



Shay Bilchik, Administrator

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The Youngest Delinquents: Offenders Under Age 15

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Many people believe that juvenile delinquents are becoming younger and committing more serious crimes at earlier ages than the young offenders of 10 or 15 years ago. This belief in an increasingly younger and more serious juvenile offender population influences juvenile justice policy and shapes public attitudes about the Nation's juvenile justice system.

Has there actually been a change in the age profile of juvenile offenders encountered by law enforcement authorities and juvenile courts across the United States? Is the juvenile justice system seeing ever younger, increasingly serious offenders?

This Bulletin presents the findings of a study that explored these issues by examining the most recent data on juvenile¹ arrests and the delinquency cases processed by U.S. juvenile courts. The study compared the characteristics of young offenders arrested in recent years with those arrested in 1980 and analyzed the juvenile court's response to those offenders once they had been charged.

The data used here are from the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI's) Uniform Crime Reporting Program and the National Juvenile Court Data Archive,

which is maintained for the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention by the National Center for Juvenile Justice.

Findings from the study indicate:

- ◆ Offenders under age 15 represent the leading edge of the juvenile crime problem, and their numbers have been growing.
- ◆ Violent crime arrests, for example, grew 94% between 1980 and 1995 for youth under age 15, compared with 47% for older youth.
- ◆ Consequently, the age profile of juvenile offenders has changed somewhat since 1980. Offenders under age 15 accounted for an increased proportion of all juvenile arrests for violent crime in 1995 (30%) compared with 1990 (28%), 1985 (29%), and 1980 (25%), the most significant increases occurring between 1980 and 1985.
- ◆ However, recent trends are encouraging. Between 1994 and 1995, decreases in the number of juvenile arrests for violent crime were greater for offenders ages 13 and 14 (down 6%) than for those age 15 or older (down 2%).
- ◆ Because offenders under age 15 have a high risk of continued criminal involvement, yet are often more amenable to services and sanctions, juvenile crime policy should continue to focus on early and effective interventions with these youngest delinquents.

From the Administrator

In recent years, Americans have been alarmed by increases in juvenile crime and by news reports of heinous acts by younger juveniles. Against a decade-long background of disturbing statistics, anecdotal evidence of violent children affects the public discourse on juvenile justice. But sound decisionmaking rests on more than shocking news stories.

The Youngest Delinquents: Offenders Under Age 15 draws on data from the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the National Juvenile Court Data Archive to track trends in youth crime. While confirming the recent disproportionate increase in the number of young offenders, the Bulletin reports that juvenile offenders as a group have not become markedly younger in the past decade. An additional encouraging finding is that the number of violent crime index arrests, which declined 3% between 1994 and 1995 for all juveniles, dropped 6% among youth ages 13 and 14.

The data presented in this Bulletin will enable policymakers and the public to better understand the role that younger delinquents play in the overall problem of juvenile crime and violence as the debate continues over the best way to intervene with these young offenders.

Shay Bilchik
Administrator

¹ The term "juvenile" is used here to mean below the age of 18, although the actual definition of juvenile status varies according to State laws governing the upper age of original juvenile court jurisdiction.

Offenders age 12 or younger were involved in 9% of all juvenile arrests

Fewer than 1 in 10 juvenile arrests in 1995 involved youth age 12 or younger. Arrests of 13- and 14-year-old juveniles accounted for another 25% of juvenile arrests in 1995.

The proportion of juvenile arrests that involved offenders age 12 or younger varied by offense. In 1995, youth in this age group were responsible for 8% of arrests for Violent Crime Index offenses and 13% of arrests for Property Crime Index offenses. They accounted for 2% of juvenile arrests for drug abuse violations, but were responsible for 35% of arrests for arson. Other offenses in which a relatively high proportion of arrests involved juveniles age 12 or younger included vandalism and sex offenses.

Offenders ages 13 and 14 accounted for 23% of juvenile arrests for Violent Crime Index offenses and 28% of arrests for Property Crime Index offenses in 1995. Juveniles in this age group were involved in 10% of arrests for murder and 23% of arrests for aggravated assault. They accounted for fewer than 10% of arrests for offenses such as liquor law violations, but were involved in more than 25% of juvenile arrests for simple assault, vandalism, sex offenses, disorderly conduct, and running away.

The majority of juvenile arrests in 1995 involved youth age 15 or older. These older youth were involved in 70% of juvenile arrests for Violent Crime Index offenses and 58% of juvenile arrests for Property Crime Index offenses. They accounted for 86% of juvenile arrests for murder and more than 80% of the arrests for forgery, embezzlement, driving under the influence, and liquor law violations.

Arrests of juveniles ages 13 and 14 grew disproportionately

The total number of juvenile arrests increased 26% between 1980 and 1995. Arrests involving juveniles age 12 or younger grew 24%, while those involving juveniles ages 13 and 14 increased 54%.

In 1995 there were nearly 148,000 arrests of juveniles for Violent Crime Index offenses. The number of these arrests involving juveniles age 15 or older (103,000)

The age profile of juvenile arrests in 1995 varied by offense

Offense	Percent of Juvenile Arrests in 1995		
	Juveniles Age 12 or Younger	Juveniles Ages 13 and 14	Juveniles Age 15 or Older
Total	9%	25%	66%
Crime Index total	12	27	60
Violent Crime Index	8	23	70
Murder and nonnegligent manslaughter	3	10	86
Forcible rape	11	26	63
Robbery	6	22	72
Aggravated assault	9	23	68
Property Crime Index	13	28	58
Burglary	12	27	61
Larceny-theft	15	29	56
Motor vehicle theft	4	25	72
Arson	35	33	33
Nonindex			
Simple assault	13	28	59
Forgery and counterfeiting	3	10	87
Fraud	4	22	74
Embezzlement	3	7	90
Stolen property (buying, receiving, possessing)	6	22	72
Vandalism	19	29	53
Weapons (carrying, possessing, etc.)	8	22	70
Prostitution and commercialized vice	5	12	83
Sex offense (except forcible rape and prostitution)	18	33	49
Drug abuse violations	2	15	83
Gambling	3	13	83
Offenses against the family and children	8	22	70
Driving under the influence	2	1	97
Liquor law violations	1	9	90
Drunkenness	2	12	85
Disorderly conduct	9	26	65
Vagrancy	4	17	79
All other offenses (except traffic)	7	21	72
Suspicion	6	21	73
Curfew and loitering	5	24	71
Running away	8	35	56

Note: Percentages may not add to 100% because of rounding.

Source: Authors' analysis of data from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crime in the United States 1995* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1996).

far exceeded the number of arrests involving younger offenders. However, while Violent Crime Index arrests involving older juveniles increased 47% between 1980 and 1995, arrests of juveniles ages 13 and 14 grew 92%, and arrests of juveniles age 12

or younger grew 102%. Arrests of juveniles ages 13 and 14 for Property Crime Index offenses increased 16% between 1980 and 1995, compared with a decline of 1% for juveniles age 12 or younger and a decrease of 9% for older juveniles. Most

Increases in the number of arrests between 1980 and 1995 were relatively greater for juveniles ages 13 and 14

	Juveniles Age 12 or Younger		Juveniles Ages 13 and 14		Juveniles Age 15 or Older	
	Estimated 1995 Arrests	Percent Change 1980–1995	Estimated 1995 Arrests	Percent Change 1980–1995	Estimated 1995 Arrests	Percent Change 1980–1995
Total*	256,300	24%	680,400	54%	1,808,300	18%
Crime Index total	109,300	5	243,000	23	532,800	–2
Violent Crime Index	11,500	102	33,300	92	103,000	47
Murder and nonnegligent manslaughter	100	209	300	88	2,800	72
Forcible rape	600	190	1,400	62	3,500	–3
Robbery	3,200	41	12,400	45	39,900	16
Aggravated assault	7,600	139	19,100	147	56,800	85
Property Crime Index	97,800	–1	209,800	16	429,800	–9
Burglary	16,600	–35	36,500	–32	82,700	–46
Larceny-theft	74,600	9	150,000	35	286,000	5
Motor vehicle theft	2,900	31	19,900	53	57,700	23
Arson	3,600	29	3,400	54	3,400	–8
Nonindex*						
Simple assault	28,700	170	60,600	196	126,500	115
Stolen property (buying, receiving, possessing)	2,500	7	9,300	20	31,000	14
Vandalism	26,000	–7	39,900	28	73,700	13
Weapons (carrying, possessing, etc.)	4,500	206	12,600	167	39,200	93
Sex offenses (except forcible rape and prostitution)	2,900	125	5,300	68	7,800	4
Drug abuse violations	4,100	129	28,000	101	157,700	67
Liquor law violations	1,200	31	11,300	19	107,500	–24
Disorderly conduct	16,000	63	45,600	102	112,300	17
Curfew and loitering	7,100	136	35,900	170	106,700	96
Running away	21,100	47	88,100	80	140,300	56

◆ Between 1980 and 1995, arrests for Violent Crime Index offenses doubled for juveniles age 12 or younger, although these youth accounted for just 8% of juvenile arrests for Violent Crime Index offenses in 1995.

*Not all offenses included in the nonindex category are represented.

Note: Detail may not add to totals because of rounding.

Source: Authors' analysis of data from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crime in the United States 1980* and *Crime in the United States 1995* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1981 and 1996, respectively).

Juvenile Arrest Data

Through its Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) collects data on arrests made by law enforcement agencies throughout the United States. The number of agencies able to participate in the UCR Program varies from year to year. Between 1985 and 1995, the reporting sample ranged from 75% to 85% of the U.S. population.

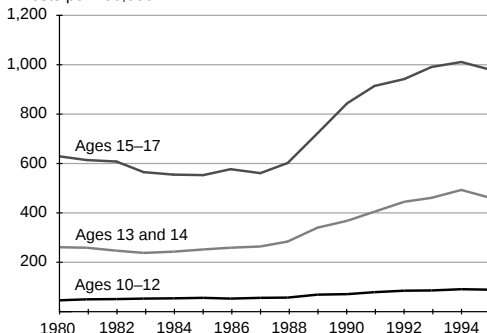
Data from the UCR Program can be used to describe the juveniles who come to the attention of police each year. The FBI does not calculate national estimates for arrests involving persons under the age of 18, but its annual publication *Crime in the United States* provides national estimates for the total number of arrests for various offenses. The juvenile arrest estimates

presented in this study were developed by deriving the proportion of youth arrests in each offense category from the data reported by UCR-participating jurisdictions and then applying that proportion to the UCR national estimate of total arrests for that offense. For more information, see *Juvenile Arrests 1995*, by Howard N. Snyder (Washington, DC: OJJDP, 1997).

After increases in the early 1990's, the rate of Violent Crime Index arrests declined in recent years

Violent Crime Index

Arrests per 100,000



Violent Crime Index

Arrest Rates*

Ages	1980	1995	% Change
10-12	46	89	91%
13-14	261	460	76
15-17	629	979	56

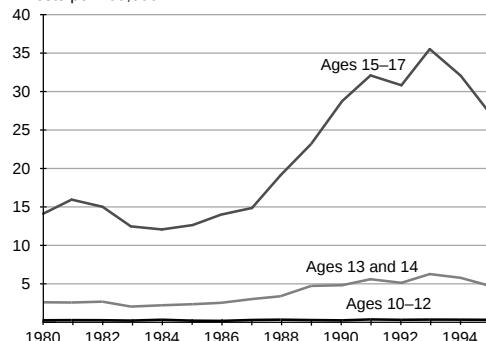
Murder

Arrest Rates

Ages	1980	1995	% Change
10-12	0.26	0.32	23%
13-14	2.60	4.67	80
15-17	14.12	26.89	90

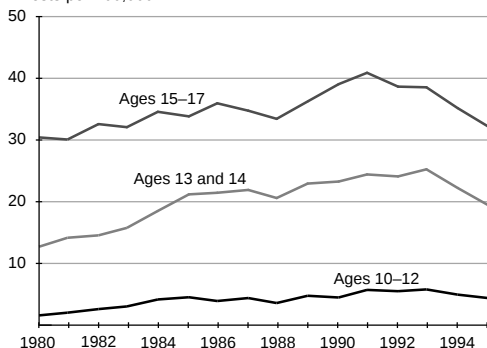
Murder

Arrests per 100,000



Forcible Rape

Arrests per 100,000



Forcible Rape

Arrest Rates

Ages	1980	1995	% Change
10-12	1.6	4.4	177%
13-14	12.7	19.4	53
15-17	30.4	32.2	6

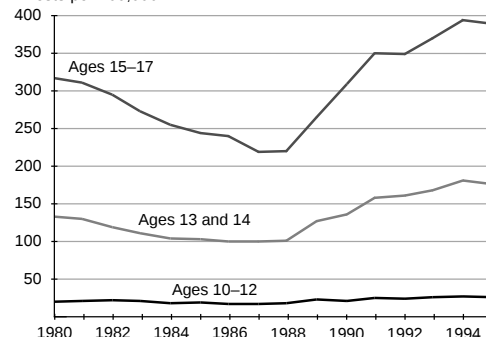
Robbery

Arrest Rates

Ages	1980	1995	% Change
10-12	20	26	29%
13-14	133	176	32
15-17	317	389	23

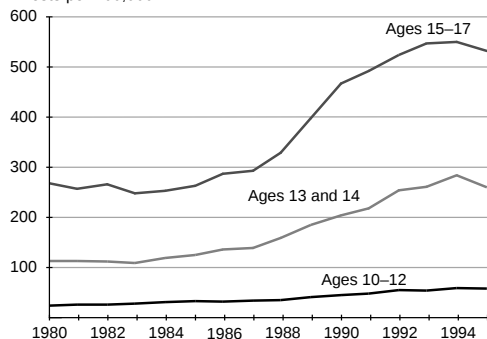
Robbery

Arrests per 100,000



Aggravated Assault

Arrests per 100,000



Aggravated Assault

Arrest Rates

Ages	1980	1995	% Change
10-12	24	58	138%
13-14	113	260	130
15-17	268	532	98

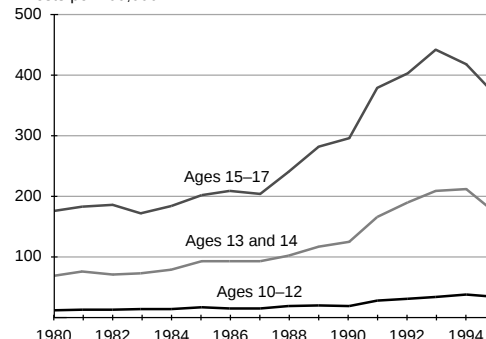
Weapons Offenses

Arrest Rates

Ages	1980	1995	% Change
10-12	12	34	181%
13-14	69	171	149
15-17	176	365	108

Weapons Offenses

Arrests per 100,000



*Per 100,000 youth.

Source: Authors' analysis of unpublished data from the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Reporting Program.

of the growth in Property Crime Index arrests involving juveniles ages 13 and 14 resulted from an increase of 35% in arrests for larceny-theft.

In many other offense categories, arrests of juveniles ages 13 and 14 increased more than arrests involving older youth between 1980 and 1995. Weapons arrests,

for instance, increased more for juveniles age 12 or younger (206%) than for juveniles ages 13 and 14 (167%) or older juveniles (93%). However, 70% of all juvenile arrests for weapons violations in 1995 involved youth age 15 or older, and the number of offenders age 12 or younger remained relatively small.

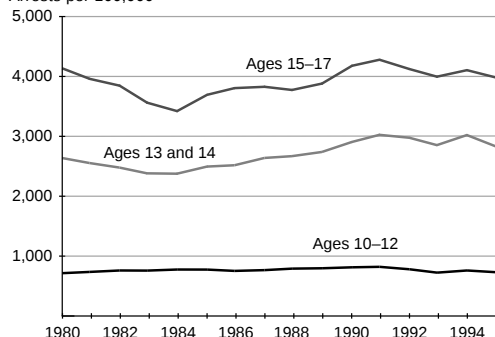
Arrest rates for juveniles age 12 or younger were far lower than for older juveniles

The juvenile population of the United States has fluctuated in recent decades.

Between 1980 and 1995, arrest rates for many property crimes increased for youth ages 13 and 14

Property Crime Index

Arrests per 100,000



Property Crime Index

Arrest Rates*

Ages	1980	1995	% Change
10-12	715	730	2%
13-14	2,638	2,825	7
15-17	4,136	3,978	-4

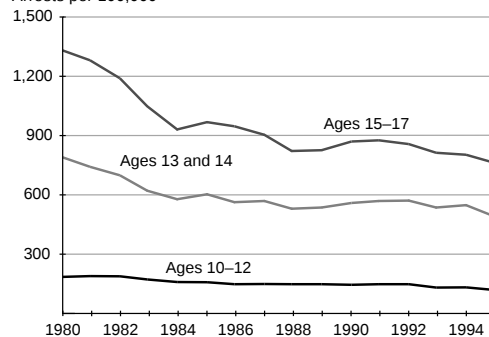
Burglary

Arrest Rates

Ages	1980	1995	% Change
10-12	185	118	-36%
13-14	790	488	-38
15-17	1,331	760	-43

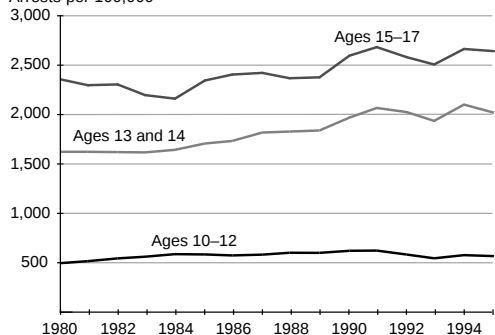
Burglary

Arrests per 100,000



Larceny-Theft

Arrests per 100,000



Larceny-Theft

Arrest Rates

Ages	1980	1995	% Change
10-12	496	567	14%
13-14	1,623	2,019	24
15-17	2,358	2,642	12

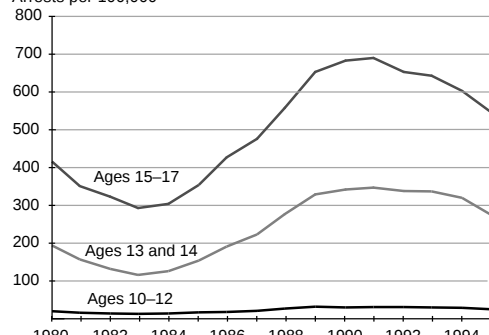
Motor Vehicle Theft

Arrest Rates

Ages	1980	1995	% Change
10-12	20	25	23%
13-14	194	273	41
15-17	416	544	31

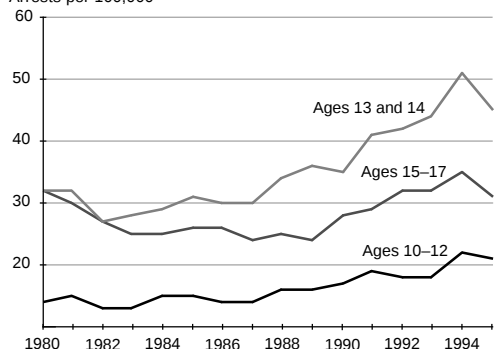
Motor Vehicle Theft

Arrests per 100,000



Arson

Arrests per 100,000



Arson

Arrest Rates

Ages	1980	1995	% Change
10-12	14	21	52%
13-14	32	45	43
15-17	32	31	-2

Drug Violations

Arrest Rates

Ages	1980	1995	% Change
10-12	16	31	96%
13-14	202	384	90
15-17	815	1,485	82

Drug Violations

Arrests per 100,000



*Per 100,000 youth.

Source: Authors' analysis of unpublished data from the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Reporting Program.

Analyzing per capita arrest rates removes the effect of this changing population and clarifies the comparison of arrest trends over time.

Calculations of age-specific arrest rates using unpublished FBI data show that the

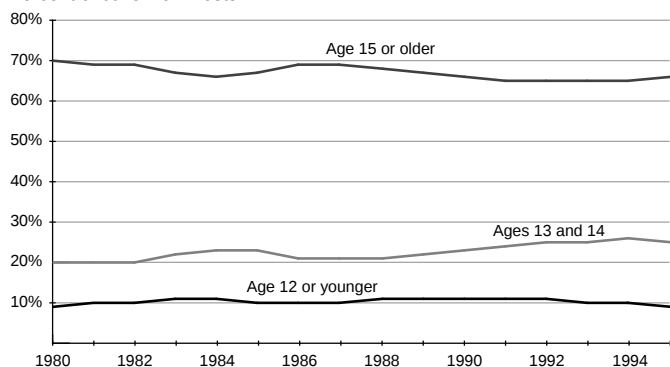
1995 arrest rate for Violent Crime Index offenses was much lower for juveniles age 12 or younger (89 per 100,000) than for those ages 13 and 14 (460 per 100,000) or older youth (979 per 100,000). However, arrest rates for juvenile offenders have

increased disproportionately in recent years. Between 1980 and 1995, for example, the Violent Crime Index arrest rate increased 91% for juveniles age 12 or younger, 76% for youth ages 13 and 14, and 56% for youth age 15 or older.

Despite differential increases in juvenile arrests within age groups, the age profile of arrested youth changed relatively little between 1980 and 1995

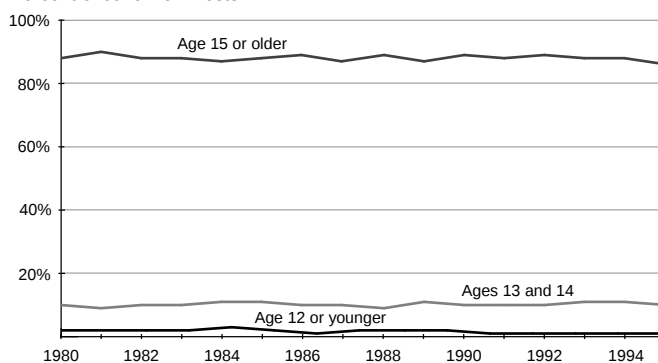
Total Arrests

Percent of Juvenile Arrests



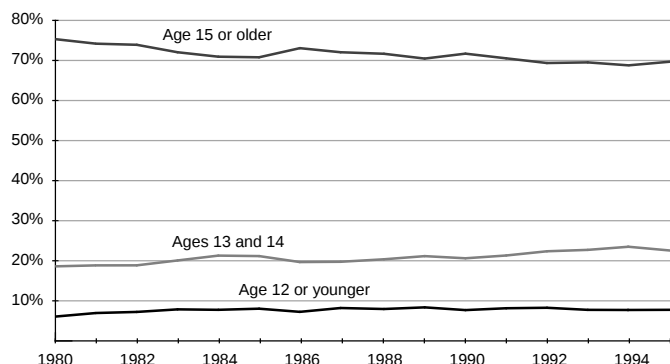
Murder

Percent of Juvenile Arrests



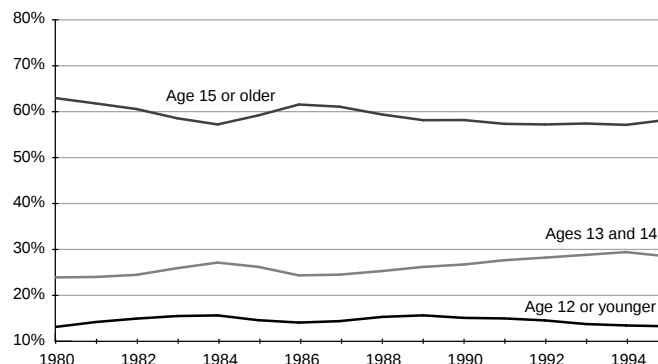
Violent Crime Index

Percent of Juvenile Arrests



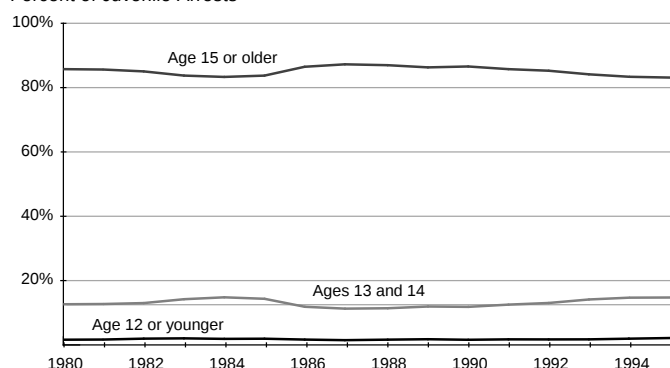
Property Crime Index

Percent of Juvenile Arrests



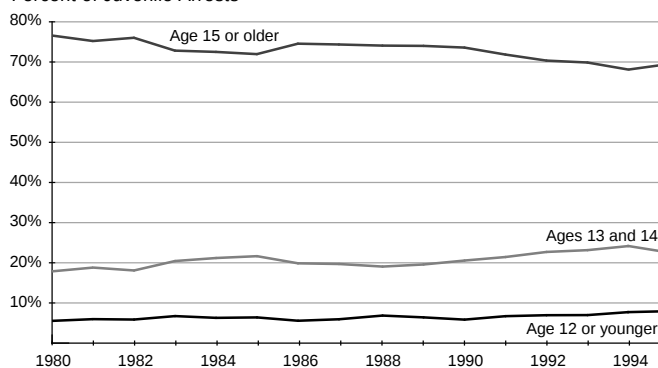
Drug Offenses

Percent of Juvenile Arrests



Weapons Offenses

Percent of Juvenile Arrests



- ◆ In 1995, 30% of juvenile arrests for Violent Crime Index offenses involved youth under age 15, as compared with 25% in 1980.
- ◆ Between 1984 and 1995, there was virtually no change in the proportion of offenders ages 13 and 14 arrested for violent crimes.
- ◆ Some of the changes in the age profile of juvenile arrests were likely due to fluctuations in the juvenile population.
- ◆ The proportion of juvenile drug arrests that involved offenders ages 13 and 14 increased somewhat between 1990 and 1995, but the 1995 figure was largely the same as the proportion of offenders in this age group in 1985.
- ◆ In 1995, 30% of juvenile arrests for weapons offenses involved youth under age 15, as compared with 23% in 1980.

Source: Authors' analysis of unpublished data from the Federal Bureau of Investigation Uniform Crime Reporting Program.

In recent years, arrests for index offenses declined more for offenders age 14 or younger

The most recent juvenile arrest trends suggest that the juvenile justice system may have turned a corner since 1994. Violent Crime Index arrests declined 3% for all juveniles between 1994 and 1995 but dropped 6% among youth ages 13 and 14. The number of Property Crime Index arrests did not change between 1994 and 1995 for youth age 15 or older, but decreased 3% for youth age 12 or younger and dropped 5% for youth ages 13 and 14. While the significance of any single-year change should not be exaggerated, these recent patterns are an encouraging turnaround from earlier arrest trends and run counter to predictions of increased delinquency based on the demographic trend of rising numbers of young people.

Change in Juvenile Arrests for Crime Index Offenses: 1994–1995

Age of Juvenile	Crime Index Offense	
	Violent	Property
12 or younger	–1%	–3%
13 and 14	–6	–5
15 or older	–2	0

Source: Authors' analysis of data from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crime in the United States 1995* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1996).

Between 1985 and 1994, juvenile court cases involving offenders age 12 or younger increased 32%

Juvenile courts in the United States handled an estimated 1,555,200 delinquency cases in 1994. This number represented a 20% increase over the 1990 caseload and a 41% increase over the number of cases handled in 1985.

Between 1985 and 1994, the number of delinquency cases involving juveniles age 12 or younger grew 32%, those involving

Between 1985 and 1994, person offense cases involving youth ages 13 and 14 increased more than any other type of delinquency case

Offense	1985	1990	1994	Percent Change	
				1985–1994	1990–1994
Juveniles age 12 or younger	128,000	157,500	168,700	32%	7%
Person	20,700	31,700	41,800	101	32
Property	93,100	109,900	105,200	13	–4
Drugs	1,500	1,500	2,700	75	78
Public order	12,600	14,400	19,100	52	33
Juveniles ages 13 and 14	294,400	349,600	438,300	49%	25%
Person	48,400	69,200	100,200	107	45
Property	186,900	213,600	241,800	29	13
Drugs	13,300	11,400	20,700	56	82
Public order	45,900	55,500	75,500	65	36
Juveniles age 15 or older	681,500	792,100	948,200	39%	20%
Person	105,200	142,600	194,000	84	36
Property	378,600	428,000	456,300	21	7
Drugs	59,300	58,200	96,800	63	66
Public order	138,400	163,400	201,000	45	23

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

Source: Authors' analysis of data from the National Center for Juvenile Justice, *National Juvenile Court Data Archive: Juvenile Court Case Records 1985–1994* [machine-readable data files].

Juvenile Court Data

The National Juvenile Court Data Archive generates annual estimates of the number of delinquency cases disposed by juvenile courts nationwide. Estimates are based on data collected from State and local agencies throughout the Nation.

Data are collected in two forms—detailed *case-level* data and aggregate *court-level* data. In 1994, case-level data describing each case's demographic and processing characteristics were obtained from more than 1,400 jurisdictions in 26 States. In all, 1994 data were collected from 1,816 jurisdictions containing 67% of the Nation's juvenile population.

National estimates were developed by a weighting procedure that incorporates key characteristics of each U.S. county that are known to affect juvenile court caseloads—e.g., upper age of the juvenile court's jurisdiction, age and racial composition of the juvenile population.

For more information, see *Offenders in Juvenile Court, 1994*, by Jeffrey A. Butts (Washington, DC: OJJDP, 1996).

juveniles ages 13 and 14 increased 49%, and cases involving older juveniles grew 39%. In all three age groups, the largest relative increases between 1985 and 1994 were in cases in which a person offense was the most serious charge.² Since 1990,

however, drug offenses have increased the most for juveniles of all ages.

² Person offenses are homicide, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, simple assault, and other violent sex offenses.

The proportion of person offense cases that involved juveniles age 12 or younger was the same in 1994 as in 1985

	1985	1990	1994
Total delinquency cases	1,103,900	1,299,200	1,555,200
Age 12 or younger	12%	12%	11%
Ages 13 and 14	27	27	28
Age 15 or older	62	61	61
Person offenses	174,400	243,500	336,100
Age 12 or younger	12%	13%	12%
Ages 13 and 14	28	28	30
Age 15 or older	60	59	58
Property offenses	658,600	751,500	803,400
Age 12 or younger	14%	15%	13%
Ages 13 and 14	28	28	30
Age 15 or older	58	57	57
Drug offenses	74,100	71,100	120,200
Age 12 or younger	2%	2%	2%
Ages 13 and 14	18	16	17
Age 15 or older	80	82	81
Public order offenses	196,800	233,200	295,600
Age 12 or younger	6%	6%	6%
Ages 13 and 14	23	24	26
Age 15 or older	70	70	68

Note: Detail may not add to 100% because of rounding.

Source: Authors' analysis of data from the National Center for Juvenile Justice, *National Juvenile Court Data Archive: Juvenile Court Case Records 1985–1994* [machine-readable data files].

Juveniles age 12 or younger were involved in 11% of juvenile court delinquency cases in 1994

In 1994 juveniles age 12 or younger accounted for 12% of all person offense cases, 13% of property offense cases, 2% of drug law violation cases, and 6% of public order offense cases (i.e., disorderly conduct, weapons offenses, liquor law violations, etc.).

Between 1985 and 1994, the proportion of juveniles ages 14 or younger among the total delinquency caseload did not change substantially. The percentage of juveniles age 12 or younger decreased from 12% to 11% and the percentage of juveniles ages 13 and 14 grew from 27% to 28%.

Even when each type of offense is considered separately, the age profile of delinquency cases did not change significantly

between 1985 and 1994. Juveniles ages 13 and 14 were involved in a slightly larger proportion of person, property, and public order offense cases in 1994, but the largest change was just 3%: This group accounted for 26% of public order offense cases in 1994, as compared with 23% in 1985.

Changes in juvenile court case rates varied among different age groups

Between 1985 and 1994, the number of delinquency cases involving 13-year-old juveniles increased more (55%) than cases involving juveniles of any other age. The number of cases involving 16-year-olds grew 42%, and those involving 17-year-olds increased 33%.

Much of the disproportionate increase in delinquency cases involving young juveniles may have been due to the changing nature of the youth population itself.

To control for fluctuations in the size of the juvenile population, the number of delinquency cases involving youth of each age group was converted into a rate that represented the number of cases processed by juvenile courts for every 1,000 youth in the age group at risk of referral to a juvenile court.³

Analyzing per capita case rates reveals that age-related changes in the cases referred to the juvenile justice system are partly related to the relative size of youth population cohorts as they move through the ages of juvenile court jurisdiction.

Between 1985 and 1994, the total delinquency case rate for juveniles increased 33%, from 42.0 to 56.1 cases disposed for every 1,000 youth at risk. The smallest relative increases were for juveniles age 12 or younger. Between 1985 and 1994, the case rate for 11- and 12-year-olds increased 13% and 29%, respectively. The growth in delinquency case rates was higher for juveniles between the ages of 13 and 16 (up about 45%).

While it is useful to examine variations in the age profile of delinquency caseloads in order to appreciate the changing workload of the juvenile justice system, it is not appropriate to view any change in juvenile court caseloads as proof that youth of a certain age have become more delinquent. Before inferences about delinquency trends are made, juvenile population changes should be analyzed as well.

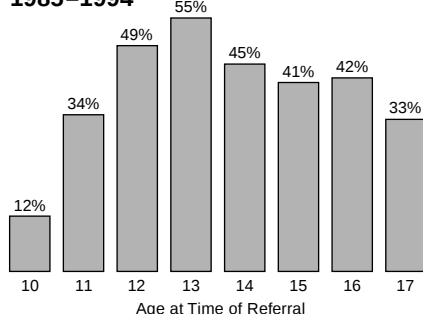
Juvenile court outcomes for offenders age 12 or younger were often less severe

In both 1994 and 1985, cases involving juveniles age 12 or younger were less likely than those involving older juveniles to be processed formally, more likely to receive probation as the most restrictive disposition, and less likely to result in detention or out-of-home placement. For example, in 1994, juveniles age 12 or younger were less likely to be processed formally with the filing of a delinquency petition (38%) than were either juveniles ages 13 and 14 (52%) or older juveniles (59%). The use of formal handling increased between 1985 and 1994 for all age groups.

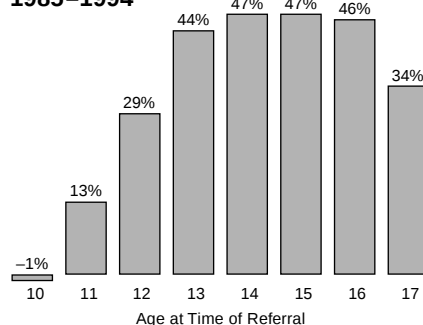
³ Population at risk of referral is adjusted for State variations in the ages covered by juvenile court jurisdiction. Juveniles at risk are defined as youth age 10 or older who were at or under the upper age of original jurisdiction of the juvenile courts in their State.

The number of delinquency cases involving 10-year-olds grew 12% between 1985 and 1994, but their per capita case rate declined 1%

Increase in delinquency cases:
1985–1994



Increase in delinquency case rates:
1985–1994



Case rate = Cases per 1,000 youth at risk.

Source: Authors' analysis of data from the National Center for Juvenile Justice, *National Juvenile Court Data Archive: Juvenile Court Case Records 1985–1994* [machine-readable data files].

If handled formally, delinquency cases involving juveniles age 12 or younger were less likely to result in adjudication. In 1994, 50% of petitioned cases involving youth in this age group were adjudicated, as compared with 59% of cases involving juveniles age 15 or older and 60% of those involving juveniles ages 13 and 14. The use of adjudication decreased between 1985 and 1994 for juveniles of all ages.

In 1994, delinquency cases involving juveniles age 12 or younger were far less likely than cases involving older juveniles to be judicially waived to criminal (adult) court. Fewer than 1% of formally processed cases involving juveniles age 14 or younger were judicially waived to criminal court. Of 12,000 cases judicially

Changes in the characteristics of delinquency cases of offenders age 14 or younger paralleled those of older juveniles

	Juveniles Age 12 or Younger		Juveniles Ages 13 and 14		Juveniles Age 15 or older	
	1985	1994	1985	1994	1985	1994
Sex of youth						
Female	17%	19%	22%	24%	18%	20%
Male	83	81	78	76	82	80
Race of youth						
White	68	62	70	63	73	65
Black	29	34	27	33	24	31
Other	3	4	3	4	3	3
Most serious offense						
Person	16	25	16	23	15	20
Property	73	62	63	55	56	48
Drug	1	2	5	5	9	10
Public order	10	11	16	17	20	21
Predisposition detention						
Not detained	73	77	63	69	63	68
Securely detained	27	23	37	31	37	32
Manner of handling						
Informal	72	62	56	48	50	41
Formal (petitioned)	28	38	44	52	50	59
Result of petition*						
Not adjudicated	43	50	32	40	33	41
Formally adjudicated	57	50	68	60	67	59
Disposition of adjudicated cases						
Placed out of home	21	21	29	29	29	29
Formal probation	63	62	58	56	55	51
Restitution, fine, etc.	11	15	9	13	12	15
Dismiss, release	5	3	4	3	4	4

◆ In one in four delinquency cases involving youth age 12 or younger in 1994, a person offense was the most serious charge.

◆ Cases of juveniles age 12 or younger were less likely than those of older youth to involve secure detention or to result in out-of-home placement.

*Excludes cases waived to criminal court.

Note: Percentages may not add to 100% because of rounding.

Source: Authors' analysis of data from the National Center for Juvenile Justice, *National Juvenile Court Data Archive: Juvenile Court Case Records 1985–1994* [machine-readable data files].

waived to criminal courts nationwide in 1994, fewer than 500 involved juveniles under age 15.

Conclusion

The findings of this study confirm that the number of offenders age 14 or younger in the Nation's juvenile justice system has increased disproportionately in recent years. Relative to the 1980's, arrests and

juvenile court cases involving youth under the age of 15 increased more than those involving juveniles age 15 or older.

However, the actual number of offenders age 14 or younger remained relatively small as compared with the caseload of older juvenile offenders seen by law enforcement agencies and the courts. Thus, juvenile offenders as a group have not become markedly younger in the past

In 1994, juveniles age 12 or younger were less likely to be judicially waived to criminal court, adjudicated in juvenile court, or placed out of the home following juvenile court adjudication

Age 12 or younger			Transferred			<100	<1%	Placed			6,600	21%
168,700 Cases	Petitioned 64,000	38%	Adjudicated		32,300	50%		Probation	20,100	62%		
	Nonpetitioned 104,700	62%	Nonadjudicated		31,700	49%		Placed	800	2%		
Ages 13 and 14			Transferred			400	<1%	Placed			39,300	29%
438,300 Cases	Petitioned 228,500	52%	Adjudicated		137,900	60%		Probation	77,300	56%		
	Nonpetitioned 209,900	48%	Nonadjudicated		90,200	39%		Placed	1,800	2%		
Age 15 or older			Transferred			11,900	2%	Placed			95,400	29%
948,200 Cases	Petitioned 562,800	59%	Adjudicated		324,800	58%		Probation	167,200	51%		
	Nonpetitioned 385,400	41%	Nonadjudicated		226,100	40%		Placed	5,200	2%		

Note: Detail may not add to totals because of rounding.

Source: Authors' analysis of data from the National Center for Juvenile Justice, *National Juvenile Court Data Archive: Juvenile Court Case Records 1985–1994* [machine-readable data files].

decade. Offenders age 12 or younger represent the same proportion of juvenile arrests (9%) and juvenile court cases (11%) as they did more than a decade ago, and the percentage of offenders ages 13 and 14 increased only slightly.

Recent trends are particularly encouraging as they relate to the delinquent behavior of offenders ages 13 and 14. Between 1994 and 1995, arrests for Property Crime Index offenses declined for offenders in this age group while remaining unchanged for older youth. Violent crime

arrests, which decreased for all juveniles between 1994 and 1995, decreased the most among offenders ages 13 and 14.

Of course, youth under the age of 15 still account for 3 of every 10 juvenile arrests for Violent Crime Index offenses and 4 of every 10 juvenile arrests for Property Crime Index offenses. The findings of this study suggest, therefore, that the Nation's juvenile courts and juvenile justice agencies should continue preventive services and early intervention for offenders age 14 or younger. The findings also suggest,

however, that it is inaccurate to depict the typical juvenile offender of today as significantly younger than the offenders of 10 or 15 years ago.

Finally, it is also important to remember that this study relies entirely upon official data reported by law enforcement agencies and juvenile courts. Thus, the findings of the study inform the reader only about young offenders who come into contact with the justice system. Since not all of the juveniles who violate the law are arrested, and not all of those who are

arrested are referred to court, changes in the characteristics of juvenile arrests and juvenile court cases may reflect the evolving practices of law enforcement and the courts as much as they reflect the changing behavior of young offenders.

Postscript

This study suggests that today's serious and violent juvenile offenders are not significantly younger than those of 10 or 15 years ago. Yet many juvenile justice professionals, as well as the public, would assert the opposite. What explains this discrepancy? The authors of this study believe several factors are at work.

First, overall growth in the number of violent juvenile offenders has drawn increased attention to the problem of young offenders in general. Second, the nature of the delinquency cases involving juveniles age 12 or younger has changed. Person offenses, which once constituted 16% of the total court cases for this age group, now constitute 25%. Third, delinquency caseloads have doubled nationwide since 1970. A judge, prosecutor, or probation officer with 25 years of job experience should expect to see twice as many 12-year-old killers in 1995 as in 1970, simply due to this increased workload.

Fourth, justice professionals tend to accumulate memories of exceptional cases. Every 12-year-old killer is remembered, even though such cases are few in number. After many years of working with juveniles, justice professionals may believe that the problem of young killers is getting worse because of the numbers that have been encountered during their careers.

Finally, the news media have increased their reporting of crime, especially violent crimes by the very young. Today, the public hears about every incident, whether it happened in a different town or on a different continent. Moreover, the details of every incident are repeated several times—at arrest, trial, sentencing, etc. The growing publicity about these cases may suggest to the public that they are occurring more frequently, even if juvenile crime trends indicate otherwise.

The number of homicide offenders ages 13 and 14 increased between 1980 and 1994, but declined between 1994 and 1995

Number of juvenile homicide offenders

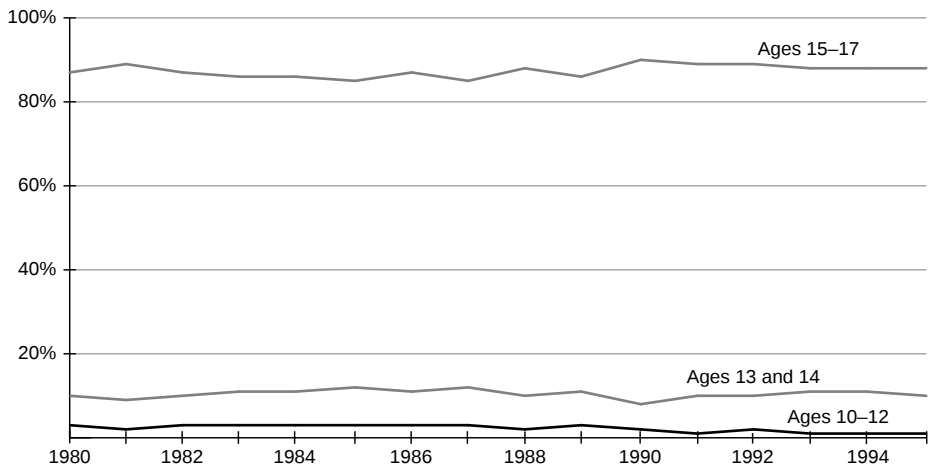


◆ Between 1980 and 1995, the estimated number of juvenile homicide offenders ages 15–17 increased 61%, from 1,279 to 2,060 per year. During the same period, the estimated number of homicide offenders ages 13 and 14 grew 75%, from 140 to 245, and the number of homicide offenders age 12 or younger declined 30%, from 44 to 31.

Source: Authors' analysis of data from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Supplementary Homicide Reports 1980–1995* [machine-readable data files].

Between 1980 and 1995, the age profile of juvenile homicide offenders did not change substantially

Percent of juvenile homicide offenders



◆ Despite a 75% increase in 13- and 14-year-old homicide offenders between 1980 and 1995, young juveniles did not increase as a proportion of all juvenile homicides. Youth ages 13 and 14 accounted for 10% of juvenile homicide offenders in both 1980 and 1995.

Source: Authors' analysis of data from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Supplementary Homicide Reports 1980–1995* [machine-readable data files].

Related materials

Readers interested in additional information about juvenile arrests should obtain a copy of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's primary report on arrest statistics, *Crime in the United States 1995*, by contacting the U.S. Government Printing Office or its local bookstore. Readers interested in more information about the juvenile court data presented in this Bulletin should refer to the annual *Juvenile Court Statistics* reports published by OJJDP or contact the National Center for Juvenile Justice (NCJJ) at 710 Fifth Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15219-3000; 412-227-6950.

NCJJ has also developed several user-friendly software packages that allow anyone with a personal computer to have access both to juvenile and adult arrest statistics for every State and county in the Nation and to national juvenile court data. To obtain a copy of *Easy Access to FBI Arrest Statistics: 1991-1995*, *Easy Access to the FBI's Supplementary Homicide Reports: 1980-1995*, or *Easy Access to Juvenile Court Statistics 1990-1994*, call or write to NCJJ at the address given above. These software packages can also be downloaded from OJJDP's Web site, <http://www.ncjrs.org/ojjhome.htm>.

Additional information on these and other juvenile justice products and reports may be obtained from the Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse by telephone at 800-638-8736; by mail at P.O. Box 6000, Rockville, MD 20849-6000; by e-mail at askncjrs@ncjrs.org; or by viewing OJJDP's home page.

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