



OJJDP FACT SHEET

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Petitioned Status Offense Cases in Juvenile Courts, 2004

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Counts and Trends¹

In 2004, juvenile courts in the United States formally processed an estimated 159,400 status offense cases. Only a juvenile court can adjudicate status offenses (acts that are considered illegal only when juveniles commit them). Once a status offense case has been referred for court intake, the court must decide whether to process the case by filing a petition or to refer the youth away from the juvenile justice system to other juvenile service agencies. This Fact Sheet discusses petitioned status offense cases in five major categories: running away, truancy, curfew law violations, ungovernability, and underage liquor law violations.²

Offense profile of petitioned status offense cases, 1995 and 2004

Most serious offense	1995	2004
Total	100%	100%
Running away	17	13
Truancy	29	35
Curfew violations	10	10
Ungovernability	14	14
Liquor law violations	23	19
Miscellaneous offenses	7	9

Detail may not total 100% because of rounding.

Between 1995 and 2004, the number of petitioned status offense cases that juvenile courts handled increased 39%—truancy cases increased 69%, curfew violation cases increased 38%, ungovernability cases increased 38%, and liquor law violation cases increased 17%. The number of petitioned runaway cases remained relatively stable between 1995 and 2004.

¹ 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.

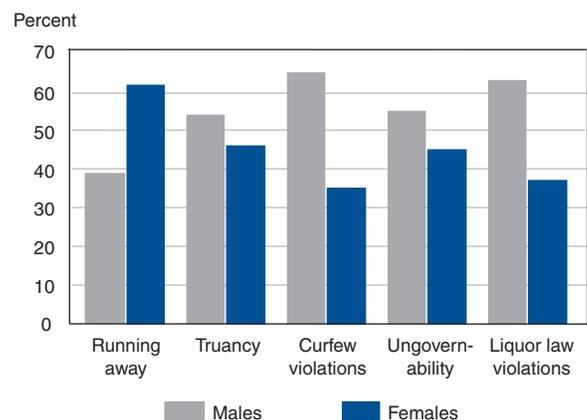
² Other behaviors that may be considered to be status offenses, such as tobacco violations, are included under miscellaneous offenses and are not discussed independently.

Compared with 1995, smaller proportions of the petitioned status offense caseload in 2004 involved runaway cases and liquor law violations; a larger proportion involved truancy cases.

Gender

Between 1995 and 2004, the petitioned status offense caseload for girls increased 42% compared with a 37% increase in caseload for boys. In 2004, boys accounted for 56% of the total petitioned status offense caseload—63% of status liquor law violation cases, 65% of curfew violation cases, 54% of truancy cases, and 55% of ungovernability cases. Girls accounted for the majority of petitioned runaway cases (62%), the only status offense category in 2004 in which girls represented a larger proportion of the caseload than boys.

Petitioned status offense caseloads by gender, 2004



Age

In 2004, 60% of petitioned status offense cases involved a juvenile younger than age 16 at the time of referral. Juveniles younger than age 16 accounted for 73% of ungovernable cases, 71% of truancy cases, 62% of runaway cases, 53% of curfew violation cases, and 31% of the liquor law violation caseload.

Race

In 2004, truancy cases made up the largest proportion of the petitioned status offense caseloads for juveniles of all races, with the exception of American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) youth for whom liquor law violation cases constituted the greatest proportion of petitioned cases.

Offense profile of petitioned status offense cases by race, 2004

Most serious offense	White	Black	AI/AN	Asian/ NHPI*
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
Running away	11	19	5	22
Truancy	35	36	24	40
Curfew violations	9	11	16	13
Ungovernability	13	23	2	2
Liquor law violations	23	4	47	15
Miscellaneous	9	8	6	8

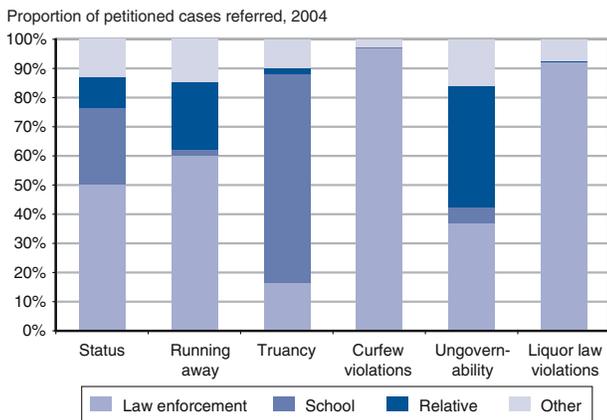
Detail may not total 100% because of rounding.

*The racial classification Asian/NHPI includes Asian, Native Hawaiian, and other Pacific Islander.

Source of Referral

A number of sources, including law enforcement agencies, schools, relatives, social service agencies, probation officers, and victims, can refer juveniles who engage in status offenses to court intake. In 2004, the source of referral varied substantially with the nature of the offense: law enforcement agencies referred 50% of all petitioned status offense cases, schools referred 72% of truancy cases, and relatives referred 42% of ungovernability cases. Law enforcement referred the largest proportion of runaway, curfew, and liquor law violation cases.

Proportion of petitioned status offense cases by referral type, 2004



Detention

In 2004, juveniles were securely detained in 7% of petitioned status offense cases, about the same proportion as in 1995 (6%). Before 1997, runaway cases comprised the largest proportion of the detained status offense caseload. Since that time, however, cases involving liquor law violations have accounted for the largest share of detentions—28% in 2004.

Adjudication and Disposition

Adjudicatory hearings establish responsibility for an alleged act; courts hold disposition hearings to decide what sanctions they should impose on a juvenile who has been adjudicated. The likelihood of adjudication for petitioned status offense cases was 63% in 2004, compared with 50% in 1995. Among the status offense categories in 2004, adjudication was least likely in petitioned runaway cases (43%) and most likely in cases involving liquor law violations (78%). The likelihood of adjudication for petitioned curfew violation cases in 2004 (73%) was higher than that for both truancy (58%) and ungovernability cases (57%).

In 2004, truancy cases were the largest share of the adjudicated status offense caseload that resulted in out-of-home placement. With the exception of cases involving truancy and liquor law violations, the likelihood that an adjudicated status offense case would result in out-of-home placement decreased for each of the major status offense categories between 1995 and 2004.

Probation was the most restrictive disposition used in 52% of the petitioned status offense cases in 2004. Courts ordered probation in 70% of adjudicated ungovernability cases, 64% of runaway cases, 61% of cases involving truancy, 48% of cases involving liquor law violations, and 20% of curfew violation cases.

In 2004, the juvenile was not adjudicated a status offender in 37% of formally handled cases; the court dismissed 87% of these cases, 3% resulted in informal probation, and in 10% of these cases, the youth voluntarily agreed to other informal dispositions such as community service.

For Further Information

This Fact Sheet is based on the report *Juvenile Court Statistics 2003–2004*, which is available on OJJDP's Web site (www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ojjdp). To learn more about juvenile court cases, visit OJJDP's Statistical Briefing Book at www.ojjdp.ncjrs.gov/ojstatbb/index.html and click on "Juveniles in Court."

Anne L. Stahl is Manager of the National Juvenile Court Data Archive, which is supported by OJJDP grant 2005–JL–FX–0250.

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 Community Capacity Development Office; the National Institute of Justice; the Office for Victims of Crime; and the Office of Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering, and Tracking (SMART).