Person Offense Cases in Juvenile Court, 2008

by Sarah Hockenberry

Counts, rates, and trends

U.S. juvenile courts handled an estimated 403,300 delinquency cases in 2008 in which the most serious charge was an offense against a person. (Person offenses include assault, robbery, rape, homicide, and other crimes involving force or threat of force against persons.) The 2008 person offense caseload was 119% greater than in 1985. In 2008, person offenses accounted for 24% of the delinquency caseload, compared with 16% in 1985.

In 2008, juvenile courts handled 13.1 person offense cases for every 1,000 juveniles age 10 through the upper age of original juvenile court jurisdiction. The 2008 person offense case rate was 87% greater than the 1985 rate but 8% less than the 1997 peak rate.

Homicide was the most serious charge in 1,400 cases handled in 2008. This amounted to less than 0.4% of all person offense cases that juvenile courts handled in 2008. The majority of person offense cases involved charges of simple assault (270,200) or aggravated assault (48,000). Together, these two offenses accounted for 79% of all person offense cases processed in 2008.

Characteristics of offenders

More than half (56%) of person offense cases in 2008 involved white youth, 41% involved black youth, 1% involved American Indian youth (includes Alaskan Native), and 1% involved Asian youth (includes Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander). Between 1985 and 2008, person offense case rates for black juveniles were substantially greater than those for the other racial groups; however, the case rate increased most for white youth (88%), followed by black youth (80%), Asian youth (53%), and American Indian youth (37%). Person offense case rates peaked for all racial groups during the 1990s and declined through the
early 2000s. Although case rates were generally flat between 2000 and 2008 for white, American Indian, and Asian youth, case rates for black youth increased 17%, almost reaching the 1995 peak rate.

Compared with 1985, juveniles involved in person offense cases in 2008 were about the same age but more likely to be female. In 2008, 60% of person offenses involved juveniles younger than 16, compared with 62% in 1985. Between 1985 and 2008, the relative increase in the female caseload outpaced that of males for person offenses (228% vs. 93%). As a result, the female share of the person offense caseload has grown since 1985. For example, females accounted for about 21% of person offenses for each year between 1985 and 1991. Between 1991 and 2008, the female proportion of the person offense caseload steadily increased and was 29% in 2008.

Compared with males, the 2008 female delinquency caseload had a greater proportion of simple assault cases (21% vs. 15%) and an equal proportion of aggravated assault cases (3%). Even though assault cases increased both for males and females between 1985 and 2008, the growth in female assault cases exceeded the growth in male assault cases (226% vs. 108%).

**Case processing**

Of the 403,300 person offense cases that juvenile courts disposed in 2008, 58% (238,100) were handled formally (i.e., a petition was filed requesting an adjudicatory or transfer hearing). Of these petitioned cases, 58% (139,300) resulted in the youth being adjudicated delinquent in the juvenile justice system, 40% (94,400) resulted in the youth being adjudicated not delinquent, and 2% (4,400) were judicially waived to criminal court.

The proportion of petitioned person offense cases judicially waived to criminal court peaked in 1994, when 2.7% (5,800) of such cases were waived. Since 1994, the likelihood of waiver has declined. By 2008, 1.9% (4,400) of the petitioned person offense caseload was waived. Although the likelihood of waiver has declined, person offense cases were more likely to be waived than cases involving other offenses in 2008. Cases involving males were four times as likely as those involving females to be judicially waived to criminal court in 2008, and cases involving juveniles age 16 or older were more likely to be waived than those involving juveniles younger than 16.

In 31% (43,500) of the 139,300 person offense cases in which the youth was adjudicated delinquent in 2008, the most severe disposition imposed was placement out of the home in a residential facility. Probation was ordered in 59% (82,200) of the cases and 10% (13,600) resulted in other sanctions, including referral to an outside agency, fines, community service, and restitution.

Among person offense cases in which youth were adjudicated delinquent, the percentage of youth ordered to out-of-home placement decreased between 1985 and 2008, and the percentage of youth ordered to probation remained the same.

In 2008, those most likely to receive a disposition of out-of-home placement for person offense cases were youth age 16 or older, males, and American Indian youth. Those most likely to be ordered to probation were youth age 15 or younger, females, and Asian youth.

**For further information**

This fact sheet is based on the report, *Juvenile Court Statistics 2008*, which is available through OJJDP’s Web site (ojjdp.gov). To learn more about juvenile court cases, visit OJJDP’s online Statistical Briefing Book (ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/) 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 “Data Analysis Tools” section of the Statistical Briefing Book.

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