



# OJJDP FACT SHEET

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## Detention in Delinquency Cases, 1989–1998

by Paul Harms

### Detention caseloads increased 25% between 1989 and 1998

The increase in the delinquency caseload handled by juvenile courts has driven the growth in the number of juveniles in the detention system. In 1989, juvenile courts handled 1.2 million delinquency cases. By 1998, this number had risen 44%, to nearly 1.8 million. The growth in the volume of cases entering the juvenile justice system resulted in a 25% increase in the number of delinquency cases involving detention at some point between referral and case disposition. The number of delinquency cases detained in 1998 was 66,100 more than in 1989. As a result, the demand for juvenile detention bedspace has increased nationwide.

### 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 ordered to detention remained relatively steady between 1989 and 1998. Juveniles were detained in 21% of the cases processed in 1989, compared with 19% of the cases processed in 1998. However, the profile of the national detention population shifted during this period, with a greater proportion of youth charged with person and drug offenses and a greater proportion of females in the detention population by 1998.

During the 1989–1998 period, there was a surge in the number of female delinquency cases entering detention (a 56% increase, compared with 20% for males). The large increase was tied to the growth in the number of delinquency cases involving females charged with person offenses (157%).

### Detention caseloads increased more for white juveniles than black juveniles

Between 1989 and 1998, the number of cases involving detention increased more for white juveniles (33%, from 149,000 to 198,000) than for black juveniles (15%, from 100,900 to 115,800), in part because the use of detention in cases involving person and drug offenses increased more for whites than blacks. The increase

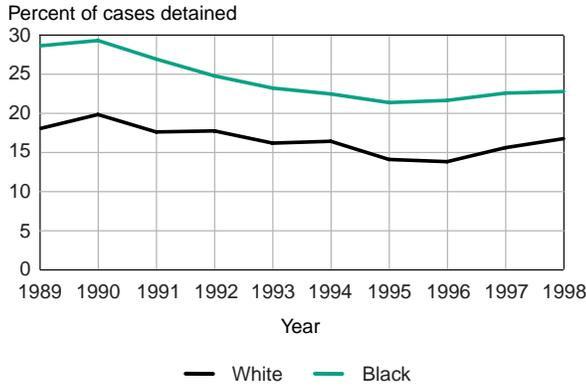
in detention for juveniles charged with person offenses was 3 times greater for whites than blacks (95% versus 30%), and the increase for drug offenses was 12 times greater for whites than blacks (128% versus 11%).

In spite of this trend, black juveniles were more likely to be detained than white juveniles during every year between 1989 and 1998. This was true for all offense categories.

Delinquency cases involving detention, 1989–1998

Case Type	Percent of All Cases Involving Detention			Percent Change in Number of Cases, 1989–98		Change in Number of Cases Involving Detention, 1989–98
	1989	1994	1998	All Cases	Detained Cases	
<b>Total</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>66,100</b>
Person	25	23	22	88	63	34,200
Property	17	15	15	11	-6	-7,400
Drugs	36	24	23	148	55	15,600
Public order	26	21	22	73	44	23,800
<b>Male</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>44,200</b>
Person	27	25	24	71	49	22,800
Property	18	16	16	3	-8	-8,700
Drugs	38	25	23	142	51	12,800
Public order	26	22	22	65	40	17,400
<b>Female</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>83%</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>21,900</b>
Person	19	17	18	157	138	11,500
Property	12	10	9	44	8	1,300
Drugs	28	18	19	182	93	2,800
Public order	25	18	19	105	59	6,400
<b>White</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>49,200</b>
Person	22	20	21	107	95	25,100
Property	15	14	13	8	-8	-5,900
Drugs	23	17	18	192	128	13,100
Public order	24	20	21	68	48	16,900
<b>Black</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>14,900</b>
Person	30	26	24	63	30	7,800
Property	23	18	19	16	-1	-300
Drugs	56	36	35	80	11	2,000
Public order	30	22	21	86	32	5,400

**The proportion of cases involving detention decreased more for black juveniles than white juveniles between 1989 and 1998**



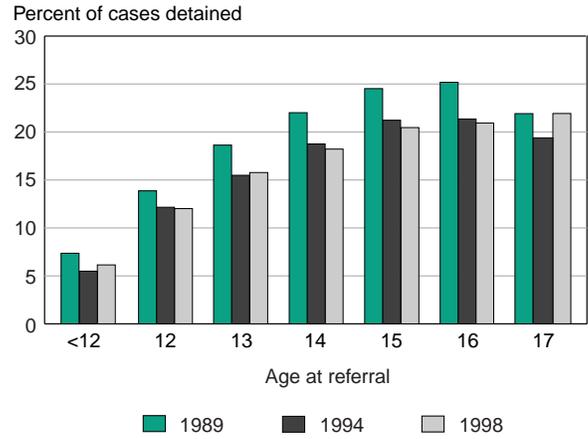
**With the exception of drug offense cases, the use of detention remained relatively constant**

Beginning in the late 1980s, the war on drugs coincided with a high rate of detention for drug offense cases. Since that time, however, the proportion of drug offense cases involving detention has declined. For example, the number of drug offense cases handled by juvenile courts increased 171% between 1990 and 1998, while the proportion of drug offense cases involving detention declined 15 percentage points (from 38% to 23%) during this period. 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 courts regarding the use of detention.

**For most age groups, the use of detention decreased slightly between 1989 and 1998**

Although the number of cases ordered to detention involving youth age 13 and younger rose 16% between 1989 and 1998, the proportion of cases involving detention in this age category declined during this period. These data indicate that although more young children were in the juvenile justice system in 1998 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

**Profile of detainees by age**



young offenders in juvenile detention centers has placed new demands on these institutions.

**For further information**

This Fact Sheet is based on the forthcoming Report *Juvenile Court Statistics 1998*, which will be available on the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's (OJJDP's) Web site ([ojjdp.ncjrs.org](http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org)). To learn more about juvenile court cases, visit OJJDP's *Statistical Briefing Book* ([ojjdp.ncjrs.org/ojstatbb/index.html](http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/ojstatbb/index.html)) 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*.

Paul Harms, Ph.D., 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.*

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