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Jeffrey A. Butts
CUNY John Jay College

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Out-of-Home Placements Falling Among Younger Juveniles

by Jeffrey A. Butts

The number of young people referred to court for delinquency offenses plummeted after the 1990s. According to juvenile court data maintained by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) and disseminated by the National Center for Juvenile Justice (NCJJ), the number of delinquency cases nationwide fell 34 percent between 1996 and 2011 (the most recent year available) – from 1.9 million to 1.2 million cases disposed (or completed) per year.

The number of formally handled delinquency cases (i.e. those charged by prosecutors) dropped 36 percent during the same period, and the number of cases involving adjudication (similar to criminal conviction) fell 35 percent. On the other hand, adjudicated cases involving out-of-home placement declined 41 percent. In other words, juvenile courts were less likely to use out-of-home placement in 2011 compared with previous years.

Out-of-home placements typically include juvenile correctional institutions, group homes, and residential treatment facilities. The decline in the use of placement was greater among youth ages 16 and younger than among 17-year-old juveniles.

Before 1995, placement rates among all delinquency cases were somewhat similar, although the rate among 17-year-olds was not declining as much as the rate for younger youth. After 1995, placement rates for 17-year-olds remained stable, while the rate among youth ages 16 and younger continued to fall sharply. Among adjudicated cases and adjudicated cases involving person offenses, the difference was marked.

DATA SOURCE:
Sickmund, M., Sladky, A., and Kang, W. (2014). *Easy Access to Juvenile Court Statistics: 1985-2011*. Online. Available: <http://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/ezajcs/> National estimates of delinquency cases in U.S. juvenile courts are compiled annually by the National Juvenile Court Data Archive at the National Center for Juvenile Justice. The Archive collects, stores, and analyzes court records from jurisdictions containing about 80 percent of the national youth population.

Placements Down for Most Youth; Not for 17-Year-Olds

