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Person Offenses in Juvenile Court, 1990–1999

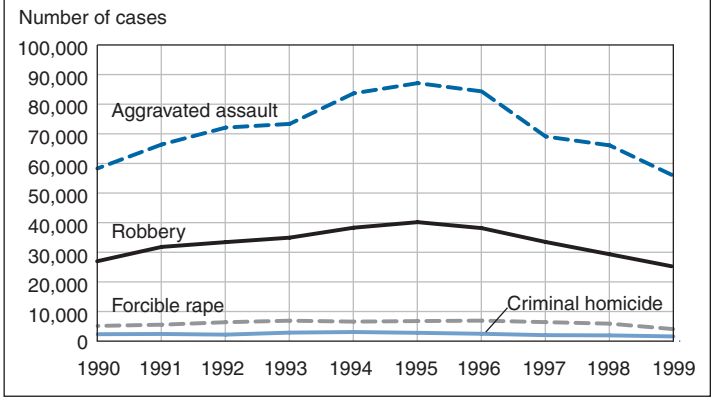
by Charles M. Puzzanchera

Person offenses accounted for 23% of all delinquency cases in 1999

In 1999, U.S. juvenile courts handled an estimated 387,100 delinquency cases in which the most serious charge was an offense against a person. Person offenses include assault, robbery, rape, and homicide. The 1999 person offense caseload was 55% greater than in 1990. Person offense cases accounted for 23% of all delinquency cases in 1999, compared with 19% in 1990.

In 1999, U.S. juvenile courts handled 13.2 person offense cases for every 1,000 juveniles age 10 through the upper age of juvenile court jurisdiction. The person offense case rate increased 35% between 1990 and 1999. In contrast, the case rate for property offenses decreased 20% between 1990 and 1999, while the drug offense case rate grew 135% and the rate for public order offenses increased 52%.

Delinquency cases involving FBI Violent Crime Index offenses, 1990–1999



Person offense cases handled by U.S. juvenile courts, 1990–1999

				Percent change	
Cases disposed	**1990**	**1995**	**1999**	**1990–99**	**1995–99**
Total person offenses*	249,500	387,000	387,100	55%	0%
Violent Crime Index	93,600	136,900	86,900	–7	–37
Criminal homicide	2,300	2,800	1,800	–21	–34
Forcible rape	5,100	6,800	4,200	–19	–38
Robbery	27,600	40,200	25,100	–9	–38
Aggravated assault	58,600	87,100	55,800	–5	–36
Simple assault	131,500	218,600	255,900	95	17
Case rate**					
Total person offenses*	9.7	13.7	13.2	35%	–4%
Violent Crime Index	3.7	4.8	3.0	–19	–39
Criminal homicide	0.1	0.1	0.1	–31	–37
Forcible rape	0.2	0.2	0.1	–29	–41
Robbery	1.1	1.4	0.9	–21	–40
Aggravated assault	2.3	3.1	1.9	–17	–38
Simple assault	5.1	7.7	8.7	70	13

Percent change figures are based on unrounded numbers.

* Total includes other person offense categories not listed.
** Per 1,000 youth age 10 through the upper age of juvenile court jurisdiction.

Homicide was the most serious charge in 1,800 cases handled in 1999. This was less than 0.5% of all person offense cases handled by juvenile courts in 1999. The majority of person offense cases involved charges of simple assault (255,900) or aggravated assault (55,800). Together, these two offenses accounted for 81% of all person offense cases processed in 1999.

Characteristics of offenders

Compared with 1990, juveniles involved in person offense cases in 1999 were slightly younger and more likely to be female. In 1999, 64% of person offense cases involved juveniles younger than 16 years old, compared with 62% in 1990. Females were involved in 27% of person offense cases in 1999, compared with 20% in 1990. Nearly two-thirds (63%) of person offense cases in 1999 involved white youth, 34% involved black youth, and 3% involved youth of other races.[1]

[1] Juveniles of Hispanic ethnicity can be of any race, but most are included in the white racial category.

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Case processing

Of the 387,100 person offense cases disposed by U.S. juvenile courts in 1999, 60% (233,200) were handled formally (that is, a petition was filed requesting an adjudicatory or transfer hearing). Of these petitioned cases, slightly more than 1% (2,500) were judicially waived to criminal court, more than half (63% or 147,800) were formally adjudicated delinquent in the juvenile justice system, and 36% (82,800) were petitioned but not adjudicated delinquent.

In 26% (38,100) of the 147,800 person offense cases formally adjudicated by juvenile courts in 1999, the most severe disposition imposed by the court was placement out of the home in a residential facility. Probation was ordered in 63% (92,500) of the cases, while 8% (11,400) resulted in other sanctions, including referral to an outside agency, fines, community service, and restitution. Approximately 4% (5,900) of formally adjudicated person offense cases were released (i.e., no sanctions were ordered at the adjudicatory hearing).

In 1999, an estimated 82,800 person offense cases were formally petitioned by the court but not adjudicated. Most (70% or 58,100) of these cases were dismissed. In 13% (10,700) of these petitioned cases, the youth agreed to informal probation; 15% (12,500) of these cases resulted in other dispositions. About 2% of nonadjudicated person offense cases resulted in voluntary out-of-home placement.

Forty-four percent (68,300) of the 153,900 person offense cases handled informally (no petition was filed) by juvenile courts in 1999 were dismissed. The remainder resulted in voluntary probation (34% or 52,300) or other dispositions (21% or 33,100), while a small number (less than 1% or about 200) resulted in out-of-home placement.

Characteristics of person offense cases, 1990–1999

	1990	1995	1999
Gender			
Male	80%	76%	73%
Female	20	24	27
Age at referral			
15 or younger	62%	64%	64%
16 or older	38	36	36
Race			
White	57%	59%	63%
Black	40	38	34
Other	3	3	3
Predisposition detention			
Detained	27%	22%	23%
Not detained	73	78	77
Manner of handling			
Formal	55%	58%	60%
Informal	45	42	40
Outcome of formal handling			
Adjudicated	55%	55%	63%
Not adjudicated	43	43	36
Waived	2	2	1
Disposition of adjudicated cases			
Placed out of the home	35%	29%	26%
Probation or supervision	55	54	63
Other (fines, restitution, etc.)	7	10	8
Dismissed or released	4	7	4

Detail may not add to 100% because of rounding.

For further information

This Fact Sheet is based on the forthcoming Report *Juvenile Court Statistics 1999,* which will be available on the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's (OJJDP's) Web site (www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ojjdp). To learn more about juvenile court cases, visit OJJDP's *Statistical Briefing Book* (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.*

Charles M. Puzzanchera is a Research Assistant 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.