



OJJDP FACT SHEET

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Detention in Delinquency Cases, 1987–1996

by Lynn Ryan MacKenzie

Detention caseloads increased 38% between 1987 and 1996

The increase in the number of delinquency cases handled by the courts has driven the growth in the number of juveniles in the detention system. In 1987, 1.2 million delinquency cases were disposed in juvenile courts. By 1996, this number had risen 49%, to almost 1.8 million. This increase in the volume of juveniles in the justice system resulted in a 38% increase in the number of delinquency cases that involved the use of detention. The number of juvenile delinquency cases detained in 1996 was 89,000 more than in 1987. This has resulted in increased demand for juvenile detention bed space across the country.

The most dramatic change in the detention system was the influx of females charged with person offenses

In general, the courts' use of detention remained relatively steady between 1987 and 1996. Juveniles were detained in 20% of cases processed in 1987; in 1996, the proportion was 18%. However, there was a surge in the number of female cases entering detention (a 76% increase compared with 42% for males). The large increase was tied to the growth in the number of delinquency cases involving females charged with person offense crimes over this period (182%).

Between 1987 and 1996, the increase in the number of cases involving detention was almost four times greater for black youth than for white youth. Contributing to this disproportionate increase was a 68% rise in juvenile court caseloads involving black juveniles, compared with a 39% rise for white juveniles. In 1996, 27% of cases involving black youth included detention between referral and disposition, compared with 14% for white youth. In fact, among all offense categories, black youth were more likely to be detained than white youth during every year between 1987 and 1996. Consequently, the profile of the national detention population has shifted over the past 10 years, with a greater proportion of youth charged with person offenses, a greater proportion of females, and a greater proportion of blacks in the detention population.

The use of detention remained relatively constant except for drug violation cases

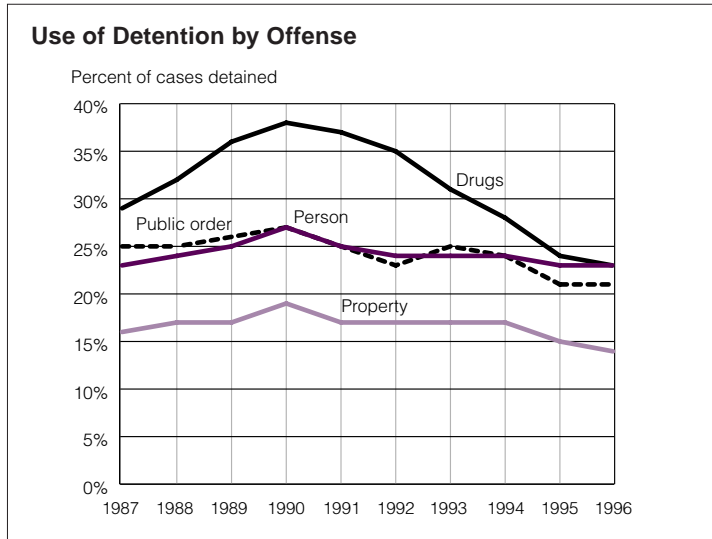
Beginning in the late 1980's, the war on drugs coincided with an increased rate of detention for drug offense cases that has tapered off over time. The steady growth in the number of offenders, along with the limited number of detention beds available, are likely

Delinquency Cases Involving Detention, 1987–1996

Case Type	Percent of All Cases Involving Detention			Percent Change in Number of Cases, 1987–1996		Increase in Number of Cases Detained, 1987–1996
	1987	1992	1996	All Cases	Detained Cases	Additional Cases
Total	20%	20%	18%	49%	38%	89,100
Person	23	24	23	100	97	42,800
Property	16	17	14	23	8	9,900
Drugs	29	35	23	144	89	18,700
Public order	25	23	21	58	35	17,600
Male	21%	21%	20%	42%	35%	68,900
Person	25	26	24	87	82	31,300
Property	17	18	16	16	6	6,000
Drugs	30	36	24	149	95	17,500
Public order	25	24	21	55	36	14,300
Female	16%	15%	14%	76%	57%	20,100
Person	17	17	19	152	182	11,600
Property	11	12	9	52	25	3,900
Drugs	23	27	15	123	48	1,300
Public order	25	22	19	72	31	3,400
White	17%	18%	14%	39%	18%	25,000
Person	19	21	19	104	108	22,500
Property	14	15	11	17	-6	(4,800)
Drugs	20	25	14	136	58	5,700
Public order	23	23	17	38	5	1,600
Black	27%	25%	27%	68%	71%	59,900
Person	29	27	28	88	83	18,200
Property	22	21	22	33	36	13,500
Drugs	48	45	40	159	117	12,600
Public order	30	24	29	117	106	15,700

Note: Detail may not total 100% because of rounding.

factors that influenced decisions made by the court regarding the use of detention. For instance, 38% of drug offense cases were detained in 1990, compared with 23% in 1996. However, the number of drug offense cases detained increased from 26,900 to 39,700 during that same period.



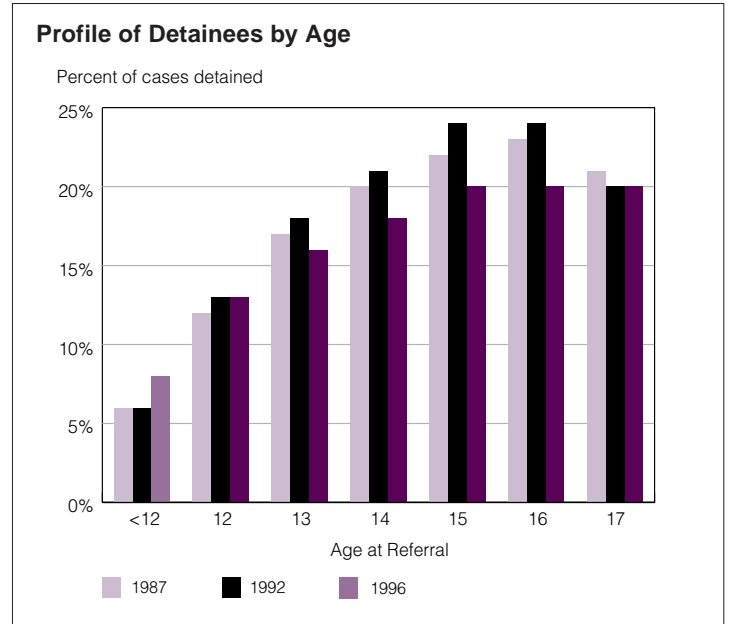
The use of detention for juveniles remained consistent in relation to their ages between 1987 and 1996

Although the number of cases detained involving juveniles age 13 and younger rose 63% (from 29,300 in 1987 to 47,600 in 1996), the percentage of cases involving detention in this age category did not rise significantly. These data indicate that although more young children were in the juvenile justice system in 1996 than 10 years earlier, the courts did not judge that the new class of young offenders had a greater need for secure confinement during case processing. Juvenile courts were more likely to detain 15- and 16-year-olds than younger children.

For further information

This Fact Sheet is based on the Report *Juvenile Court Statistics 1996*. 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, Pittsburgh, PA, 412-227-6950. This software can also be downloaded from OJJDP’s home page: www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org.



Lynn Ryan MacKenzie, Ph.D., is a Research Associate with the National Juvenile Court Data Archive, which is supported by an OJJDP grant.

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