



OJJDP FACT SHEET

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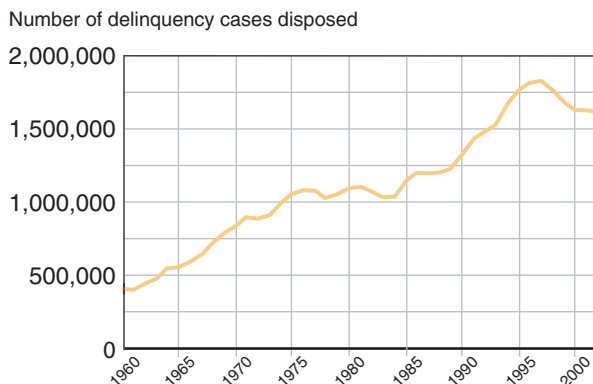
Delinquency Cases in Juvenile Court, 2002

by Anne L. Stahl

Counts and trends

In 2002, U.S. juvenile courts processed an estimated 1,615,400 delinquency cases. These cases involve juveniles charged with criminal law violations. The number of delinquency cases handled by juvenile courts has increased 41% since 1985. However, between 1997 and 2002, the nation's juvenile court delinquency caseload decreased 11%. During this time, the number of person offense cases decreased 2%, property offense cases decreased 27%, drug law violation cases increased 1%, and public order offense cases increased 7%.

The 2002 juvenile court delinquency caseload was 4 times the caseload in 1960.



These estimates are based on data from more than 2,100 courts with jurisdiction over more than 75% of the U.S. juvenile population. In this Fact Sheet, each case represents one youth processed by a juvenile court on a new referral, regardless of the number of individual offenses contained in that referral. A youth can be involved in more than one case during the calendar year.

Gender

Although the vast majority of the delinquency cases handled by juvenile courts continued to involve males, the female proportion of cases increased from 20% to 26% between 1993 and 2002. In 2002, females accounted for 28% (109,700) of person offense cases, 26% (164,500) of property offense cases, 18% (35,100) of drug offense cases, and 28% (113,800) of public order offense cases. Since 1985, the number of delinquency cases involving females has increased 92% (from 220,600 to 423,100), compared with a 29% increase (from 925,200 to 1,192,300) for males. Between 1997 and 2002, the male delinquency caseload decreased 15% while the female delinquency caseload was unchanged. Between 2001 and 2002, the male delinquency caseload decreased 1% while the female caseload increased 2%. Between 1985 and 2002, the growth in cases involving females outpaced the growth in cases involving males in all offense categories. Simple assault cases increased more than any other person offense for both genders (238% for females and 152% for males). In the public order offense category, the greatest increase for males was in cases involving obstruction of justice (169%); for females, it was disorderly conduct (241%).

Age

Fifty-eight percent of the delinquency cases processed in 2002 involved a juvenile younger than 16 at referral, compared with 60% in 1990. In 2002, juveniles younger than 16 were responsible for 64% (249,800) of person offense cases, 60% (376,200) of property offense cases, 41% (80,100) of drug law violation cases, and 55% (224,300) of public order offense cases.

Race

In 2002, approximately 78% of the U.S. juvenile population was white and 16% was black. White juveniles were involved in 67% (1,086,700) of the delinquency cases handled by juvenile courts

Delinquency cases disposed, by most serious offense, 2002

Most serious offense	Number of cases	Percent change		
		1985-02	1997-02	2001-02
Total	1,615,400	41%	-11%	0%
Person offenses	387,500	113	-2	0
Criminal homicide	1,700	41	-25	11
Forcible rape	4,700	8	-14	-7
Robbery	21,500	-13	-36	-2
Aggravated assault	47,400	32	-26	-4
Simple assault	270,700	174	6	0
Other violent sex offenses	16,400	150	31	19
Other person offenses	25,200	144	18	-4
Property offenses	624,900	-10	-27	-1
Burglary	100,000	-29	-29	-1
Larceny-theft	284,400	-13	-29	-1
Motor vehicle theft	38,500	0	-30	3
Arson	8,100	18	-10	-3
Vandalism	94,800	11	-18	0
Trespassing	50,800	-5	-24	0
Stolen property offenses	22,100	-20	-32	-6
Other property offenses	26,200	45	-16	1
Drug law violations	193,200	159	1	-4
Public order offenses	409,800	113	7	2
Obstruction of justice	182,600	180	10	-2
Disorderly conduct	108,500	145	18	11
Weapons	35,900	85	-19	-1
Liquor law violation (not status)	28,200	57	96	6
Nonviolent sex offense	15,500	16	20	1
Other public order offenses	39,000	23	-25	-3
Violent Crime Index*	75,300	13	-29	-3
Property Crime Index**	431,000	-16	-29	-1

Detail may not add to totals because of rounding. Percent change calculations are based on unrounded numbers.

* Includes murder and nonnegligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault.

** Includes burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson.

in 2002, compared with 29% (473,100) for black juveniles. White juveniles were involved in 60% (233,700) of person offense cases, 68% (427,700) of property offense cases, 76% (146,300) of drug law violation cases, and 68% (279,100) of public order cases. Black juveniles were involved in 37% (141,900) of person offense cases, 28% (172,000) of property offense cases, 21% (41,400) of drug law violation cases, and 29% (117,800) of public order cases.

Detention

Juvenile courts may hold a youth in a secure detention facility at some point prior to adjudication. The court may decide that detention is necessary to protect the community, secure the juvenile's safety, or ensure the juvenile's appearance at court hearings. Juveniles were detained in 20% (329,800) of the delinquency cases processed in 2002. Detention was used in 25% (97,300) of person offense cases, 17% (106,700) of property offense cases, 20% (37,900) of drug violation cases, and 21% (87,900) of public order offense cases.

Intake decision

Justice system authorities review each case and decide whether to dismiss it, handle it informally (without a petition), or formally

process the case by filing a petition requesting an adjudicatory or waiver hearing. About 16% (263,400) of all delinquency cases in 2002 were dismissed at intake, often for lack of legal sufficiency. Another 26% (417,200) were processed informally, with the juvenile voluntarily agreeing to the recommended disposition (e.g., probation). More than half (58% or 934,900) of delinquency cases were processed formally, with either an adjudicatory hearing or a hearing to consider waiving jurisdiction to criminal (adult) court.

Waiver to criminal court

One of the first decisions made at intake is determining whether a case should be processed in the adult justice system instead of the juvenile justice system. Judicial waiver decisions may be based on a number of factors, including the seriousness of the offense, the youth's prior record, and the youth's amenability to treatment. In 2002, juvenile court judges waived 7,100 delinquency cases. The number of cases waived in 2002 was 39% less than in 1993 and 32% less than in 1997, but 13% more than in 2001. Of the cases waived in 2002, 41% (2,900) involved a person offense as the most serious charge, 36% (2,600) involved a property offense, 14% (1,000) involved a drug law violation, and 9% (600) involved a public order offense.

Adjudication and disposition

Adjudicatory hearings establish responsibility for an alleged delinquent act. Disposition hearings are held to decide whether a juvenile adjudicated as delinquent should be placed under court supervision and what disposition should be imposed. In 2002, juveniles were adjudicated delinquent in 67% of the 934,900 cases brought before a judge. Once adjudicated, juveniles were placed on formal probation in 62% (385,400) of cases; juveniles were placed in a residential facility in 23% (144,000) of cases. Fourteen percent of adjudicated cases resulted in other dispositions, such as referral to an outside agency, community service, or restitution. Between 1997 and 2002, the number of cases resulting in residential placement decreased 10%, while the number of formal probation cases increased 5%.

For further information

This Fact Sheet is based on the forthcoming report, *Juvenile Court Statistics 2001-2002*, which will be available on the OJJDP Web site. To learn more about juvenile court cases, visit OJJDP's online Statistical Briefing Book and click on "Juveniles in Court." OJJDP also supports Easy Access to Juvenile Court Statistics, a Web-based application that analyzes the data files used for the *Juvenile Court Statistics* report. This application is available from the Statistical Briefing Book.

Anne L. Stahl is a Research Associate with the National Juvenile Court Data Archive, which is supported by an OJJDP grant.

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.