



OJJDP FACT SHEET

J. Robert Flores, Administrator November 2006 #03

Person Offenses in Juvenile Court, 1985–2002

by Anne L. Stahl

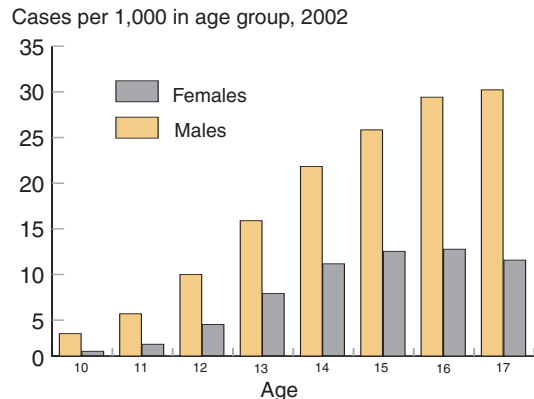
Person offenses accounted for 24% of all delinquency cases in 2002

In 2002, U.S. juvenile courts handled an estimated 387,500 delinquency cases in which the most serious charge was an offense against a person. (Person offenses include assault, robbery, rape, and homicide.) Although the number of person offense cases in 2002 was more than double the number in 1985, the number decreased 2% between 1998 and 2002. In 2002, person offense cases accounted for 24% of the delinquency caseload, compared with 16% in 1985.

Juvenile courts handled 12.4 person offense cases for every 1,000 juveniles age 10 through the upper age of juvenile court jurisdiction

in 2002, an increase of 79% over the rate in 1985. Although person offense case rates have declined recently for all racial groups, the rate for black youth remained substantially higher than the rates for whites and youth of other races. In 2002, the person offense case rate for white youth decreased 9% from the peak rate in 1998 (10.4 vs. 9.5), the rate for black youth decreased 18% from its 1995 peak (34.3 vs. 28.2), and the rate for youth of other races decreased 17% from its 1994 peak (8.1 vs. 6.7).

Across all age groups, male person offense case rates exceeded rates for females



Homicide was the most serious charge in 1,700 cases handled in 2002—0.4 % of all person offense cases handled by juvenile courts in that year. The majority (70%) of person offense cases involved charges of simple assault, 12% involved aggravated assault, and 6% involved robbery. Compared with 1998, the number of juvenile court cases involving criminal homicide decreased 19%, aggravated assault decreased 21%, and robbery decreased 28%. In contrast, between 1998 and 2002, the number of cases involving simple assault increased 4%.

Person offense cases handled by U.S. juvenile courts, 1985–2002

Cases disposed	1985	1998	2002	Percent change	
				1985–2002	1998–2002
Total person offenses*	181,900	396,500	387,500	113%	-2%
Violent Crime Index	66,300	97,600	75,300	13%	-23%
Criminal homicide	1,200	2,100	1,700	41%	-19%
Forcible rape	4,300	5,200	4,700	8%	-9%
Robbery	24,900	30,000	21,500	-13%	-28%
Aggravated assault	35,900	60,300	47,400	32%	-21%
Simple assault	98,700	260,800	270,700	174%	4%
Case Rate**	1985	1998	2002	1985–2002	1998–2002
Total person offenses	6.9	13.3	12.4	79%	-7%
Violent Crime Index	2.5	3.3	2.4	-5%	-27%
Criminal homicide	0.1	0.1	0.1	19%	-23%
Forcible rape	0.2	0.2	0.1	-9%	-14%
Robbery	1.0	1.0	0.7	-27%	-32%
Aggravated assault	1.4	2.0	1.5	11%	-25%
Simple assault	3.8	8.7	8.6	130%	-1%

Percent change figures are based on unrounded numbers.

* Total includes other person offense categories not listed.

** Per 1,000 youth age 10 through the upper age of juvenile court jurisdiction.

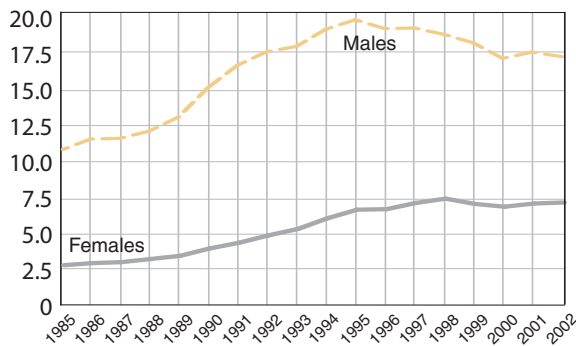
Characteristics of offenders

Compared with 1985, juveniles involved in person offense cases in 2002 were slightly younger and more likely to be female. In 2002, 64% of person offense cases involved juveniles younger than 16, compared with 61% in 1985. Females were involved in 28% of person offense cases in 2002, compared with 20% in 1985. Compared with males, the 2002 female delinquency caseload had a greater proportion of simple assault cases (21% vs. 15%) and an equal proportion of aggravated assault cases (3%).

Between 1985 and 2002, the relative increase in the female caseload outpaced that of males for person offenses (202% vs. 91%). As a result, the female share of the person offense caseload has grown since 1985. For example, females accounted for 20% of person offense cases for each year between 1985 and 1991. Between 1991 and 2002, the female proportion of the person offense caseload steadily increased to 28%.

In 2002, female person case rates remained at their highest level, while male person case rates fell 8% between 1998 and 2002

Person cases per 1,000 youth ages 10–upper age

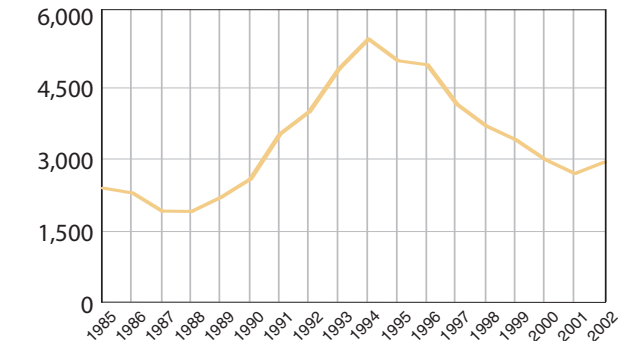


Case processing

Of the 387,500 person offense cases disposed by U.S. juvenile courts in 2002, 60% (233,200) were handled formally (i.e., a petition was filed requesting an adjudicatory or transfer hearing).

The number of person offense cases judicially waived to criminal court peaked in 1994

Number of cases



Of these petitioned cases, 1.3% (2,900) were judicially waived to criminal court, 62% (145,800) were formally adjudicated delinquent in the juvenile justice system, and 36% (84,600) were petitioned but not adjudicated delinquent.

The proportion of judicially waived person offense cases decreased between 1985 and 1988 and then increased steadily, peaking in 1994 when almost 3% (5,500) of such cases were waived. In 2002, a little more than 1% (2,900) of petitioned person offense cases were waived.

In 2002, males charged with person offenses were six times as likely as females to have their cases judicially waived to criminal court. In each year from 1996 to 2002, the number of person offense cases judicially waived to adult court was greater for white youth than for black youth. Regardless of race, person offense cases in 2002 were more likely to be waived than cases involving other offenses, and cases involving juveniles age 16 or older were more likely to be waived than were those involving juveniles 15 or younger.

In 25% (37,200) of the 145,800 person offense cases formally adjudicated by juvenile courts in 2002, the most severe disposition imposed by the court was placement out of the home in a residential facility. Probation was ordered in 63% (92,000) of the cases, while 9% (13,800) resulted in other sanctions, including referral to an outside agency, fines, community service, and restitution.

Among the 2002 person offense cases that were formally petitioned by the court but not adjudicated, 72% (60,700) were dismissed. In 8% (7,000) of these petitioned cases, the youth agreed to informal probation; 20% (16,900) of these cases resulted in other dispositions.

In 2002, of the 154,200 person offense cases handled informally (without a petition), 45% (68,700) were dismissed, 31% (47,300) resulted in voluntary probation, and 25% (38,200) resulted in other dispositions.

For further information

This Fact Sheet is based on the forthcoming report, *Juvenile Court Statistics 2001–2002*, which will be available on the OJJDP Web site. To learn more about juvenile court cases, visit OJJDP's online Statistical Briefing Book 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.

Anne L. Stahl is a Research Associate with 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.