

Less Serious Offenses Account for 90 Percent of the Growth in Juvenile Placements

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The National Center for Juvenile Justice collects, stores, and analyzes data about the young offenders handled in U.S. juvenile courts. The NCJJ currently receives delinquency case records from jurisdictions containing 80 percent of the national youth population. According to the most recent national estimates created from these data, juvenile courts processed nearly 1.7 million delinquency cases through to final disposition in 2008, up from 1.2 million cases in 1985.

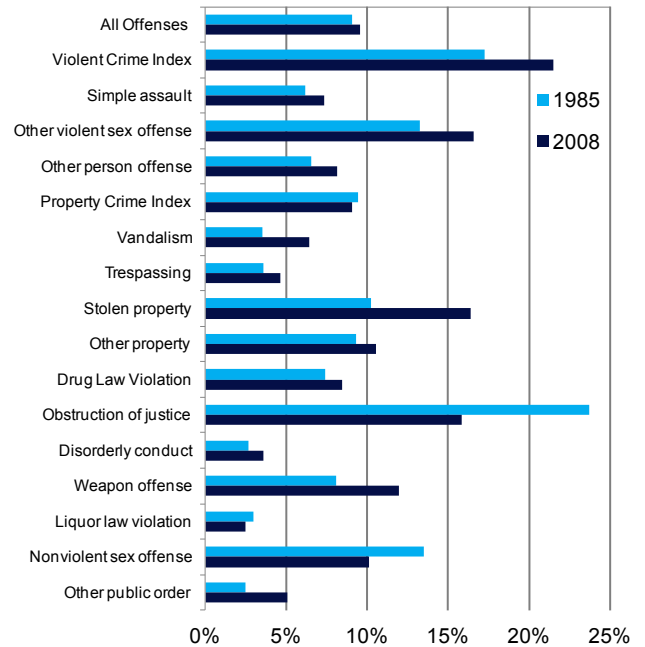
Just 10 percent of the delinquency cases referred to juvenile courts in 2008 ended in dispositions involving some form of placement, whether in secure facilities, group homes, residential treatment centers, or other settings. The overall placement rate increased only slightly between 1985 (9.0%) and 2008 (9.5%). The number of cases placed grew from 104,500 to 157,700—up more than 53,000.

The offenses most likely to end in placement were those included in the FBI’s Violent Crime Index (murder, robbery, rape, and aggravated assault). Placement was ordered in 22 percent of Violent Crime cases, and the number of these placements grew from 11,100 to 18,600—an increase of 7,500.

In combination with changes in caseload, however, the largest growth in placements occurred in cases involving obstruction of justice. The number of obstruction cases referred to juvenile courts grew from 66,200 to 211,600 between 1985 and 2008. Thus, even with a lower *rate* of placement in 2008, the number of placement cases involving obstruction of justice charges climbed by 17,800, or one-third of the total.

The next largest increases were for cases involving simple assault (up 13,700), drug law violations (up 9,500), vandalism (up 3,800), and disorderly conduct (up 3,400). Together with obstruction, these less serious offenses accounted for 48,200 new placement cases in 2008, or more than 90 percent of all the growth in out-of-home placements since 1985.

Percent of Delinquency Cases Involving Placement



Change in Placement Cases: 1985-2008

Most Serious Offense	Placement Cases Disposed in 2008	Change in Placed Cases: 1985-2008
Obstruction of justice	33,500	17,800
Simple assault	19,900	13,700
Drug Law Violation	15,200	9,500
Violent Crime Index	18,600	7,500
Vandalism	6,800	3,800
Disorderly conduct	4,600	3,400
Weapon offense	4,700	3,100
Other person offense	2,600	1,900
Other violent sex offense	2,400	1,300
Other public order	2,000	1,200
Trespassing	2,500	600
Other property	1,900	200
Stolen property	2,900	100
Liquor law violation	600	0
Nonviolent sex offense	1,200	-500
Property Crime Index	38,300	-10,300

Data Source: Puzzanchera, Charles, Benjamin Adams and Melissa Sickmund (2011). *Juvenile Court Statistics 2008*. Pittsburgh, PA: National Center for Juvenile Justice.