



# OJJDP FACT SHEET

Shay Bilchik, Administrator April 1999 #104

## Juvenile Court Processing of Delinquency Cases, 1987-1996

by Anne L. Stahl

### More than half of delinquency cases handled by juvenile courts in 1996 were formally processed

In 1996, U.S. courts with juvenile jurisdiction handled an estimated 1.76 million cases involving delinquency charges. More than half (56%) of these cases were processed formally, either by filing a delinquency petition in the juvenile court or waiving the case to criminal court. This Fact Sheet presents national data on delinquency cases processed by juvenile courts from 1987 through 1996. National estimates were generated using information from the National Juvenile Court Data Archive. Nearly 1,800 jurisdictions containing 67% of the U.S. juvenile population contributed data for these national estimates.

### The number of formally processed delinquency cases increased 78% between 1987 and 1996

Between 1987 and 1996, the total delinquency caseload of U.S. juvenile courts increased 49%. The number of cases formally processed by juvenile courts rose from 552,600 to 983,100 during this time period. In contrast, the number of cases handled informally (without a petition or court hearing) increased just 23% since 1987.

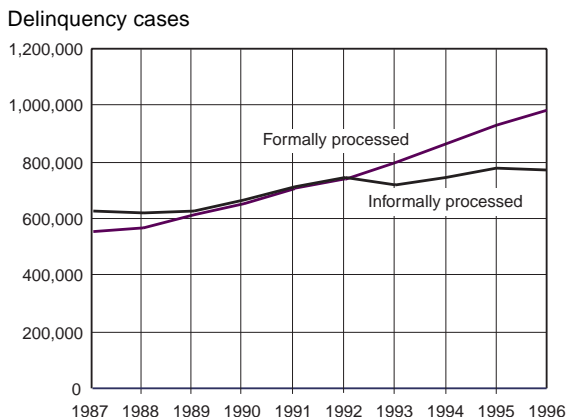
Between 1987 and 1992, juvenile courts handled a greater number of delinquency cases informally, although the proportion was nearly equal from 1989 to 1992. Beginning in 1993, formally processed delinquency cases outnumbered those handled informally. In 1996, the formal delinquency caseload was 27% larger than the informal caseload.

The likelihood of formal processing for delinquency cases in general increased from 47% to 56% between 1987 and 1996. The largest relative changes were in formal processing of liquor law

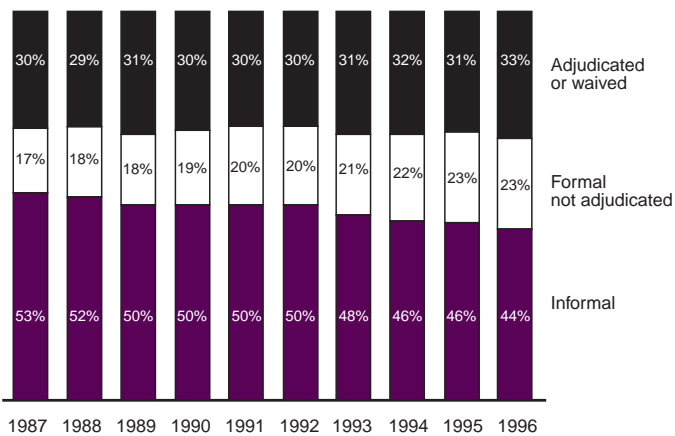
### Between 1987 and 1996, the likelihood of formal handling increased for nearly every offense

Most serious offense	Percent of delinquency cases handled formally		
	1987	1992	1996
<b>Total delinquency</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>56%</b>
<b>Person offenses</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>54%</b>	<b>59%</b>
Criminal homicide	82	88	91
Forcible rape	77	75	79
Robbery	81	85	87
Aggravated assault	63	63	61
Simple assault	41	41	51
Other violent sex offenses	71	68	75
Other person offenses	49	56	63
<b>Property offenses</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>52%</b>
Burglary	68	69	76
Larceny-theft	35	35	41
Motor vehicle theft	64	67	73
Arson	52	51	56
Vandalism	37	39	50
Trespassing	32	34	41
Stolen property offenses	55	61	68
Other property offenses	55	61	71
<b>Drug law violations</b>	<b>54%</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>62%</b>
<b>Public order offenses</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>60%</b>
Obstruction of justice	70	68	77
Disorderly conduct	28	35	38
Weapons offenses	47	54	64
Liquor law violations	27	42	49
Nonviolent sex offenses	52	47	51
Other public order offenses	29	40	54

### The number of formally processed delinquency cases increased substantially between 1987 and 1996



**Despite increases in the use of formal processing, the total proportion of delinquency cases resulting in adjudication or waiver remained virtually the same**



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

violation cases (from 27% to 49%) and weapons offense cases (from 47% to 64%). The proportion of formally processed aggravated assault cases dropped slightly from 63% to 61%.

**In nearly one-third of all delinquency cases referred to juvenile courts, the youth was adjudicated delinquent or waived to criminal court**

A youth may be adjudicated delinquent because he or she admits to the charges or because the court finds sufficient evidence to judge the youth delinquent. The most severe court actions in delinquency cases are adjudication in juvenile court or waiver to criminal court. Only 1% of formally processed cases were waived to criminal court in 1996. Despite increases in the use of formal processing, the proportion of delinquency cases that were either adjudicated or waived to criminal court did not change substantially. Adjudications and waivers represented between 29% and 33% of all delinquency cases each year from 1987 to 1996. In 1996, drug cases were most likely to result in adjudication or waiver (37%) and property cases were least likely (31%).

**The proportion of cases that were either adjudicated or waived to criminal court did not change substantially for most offenses between 1987 and 1996**

Most serious offense	Percent adjudicated or waived to criminal court		
	1987	1992	1996
Person	31%	30%	33%
Property	29	28	31
Drugs	35	39	37
Public order	30	31	35

**For further information**

This Fact Sheet is based on the forthcoming Report *Juvenile Court Statistics 1996*. Copies will be available from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's (OJJDP's) Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse, 800-638-8736. OJJDP also supports distribution of an easy-to-use, PC-compatible software version of the data analyzed in *Juvenile Court Statistics 1996*. To obtain the software, write to the National Juvenile Court Data Archive project at the National Center for Juvenile Justice or call 412-227-6950 and request *Easy Access to Juvenile Court Statistics*. Both the Report and software can be downloaded from OJJDP's home page: [www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org](http://www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org).

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*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 National Institute of Justice, and the Office for Victims of Crime.*

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