

Females Account for a Larger Proportion of Juvenile Drug Cases



RECLAIMING FUTURES

Public Health, Justice, Equity.

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Juvenile arrests for drug law violations in the United States skyrocketed during the 1990s and then fell just as dramatically. Based on the most recent statistics from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) within the U.S. Department of Justice, the total number of drug arrests involving juveniles (youth under age 18) more than doubled in the 1990s.

From just over 80,000 arrests nationwide in 1990, juvenile drug arrests peaked at 216,000 in 1997, and remained at nearly 200,000 in 2000. Even adjusting for population, the juvenile drug arrest rate grew from nearly 300 to more than 600 arrests per 100,000 youth between 1990 and 2000. By 2014, the arrest rate was below 340 and the total number of juvenile drug arrests declined to slightly more than 112,000.

Much of the growth and subsequent decline of juvenile drug arrests involved males. Female juveniles were involved in far fewer arrests for most offenses, including drug crimes. Both male and female juveniles experienced falling drug arrests after 2000, but while the number of male arrests fell 46 percent between 2000 and 2014, female arrests dropped just 23 percent.

As a result, females accounted for a larger proportion of juvenile drug arrests in 2014 than in 1990 or 2000. The proportion of juvenile drug arrests that involved females was actually higher in 2014 (20%) than at any time since 1980. Furthermore, the growing proportion of females among juvenile drug arrests was seen among arrests for drug manufacturing and sales as well as arrests for simple drug possession.

Again, the increasing proportion of females among juvenile drug arrests is largely a result of a steep decline in male drug arrests. These trends, however, suggest that U.S. juvenile courts may be experiencing increased gender parity in the number of cases referred to court for drug law violations.

In fact, the most recent statistics from U.S. juvenile courts do indicate slowly increasing gender parity in court processing. The handling of drug cases became less severe between 2000 and 2013 (especially in the use of adjudication and out-of-home placement), and the direction and pattern of changes was similar for male and female juveniles.

For example, the proportion of formally charged drug cases that resulted in adjudication fell between 1985 and 2013, and the decline was slightly larger for cases involving males. By 2013, the adjudication rate for males was just one percentage point greater than the adjudication rate for drug cases involving females (54% compared with 53%).

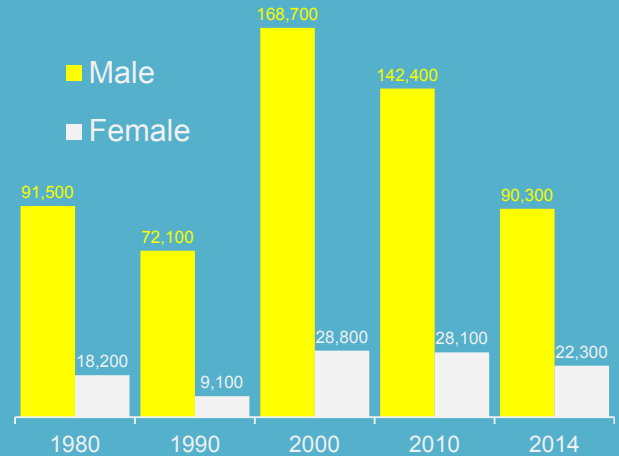
DATA SOURCES:

National arrest estimates for 1980-2012 are from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), as published by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS). Estimates for 2013-2014 were calculated by John Jay College using BJS methods. Juvenile rates calculated by BJS, however, represent the number of arrests per 100,000 population ages 0-17, while this analysis uses ages 10-17 as the basis for juvenile arrest rates.

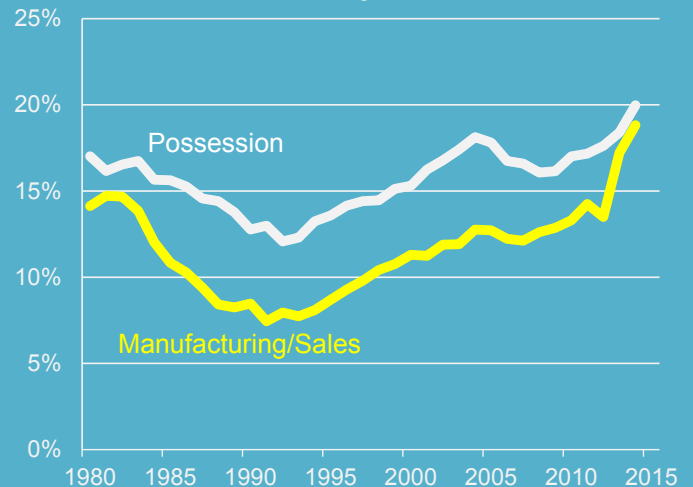
Juvenile court processing data are from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP). See Sickmund, M., Sladky, A., and Kang, W. (2015). Easy Access to Juvenile Court Statistics: 1985-2013 Online. Available: <http://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/ezajcs/>

Drug Arrests of Juveniles Under Age 18

Number of Juvenile Drug Arrests



Females as Percent of Juvenile Drug Arrests



Juvenile Court Processing of Drug Cases

		1985	2000	2013
Percent of Referred Cases Handled Formally (Charged)	Females	34%	51%	42%
	Males	45%	61%	51%
Percent of Charged Cases Resulting in Adjudication	Females	66%	60%	53%
	Males	69%	64%	54%
Percent of Adjudicated Cases Placed Out-of-Home	Females	23%	16%	14%
	Males	26%	24%	17%

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