



OJJDP FACT SHEET

Shay Bilchik, Administrator November 1998 #87

The Youngest Offenders, 1996

by Charles M. Puzzanchera

In 1996, youth under age 15 were involved in 32% of all juvenile arrests

The majority of juvenile arrests involved youth age 15 or older (68%), while 9% of juvenile arrests involved youth under 13. Of all arrests of youth under 15, 30% were for larceny-theft or vandalism, 13% were for assaultive behaviors, 9% were for running away, 6% were for drug- or alcohol-related offenses, and 6% were for curfew violations.

The arrest profile of youth under 15 varied from that of youth 15 and older. Compared with older juveniles, youth under 15 had a greater proportion of property offense arrests (40% vs. 20%), a greater proportion of person offense arrests (15% vs. 10%), and a smaller proportion of drug and alcohol arrests (6% vs. 18%).

Since peaking in 1994, the violent crime arrest rate for youth under 15 has declined

The violent crime arrest rate for youth under 15 gradually increased throughout the 1980's and peaked in 1994. For youth 15 and older, the violent crime arrest rate remained relatively stable from 1980 through 1987 and increased sharply from 1988 through 1994. For both groups, the violent crime arrest rate declined between 1994 and 1996—15% for youth under 15 and 12% for youth 15 and older. Despite these declines, the 1996 violent crime arrest rate was still 60% higher than the 1980 rate for youth under 15 and 41% higher for youth 15 and older.

While arrest rates for murder for both age groups increased between 1980 and 1993, the increase was greater for youth 15 and older. For both age groups, the murder arrest rate reached a peak in 1993 and declined by one-third between 1993 and 1996. Despite these declines, the 1996 murder arrest rate was 67% higher than the 1980 rate for youth 15 and older, and 37% higher for youth under 15.

Since peaking in 1991, the property crime arrest rate for youth under 15 has declined

Between 1980 and 1996, the property crime arrest rate varied more for youth 15 and older than for youth under 15. The property crime arrest rate remained relatively constant for youth under 15 during this period. For youth under 15, the property

Estimated Number of Juvenile Arrests by Age Group, 1996

Most Serious Offense	Age 12 and Younger	Age 13 and 14	Age 15 and Older
Total	250,000	671,900	1,929,800
Crime Index Total	101,600	225,900	527,900
Violent Crime Index	10,600	29,600	95,000
Murder and nonnegligent manslaughter	<50	300	2,500
Forcible rape	600	1,400	3,700
Robbery	2,800	10,700	36,600
Aggravated assault	7,200	17,200	52,200
Property Crime Index	91,000	196,300	433,000
Burglary	16,000	34,900	84,200
Larceny-theft	69,000	141,500	291,900
Motor vehicle theft	2,500	16,700	53,600
Arson	3,500	3,200	3,300
Nonindex			
Simple assault	31,800	64,200	138,100
Forgery and counterfeiting	200	800	7,500
Fraud	1,300	6,500	19,200
Embezzlement	<50	100	1,200
Stolen property (buying, receiving, possessing)	2,200	8,800	30,100
Vandalism	25,000	38,500	78,100
Weapons violations	4,200	11,500	37,100
Prostitution and commercialized vice	<50	100	1,200
Sex offenses (except forcible rape and prostitution)	3,300	5,300	8,600
Drug abuse violations	4,300	31,300	175,800
Gambling	<50	300	2,400
Offenses against the family and children	800	1,900	5,700
Driving under the influence	200	300	18,100
Liquor law violations	1,600	15,400	138,200
Drunkenness	400	2,900	20,200
Disorderly conduct	18,400	53,900	142,800
Vagrancy	100	700	2,900
All other offenses (except traffic)	30,600	95,600	324,000
Suspicion	100	300	1,200
Curfew	8,900	42,200	134,000
Runaway	14,900	65,300	115,500

Data Source: Arrest estimates developed by the author using data from Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crime in the United States 1996*.

crime arrest rate peaked in 1991, then declined. The 1996 rate was almost identical to that in 1980. For youth 15 and older, the property crime arrest rate decreased sharply between 1980 and 1984, then increased steadily through 1991. From 1991 through 1996, the property crime arrest rate for youth 15 and older declined slightly (8%).

The number of court cases involving youth under 15 increased 57% from 1986 to 1995

In 1995, juvenile courts handled an estimated 651,700 cases involving youth under 15, compared with 414,600 cases in 1986. A case represents one youth processed on a new referral, regardless of the number of offenses contained in that referral. An individual youth can be involved in more than one case during the year. Thirty-nine percent of all cases processed in 1995 involved youth under age 15. In 1995, the caseloads of youth under 15 contained a greater proportion of person offense cases (24% vs. 21%) and property offense cases (56% vs. 48%) and a smaller proportion of drug offense cases (5% vs. 12%) than those of youth 15 and older.

In 1995, the caseloads of youth under 15 (36%) contained a slightly greater proportion of minority youth than those of youth 15 and older (33%). The racial characteristics of juveniles involved in person, property, and drug offense cases processed in 1995 varied between younger and older juveniles. Person offense cases involving youth under 15 (44%) contained a greater proportion of nonwhite youth than those involving youth 15 and older (41%). The same was true for property offense cases (33% and 28%, respectively). The proportion of drug offense cases involving nonwhite youth, however, did not vary between the two age groups.

Proportion of Cases Involving White Youth

Most Serious Offense	Under Age 15		Age 15 and Older	
	1986	1995	1986	1995
Total	69%	64%	73%	67%
Person	56	56	58	59
Property	71	67	75	72
Drugs	77	64	74	64
Public order	72	61	76	65

Note: Percentages are calculated using unrounded numbers.

Caseload trends differed for younger and older youth

Between 1986 and 1995, the number of cases referred to juvenile court increased 57% for youth under 15 and 39% for youth 15 and older. In the same period, person offense cases handled by juvenile courts increased 129% for youth under 15 and 81% for

youth 15 and older. During the same period, drug offense cases processed by juvenile courts increased 136% for youth under 15 and 117% for youth 15 or older. Property offense cases increased 33% and 16%, respectively.

Between 1986 and 1995, the proportion of cases referred to juvenile court increased 85% for nonwhite youth under 15 and 69% for nonwhite youth 15 and older. During the same period, the proportion of cases referred to juvenile court increased 45% for white youth under 15 and 27% for white youth 15 and older.

Estimated Number of Cases Handled by Juvenile Courts

Most Serious Offense	1986	1995	Percent Change
Under Age 15	414,600	651,700	57%
Person	69,400	158,900	129
Property	275,600	366,900	33
Drugs	13,000	30,700	136
Public order	56,500	95,300	68
Age 15-17	740,000	1,025,800	39%
Person	117,400	212,400	81
Property	421,700	489,400	16
Drugs	57,200	123,900	117
Public order	143,700	200,100	39

Note: Percent change figures are calculated using unrounded numbers.

For further information

This Fact Sheet is based in part on the report *Juvenile Court Statistics 1995*. 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: www.ncjrs.org/ojjhome.htm.

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FS-9887

FS-9887

Fact Sheet



U.S. Department of Justice
Office of Justice Programs
Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
Washington, DC 20531

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