



# OJJDP Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

Shay Bilchik, Administrator

Fact Sheet #57 March 1997

## Juvenile Court Processing of Delinquency Cases, 1985–1994

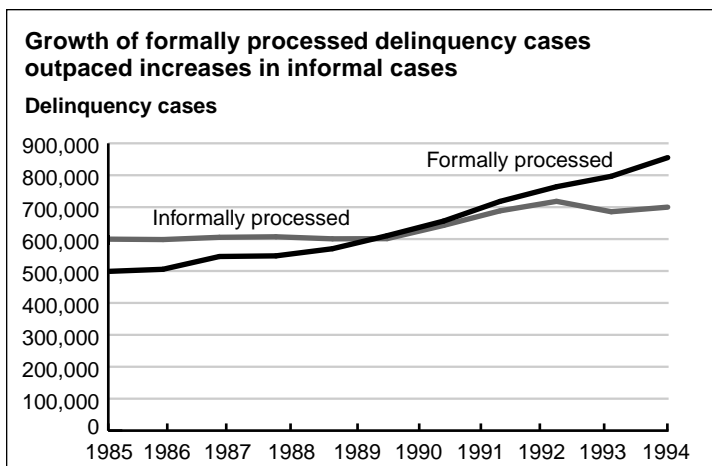
by Jeffrey A. Butts, Ph.D.

### More than half of the delinquency cases processed by U.S. juvenile courts in 1994 were handled formally

In 1994 U.S. courts with juvenile jurisdiction handled an estimated 1,555,200 cases involving delinquency charges. More than half (55%) of these cases were processed formally, either by filing a delinquency petition in the juvenile court or transferring the case to criminal court. This Fact Sheet presents national data on delinquency cases processed by juvenile courts from 1985 through 1994. National estimates were generated using information from the National Juvenile Court Data Archive. More than 1,800 jurisdictions containing 67% of the U.S. juvenile population contributed data for these national estimates.

### Formal delinquency cases grew 69% since 1985

Between 1985 and 1994, the total delinquency caseload of U.S. juvenile courts increased 41%. The number of formally handled cases grew 69%, from 505,400 to 855,200 cases annually. In contrast, the number of cases handled informally (i.e., without a petition or court hearing) increased just 17% since 1985. The formal delinquency caseload in 1994 was 22% larger than the total informal caseload. As recently as 1988, informal delinquency cases outnumbered formal cases.



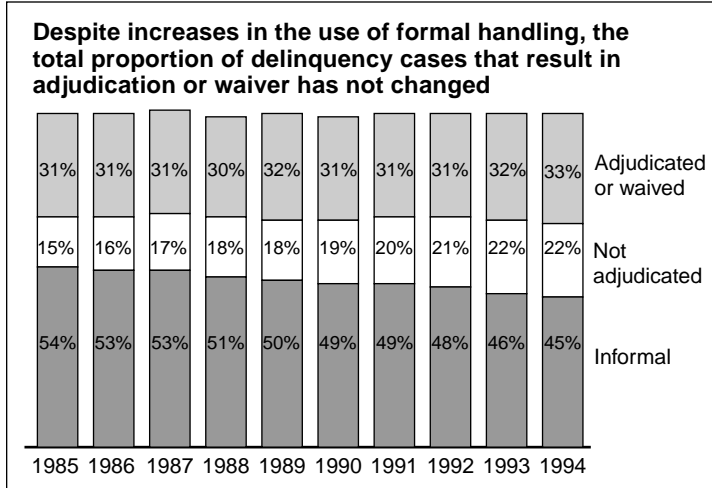
Between 1985 and 1994, the likelihood of formal handling increased from 46% to 55% of all cases

Most Serious Offense	Percent of Delinquency Cases Handled Formally		
	1985	1990	1994
<b>Total Delinquency</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>55%</b>
<b>Person Offense</b>	<b>54%</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>59%</b>
Criminal homicide	85	91	90
Forcible rape	81	81	85
Robbery	85	84	86
Aggravated assault	62	64	64
Simple assault	42	43	49
Other violent sex offense	70	64	67
Other person offense	45	59	59
<b>Property Offense</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>52%</b>
Burglary	66	68	73
Larceny-theft	36	36	42
Motor vehicle theft	61	66	71
Arson	50	49	53
Vandalism	34	40	45
Trespassing	31	32	39
Stolen property offense	52	61	68
Other property offense	48	64	63
<b>Drug Law Violation</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>66%</b>	<b>61%</b>
<b>Public Order Offense</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>57%</b>
Obstruction of justice	71	71	73
Disorderly conduct	27	33	40
Weapons offense	45	52	62
Liquor law violation	27	29	44
Nonviolent sex offense	55	52	55
Other public order	24	35	47

### Formal handling up sharply for some offenses

The likelihood of formal processing for delinquency cases in general increased from 46% to 55% between 1985 and 1994. The largest relative changes were in drug offense cases (61% formal in 1994, compared with 43% in 1985) and weapon cases (62% formal in 1994 versus 45% in 1985). The likelihood of formal

handling did not change substantially in cases involving charges such as robbery, aggravated assault, and arson.



**One in three delinquency cases results in juvenile court adjudication or waiver to criminal court**

A youth may be adjudicated delinquent because he or she admits to the charges in a case or the court finds sufficient evidence to judge the youth a delinquent. The most severe court actions in delinquency cases are considered to be adjudication in juvenile court or waiver to criminal court, although fewer than 1 in 70 such cases were transferred to criminal court. The increased use of formal handling between 1985 and 1994 did not result in an equivalent increase in the proportion of delinquency cases that were either adjudicated or waived to criminal court. Adjudications and waivers represented between 30% and 33% of all delinquency

cases in each year from 1985 to 1994. In recent years drug offense cases have been most likely to result in adjudication or waiver (37% in 1994).

**For most offenses, the proportion of cases that were either adjudicated or waived to criminal court increased only slightly between 1985 and 1994**

Most Serious Offense	Percent Adjudicated or Waived to Criminal Court		
	1985	1990	1994
Person offense	33%	32%	33%
Property offense	30	30	31
Drug offense	31	42	37
Public order offense	32	32	35

**For further information**

This Fact Sheet is based on the report *Juvenile Court Statistics 1994*. 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, 412-227-6950. This software can also be downloaded from OJJDP’s home page: <http://www.ncjrs.org/ojjhome.htm>.

Jeffrey A. Butts is Project Manager of the National Juvenile Court Data Archive, which is supported by an OJJDP grant.

FS-9757

BULK RATE  
POSTAGE & FEES PAID  
DOJ/OJJDP  
Permit No. G-91

U.S. Department of Justice  
Office of Justice Programs  
Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention  
Washington, D.C. 20531  
Official Business  
Penalty for Private Use \$300