should be imposed. In 1999, juveniles were adjudicated delinquent in 66% of the 962,000 cases brought before a judge. Once adjudicated, juveniles in 62% (398,200) of the cases were placed on formal probation; in 24% (155,200) of the cases, juveniles were placed in a residential facility. Ten percent of adjudicated cases resulted in other dispositions, such as referral to an outside agency, community service, or restitution. Between 1990 and 1999, the number of cases in which the court ordered an adjudicated delinquent to be placed in a residential facility increased 24%, while the number of formal probation cases increased 80%.

## For further information

This Fact Sheet is based on the forthcoming Report *Juvenile Court Statistics 1999*, which will be available on the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's (OJJDP's) Web site ([www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ojjdp](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ojjdp)). To learn more about juvenile court cases, visit OJJDP's *Statistical Briefing Book* ([ojjdp.ncjrs.org/ojstatbb/index.html](http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/ojstatbb/index.html)) and click on "Juveniles in Court." OJJDP also supports Easy Access to Juvenile Court Statistics, a Web-based application that analyzes the data files used for the *Juvenile Court Statistics* Report. This application is available from the *Statistical Briefing Book*.

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

*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 National Institute of Justice, and the Office for Victims of Crime.*

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<sup>1</sup> Juveniles of Hispanic ethnicity can be of any race, but most are included in the white racial category.