



OJJDP FACT SHEET

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Detention in Delinquency Cases, 1988–1997

by Gillian Porter

The number of cases involving detention increased 35% between 1988 and 1997

The increase in the number of delinquency cases handled by juvenile courts has driven the growth in the number of juveniles held in juvenile detention facilities. In 1988, juvenile courts handled 1.2 million delinquency cases. By 1997, this number had risen 48%, to nearly 1.8 million. This increase in the volume of cases entering the juvenile justice system resulted in a 35% increase in the number of delinquency cases that involved detention at some point between referral and case disposition. The number of juvenile delinquency cases detained in 1997 was 85,100 more than in 1988, which has resulted in increased demand for juvenile detention bed space across the Nation.

The most dramatic change in the detention population was the influx of female juveniles charged with person offenses

In general, the proportion of delinquency cases detained remained relatively steady between 1988 and 1997. Juveniles were detained in 20% of cases processed in 1988; in 1997, the proportion was 19%. However, the profile of the national detention population shifted during this period, with a greater proportion of youth charged with person offenses, a greater proportion of females, and a greater proportion of black youth in the detention population.

Over this period, there was a surge in the number of female delinquency cases entering detention (a 65% increase, compared with 30% for males). The large increase (155%) was tied to the growth in the number of delinquency cases involving females charged with person offenses.

In 1997, 27% of delinquency cases involving black youth included detention, compared with 15% for white youth. Between 1988 and 1997, the percent increase in the number of cases involving detention was more than two times greater for black than for white youth (52% versus 25%, respectively). Contributing to this disproportionate increase was a greater

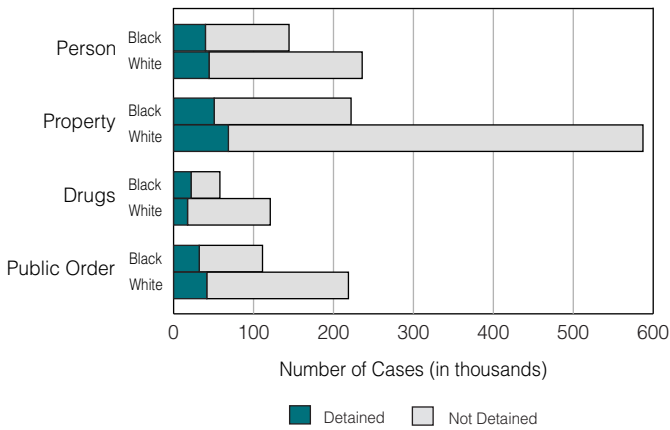
Delinquency cases involving detention, 1988–1997

Case Type	Percent of All Cases Involving Detention			Percent Change in Number of Cases, 1988–1997		Change in Number of Cases Detained, 1988–1997 Additional Cases
	1988	1993	1997	All Cases	Detained Cases	
Total	20%	21%	19%	48%	35%	85,100
Person	24	24	22	97	82	39,200
Property	17	17	15	19	6	7,000
Drugs	32	31	22	125	51	13,500
Public order	25	25	22	67	51	25,500
Male	21%	22%	20%	39%	30%	61,400
Person	26	26	24	82	68	27,700
Property	18	18	16	11	3	2,600
Drugs	34	32	23	124	52	12,200
Public order	25	25	23	60	48	18,900
Female	16%	16%	15%	83%	65%	23,700
Person	18	17	18	155	156	11,500
Property	12	13	10	54	28	4,300
Drugs	26	23	16	132	44	1,300
Public order	25	23	21	93	63	6,500
White	17%	17%	15%	43%	25%	34,600
Person	20	20	19	111	100	22,200
Property	14	14	12	16	-4	-3,200
Drugs	21	20	14	144	67	7,000
Public order	23	21	19	50	26	8,700
Black	28%	29%	27%	57%	52%	49,300
Person	29	29	28	76	65	15,700
Property	23	24	23	25	27	10,900
Drugs	51	45	38	93	42	6,400
Public order	30	32	29	112	104	16,300

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

increase in black juvenile case referrals (57%) compared with white juvenile referrals (43%) and a decline in the detention of white youth charged with property offenses. In fact, among all offense categories, black youth were more likely to be detained than white youth during every year between 1988 and 1997.

Although the white delinquency caseload was twice that of the black caseload, their detention caseloads were nearly equal in 1997



With the exception of drug offense cases, the use of detention remained relatively constant

Beginning in the late 1980's, the war on drugs coincided with a high rate of detention for drug offense cases. Since that time, the proportion of drug offense cases detained has declined. The steady growth in the number of offenders and the limited number of available detention beds are factors that likely influenced decisions made by the court regarding the use of detention. For example, the number of drug offense cases handled by juvenile courts increased 157% between 1990 and 1997, while the proportion of drug cases detained declined 16% (from 38% to 22%) during this period.

Between 1988 and 1997, the use of detention for juveniles remained consistent in relation to their ages

Although the number of cases detained involving juveniles age 13 and younger rose 39% between 1988 and 1997 (from 32,800 to 45,700), 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 1997 than 10 years earlier, the courts did not determine that this group of young offenders had a greater need for secure confinement during case processing. Nevertheless, the increase in the number of very young offenders in juvenile detention centers has placed new demands on these institutions.

For further information

This Fact Sheet is based on the Report *Juvenile Court Statistics 1997*. 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.

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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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