



OJJDP FACT SHEET

Shay Bilchik, Administrator June 1998 #81

Drug Offense Cases in Juvenile Court, 1986–1995

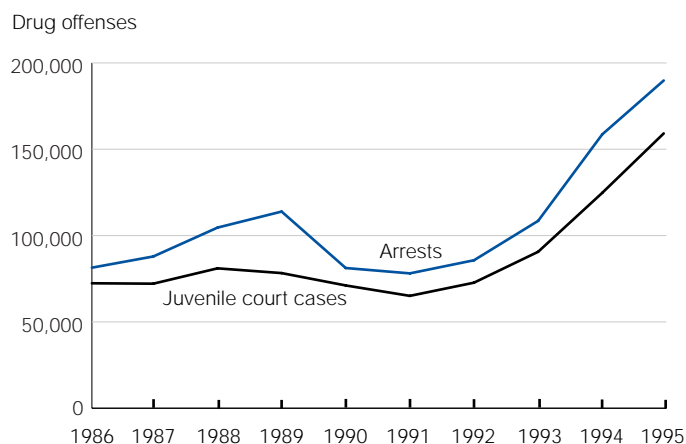
by Anne L. Stahl

Drug offense cases up 145% from 1991

In 1995, juvenile courts in the United States handled an estimated 159,100 delinquency cases involving drug law violations. Drug offenses accounted for 9% of all delinquency cases in 1995, compared with 5% in 1991. Drug offenses include possession or sale of marijuana, cocaine, and other illegal drugs. The analysis in this Fact Sheet includes only cases in which a drug offense was the most serious charge, not cases involving juveniles charged with drug offenses in addition to more serious offenses.

The number of drug offense cases processed during 1995 was 28% greater than in 1994 and 145% more than in 1991. Juvenile courts experienced a decline in their drug offense caseloads from 1988 to 1991, but then saw a sharp increase from 1991 to 1995. The number of juvenile arrests involving drug offenses followed a similar pattern.

Juvenile arrests and juvenile court cases involving drug offenses more than doubled between 1991 and 1995



Note: Arrest data are from H.N. Snyder, *Juvenile Arrests 1996*, Bulletin, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, November 1997.

Drug cases in juvenile court, 1986, 1991, and 1995

Gender	1986	1991	1995
Male	83%	88%	86%
Female	17	12	14
Age at Time of Referral			
Under 16 years	41%	41%	42%
16 or older	59	59	58
Race/Ethnicity			
White	74%	49%	64%
Black	24	49	34
Other	2	2	2
Predisposition Detention			
Detained	25%	37%	24%
Not detained	75	63	76
Manner of Handling			
Formal	49%	67%	61%
Informal	51	33	39
Outcome of Formal Handling			
Adjudicated	68%	58%	57%
Not adjudicated	32	42	43
Disposition of Adjudicated Cases			
Placed out of the home	30%	36%	25%
Probation or supervision	58	51	53
Other (fines, restitution, etc.)	8	8	15
Dismissed or released	4	5	7

Note: Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.

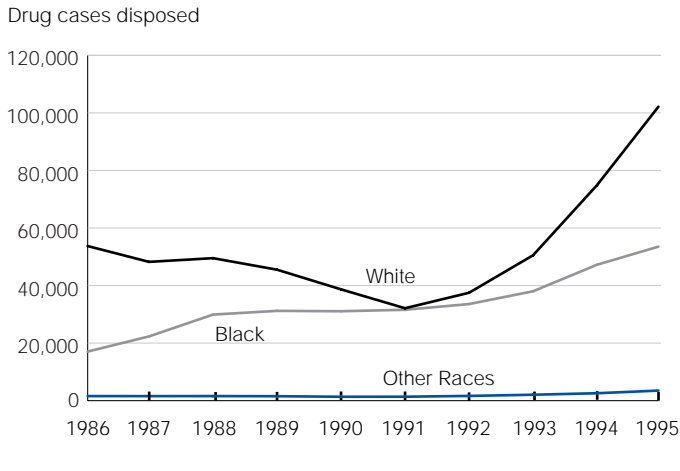
Typical drug case in 1995 involved a white male

Males accounted for the vast majority of drug cases processed in juvenile court. Between 1986 and 1995, the male proportion of the drug caseload ranged from 83% to 88%. The male proportion was consistently higher among black juveniles (92% to 94%) than among white juveniles (80% to 84%).

The proportion of the drug caseload involving white youth ranged from 74% in 1986 to 49% in 1991. In 1986, white males accounted for 60% of drug cases and black males accounted for 22%. However, by 1991, the proportion of drug cases involving black males was greater than that involving white males (45% versus 41%). In 1995, white males were again a larger proportion of the drug caseload than black males (53% versus 31%).

Each year from 1986 through 1995, about 6 in 10 drug cases involved juveniles age 16 or older. In 1995, these older juveniles accounted for 58% of the drug caseload.

Drug offense cases involving white youth climbed 218% between 1991 and 1995, compared with 69% for those involving black youth



Use of detention in drug cases changed

In 1986, youth were detained at some point between referral to court and case disposition in 18,400 drug cases, representing 25% of all drug cases that year. By 1990, the proportion of drug cases involving detention had risen to 38%. Since 1991, the proportion of drug cases involving detention has dropped steadily, reaching 24% in 1995. However, the actual number of drug cases involving detention in 1995 (38,600) was 110% higher than in 1986.

Formally processed cases more than doubled between 1991 and 1995

Although juvenile courts handled a smaller percentage of drug offense cases with the filing of a petition in 1995 than in 1991 (61% versus 67%), the actual number of formally handled drug cases more than doubled (from 43,800 to 97,400). In 1995, approximately 1% of formal drug cases were judicially waived to criminal court. Overall, drug offenses accounted for 13% of the delinquency cases judicially waived to criminal court in 1995, a larger percentage than in 1986 (6%) but down slightly from 1991 (17%).

The majority of drug cases formally processed in juvenile court resulted in the juvenile being adjudicated delinquent. In 57% of all drug cases formally processed in 1995, the juvenile was adjudicated delinquent. In 25% of the adjudicated drug offense cases in 1995, the most severe disposition imposed by the juvenile court was residential placement. The courts used probation in 53% of the cases and imposed other sanctions, such as fines and restitution, in 15%. In 7% of adjudicated drug offense cases, the court released the juvenile with no further sanctions.

In 1995, most formally petitioned drug cases that were not waived or adjudicated were dismissed (63%), but in 20% the youth agreed to informal probation and in 14% to other dispositions. About 3% of these cases resulted in voluntary out-of-home placement.

For further information

This Fact Sheet is based on the report *Juvenile Court Statistics 1995*. The report bases its national estimates of 1995 juvenile court cases on data from nearly 1,800 courts with jurisdiction over 67% of the U.S. juvenile population. The unit of count is a case disposed during the calendar year, where each 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.

Copies of *Juvenile Court Statistics 1995* 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.

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

FS-9881



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