CHAPTER 1

# JUVENILE DELINQUENTS AND JUVENILE JUSTICE CLIENTELE

## TRENDS AND PATTERNS IN CRIME AND JUSTICE SYSTEM RESPONSE

HOWARD N. SNYDER[1]

In the United States, the legal definition of a juvenile varies from state to state. As a result, the United States does not have a unified juvenile justice system, and what constitutes a juvenile crime in one state may not be a juvenile crime in another. A person as young as seven in some states can be taken into custody (i.e., arrested) for a law-violating behavior. In most states the juvenile courts have original jurisdiction over youths up to the age of 18, while in other states youths ages 16 and/or 17 are always processed as adults in the criminal justice system. In fact, as we shall detail later, about two of every five 17-year-olds in the United States have no opportunity to be processed in a juvenile court. And all states have legislation that enables persons of juvenile age charged with a law-violating behavior to be tried as an adult in their criminal justice system. It is important to keep in mind these legal variations in the definition of *juvenile* when reviewing the statistical information that follows.

The goal of this chapter is to present an empirically based profile of the law-violating behavior of youth and the juvenile justice system's response to these behaviors over the last generation. First, trends in juvenile violent crime and drug abuse behavior will be documented using reports on or by victims and juvenile offender self-reports. Next, trends in these and other juvenile law-violating behaviors known to law enforcement will be described using arrest statistics. Then, using juvenile court caseload and juvenile corrections statistics, trends in the juvenile justice system's responses to these officially recognized behaviors will be explored. The statistical resources that will be used to build this picture have their own unique characteristics that need to be understood (at least to a minimum extent) to interpret their findings properly. When necessary, therefore, the relevant characteristics of the data systems will be briefly discussed.

# I. Juvenile Offending

An understanding of trends in juvenile offending can be constructed through the use of several data resources. Trends in murders by juveniles can be inferred from the Supplementary Homicide Reports provided to the Federal Bureau of Investigation by law enforcement agencies. The Bureau of Justice Statistics' National Criminal Victimization Survey can be used to document trends in juvenile offending for crimes in which the victim sees the offender. For most other behaviors (e.g., burglary, shoplifting, drug selling, curfew violations), the only possible sources for incident and trending information on juvenile offending are self-reports from the juveniles themselves, and such data collection efforts are not common in the United States.

## A. Lethal Violence

Annually the FBI's Supplementary Homicide Reports (SHR) collects information on about 90% of the estimated number of murders that occur in the United States. These data describe the demographic characteristics of homicide victims and the weapons used in the crimes. In addition, and when known, the SHR contains the demographics of the offenders and their relationships to the victims. Between 1985 and 2005, the SHR contained no information on offenders in 36% of reported murders. This proportion is composed of (1) those murders for which law enforcement was unable to identify an offender and (2) those murders for which an offender was identified but the information was not reported to the FBI. This large proportion of missing information presents a problem when attempting to describe juvenile offending trends. If it could be assumed that the offender characteristics in these murders were similar to those for which offender information was known, then it would be a simple process of extrapolating from the knowns to the unknowns. However, this assumption is likely to be false. As a result, we are left with trending

the murders that are known to be caused by juvenile offenders (i.e., persons under age 18). This certainly undercounts the number of these murders; however, if the nature of the unknowns has remained constant over the time period, then the trend in murders caused by known juvenile offenders should be a good approximation for the trend in the actual number of murders with juvenile offenders.

Eleven percent (11%) of all murders that occurred between 1985 and 2005 for which an offender was known involved a juvenile offender (i.e., a person under age 18). This proportion grew from 7% in 1985 to its peak in 1994 at 16% and then fell thereafter, reaching 9% by 2005. Over this period, about 30% of all murders involving a juvenile offender also involved an adult offender, with this proportion generally increasing across the time period (from 25% in 1985 to 38% in 2005). The annual number of murders attributed to juvenile offenders increased nearly 140% from 1985 to 1994 (see Figure 1.1). Following this sharp increase, the number of murders attributed to juvenile offenders fell as sharply through 2005, erasing all of the increase. In fact, the number of murders attributed to juvenile offenders in 2005 was 8% below the 1985 figure. If we take into account the fact that the SHR data contained

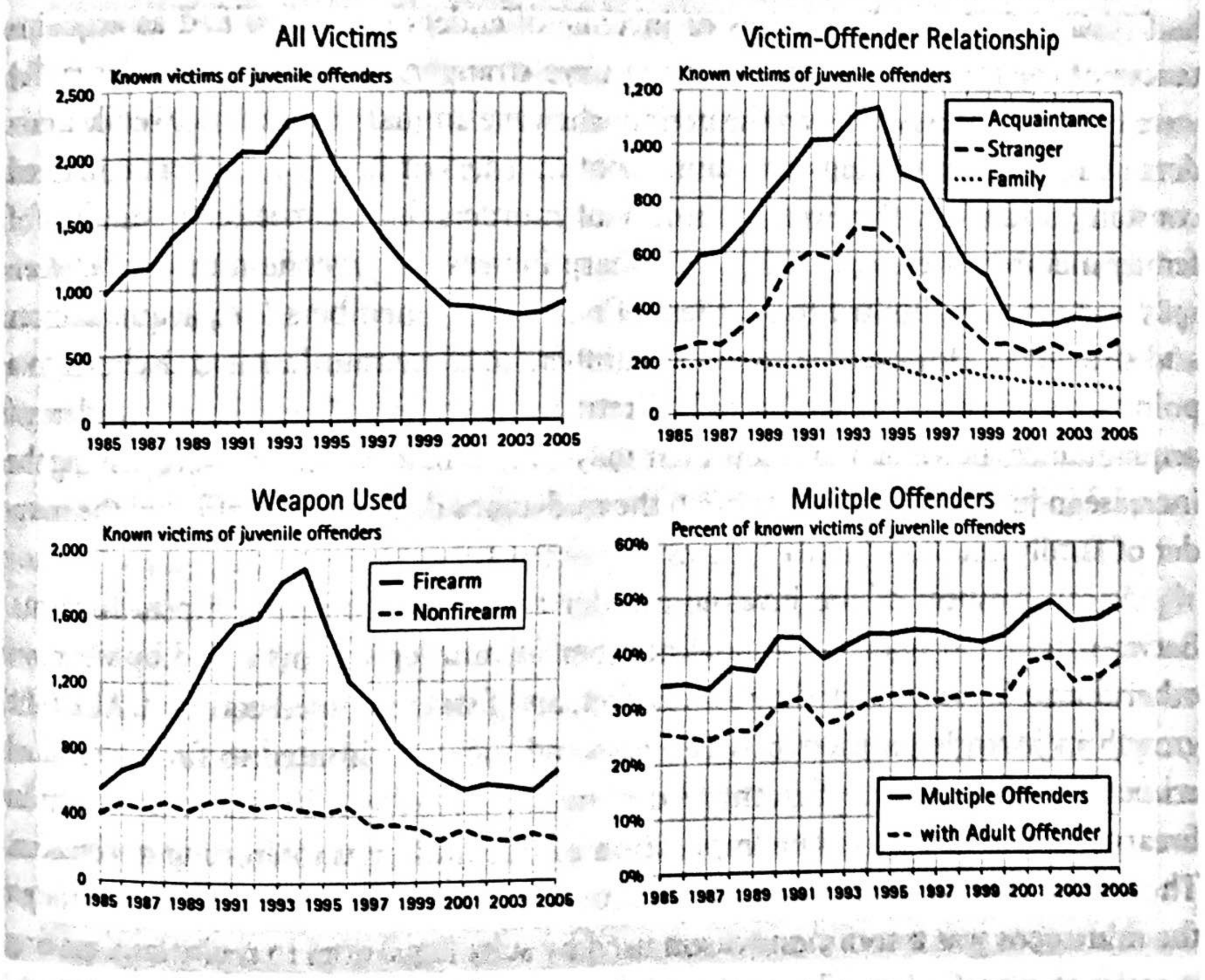



**Figure 1.1. Murders Attributed to Juveniles: 1985 to 2005**

*Notes*: Estimates were developed by the author using data reported to the FBI's Supplementary Homicide Reports Program. [United States Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Uniform Crime Reporting Program. Various years. *Supplementary Homicide Reports* for the years 1985 through 2005.]

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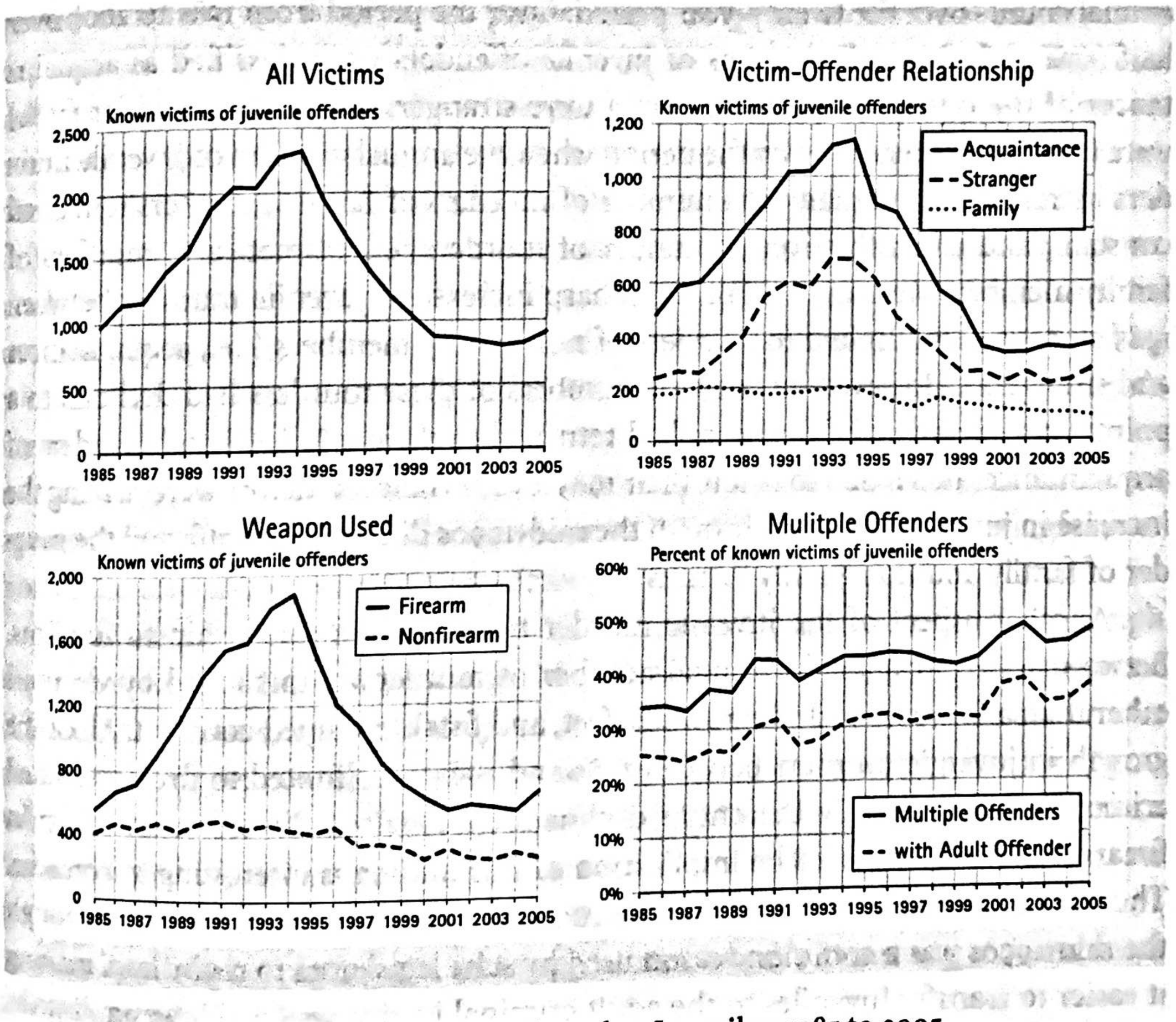



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a larger number of murders in 2005 than in 1985 for which no offender was identified, it is fair to say that the number of murders committed by juveniles in 2005 was roughly equal to the number committed in 1985.

To place the juvenile trend in context, it is useful to compare it to the trend in murders attributed to adult offenders. Murders attributable to adult offenders increased 13% between 1985 and its peak in 1991 (a few years prior to the juvenile peak). Between 1991 and 2005, the number of these murders fell 31%, so that by 2005, the number of murders attributable to adult offenders was below its 1985 level—even after taking into account larger numbers of murders for which no offender was identified. Finally, over this period, while adult offenders were involved in a substantial proportion of murders attributed to juvenile offenders (30%), juvenile offenders were involved in just 4% of murders attributable to adult offenders. In summary, over the period from 1985 through 2005, murders by both juveniles and adults increased into the early 1990s and then declined by 2005 to near their twenty-year lows; the difference was that the amplitude of the juvenile trend was far more pronounced than the adult trend.

With the SHR data it is possible to develop a better understanding of the nature of murders by juveniles and the factors related to the substantial changes in their annual counts over the twenty-year period. Over the period from 1985 to 2005 over half (55%) of all murder victims of juvenile offenders were classified as acquaintances of the offender, one-third (32%) were strangers, and the remainder (15%) were family members. During the period when the annual number of juvenile murders increased substantially, the number of murders of family members remained constant; and when the overall number of murders fell dramatically, murders of family members were cut in half. The sharp increase in juvenile murders between 1985 and 1994 was limited to murders of non-family members (i.e., acquaintances and strangers). However, by 2005 the numbers of these murders had declined to a point where murders of strangers had returned to their 1985 level and murders of acquaintances had fallen to below their 1985 level. Whatever factors were driving the increase in juvenile murders through the mid-1990s differentially affected the murder of family and non-family victims.

Another aspect of the juvenile murder trend is the relationship to firearms. Between 1985 and 1994, the annual number of murder victims killed by weapons other than a firearm (including hands, feet, and fists) remained constant. All of the growth in juvenile murders between 1985 and 1994 was limited to firearm-related crimes. Similarly, nearly the entire decline after 1994 was linked to the drop in firearm-related murders. The implication of this finding is interesting to consider. The speculation that juveniles became more violent from the mid-1980s through the mid-1990s was a common reason used by state legislators to revise laws making it easier to transfer juveniles to the adult criminal justice system. However, if juveniles had become more violent, it would be logical to predict that murders with and without firearms would have both increased. The fact that only firearm-related murders increased points not to a change in juveniles' propensity for violence but to a change in juveniles' access to (or willingness to use) firearms.

Another aspect of the trend in murders by juveniles is the growth in the proportion of these crimes that involved multiple offenders. From 1985 to 2005, the percentage of murders attributed to juveniles that involved at least two offenders generally increased from 34% to 48%. Over this period, an average of three-fourths (73%) of these multiple offender crimes involved an adult offender, with this proportion gradually increasing over the period.

In summary, while roughly the same in 1985 and 2005, the annual number of murders attributed to juvenile offenders spiked in the mid-1990s. This large increase was limited to crimes against non-family members and crimes involving firearms. Over the period, a large proportion of murders attributed to juvenile offenders involved multiple offenders. In most multiple offender murders, juveniles committed their crimes with adults.

## B. Non-lethal Violent Crime

The National Criminal Victimization Survey (NCVS) is the primary source of information on the frequency, characteristics, and consequences of non-lethal criminal victimization in the United States. Each year a large sample of persons ages 12 and above are asked about the personal and property victimizations they have experienced. For serious violent crimes (i.e., sexual assault, aggravated assault, and robbery), the victims are asked for their perception of the age, sex, race, and Hispanic ethnicity of the offenders. Clearly, unless the offenders are known by the victims, the accuracy of victims' assessments of offenders' ages are questionable (i.e., it is difficult to distinguish between a 17-year-old and an 18-year-old). However, if there is a bias in the perception of offender age, it is likely that the bias has been constant over the years; so while the actual value of the incidence rate of juvenile offending within a year may be questioned, the NCVS trend in serious violent juvenile offending can be studied with greater confidence. Also it should be noted that, by not interviewing (or using surrogate responders for) persons under the age of 12, crimes against these persons are excluded from the NCVS, which may be a meaningful portion of the total amount of juvenile serious violent offending.

Based on victim reports to the NCVS, the period from the mid-1980s through the mid-1990s experienced a substantial growth in serious violent juvenile crime (Figure 1.2). Between 1985 and its peak in 1993, the rate of serious violent crimes committed by juvenile offenders increased 58%.[2] The growth was greater for aggravated assaults (65%) than for robberies (49%) and forcible rape (43%). To place these changes in perspective, victim reports indicate that the adult offending rate for serious violent crime increased just 2% between 1985 and 1993, with the rate of robbery by adults increasing 9%, adult aggravated assaults increasing 6%, and forcible rape by adults falling 28%.

After its peak in 1993, juvenile violence plummeted. Between 1993 and 2007, the rate of serious violent juvenile offending fell 74%. This decline wiped out all of the increase experienced between 1985 and 1993—and more. In 2007, the juvenile serious violent offending rate based on victim reports was 58% below what it was in 1985.

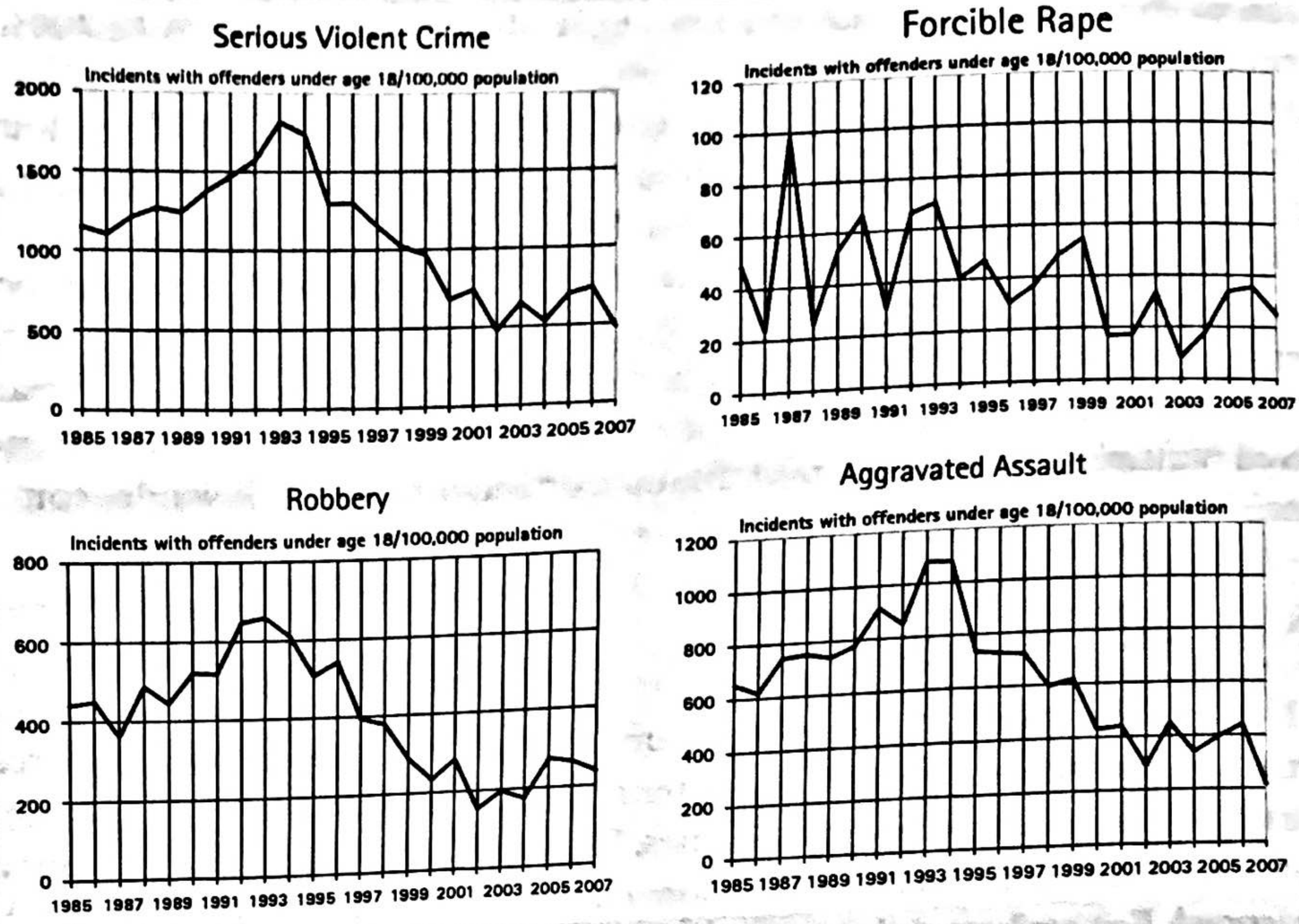



**Figure 1.2. Juvenile Offending for Serious Violent Crimes: 1985 to 2007**

*Notes*: Serious Violent Crime includes forcible rape, robbery and aggravated assault. Estimates were derived from victim reports of their violent juvenile offenders in BJS' National Crime Victimization Survey and reported by BJS in the machine readable data file *Age of offenders in serious violent crime, 1973–2007 by number of offenders* (BJS, 2009). Annual estimates of juvenile forcible rape offending are unstable due to the small number of such incidents reported to the NCVS.

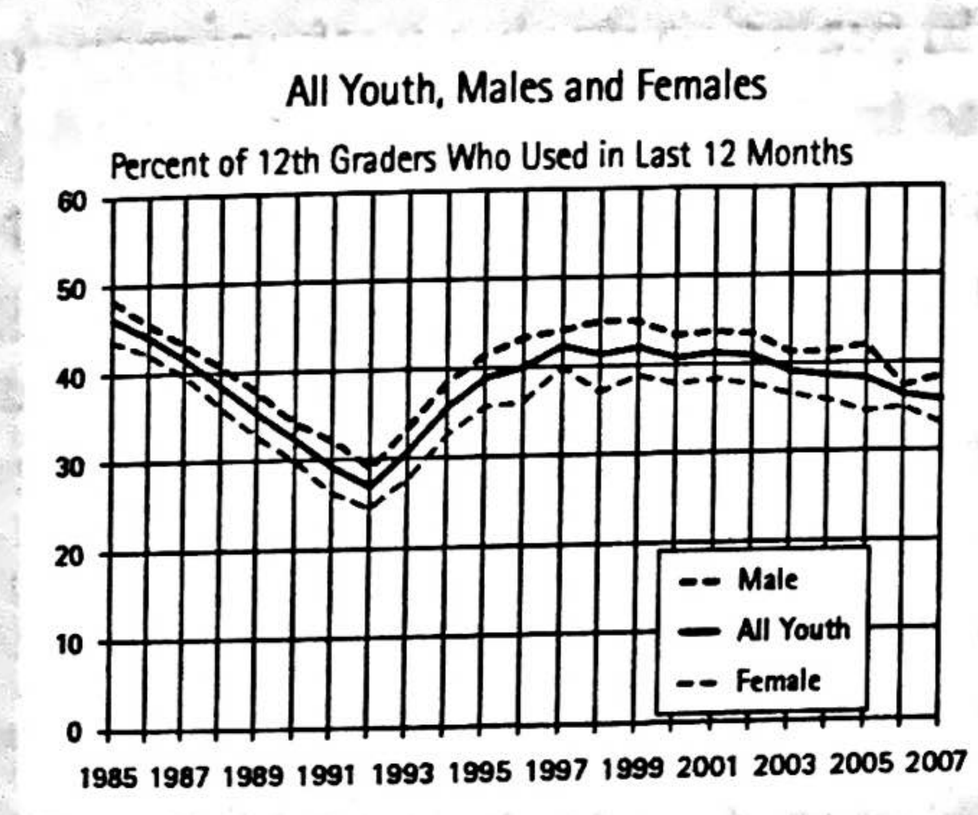
Similar patterns were found in forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault, with their 2007 rates at least 45% below their 1985 levels. For whatever reasons, the overall decline in the rate of juvenile serious violent crime following its peak in 1993 drove the rate in the first decade of the twenty-first century to levels not seen since at least the beginning of the NCVS in 1973; in fact, the juvenile serious violent offending rate in 2007 was about one-third of the 1973 rate, so it is very likely the low rates in 2007 rivaled (or even surpassed) those of the 1950s and 1960s. It is important to note that the general trend from the mid-1980s into the early twenty-first century in juvenile non-lethal violent offending documented by the National Criminal Victimization Survey is remarkably similar to the trend in lethal juvenile offending documented by the Supplementary Homicide Report data. It is also important to consider that adult serious violent offending also fell markedly after the mid-1990s. By 2007, the adult serious violent offending rate was 64% below its 1985 level and just one-third of its 1973 level. Therefore, whatever the factors were that drove down the levels of serious violent offending in the United States after the mid-1990s, they had large effects on both juveniles and adults.

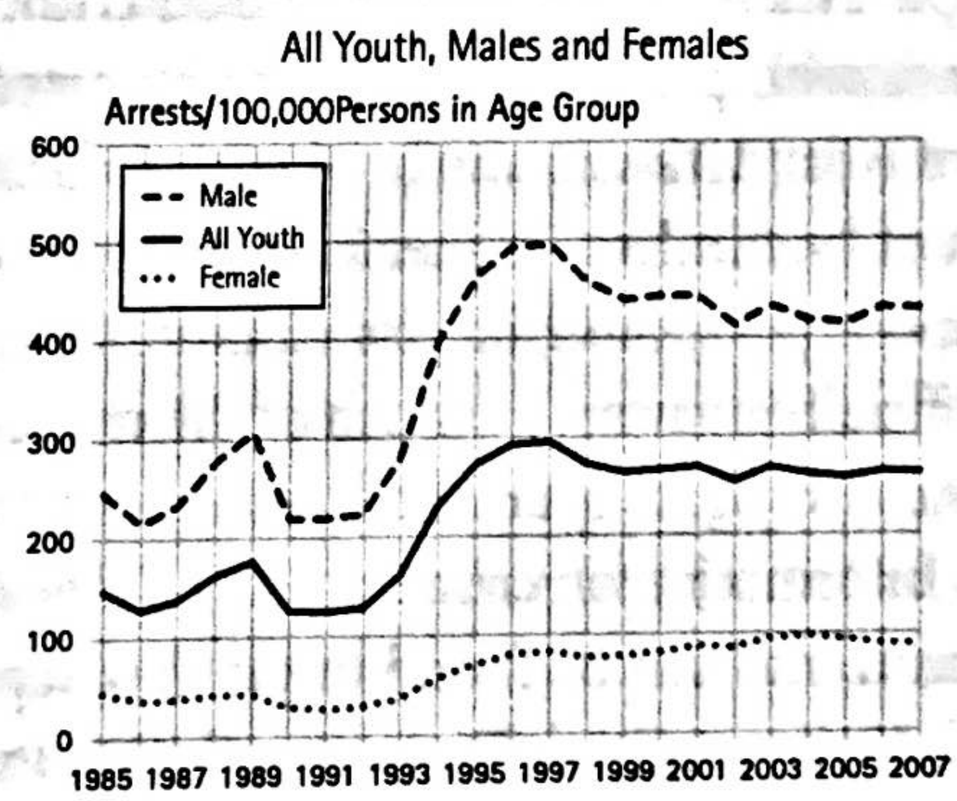
Other NCVS analyses (e.g., Lynch and Snyder 2007) have compared juvenile violence trends for males and females and for whites and blacks over this period. This work found that serious violent offending by both juvenile males and juvenile females

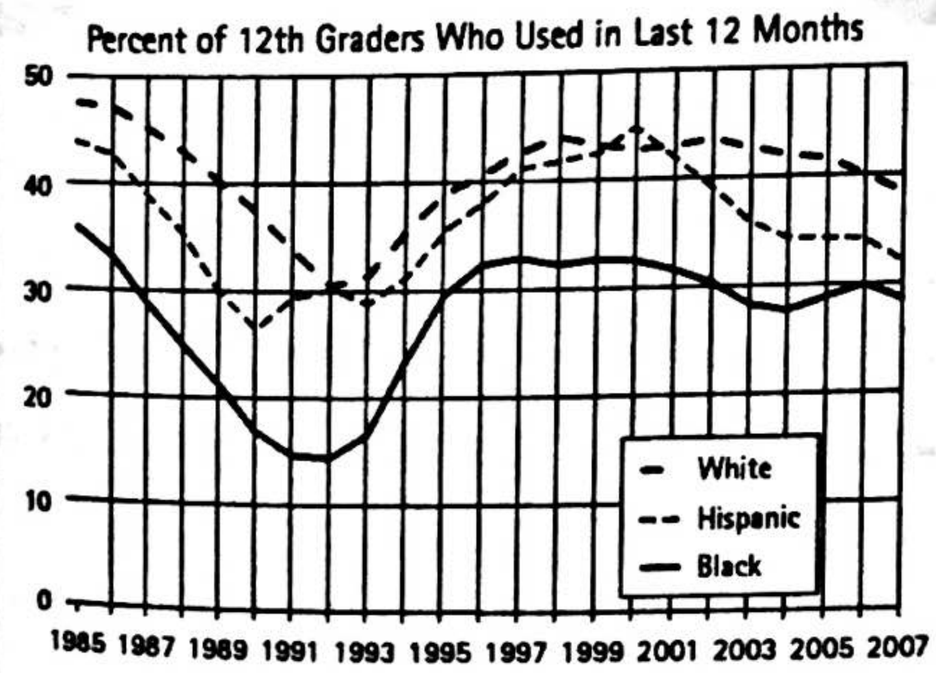
increased substantially from the mid-1980s through the mid-1990s and then dropped substantially through the mid-2000s; however, the juvenile female increase was greater than the juvenile male increase in the earlier period, and the juvenile female decline was less than the male decline in the latter period. Turning to race, the trends in white and black juvenile offending were similar over the period, with both rising from the mid-1980s through the mid-1990s and then declining sharply and equally through the mid-2000s. In all, the factors driving the trends in juvenile violence appear to have affected male and female youths and white and black youths similarly.

## C. Self-Reported Drug Use

Another crime type for which available data provide a general understanding of trends in juvenile offending is the use of illicit drugs. One of these efforts (i.e., *Monitoring the Future*, or MTF) annually measures drug use in a national sample of high school students (Johnston et al. 2008). While MTF delves into many aspects of illicit drug use, for our purposes, it is sufficient to document the general trends for various population subgroups. Between 1985 and 1992, the proportion of twelfth graders who indicated they had used illicit drugs in the prior year fell from 46% to 27% (Figure 1.3).



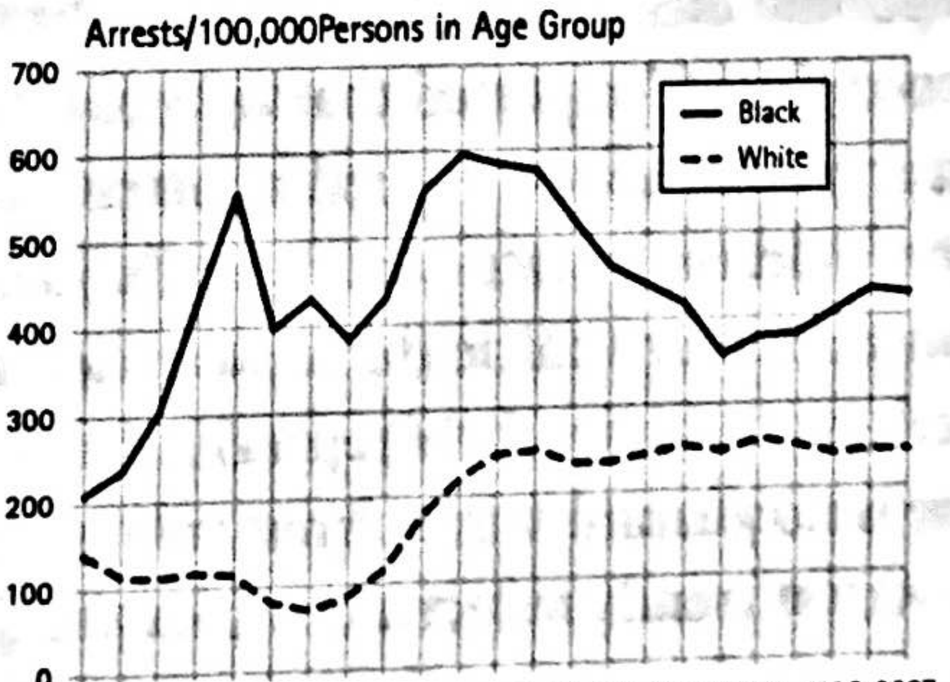




**Figure 1.3. Juveniles and Drugs: 1985 to 2007**

*Notes*: Self-reported illicit drug use prevalence percentages come from the Monitoring the Future Survey (Johnston et al. 2008). Arrest rate estimates were developed by the author from analysis of UCR arrest data (USDOJ, FBI UCRP, 2009) adjusted to reflect the FBI's national estimates of arrests.

Between 1992 and 1997, this proportion increased to 42%, and then gradually declined through 2007 to 36%.[3] The one-year prevalence trend was similar for males and females, with the male percentage marginally greater throughout the period. In contrast, the levels of white and black reported illicit drug use varied greatly over the period, while the general trend was similar for both. The reported annual rate of illicit drug use in 1985 was substantially higher for white (48%) than black (33%) youths. Both white and black rates declined to their relative low points in 1992 (30% versus 16%), then rose into the late 1990s (44% versus 33% respectively) before falling back somewhat through 2007 (39% versus 29%). Hispanic youths' reports of illicit drug use remained in between the white and black rates for most of the 1985 to 2007 period.[4]

## II. Entry into the Justice System

Many crimes are never reported to law enforcement. For example, victim reports from the NCVS in 2005 indicate that only about 60% of all serious violent crimes were reported to law enforcement (Catalano 2006). This percentage falls to 42% for simple assault, a less serious person crime. In general, only about 40% of property crimes with person victims were reported to law enforcement in 2005. And while there is no national source of such information, it is highly likely that the proportion of "victimless" crimes known to law enforcement (e.g., drug use, drug selling, weapons possession, curfew violations) is much lower. Therefore the justice system is officially unaware of much of the crime that is committed, sometimes referred to as the *dark figure of crime.*

Information on crimes known to law enforcement, crimes cleared by arrest, and arrest trends can be found in the data reported by law enforcement agencies to the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program. From these data it is known that a large portion of crimes known to law enforcement is never cleared by arrest or other exceptional means (e.g., the death of the offender, the victim's refusal to cooperate). In 2007 the FBI reported that 45% of reported violent crimes and 16% of reported property crimes were cleared by arrest or other exceptional means. Murder had the highest clearance rate (61%), while just 12% of reported burglaries and 13% of reported motor vehicle thefts were cleared. Therefore, while it is likely that a large percentage of (especially repeat) offenders are eventually arrested for some crime, there is no guarantee that arrest trends reflect crime trends or offending behavior.

Arrest trends reflect a complex combination of crime trends, victims' willingness to report crime, police behavior, offenders' ability to elude arrest, and the public's demand for enforcement. Comparing victim reports and self-reports of delinquent behavior with law enforcement reports of clearances and juvenile arrests leads to an understanding of how these factors might interact, and how delinquent behavior results in entry into the justice system. The following table below provides

**Table 1.1. What Percent of Violent Crimes were Committed by Juveniles in 2007?**

| Offense | Victim Reports | | Law Enforcement Reports | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Victim Report of Incidents with All Offenders Under Age 18 | Victim Report of Incidents with Any Offender Under Age 18 | Law Enforcement Reports of Offenses Cleared by Juvenile Arrest | Law Enforcement Reports of Juvenile Percent of All Arrests |
| Violent Crime | 19% | 22% | 12% | 16% |
| Rape/Sex Assault | 13% | 13% | 11% | 15% |
| Robbery | 28% | 29% | 15% | 27% |
| Aggravated Assault | 15% | 18% | 12% | 13% |

*Note*: Author's analyses of NCVS and UCR data.

assessments of the relative volume of serious violent crime committed by juveniles (i.e., persons under age 18) in 2007 based on three separate data sources: victim reports, clearance statistics, and arrest statistics.

Victim reports in 2007 indicate that about one in five serious violent crimes was committed by juveniles. Law enforcement in 2007 reported that closer to one in ten serious violent crimes for which an offender was identified was cleared by the arrest of a juvenile. From these two statistics it appears that many crimes committed by juveniles are never reported to law enforcement (or juveniles are very good at avoiding detection). Some juvenile crimes (e.g., a fight between two neighborhood youths) may be handled informally by parents or school officials without reporting the incident to law enforcement, while many others may never be reported to any authority. Consequently, each year there is a large pool of serious violent juvenile crime that could be reported to law enforcement. Therefore, if the factors related to crime reporting were to change (e.g., victim's willingness to report increased, community's willingness to cooperate with law enforcement increased, mandatory reporting/arrest laws were implemented), the number of serious violent juvenile crimes reported to law enforcement and the number of juvenile arrests could increase without any actual increase in juvenile crime. Also note that the juvenile proportion of arrests for serious violent crime is much larger than the proportion of crimes cleared by juvenile arrests (e.g., for robbery 15% of crimes cleared and 27% of arrests). This difference reflects the well-known fact that juveniles are more likely than adults to commit crimes in groups; therefore, one juvenile robbery reported to law enforcement will result in multiple arrests more often than will one reported robbery committed by an adult. Consequently, if the proportion of juvenile crimes committed by groups of offenders increased (e.g., an increase in gang-related crimes), the juvenile proportion of arrests would increase, while the actual numbers of crimes committed by juveniles remained constant.

A clear example of the disconnect between juvenile offending and juvenile entry into the justice system via arrest is seen in the area of drug crimes. Self-reports of juvenile drug use find that juvenile males and females report similar levels and trends in drug use between 1985 and 2007 (Figure 1.3); however throughout that period, females accounted for only 14% of juvenile drug arrests. Throughout the period, white juveniles reported drug use in larger proportions than did black juveniles, while the arrest rate for black juveniles was substantially higher than the white juvenile arrest rate. In addition, while the reported use of drugs by black juveniles declined substantially between 1985 and 1989, the corresponding arrest rate soared. Obviously, arrest rates and arrest rate trends are not always good indicators of either the relative involvement of juveniles in crime or changes in prevalence/incidence of criminal behavior. However, while arrest statistics may not yield a good portrait of the crimes committed by juveniles, they are an excellent measure of the flow of youth into the juvenile justice system.

## III. Juvenile Arrest Trends

In 2007 an estimated 2,171,200 arrests were made of youths under age 18. Half of all these juvenile arrests fell into five offense categories: larceny-theft, simple assault, disorderly conduct, drug abuse violations, and curfew/loitering violations (Table 1.2). If it can be assumed the FBI's *All Other Offense* category contains primarily public order offenses, then 15% of juvenile arrests in 2007 were for offenses against a person, 21% were for property offenses, 9% were for drug law violations, 43% were for public order offenses, and 12% were for status offenses (i.e., curfew and running away from home).

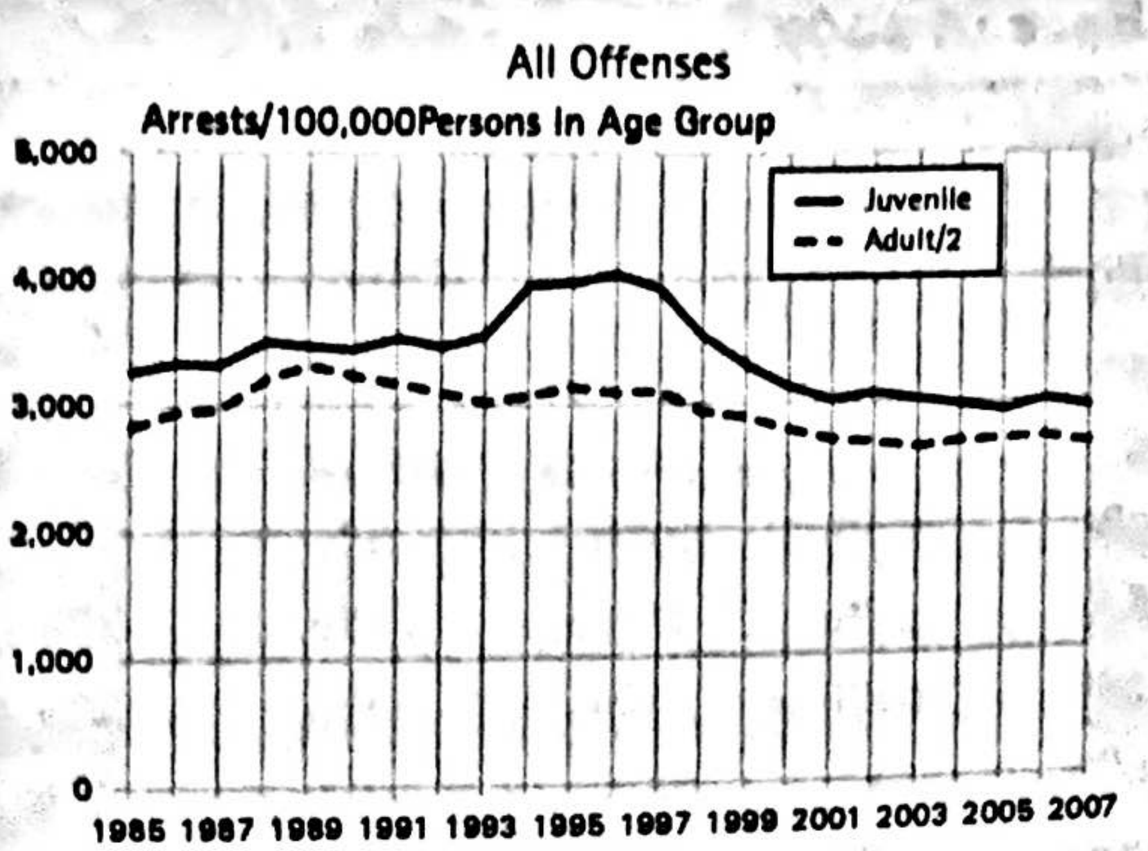
Between 1985 and 2007, the annual number of juvenile arrests controlling for variations in population (i.e., the juvenile arrest rate) peaked in 1996 (Figure 1.4). The juvenile arrest rate generally increased from 1985 to 1996, and then generally declined through 2007. The 24% increase between 1985 and 1996 was more than erased between 1996 and 2007, so that the juvenile arrest rate in 2007 was 10% below its 1985 level. Over the 1985 to 2007 period, the adult arrest rate followed a somewhat similar pattern of growth and decline, with the peak year being significantly earlier—in 1989. For adults. the 17% growth in the total arrest rate between 1985 and 1989 was also erased by its gradual decline between 1989 and 2007, falling to a level in 2007 7% below its 1985 level.

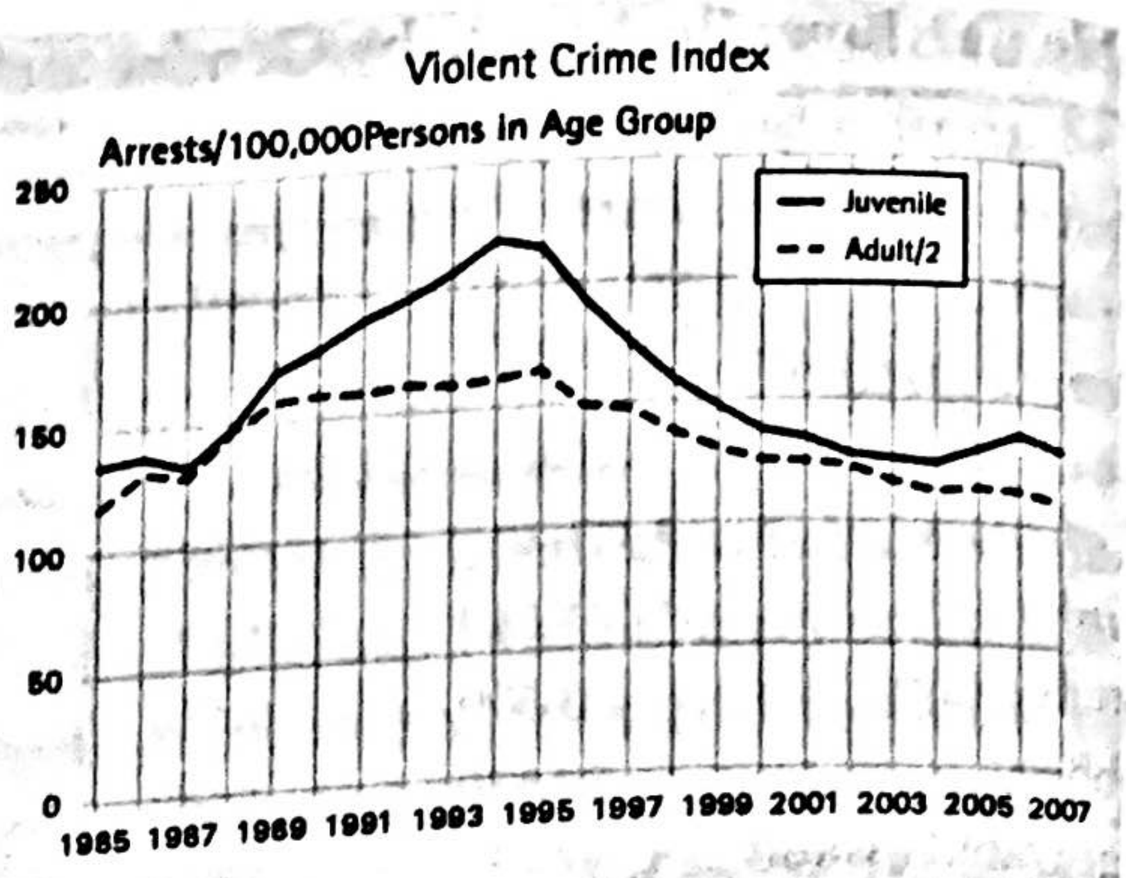
To understand the dynamics underlying the juvenile arrest rate trend, its offense-specific components must be explored. The period of the 1990s saw public attention focused on the issue of violent juvenile crime. Newspaper headlines

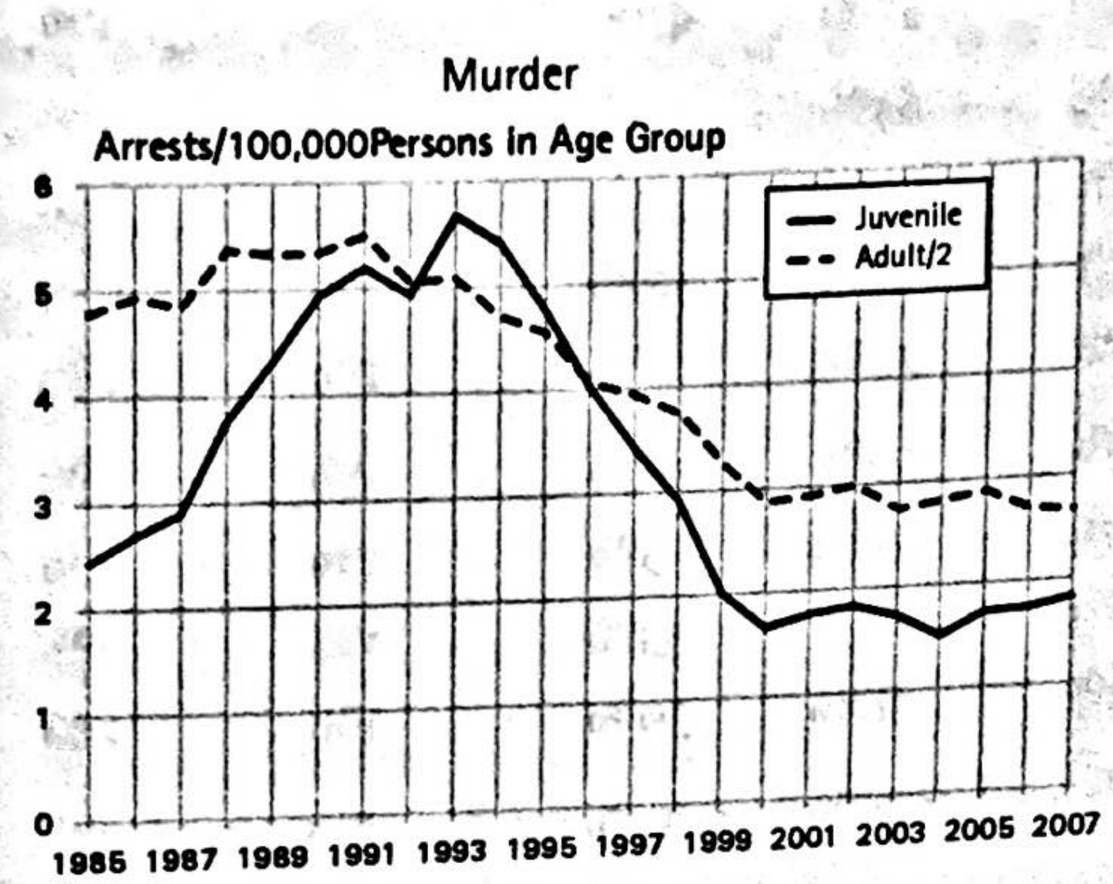
## Table 1.2. Juvenile Arrests by Gender and Race in 2007

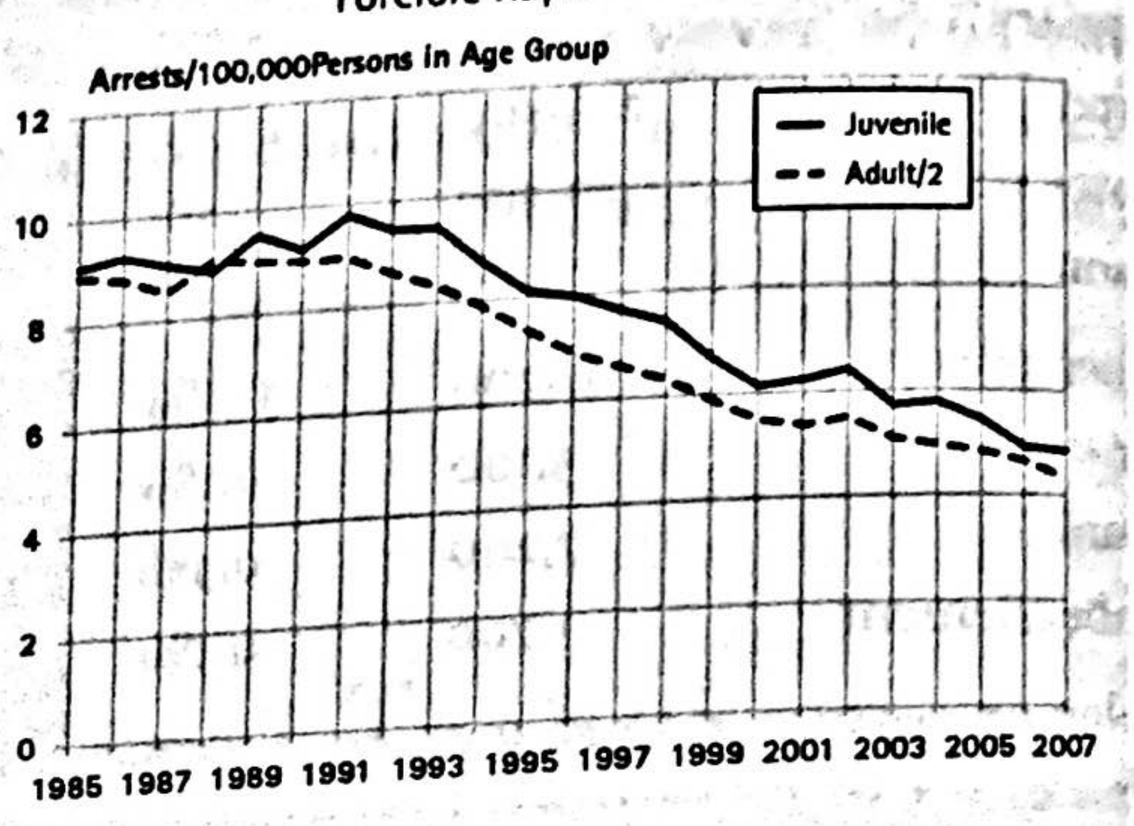
| | | Percent | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Estimated Number | Percent of Total | Female | White | Black | Native American | Asian/ Pacific Islander |
| All offenses | 2,171,200 | 100.0% | 29% | 67% | 30% | 1% | 2% |
| Murder | 1,340 | 0.1% | 8% | 40% | 57% | 1% | 1% |
| Forcible rape | 3,580 | 0.2% | 2% | 62% | 36% | 1% | 1% |
| Robbery | 34,350 | 1.6% | 10% | 30% | 68% | <1% | 1% |
| Aggravated assault | 57,230 | 2.6% | 23% | 57% | 41% | 1% | 1% |
| Burglary | 81,700 | 3.8% | 11% | 65% | 33% | 1% | 1% |
| Larceny-theft | 298,500 | 13.7% | 43% | 66% | 31% | 1% | 2% |
| Motor vehicle theft | 29,400 | 1.4% | 17% | 54% | 42% | 2% | 2% |
| Arson | 7,200 | 0.3% | 12% | 77% | 21% | 1% | 2% |
| Other assaults | 241,200 | 11.1% | 34% | 59% | 39% | 1% | 1% |
| Forgery | 3,100 | 0.1% | 32% | 72% | 25% | 1% | 2% |
| Fraud | 7,200 | 0.3% | 36% | 64% | 33% | 1% | 1% |
| Embezzlement | 1,700 | 0.1% | 41% | 58% | 39% | 1% | 2% |
| Stolen property offenses | 22,200 | 1.0% | 18% | 55% | 43% | 1% | 1% |
| Vandalism | 111,300 | 5.1% | 13% | 79% | 19% | 1% | 1% |
| Weapons offense | 43,600 | 2.0% | 10% | 61% | 37% | 1% | 1% |
| Commercialized vice | 1,500 | 0.1% | 77% | 41% | 57% | 1% | 1% |
| Other sex offenses | 15,500 | 0.7% | 10% | 70% | 28% | 1% | 1% |
| Drug offense | 195,400 | 9.0% | 16% | 69% | 29% | 1% | 1% |
| Gambling | 2,000 | 0.1% | 2% | 5% | 95% | <1% | 1% |
| Family offenses | 5,800 | 0.3% | 39% | 73% | 24% | 2% | 1% |
| Driving under the influence | 18,100 | 0.8% | 24% | 93% | 4% | 2% | 1% |
| Liquor law violations | 139,100 | 6.4% | 37% | 91% | 5% | 3% | 1% |
| Drunkenness | 16,900 | 0.8% | 26% | 89% | 8% | 2% | 1% |
| Disorderly conduct | 203,000 | 9.3% | 33% | 58% | 40% | 1% | 1% |
| Vagrancy | 3,800 | 0.2% | 29% | 78% | 21% | 1% | <1% |
| Suspicion | 400 | <0.1% | 25% | 66% | 33% | 1% | <1% |
| Curfew/loitering | 143,000 | 6.6% | 31% | 64% | 34% | 1% | 1% |
| Runaways | 108,900 | 5.0% | 56% | 67% | 26% | 2% | 5% |
| All other offenses | 374,200 | 17.2% | 26% | 70% | 27% | 1% | 2% |

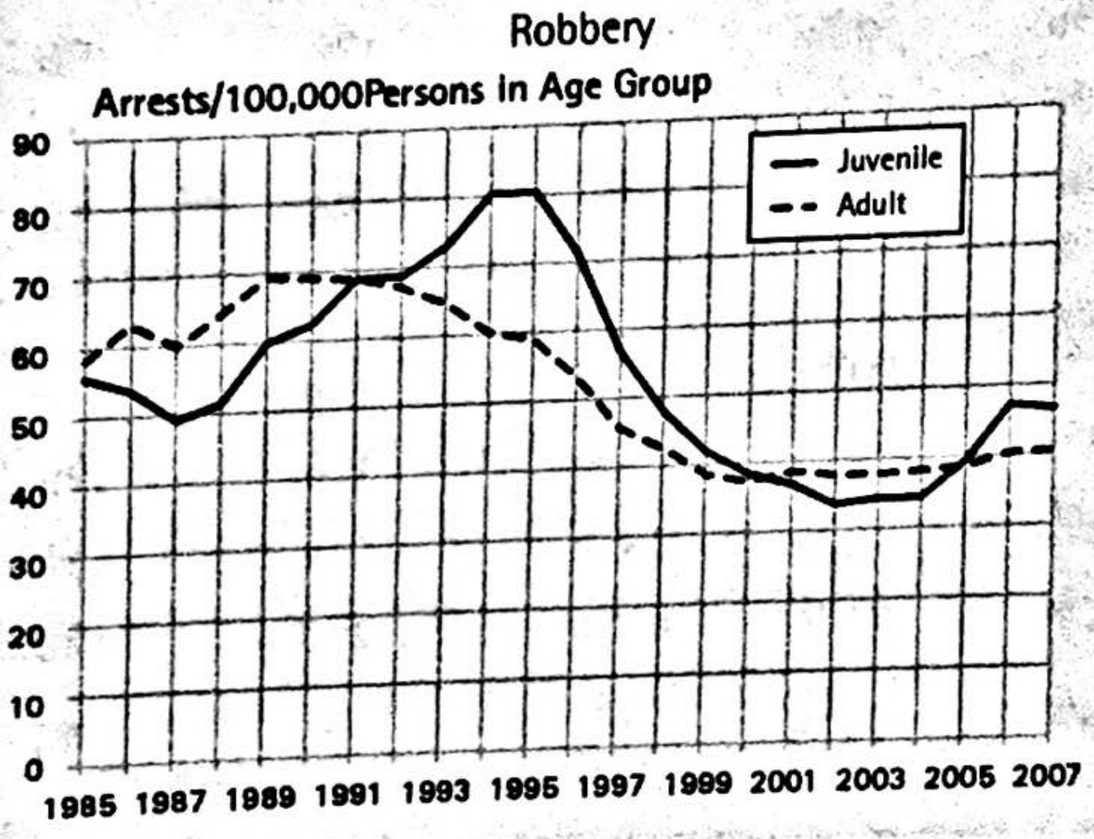
*Note*: Estimates developed by author from data reported in *Crime in the United States, 2007.*

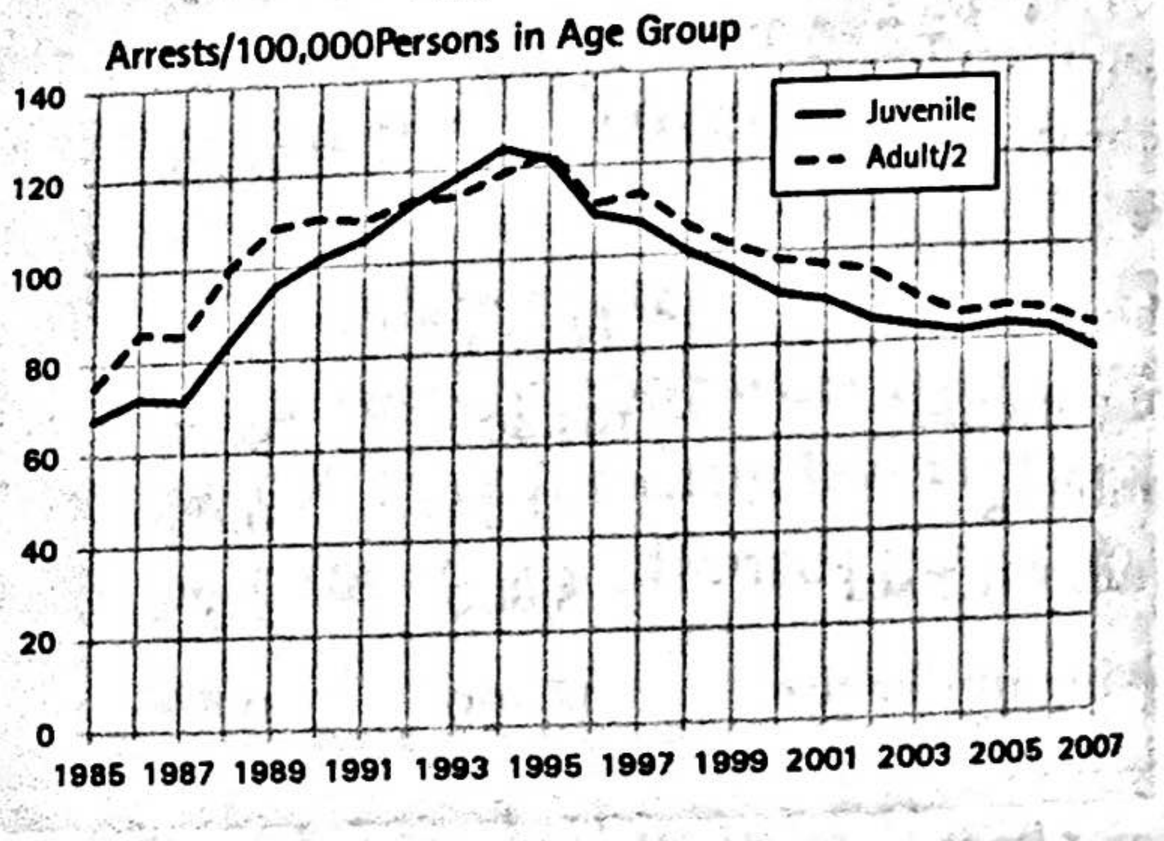



and magazine covers carried stories of incidents of juvenile violence, and commentators speculated about a new breed of juvenile offenders. The empirical support for this focus came in part from the substantial increases in juvenile violent crime arrests, especially arrests for murder and weapon law violations. It was common practice during this period to summarize violent crime patterns using the Violent Crime Index. The Violent Crime Index is the sum of four crimes (i.e., murder and non-negligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, and

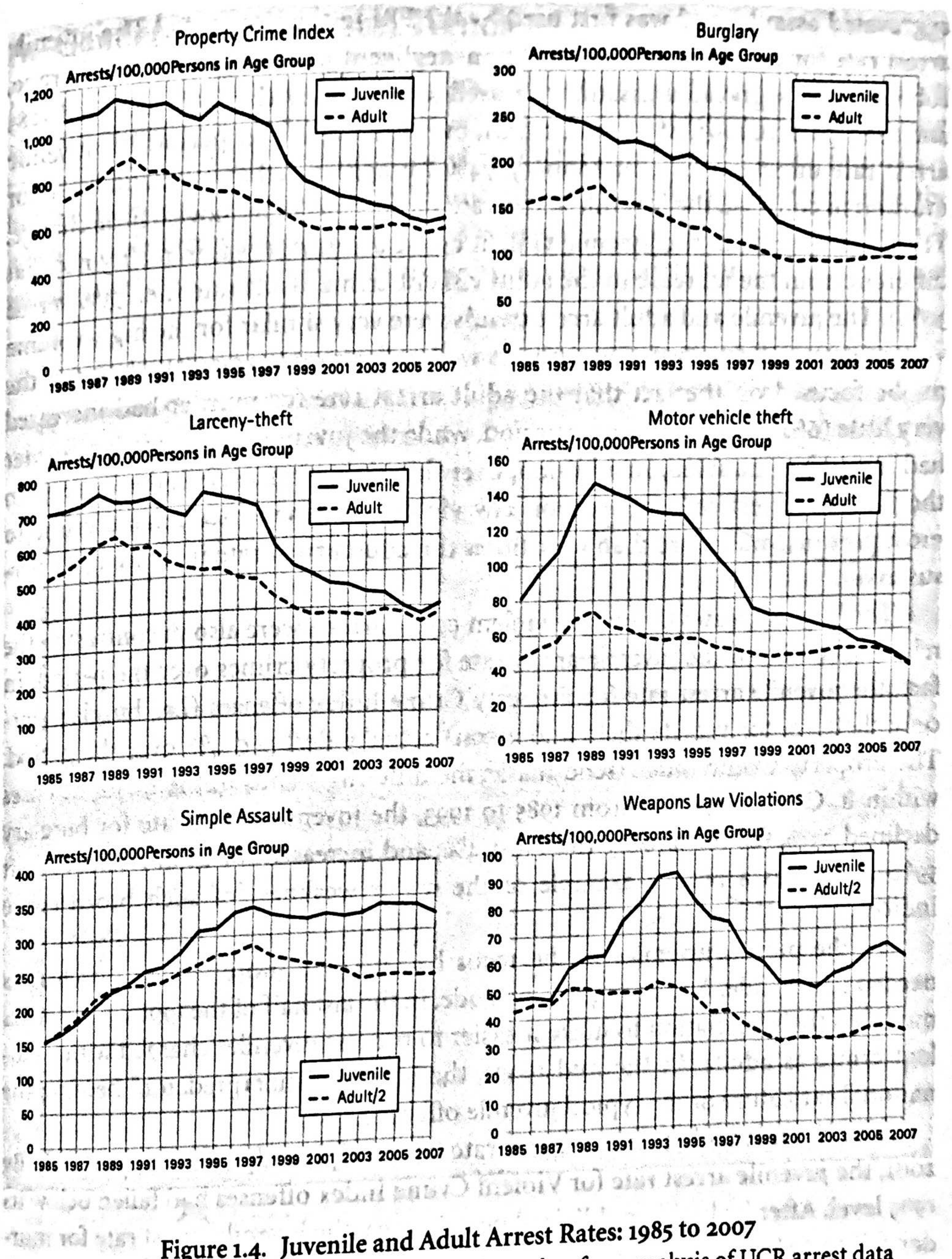



**Figure 1.4. Juvenile and Adult Arrest Rates: 1985 to 2007**

*Notes*: Arrest rate estimates were developed by the author from analysis of UCR arrest data (USDOJ, FBI UCRP, 2009) adjusted to reflect the FBI's national estimates of arrests. The Violent Crime Index includes murder and non-negligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault. The Property Crime Index includes arrests for burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft and arson. Juvenile arrest rate is 100,000 times the number of arrests of persons under age 18 divided by the population under age 18. Adult arrest rate is 100,000 times the number of arrests of persons age 18 and over divided by the population over age 17. For some graphs, the adult arrest rate is divided by two to improve the quality of the display.

aggravated assault) and was first used by the FBI in the late 1950s.[5] The juvenile arrest rate for crimes of murder and non-negligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault increased substantially (by 53%) between 1985 and their peak in 1993. More specifically, over this eight-year period, the juvenile arrest rate increased 31% for robbery, 74% for aggravated assault, and 133% for murder; in contrast, the juvenile arrest rate for forcible rape showed little change. The large increase in the juvenile violent crime arrest rate was in reality not that different from the increase in the adult violent crime arrest rate (i.e., 53% versus 36%). The juvenile and adult arrest trends were very similar for the high-volume violent crime of aggravated assault (as well as for simple assault). However, the public focused on the fact that the adult arrest rate for murder had increased very little (6%) in the eight-year period, while the juvenile arrest rate for murder had more than doubled. In addition, over this eight-year period, the increase in the juvenile arrest rate for weapon law violations (a violence-related crime to most persons) was more than four times the adult arrest rate increase (91% versus 21%).

The large increases in juvenile violent crime arrests were also in contrast to the relative stability of the juvenile arrest rate for property crimes over the period. In fact, the juvenile arrest rate for Property Crime Index offenses (i.e., burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson) actually declined 4% over the period. The Property Crime Index trend masks the differing trends in the major offenses within it. Over the period from 1985 to 1993, the juvenile arrest rate for burglary declined 25%, fell for larceny-theft just 4%, and increased for motor vehicle theft 59%—which is a perfect example of the major weakness of such broad crime indices.

To the public, juveniles in the 1990s had become more violent, so changes needed to be made. And changes were made. In the last half of the 1990s, most states modified their legislation to make it easier to process juveniles charged with a violent crime as adults. In the mid-1990s, the juvenile "superpredator" became the national caricature of the typical juvenile offender.

The juvenile violent crime arrest rate fell precipitously after its 1993 peak. By 2001, the juvenile arrest rate for Violent Crime Index offenses had fallen below its 1985 level. After its highly publicized peak in 1993, the juvenile arrest rate for murder fell to below its 1985 level in 1999 and remained near this low level through 2007. The juvenile arrest rate of robbery also fell in 1998 to its lowest level since 1985 and continued to decline for several years thereafter. By the early years of the twenty-first century, the juvenile arrest rates for murder, forcible rape, robbery, burglary, larceny-theft, and motor vehicle theft were all well below their 1985 levels, and the juvenile arrest rate for weapon law violations had returned to its 1985 level. By the early twenty-first century, juvenile law-violating behavior from the perspective of law enforcement had reached a generational low for most crime types, with the notable exceptions of drug abuse violations, aggravated assault, and simple assault.

## A. Gender-Specific Arrest Trends

Between the mid-1980s and the mid-1990s, female arrest rates (though smaller in absolute terms) increased proportionately more than the corresponding male arrest rates (Figure 1.5). Both rates declined after reaching their peaks in the mid-1990s, but the male rate fell proportionately more than the female rate. Consequently, the juvenile male arrest rate in 2007 was 18% below its 1985 level, while the juvenile female arrest rate in 2007 was 20% above its 1985 level. Comparing these arrest rates

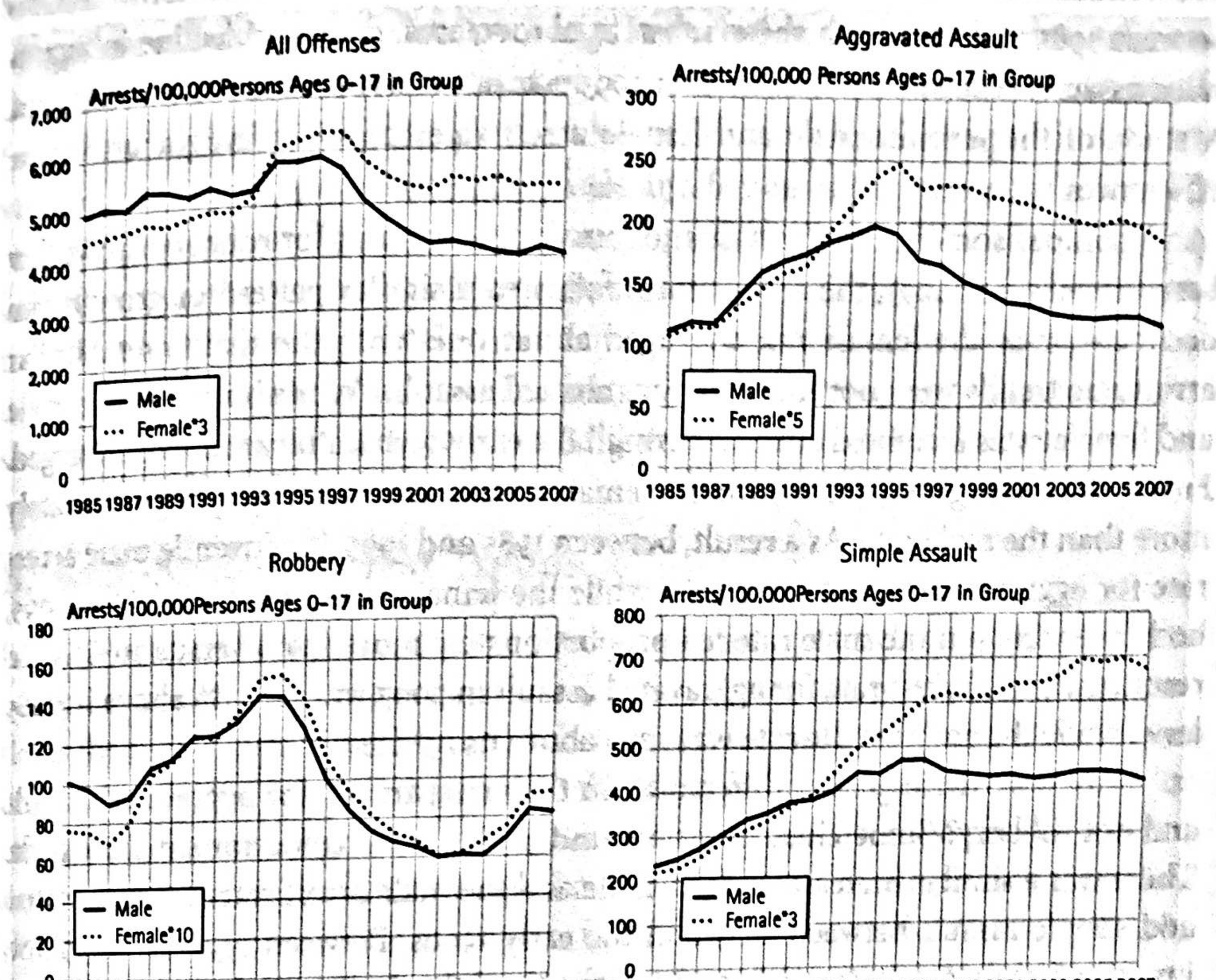



**Figure 1.5. Male and Female Juvenile Arrest Rates: 1985 to 2007**

*Note*: Arrest rate estimates were developed by the author from analysis of UCR arrest data (USDOJ, FBI UCRP, 2009) adjusted to reflect the FBI's national estimates of arrests. For some graphs, the female arrest rate is multiplied by a constant to improve the quality of the display.

directly, in 1985 the female arrest rate was 30% of the male rate; in 2007 it had grown to 44% of the male rate. The gender difference in arrests was narrowing.

Earlier we discussed factors other than juvenile law-violating behavior that have likely contributed to the juvenile drug arrest trends. It is likely that some of these factors are also involved in the narrowing of the gender difference in arrests. Victim reports from the National Criminal Victimization Survey show that assaults by juveniles peaked in 1993 and declined substantially through 2007; between 1993 and 2007, victims reported an 80% decline in the rate of aggravated assaults committed by juveniles. While the juvenile arrest rate for aggravated assault and victim reports between 1985 and 1993 both show substantial increases, the large decline in aggravated assaults reported by victims after 1993 was not seen in the juvenile arrest rate. A study of the juvenile male and female arrest rates provides insight into these differences.

A comparison of juvenile male and female arrest trends for robbery shows that between 1985 and 1993, the arrests rates followed a similar pattern of growth and decline—albeit the female rate averaged about one-tenth the male rate. Similar arrest rate trends were not found for aggravated assaults. While both juvenile male and female rates increased equally through the early 1990s, afterward they diverged. From 1991 through 1995, the juvenile female arrest rate increased proportionately more than the male rate. As a result, between 1985 and 1995, the juvenile male arrest rate for aggravated assault grew 70% while the female rate grew 129%. After 1995, both rates fell, but the male rate fell proportionately more (39% versus 26%). As a result, the male arrest rate for aggravated assault in 2007 was just 4% above its 1985 level, while the 2007 female rate was 70% above its 1985 level.

Why were there gender differences in the arrest trends for aggravated assault and not robbery? Some clues may be found in the arrest trend for simple assault. There was a similar increase in the female and the male arrest rates for aggravated and simple assault between 1985 and the early 1990s. Between 1991 and 1995, the juvenile female arrest rate increased more than the male rate for both offenses. Then, after 1995, the juvenile male and female arrest rates for aggravated assault both declined, but the female rate declined less. In stark contrast, after 1995, while the juvenile male arrest rate for simple assault held constant, the juvenile female arrest increased substantially. As a result, between 1985 and 2007, the simple assault arrest rate for juvenile males increased 78% and the female rate more than tripled. So what can explain these differing patterns of juvenile and female arrest rates for robbery, aggravated assault, and simple assault?

One cannot argue that the narrowing of the gender gap in juvenile arrest rates is because juvenile females became more violent, because that argument is not supported by (1) victim reports of declining violence by female offenders and (2) the fact the robbery arrest trends are nearly identical for males and females over the period. A clue to a possible explanation may be in the large divergence in male and female arrest rates for both aggravated and simple assault and not robbery arrests. Analyses of data from the FBI's National Incident-based Reporting System find that a greater portion of juvenile female than male violent crimes reported to law enforcement involves victims who are family members. Over the period we are

considering, public policy and law enforcement agencies became more aware of the harm caused by domestic violence; as a result, intervention policies changed. Because of these changes, more of these incidents were likely to be reported to law enforcement, and more were likely to result in arrest. Even if juvenile males and females would be arrested equally in these domestic incidents, such a change in arrest policy would have a greater effect on the relatively low assault arrest rate of juvenile females than on the much higher arrest rate of juvenile males (Feld 2009; Snyder and Sickmund 2006). This explanation for these trends fits the data. Specifically, while the number of such domestic violence incidents had not increased (as evidenced by the NCVS data), a change in law enforcement's response to domestic violence incidents caused a disproportionate increase in the arrests of juvenile females for aggravated and simple assault (the most common charges in domestic violence incidents). At the same time, male and female arrest trends for robbery (a crime largely unrelated to domestic violence) was unaffected. This argument may help to explain the narrowing of the gender gap in juvenile violent crime arrest patterns, but it does not explain the narrowing gender gap in other crime types. That is, it does not explain why the juvenile male arrest rate for property offenses declined so much more after the mid-1990s than did the juvenile female arrest rate.

## B. Race-Specific Arrest Trends

Between 1985 and 2007, the average total arrest rate for black youths (6,083) was twice the rate of white youth (3,130) and Native American youth (3,137) and four times the rate of Asian youth (1,411), where arrest rate is defined as the number of arrests per 100,000 youth ages 0 to 17 in the racial group. The arrest rate trends for each of the four racial groups followed a similar pattern over the period, with an increase from the mid-1980s through the mid-1990s, and then a decline thereafter (Figure 1.6). At its peak in the mid-1990s, the total arrest rate was 22% above its 1985 level for white youth, 36% above for black youth, 40% above for Native American youth, and 49% above for Asian youth. By 2007, the total arrest rates for black and Native American youth had returned to very near their 1985 levels (3% and 7% above their 1985 levels respectively), while white and Asian youth ended the period with arrest rates below their 1985 levels (14% and 26% respectively). As a result of their similar arrest trends, the relative size of the total arrest rates for each racial group changed little annually over the period.

As with arrests for all offenses, the black arrest rate for Property Crime Index offenses annually remained near twice the white arrest rate between 1985 and 2007. In contrast, over the period, the black arrest rate averaged five times the white rate for Violent Crime Index offenses, with the disparity in the rates declining for the Index (and for forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault) through most of the period. The disparity in the black and white arrest rates increased substantially and then declined during the period for murder, drug abuse violations, and weapon law violations. Changes in the ratio of black-to-white arrest rates over the period imply that the factors influencing the arrest of white and black youth differed, a topic which will be explored in more detail later in this volume.

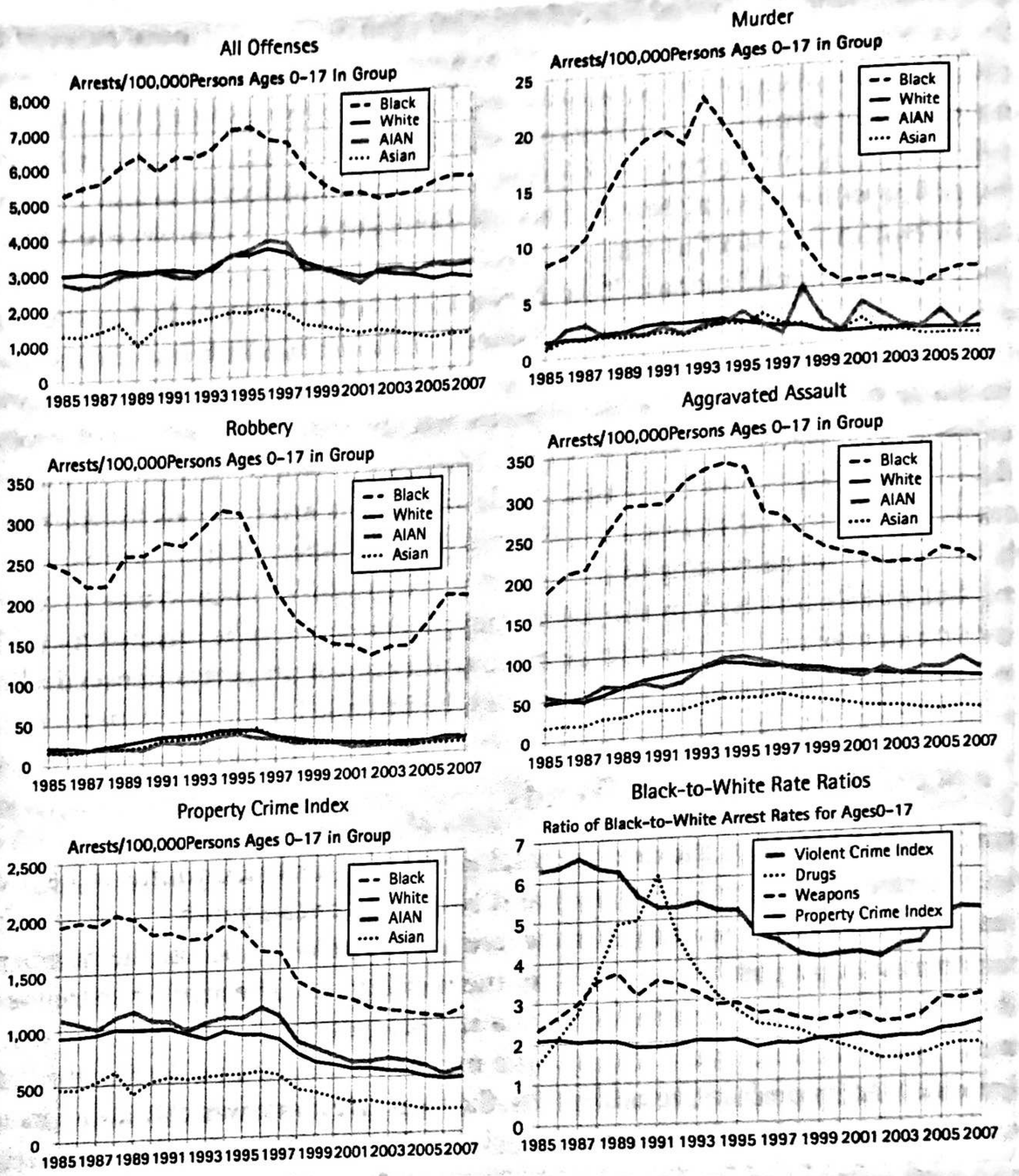



**Figure 1.6. Juvenile Arrest Rates by Race: 1985 to 2007**

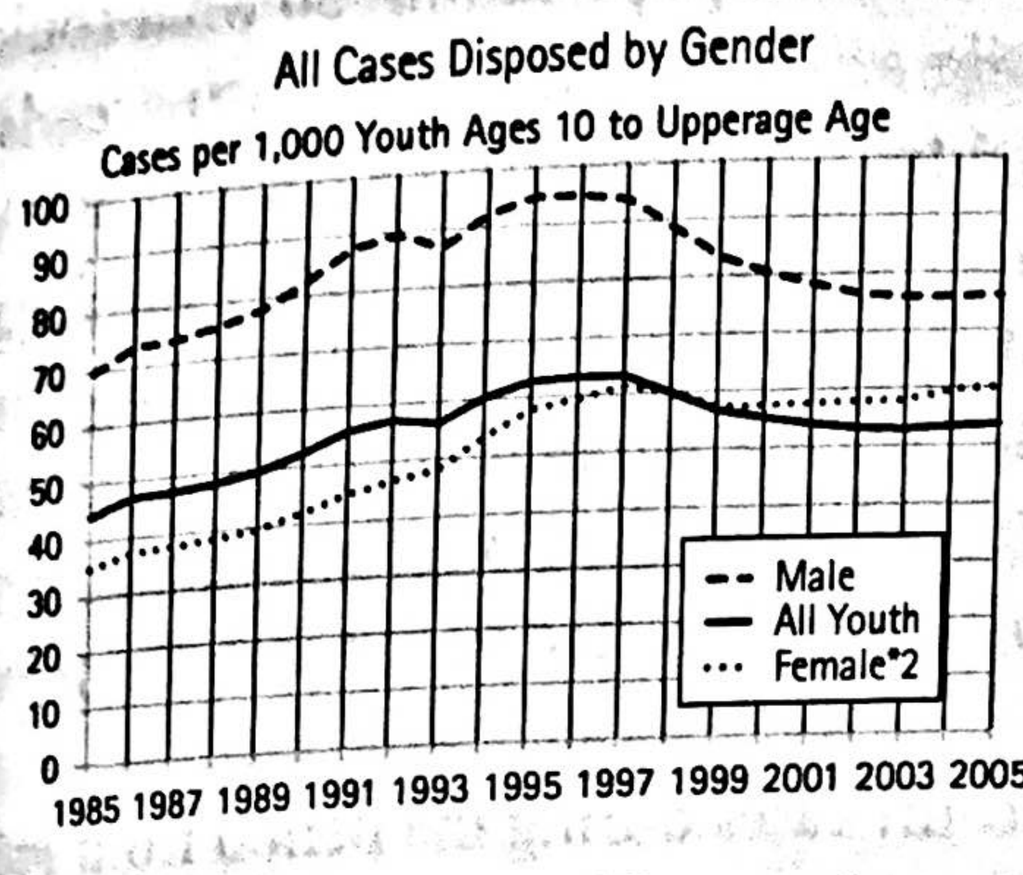
*Note.* Arrest rate estimates were developed by the author from analysis of UCR arrest data (USDOJ, FBI UCRP, 2009) adjusted to reflect the FBI's national estimates of arrests.

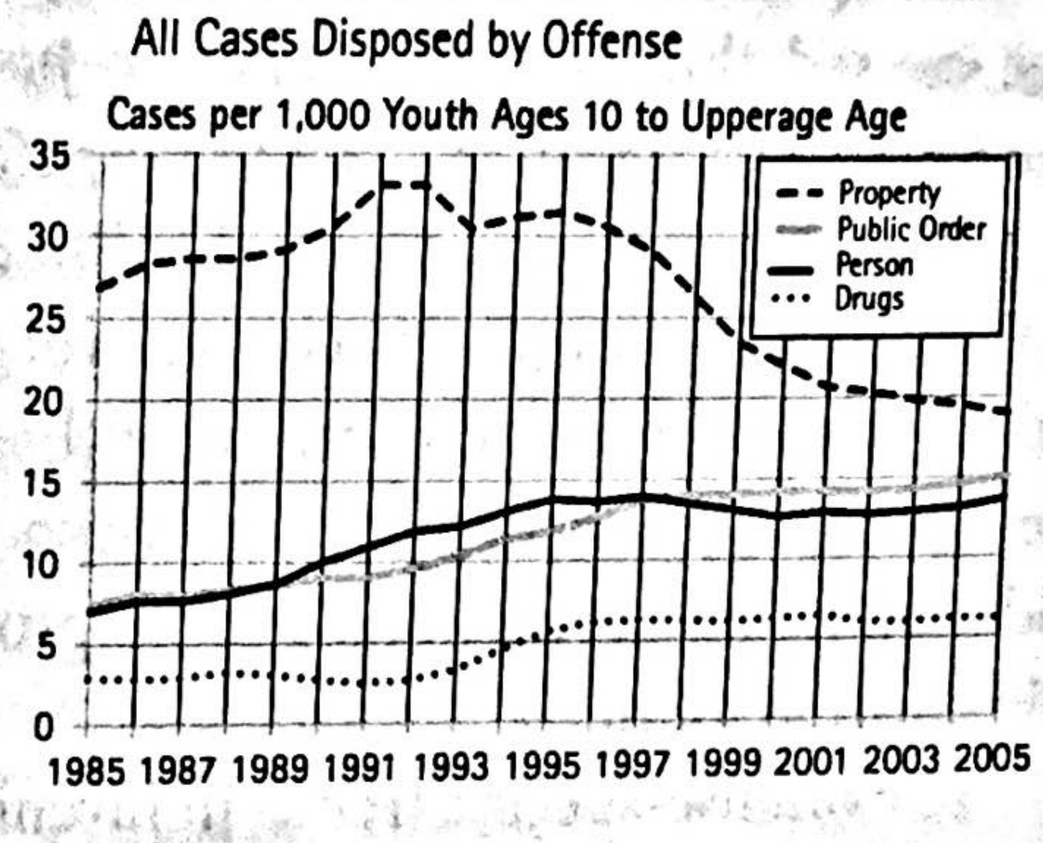
# IV. Juvenile Court Referral Trends

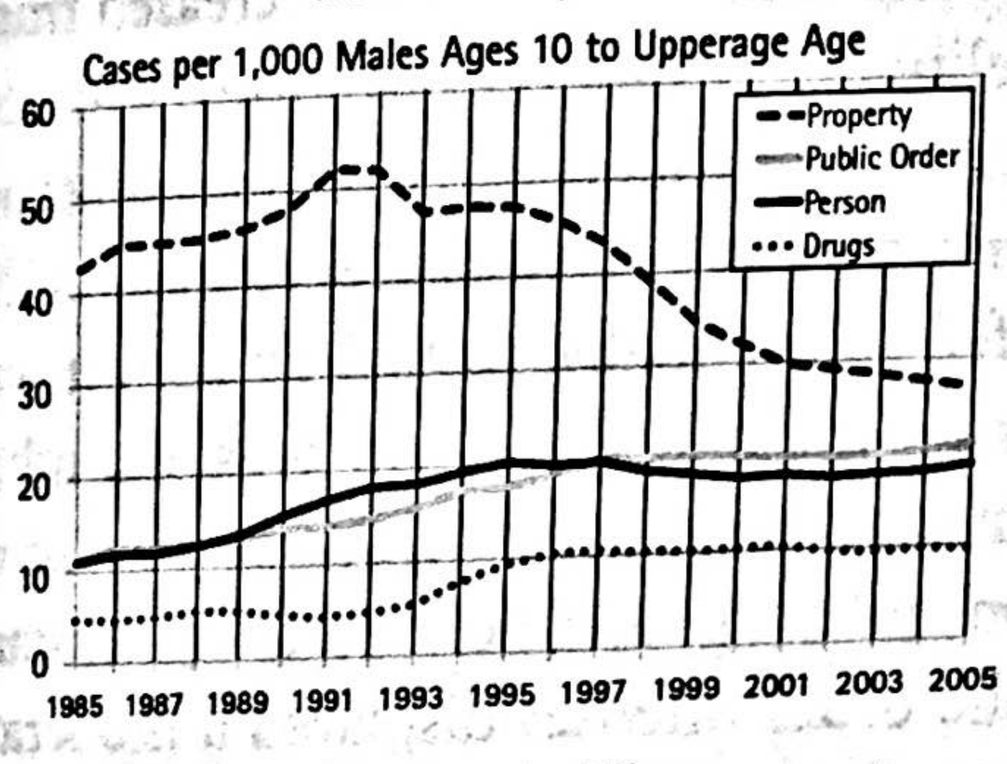
Even though most delinquency cases are referred to juvenile court intake by law enforcement, juvenile court referral trends do not mirror juvenile arrest trends. The annual rate of delinquency cases disposed by juvenile courts increased from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s (Figure 1.7). The rate increase from 1985 through 1996 was greater for juvenile court cases than for juvenile arrests (43% versus 24%). Then, after increasing more, juvenile court case rates decreased less than juvenile arrest

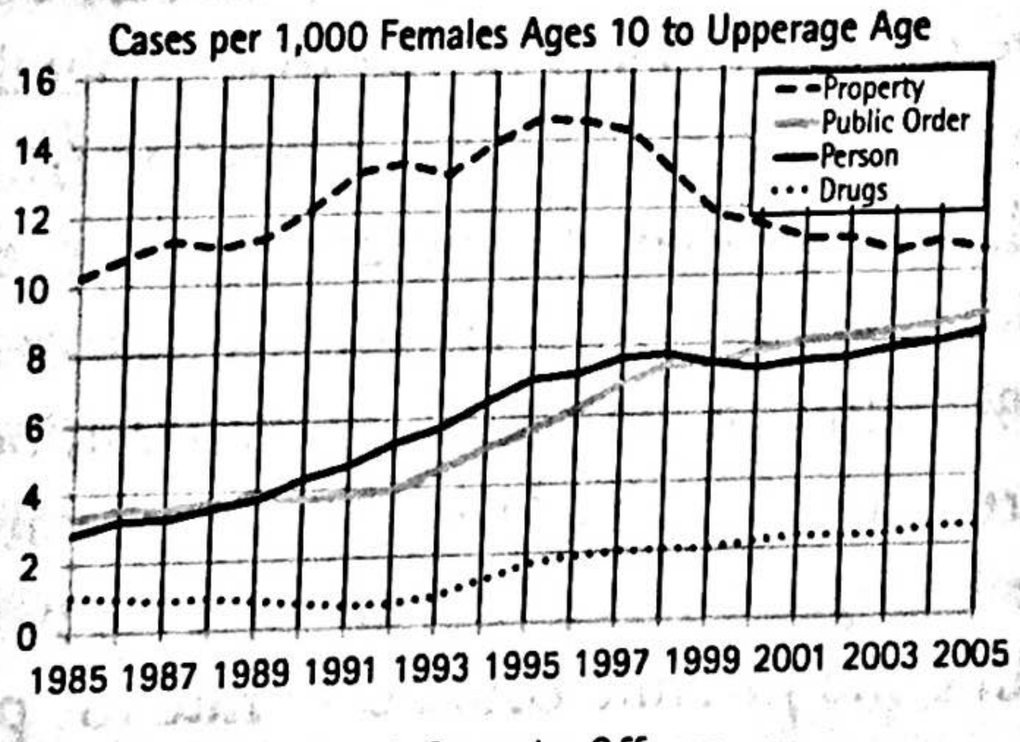
rate from 1996 to 2005 (-15% versus -28%). As a result, while the juvenile arrest rate in 2005 was 10% below its 1985 level, the juvenile court case rate in 2005 was 22% above its 1985 level.

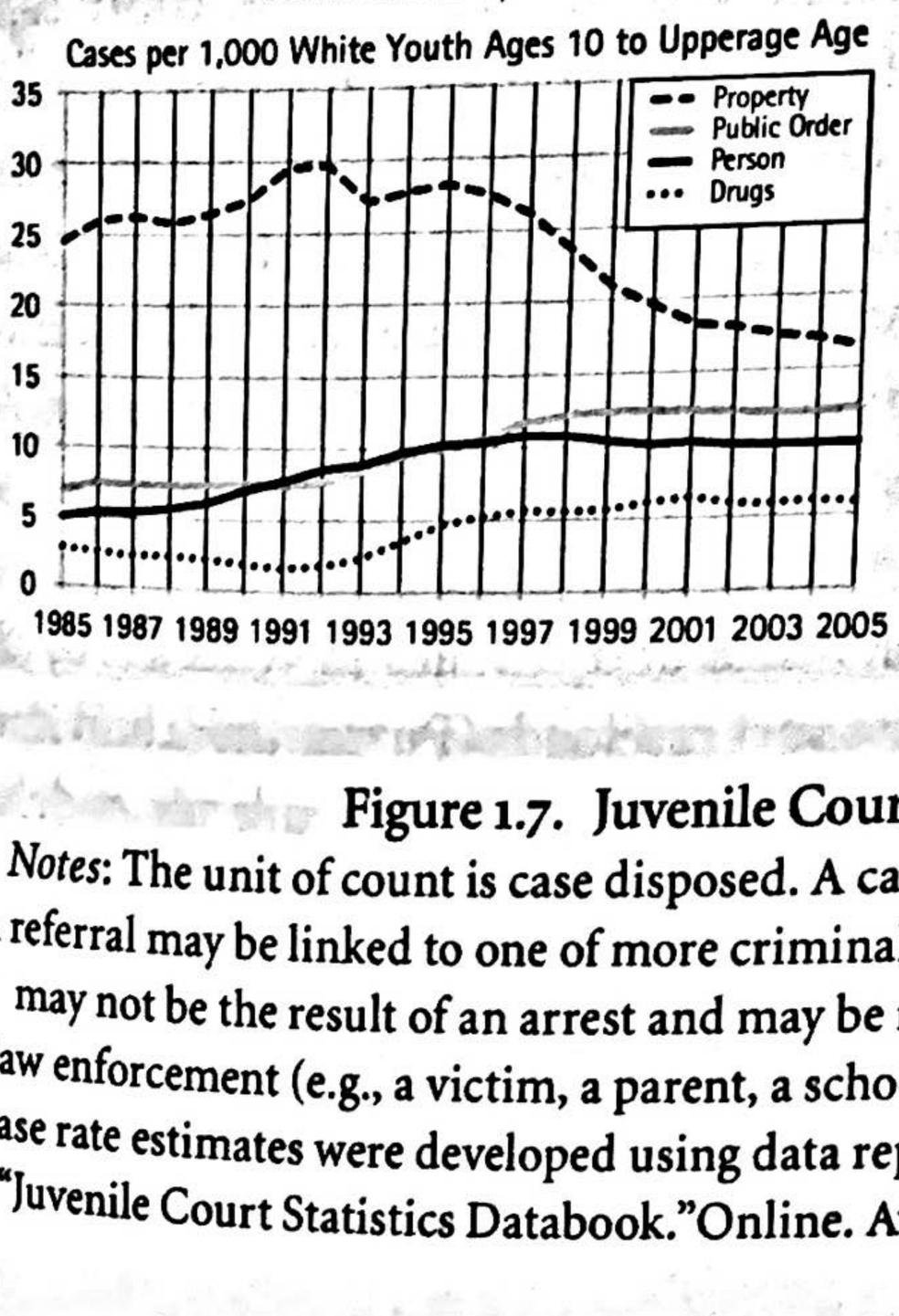
There are many reasons juvenile arrest and juvenile court case trends might differ. First, they cover somewhat different populations; that is, while juvenile arrests cover all arrests of persons under age 18, many of these youth are not handled in juvenile but in adult criminal courts due to the variations in state



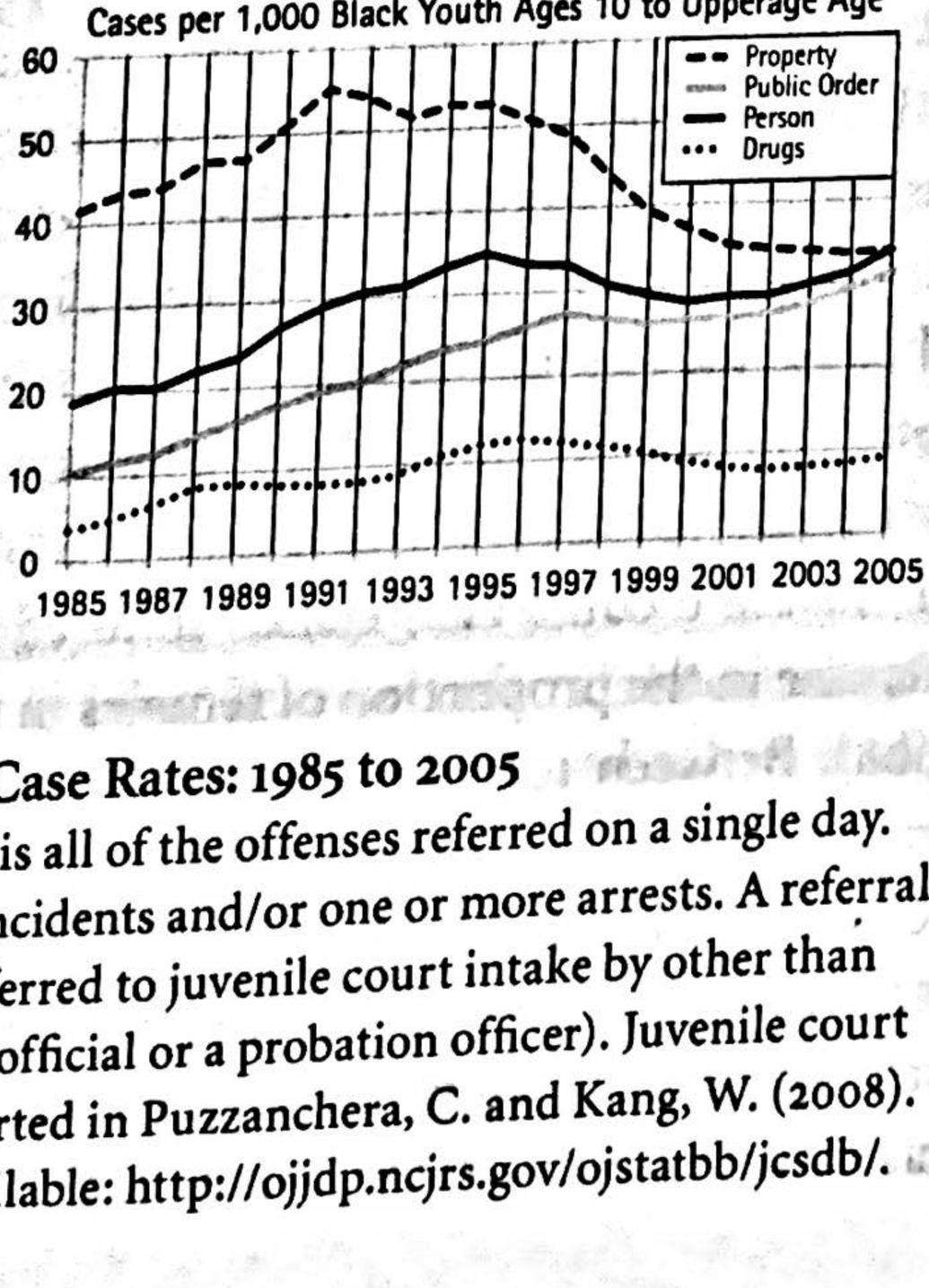




**Figure 1.7. Juvenile Court Case Rates: 1985 to 2005**

*Notes*: The unit of count is case disposed. A case is all of the offenses referred on a single day. A referral may be linked to one of more criminal incidents and/or one or more arrests. A referral may not be the result of an arrest and may be referred to juvenile court intake by other than law enforcement (e.g., a victim, a parent, a school official or a probation officer). Juvenile court case rate estimates were developed using data reported in Puzzanchera, C. and Kang, W. (2008). "Juvenile Court Statistics Databook."Online. Available: http://ojjdp.ncjrs.gov/ojstatbb/jcsdb/.

statutes described earlier in this chapter. To place these differences in perspective, it is helpful to know that in 2005, 10% of the 16-year-olds and 39% of the 17-year-olds in the United States lived in states in which any law-violating behaviors they allegedly committed were under the original jurisdiction of an adult criminal court (not a juvenile court). Another possible reason for the trend differences in juvenile arrest rates and juvenile court case rates is that about one in every six juvenile court cases is referred to the court by persons other than law enforcement (e.g., by victims, parents, school officials, and probation officers). However, even with these two differences, there is still substantial overlap in the juvenile arrest and juvenile court populations. So what could have caused the large difference in juvenile arrest and juvenile court trends? One possibility lies in the fact that a referral to juvenile court is a decision made by individuals. Over time, the likelihood of referral may vary with extra-legal factors such as community concerns about the threat of juvenile delinquency or the decision makers' perceptions of the effectiveness of juvenile court. Whatever the reason, it is fair to say that between 1985 and 2005, the juvenile justice system widened its net, bringing a greater proportion of arrested youth into the juvenile court system.

The offense-specific trends in juvenile court cases during the period from 1985 to 2005 fell into two general patterns. The juvenile court case rates increased from 1985 to 1995 in each of the four general delinquency offense categories, with the increases in person (95%), drugs (112%), and public order (73%) case rates substantially greater than the increase in the property case rate (14%). After its peak in the mid-1990s, the property offense case rate fell substantially, so that by 2005 it was 30% below its 1985 level. In contrast, between the mid-1990s and 2005, the other three case rates displayed a different pattern than the property case rate. Instead of declining, the juvenile court rates for person and drug cases held relatively constant while the juvenile court case rate for public order offenses displayed a moderate increase. Comparatively, the trends in juvenile arrests and juvenile court cases between 1985 to 2005 were roughly similar for person, property, and drug offenses, with the exception that the juvenile court case rates increased more or decreased less (i.e., demonstrating the effect of net widening). Given that a substantial portion of public order cases in juvenile court involve the crimes that are referred by sources other of law enforcement (e.g., obstruction of justice and probation/parole violations), there is no simple direct comparison in arrest statistics for public order cases in juvenile courts.

Juvenile court case trends differed for males and females as reflected by the increase in the proportion of females in the court caseloads (Puzzanchera and Kang 2008). Between 1985 and 2005, the female proportion of the juvenile court delinquency caseloads increased from 19% to 27%, with an increase in each case type: person (20% to 30%), property (19% to 27%), drug (17% to 20%), and public order (22% to 28%). These percent increases were the result of the female case rate increasing substantially more than the male case rate over the period for all delinquency cases and within specific offense categories.

| Offense | Change in case rates from 1985 to 2005 | |
|---|---|---|
| | Male | Female |
| All delinquency cases | 9% | 73% |
| Person offenses | 70% | 189% |
| Property offenses | −37% | 3% |
| Drug offense | 104% | 143% |
| Public order offense | 87% | 167% |

Juvenile court case trends differed for white and black youth between 1985 and 2005. Across the period, the overall delinquency case rate increased more for black youth than white youth, primarily because of larger increases in drug and public order cases and a smaller decline in property cases. As a result, the disparity in the ratio of the black-to-white case rates increased over the period. In 1985, the overall delinquency case rate for black youth was 1.9 times the white rate; by 2005, this ratio had increased to 2.4.

| Offense | Change in case rates from 1985 to 2005 | |
|---|---|---|
| | White | Black |
| All delinquency cases | 12% | 45% |
| Person offenses | 97% | 80% |
| Property offenses | −34% | −18% |
| Drug offense | 108% | 137% |
| Public order offense | 76% | 200% |

## V. Juvenile Court Case Processing Trends

The nature of juvenile court case processing varies across the country. However, in general, soon after a case is referred to juvenile court intake, two key decisions are made. One is whether the youth should be detained in a secure facility while awaiting case disposition. Over the period from 1985 to 2005, 20% of delinquency cases disposed by juvenile courts were securely detained for some time between referral to court intake and case disposition. This proportion changed relatively little over the period. However, given the large increase in juvenile court referrals between 1985 and 1998, the actual number of delinquency cases detained increased substantially (53%). Following this peak through 2005, the annual number of delinquency cases detained fell slightly, maintaining its relatively high levels of the late 1990s.

From 1985 to 2005, youth in 16% of property and 24% of person offense cases were securely detained, with this proportion changing little over the period. In contrast, the likelihood that a youth charged with a public order offense would be

detained fell from 28% in 1985 to 20% in the mid-1990s and then increased to 24% in 2005. In comparison, the trend in the likelihood of detention in drug offense cases was unique. In 1985, the proportion of drug offense cases detained (22%) was lower than the proportion of person (24%) and public order offense (28%) cases detained. After 1985, as detention rates for the other three delinquency offense categories either held constant or declined, and the proportion of drug offense cases detained increased substantially. By 1990, a youth referred for a drug offense was far more likely to be detained (35%) than were youths referred to juvenile court for public order (25%), person (24%), or property (17%) offenses. However, this disparity in detention rates in drug offense cases was short-lived. By the mid-1990s, the likelihood of detention in drug offense cases had returned to its 1985 level, and by 2005, drug offense cases were once again less likely to be detained (18%) than person (25%) or public order (24%) cases.

The unique detention trend pattern in drug offense cases is linked to race. Over the period from 1985 to 2005, a black youth referred to juvenile court intake was far more likely to be detained than a white youth between referral and case disposition (26% versus 17%). This general disparity was found in person (28% versus 21%), property (21% versus 14%), drug (38% versus 17%), and public order (28% versus 22%) offense cases. Consistent with this pattern, black youths charged with a drug offense in 1985 were far more likely than white youths to be securely detained during the processing of their cases (33% versus 19% respectively). However, the unique growth in the likelihood of detention in drug cases during the late 1980s was disproportionately borne by black youth. More specifically, between 1985 and 1990, the drug case detention rate for white youth grew from 19% to 23%, while the black rate increased from 33% to 53%. By the mid-1990s, both the white and black detention rates in drug offense cases had returned to their (still disparate) 1985 levels, but these ten years saw an example of the juvenile justice system's race-specific response to crime.

The other decision made soon after intake is whether the case should be handled informally (i.e., without the filing of a petition) or formally (i.e., with the filing of a petition asking a judge to make a formal ruling in the case). In 1985, most (54%) delinquency cases disposed were handled informally, with informal processing less likely in person (46%) than in property (56%), drug (57%), and public order (54%) cases. The proportion of delinquency cases handled informally decreased from 54% in 1985 to 44% in 1996 and remained essentially constant through 2005. This general pattern held for all but drug offense cases, which saw a substantial decline in informal handling between 1985 and 1991 (from 57% to 34%), followed by an increase to 41% in 1994, and then stability thereafter. In other words, over this period, the juvenile justice decision makers decided that a smaller proportion of all delinquency cases should be handled informally.

The flip side of this trend is the growth during the same period in the formal processing of delinquency cases in juvenile court. Formal court caseloads doubled between 1985 and 1997. This increase in formally handled cases was greater for drug cases (242%), public order (169%), and person (149%) cases than for property (51%)

cases. Between 1997 and 2005, the number of formally processed cases changed little for all but property cases, which fell back to near the number of formally processed cases in 1985.

Nearly all delinquency petitions request that the court formally judge the youth to be a delinquent and, if the youth is adjudicated a delinquent, to order sanctions and/or treatment. During the period from 1985 to 2005, 63% of the cases in which a delinquency petition was filed resulted in a formal adjudication of delinquency. In general, the likelihood of adjudication declined from 1985 to 1995 (falling from 65% to 57%), and then quickly returned by 1998 to near its 1985 level and remained near there through 2005. Over that period, the likelihood that a youth would be adjudicated delinquent once a petitioned had been filed was similar for property, drug, and public order cases and lower for person offense case. A possible explanation for this latter finding is that court intake workers became less willing to informally process person offense cases and decided to pass the decision of how to handle these high-profile matters to judges in the formal court setting.

At disposition, a judge may order a youth to out-of-home placement or to a term of probation, or may order some other sanction (e.g., fine or restitution). Between 1985 and 2005, the number of cases in which youths were adjudicated delinquent increased 85%, undoubtedly placing a strain on service delivery within the juvenile justice system. The number of adjudicated delinquency cases that resulted in out-of-home placement increased about 30% over the period, while the number of cases placed on probation doubled and those given other formal sanction nearly tripled. This means that over this period, the probability that an adjudicated delinquent would be placed out of the home declined, from 32% in 1985 to 22% in 2005. So while out-of-home placements increased over the period, the increase (1) was due primarily to the growth in the court caseloads and (2) was not nearly as great as the increase in adjudicated delinquency cases.

Looking more closely, the number of adjudicated delinquency cases that resulted in out-of-home placement peaked in 1997, increasing from 1985 by about 70%, while adjudicated delinquency cases increased about 90%. Then, between 1997 and 2005, while adjudicated delinquency cases remained essentially constant, the number of adjudicated delinquency cases placed out of the home declined about 20%. The smaller increase in out-of-home placements between 1985 and 1997 might by itself reflect a lack of resources in which to place these youth; but the fact that the number of out-of-home placements declined between 1997 and 2005, while adjudicated delinquency caseloads were stable, indicates the juvenile justice system was seeking (and increasingly using) alternatives to placement during this twenty-year period.

In 2005, youth in 58% of the cases adjudicated and placed out of home were white, 39% were black, 2% were Native American, and 1% was Asian/Pacific Islander. These proportions had changed noticeably since 1985, when youth in 67% of adjudicated cases placed out of the home were white, 31% black, 2% Native American, and 1% Asian/Pacific Islander. One method to understand the nature of these changes is to compare the handling of white and black youth across the key stages

of juvenile court processing. Over the 1985-to-2005 period, the black juvenile arrest rate averaged about twice the white rate (Figure 1.8). The ratio of the black-to-white arrest rates varied over the period and was mirrored very closely by the ratio of the black-to-white juvenile court case rates, with the court case ratio being somewhat larger (i.e., somewhat more racially disparate). In other words, black youth were arrested at about twice the rate of white youth and, once arrested, were somewhat more likely than white youth to be referred to juvenile court.

Once in juvenile court, the disparity in the processing of black and white youth increased when a decision was made to formally process the case, declined at the point of adjudication, and increased at the placement decision. Across the period from 1985 to 2005, delinquency cases referred to juvenile court with black youth were more likely to be processed formally than were those involving white youth. On average, over the period, 50% of white delinquency referrals were formally processed compared with 62% of black delinquency referrals—making it more likely that black youth would face a formal adjudication of delinquency and a formal court disposition. Once petitioned, however, the cases of white youth were more likely to result in

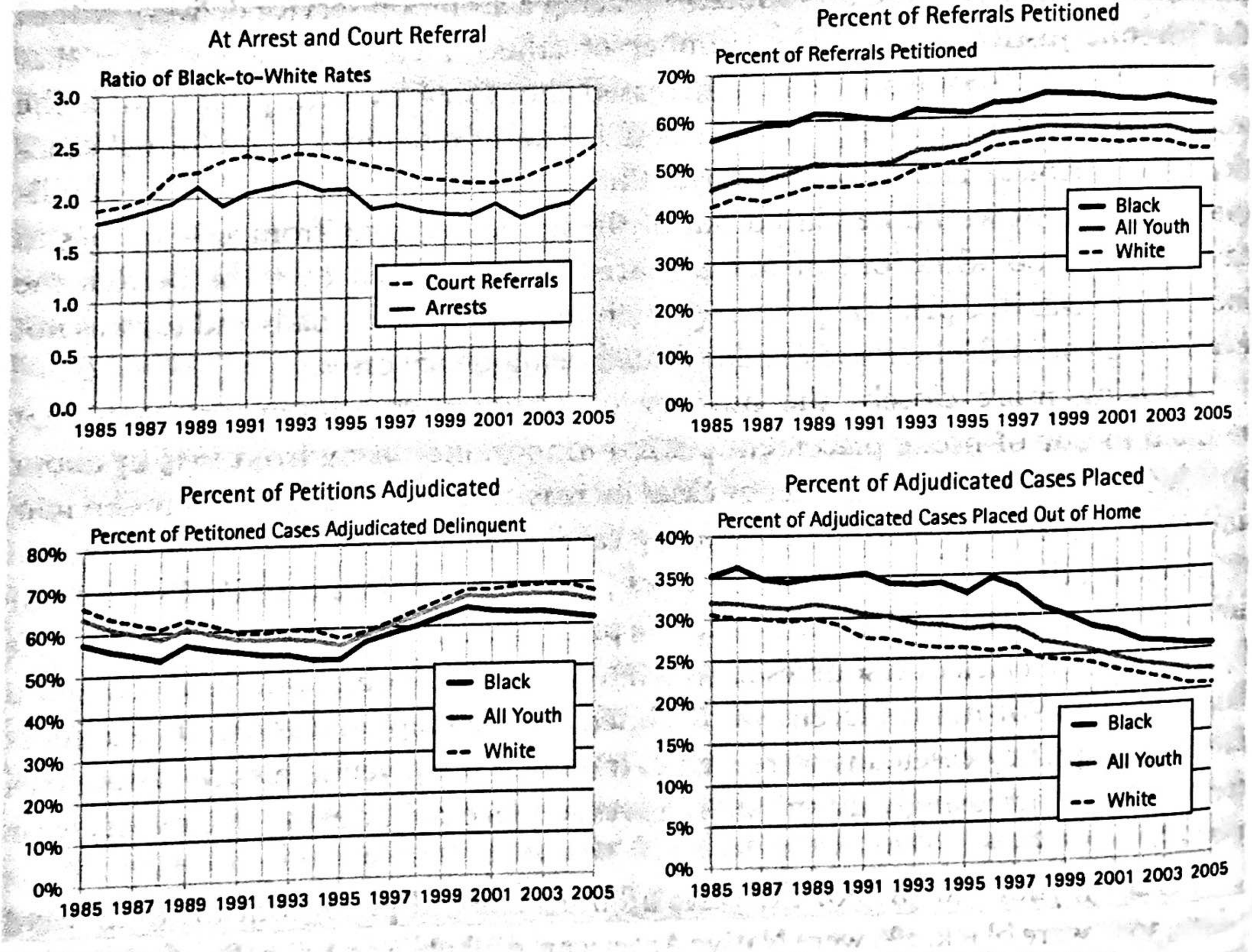



**Figure 1.8. Racial Disparity in Juvenile Court Processing: 1985 to 2005**

*Notes*: Arrest rate estimates were developed by the author from analysis of UCR arrest data (USDOJ, FBI UCRP, 2009) adjusted to reflect the FBI's national estimates of arrests. Juvenile court case rate estimates were developed using data reported in Puzzanchera, C. and Kang, W. (2008). "Juvenile Court Statistics Databook." Online. Available: http://ojjdp.ncjrs.gov/ojstatbb/jcsdb/.

an adjudication of delinquency, reducing the relative risk of black youth to receive a formal court disposition. In general, over the period, 64% of the formally processed delinquency cases involving white youth resulted in an adjudication of delinquency compared with just 58% of formally processed cases involving black youth. Finally, once adjudicated delinquent, black youth were more likely to be ordered to an out-of-home placement than were white youth (32% versus 26%).

In 2005, the population-based rate of juvenile court referral for black juveniles was 2.4 times the white referral rate, meaning that racial disparity existed upon entry to the juvenile court. There are many possible explanations for this disparity, ranging from differing levels of law-violating behavior by white and black youth to racial bias by decision makers prior to entry into the juvenile court. In 2005, the population-based rate of out-of-home placement for black youth was 3.2 times the white out-of-home placement rate, meaning that the level of racial disparity at the level of placement decision cannot be attributed entirely to the disparity at referral (2.4) and was enhanced during juvenile court processing. There are many possible reasons for this growth in disparity during juvenile court processing, an issue that will be discussed in more detail later in this book.

## VI. Transfers to Criminal Court Trends

Arguably, the most severe sanction a juvenile court can impose is the transfer of the youth's case to criminal court for possible sanctioning as an adult. This is a rare event. In 2005, juvenile courts in the United States processed 1,697,900 delinquency cases, of which 6,900 (or 0.4%) were transferred by a juvenile court judge to a criminal court. The number of cases transferred to criminal court (or waived) increased 80% between 1985 and 1994, from 7,200 to 13,000. After this peak, the number of waived cases declined so that by 2005, the juvenile court waived an estimated 6,900 cases, equivalent to the number waived in 1985.

Much of this decline could arguably be attributed to changes in juvenile legislation that occurred during the mid-1990s. As mentioned earlier, these legislative changes increased the number of youth at risk for transfer to criminal court and the pathways these cases could follow. Younger youth were at risk of transfer. An expanded list of alleged crimes was made eligible for transfer. Many states increased the authority of the prosecutor to file some "juvenile" cases directly in criminal court, while other legislation required that a "juvenile" case be filed in criminal court. These latter two changes reduced the juvenile court's role in the process of placing juveniles in the criminal justice system. This is likely a primary reason juvenile court waivers declined so substantially after 1994. Why should prosecutors bring delinquency cases before juvenile court judges asking for the cases to be waived to criminal court when they could file the cases directly in criminal court, bypassing the juvenile courts completely? In addition, the increase in mandatory exclusions

(i.e., the requirement that certain serious juvenile cases be filed directly in criminal court) skimmed off many cases that a juvenile court might have waived if given the opportunity. Therefore, it must be clearly understood that the decline in juvenile court waivers to criminal court does not mean that fewer youths were going into the criminal justice system; it just means that fewer youths were going to criminal court via the juvenile court.

There are no hard statistics on the number of juveniles whose age alone would place the law-violating behavior in the juvenile justice system but who are instead processed as adults in criminal court. The 6,900 cases waived in 2005 do not include those juvenile cases that ended up in criminal court that never passed through juvenile court. (i.e., those that state law requires to be handled in criminal court and those that were filed in criminal court at the discretion of the prosecutor). A very rough guess, based on personal experience alone, would be that these non-juvenile court pathways may process two to three times the cases waived by juvenile courts. Regardless, another "transfer" mechanism dwarfs all of these transfer mechanisms.

As noted earlier, many states in the United States give their criminal justice systems original jurisdiction over the law-violating behaviors of many youth below the age of 18. While these youth are not typically labeled as transfers to criminal court (since they never had the option of having their cases handled in a juvenile court), to many (especially those outside the United States), these youth are "juveniles handled in the criminal justice system." It is possible to develop an annual estimate of the number of criminal court cases there are involving these "age-excluded" juveniles. First, the annual number of youth ages 16 and 17 who live in states where they are under the sole jurisdiction of the criminal justice system is calculated. Then, if it can be assumed that they come to criminal court at the same rates as youth ages 16 and 17 come to juvenile court in states in which they are under the original jurisdiction of the juvenile justice system, an estimate can be produced. Using this method, it is estimated that in 2005, criminal courts in states with "age-excluded" youth processed 257,000 criminal cases involving persons under age 18. This figure increased by over 60% between 1985 and 2005. Clearly, this "transfer" mechanism contributes the greatest number of persons under age 18 to the U.S. criminal justice system.

# VII. Conclusions

Juvenile crime trends do not always mirror juvenile arrest, juvenile court referral, and juvenile out-of-home placement trends. There are many decision makers along the way. Will the victim report the juvenile crime to law enforcement? Will the law enforcement officer arrest the youth? Will law enforcement refer the arrested youth to juvenile court intake? Will juvenile court intake recommend formal processing

and will the prosecutor file formal charges? Will the judge adjudicate the youth a delinquent? Will probation recommend and/or the judge decide to place the adjudicated youth in an out-of-home facility? At each point, a decision is made that is influenced by a large number of legal and extra-legal factors. The relative importance of these factors can vary over time and with the decision maker. The juvenile justice system's response to law-violating behavior is not a mechanical process. This chapter has provided an empirical foundation of juvenile crime and juvenile justice trends. The validity of any explanation or insight found in the chapters that follow should be judged by how well its predictions match these trends.

## NOTES

1. Howard N. Snyder is Chief of Recidivism, Reentry and Special Projects at the Bureau of Justice Statistics within U.S. Department of Justice. The findings, opinions, or points of view contained in this chapter do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

2. The juvenile rate of serious violent crime is equal to the number of murder, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault incidents involving juvenile offenders per 100,000 persons under age 18 in the U.S. population for that year. The corresponding adult rate is the number of such incidents per 100,000 persons over the age of 18 in the U.S. population.

3. A similar pattern was found when twelfth graders were asked about their illicit drug use in the prior thirty-day period, although the levels were understandably lower, ranging from 30% in 1985 to 22% in 2007.

4. If the white and Hispanic groups were combined, their joint rate would still be greater than the black rate throughout this time period. This point will be important when comparing self-report and arrest data; the FBI does not report arrest data for Hispanic youth, so most Hispanic youth are found in the white racial category.

5. Recently, questions have been raised about the utility and value of the Violent Crime Index, the Property Crime Index, and their combination, the Crime Index. The general problem with these indices is that all crimes are weighted equally and that they can mask important trends in their components. Currently, crime analysts are focusing more on the offense-specific trends rather than the indices.

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CHAPTER 2

# HETEROGENEITY IN DELINQUENCY

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## I. Introduction

Beginning with the early quantitative research by Quetelet (1841), transitioning to the qualitative life narratives documented by Shaw (1931) and most recently by Laub and Sampson (2003), and culminating in the first (Wolfgang, Figlio, and Sellin 1972) and second (Tracy, Wolfgang, and Figlio 1990; Tracy and Kempf-Leonard 1996) Philadelphia Birth Cohort Studies, research on criminal careers has generated an important amount of empirical knowledge about the longitudinal patterning of crime over the life course (see reviews in Blumstein et al. 1986; Piquero, Farrington, and Blumstein 2003). Collectively, these and other studies have revealed several facts about the heterogeneous nature of offenders and their criminal careers (see Farrington 2003), including: (1) some individuals offend, but others do not (prevalence); (2) among those that do offend, some begin offending early in the life course, while others start offending later in the life course (onset age); (3) some offend at low rates, while others offend at high rates (frequency, or $\lambda$); (4) some offenders engage in all types of crimes, while others specialize in a more narrow subset (crime type mix); (5) some offenders increase the severity of their crimes as they progress in their careers, while most others do not escalate (escalation); (6) some offend due to personal and familial characteristics such as poor self-control, neuropsychological problems, inept parenting, academic failure, and compromised socioeconomic environments, while others offend with

the aid and comfort of peers; (7) most offenders commit crimes with other offenders (co-offending), while a handful offend by themselves; (8) most offenders desist from crime in early adulthood—sometimes as a result of some life event (marriage, job, child, incarceration), but a small select few persist throughout the life course (career length).

These are but just a few "facts" about the nature of delinquency and crime that underscore the heterogeneity evident within the offender population. Given that there is little ambiguity in the empiricism of these facts, what explains the above-referenced heterogeneity between offenders and offenses? In this chapter, we provide an overview of the heterogeneity that is often observed in delinquency and criminal careers. We begin with a discussion of the classic age–crime relationship, which has formed the basis for much of the theoretical, empirical, and policy discussion regarding crime and criminals. Following this introduction, we then turn our attention to the criminal career framework that parcels the longitudinal patterning of criminal offending into different dimensions, and then turn to an overview of the theories it helped to generate. Third, we then review some of the key empirical investigations that have assessed hypotheses emerging from these theories. Using the information generated from these investigations, the chapter then highlights several promising future research directions that should help fill some of the gaps in understanding the heterogeneity among offenders. Finally, the chapter presents a brief but poignant discussion regarding the policy implications emerging from theoretical and empirical literature surrounding offender heterogeneity.

## II. Age–Crime Curve

A classic criminological lesson begins with the relationship between age and crime. Commonly depicted at the aggregate level, this relationship rises from early adolescence to a peak in middle to late adolescence, and then begins a precipitous drop throughout the 20s and 30s. This age–crime curve has been observed in countless studies, from different locations throughout the world, and with a variety of different methods for measuring crime.

Yet, the age–crime relationship is one based on aggregate- and not individual-level offending information, thereby potentially obfuscating the variation that exists within criminal careers generally, and the clouding of distinct offender trajectories—each with their own patterning and etiology—in particular. In an effort to provide some clarity on these issues, the criminal career framework was developed to carefully describe the longitudinal patterning of criminal careers, including, in particular, the various dimensions of the criminal career. In the next section, we provide an overview of this framework and the career dimensions it attributes specific importance to.

# III. Criminal Career Framework

Blumstein and his colleagues (1986) presented the first systemic overview of the criminal career concept and its encompassing dimensions in a two-volume report published by the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) entitled *Criminal Careers and "Career Criminals."* They define a criminal career as the "longitudinal sequence of crimes committed by an individual offender" (p. 12). The criminal career approach divides the aggregate offending rate into two primary components: participation, or the distinction between individuals who offend and those who do not; and frequency, or the level of activity of active offenders.

In addition to these primary components, the criminal career framework includes other dimensions such as career length, crime-type mix and seriousness, and desistance. Career length is defined as the interval between the initial offense and the termination of criminal offending. Crime-type mix and seriousness refers to the pattern of offenses committed during a criminal career. This dimension addresses issues of specialization, or the degree to which offenders concentrate their offending on one type of crime or a certain class of crimes, and escalation, whether offenders move on to commit more serious offenses as their career progresses. Despite its exclusion from the original NAS report, desistance is another key dimension of criminal careers (see Laub and Boonstoppel, Chapter 17 in this volume). Compared to the other criminal career dimensions, it has been considerably more difficult to measure and define desistance (Bushway et al. 2001).

Research on these criminal career dimensions has already produced a substantial body of knowledge regarding offending patterns and the demographic characteristics of age, gender, and race (Blumstein et al. 1986). While the results obtained depend in part on a number of methodological factors such as sample characteristics, reporting method (official records versus self-reports), crime type(s) under study, and study length, several consistent findings have emerged.

Regardless of methodological differences, studies consistently demonstrate that males are more likely to participate in serious crime than females at any age (Piquero, Farrington, and Blumstein 2003). Gender differences in participation are at their greatest for the most serious offenses and are relatively smaller for less serious offenses, and these gaps grow larger over time. Similar to the relationship between gender and participation, most studies suggest a strong association between race and participation and that the difference is greatest for the most serious offenses and also grows over time. Although most studies that have explored the relationship between race and participation have relied on official records, self-report studies also suggest that minorities (especially blacks) report greater involvement in violent crime than whites (Elliott 1994). However, rates of participation in minor delinquency tend to be similar among whites and blacks. Finally, there is a strong relationship between age and participation. Participation in criminal activity tends to be greatest between the age range of 13 and 18, on the low end for self-report studies and the higher end for official records (Moffitt et al. 2001). In addition, onset age

varies by crime-type with participation in less serious crime tending to occur earlier than participation in more serious offenses (Loeber and Hay 1994; Piquero, Farrington, and Blumstein 2003).

Research on the frequency of offending has produced less consistent results than studies on participation due to differences in the definition and operationalization of offense rates (Spelman 1994). Differences in offending frequencies can be attributed to differences in the population sampled and the stage in the criminal justice system in which offenders are sampled (Canela-Cacho, Blumstein, and Cohen 1997). Nonetheless, research on the frequency of offending has provided evidence that many offenders go through periods of intermittent offending and that the distribution of offending frequencies is highly skewed, with a small group of offenders committing crimes at much higher rates. In his review of research on offending frequencies and with self-reports of offending from the Rand Inmate Survey, Spelman (1994) estimates that the average offender commits eight crimes per year, while those incarcerated at some point in their career commit between thirty and fifty crimes per year, and the average member of incoming prison cohort commits between sixty and one hundred offenses per year.

Research on criminal career duration is also greatly influenced by methodological differences between studies including whether self-reports or official records are used to measure initiation and termination; the types of crimes being measured (e.g., property, violent); the length of the study period; how career termination or desistance is defined; and different assumptions regarding the offender population. In their review of studies on career duration, Piquero and his colleagues (2003) found that most studies estimate criminal career duration to be between five and ten years. These estimates are likely to be biased downward, however, as the study period may end before offenders desist (Blumstein, Cohen, and Hsieh 1982). Studies on career duration and demographic characteristics have found that males have longer careers than females (Tarling 1993), non-whites have longer careers than whites (Piquero et al. 2002), and an earlier age of onset is associated with longer careers (Kazemian and Farrington 2006).

Other research on the criminal career paradigm has focused on patterns of offending in criminal careers such as the seriousness of the types of crimes committed and whether offenders specialize in committing certain types of crime. Most research on the severity of offending has been based on official records and suggests that the seriousness of offending increases somewhat throughout adolescence, stabilizes in early adulthood, and declines during the adult years (Piquero, Farrington, and Blumstein 2003). Studies of specialization in offending indicate that there is a small tendency for each successive crime to be similar to the one committed before, yet few criminal careers display patterns of specialization, and this is especially true among sex offenders (Zimring, Jennings, and Piquero 2007). Studies also suggest that specialization in offending increases as criminal careers progress (Blumstein et al. 1986), that it is greater among whites for some crime types such as fraud (Wolfgang, Figlio, and Sellin 1972; Blumstein et al. 1988), but not for others such as auto theft (Blumstein et al. 1988). Other research suggests that adult offenders and

incarcerated juveniles are more likely to commit offenses within an offending cluster (e.g., violent, property, drug) than to switch to offenses outside a cluster (Cohen 1986; Visher 2000).

Having been described as a "watershed event" (Osgood 2005), the National Academy of Science's criminal career report spurred much debate and criticism (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990) and led in part to the development of several criminological theories that took the criminal career dimensions and related research findings into account in articulating more formal crime-engendering processes and models. These theoretical models have done much to invigorate theoretical work in criminology and, as a result, have led to several empirical studies that have provided new information on life-course patterns of crime. The next section presents a brief overview of some of these theories, collected under the rubric of developmental/life-course criminology (Farrington 2003).

## IV. Theories Informed By the Criminal Career Paradigm

The emergence of the criminal career paradigm steered the focus of criminological research on offending away from between-group differences and shifted it to the study of within-individual differences and changes in offending. Because early criminological theories were based on between-group differences in offending, this change in emphasis required the development of new theoretical explanations, aimed at the individual-level unit of analysis and with a focus on change.

Loeber and Le Blanc (1990) were among the first set of scholars to suggest that the field of criminology adopt a developmental approach to the study of offending. Building off the criminal career framework, Loeber and Le Blanc proposed three primary developmental processes to explain changes in offending over the life span: activation, aggravation, and desistance. Activation refers to the manner in which offending behavior is first initiated and consists of three sub-processes including acceleration (increased frequency of offending over time), stabilization (increased continuity in offending over time), and diversification (the propensity to become involved in different criminal activities). Aggravation refers to the developmental sequence in offending that escalates in seriousness over time. Desistance consists of four sub-processes that indicate the winding down of criminal activity including the deceleration in the frequency of offending, specialization, de-escalation, and reaching a ceiling.

While Loeber and Le Blanc view individuals as being arrayed along a developmental continuum of some sort of individual criminal propensity, other developmental theorists propose the idea that there are qualitatively distinct groups of offenders. Moffitt's (1993) taxonomy divides the offending population into two

groups: life-course persisters and adolescent-limited offenders. Life-course persisters initiate antisocial behavior early in life, have a high offending frequency, commit many different types of crimes—including violence, and are unlikely to desist in adulthood. According to the taxonomy, individuals who follow this pattern of offending suffer from an interaction between neuropsychological deficits and family adversity early in life. These individuals demonstrate behaviors such as hyperactivity and conduct disorder in childhood, delinquency in adolescence, and criminal and related antisocial behavior in adulthood. Because this disposition is established early in life and such individuals have not developed important interpersonal skills, life-course persisters are unlikely to desist from crime.

Unlike their more serious counterparts, the second group—adolescent-limited offenders—initiate their foray into delinquency and crime in adolescence, offend at a lower rate, commit only certain types of offenses, and are likely to desist in early adulthood. The origins of offending for this group are found in the maturity gap and the peer social context. The maturity gap is a result of the disjunction between the adolescent's biological maturity and their limited access to adult privileges and responsibilities. For adolescent-limited offenders, delinquency is a way to assert their independence from parents and other authority figures and win peer approval. Among these individuals, offending is normative behavior and is restricted to instrumental offenses that provide money, goods, and adult-like status. Since the cause of their offending is not established early in life, and because they do not suffer the neuropsychological impairments and injurious childhoods that life-course persisters do, adolescent-limited offenders usually desist from crime when they enter young adulthood and take on adult roles. However, their offending careers can extend beyond adolescence because of snares, such as a criminal record or substance abuse problems, which encapsulate them into an antisocial trajectory and which make it difficult to make a successful transition into adulthood. (Note: Moffitt (2006) has recently revised her taxonomy to include a third group, low-level chronic offenders, who offend at stable but lower levels throughout adolescence and early adulthood.)

Patterson and colleagues' (1992) developmental theory is similar to that of Moffitt's (1993) in that there are two distinct groups of offenders—early starters and late starters—each of whom originate from two different causal processes. Early starters resemble Moffitt's life-course-persisters. These individuals display temper tantrums and aggression in childhood. In addition to these problem behaviors, poor interpersonal skills cause these individuals to form weak social bonds with parents, peers, and school. The poor (familial) socialization of these individuals early in the life course helps to develop a time stable propensity to offend throughout life. The second group of offenders in Patterson's typology—late starters—are similar to Moffitt's adolescent-limited offenders on two specific fronts: the principal cause of offending for this group is the deviant peer group rather than a "maturity gap," while their offending is constrained to the adolescent period and is relatively non-serious in nature.

The final developmental theory reviewed here is from Loeber and Hay (1994). These authors outline a three-pathway model beginning in childhood, in which individuals follow an orderly progression from less to more serious problem behaviors and delinquency from childhood to adolescence and for a small subset, into adulthood. The first group follows an "authority conflict pathway" prior to the age of 12 that begins with stubborn behavior, morphs into defiance at the second stage, and then progresses to authority avoidance (e.g., truancy) as a third stage. The second group follows a "covert pathway" prior to age 15 that starts with minor covert acts, progresses into property damage in the second stage, and then to moderate to serious delinquency as the third stage. The third group follows an "overt pathway" that begins with minor aggression, segues into physical fighting in the second stage, and then progresses to more serious violence in the third stage.

In contrast to these developmental perspectives that posit multiple pathways to delinquency, some life-course theories of offending advance a general explanation that applies for all offenders. The one specific theory that has received the most attention is Sampson and Laub's (1993; Laub and Sampson 2003) age-graded theory of informal social control. Their theory argues that continuity and (especially) change in offending is a function of the strength of an individual's social bonds (to parents and peers early in the life course and then to marriage and employment later in the life course), as well as an individual's purposeful choice, or human agency. According to this perspective, continuity and change in offending reflects changes in the accumulation of social bonds, and especially the strength and attachment of such bonds. Within-individual changes in social bonds, especially in adulthood—i.e., getting married and being invested in a good marriage—are believed to be implicated in desistance from crime. Importantly, the general process underlying continuity and change is similar for most offenders such that offender typologies are unwarranted and unnecessary in their framework. For Sampson and Laub, all offenders desist by middle adulthood regardless of their level of offending or the individual differences or childhood/adolescence variables that relate to their initial and continued offending patterns.

Our review of these developmental/life-course criminological theories shows that there is both overlap and disagreement about the variation within offenders. Some theories strictly adhere to group-based expectations (Patterson, Crosby, and Vuchinich 1992; Moffitt 1993). Other more complicated theories advance both a group-based hypothesis as well as a developmental progression of antisocial behavior from childhood to adolescence and then onto adulthood (Loeber and Hay 1994), while other theories argue against offender typologies but adhere to the importance of a life-course-oriented perspective that allows both continuity and especially change in offending patterns (Sampson and Laub 1993). These theories make vastly different predictions about the nature and patterning of criminal offenders and criminal offending, and several empirical tests have started to examine the veracity and validity of these models. In the next section, we highlight some of the more important studies in this area that have carefully assessed key hypotheses.

## V. Ensuing Research Testing

Research on developmental and life-course theories of offending has usually focused on three key hypotheses. The first hypothesis is whether these dynamic theories offer more complete accounts of antisocial behavior over the life course and are superior to static theories in explaining offending throughout the life span. The second hypothesis pertains to whether different causal processes lead to a different progression and pattern of offending for different subgroups of offenders, as suggested by developmental theories, or whether the same causal process operates for all offenders. In addition to this question, researchers have sought to determine how many groups and patterns exist (D'Unger et al. 1998). The third hypothesis focuses on whether and, if so how, changes in local life circumstances in adulthood alter trajectories of offending. For instance, do changes in living situations affect all offenders in a similar manner, or do some offenders react differently to such changes?

The debate over whether the offending population is composed of distinct subgroups of offenders, whose offending is caused by different causes and causal processes, or whether the same general cause and process operates for all offenders has long existed in criminology. The emergence of typological theories, such as those of Moffitt (1993) and Patterson and colleagues (1992), as well as methodological advances, such as the advent of semi-parametric modeling (Nagin and Land 1993), has brought this issue to the fore in recent years. Two studies in particular sought to determine whether developmental theories of offending are superior to general explanations.

Paternoster and Brame (1997) used self-report data from the National Youth Survey (NYS), a large sample of adolescents followed into early adulthood, to determine whether the effects of dynamic factors, such as delinquent peer exposure and prior offending, operate differently in groups of individuals who differ in their offending propensity as predicted by typological theories. Their results suggest that such factors have the same effect on both participation in delinquency and the frequency of offending regardless of offending propensity. They also find strong, positive effects of these dynamic factors on whether and how often individuals offend, even after observed and unobserved individual differences are taken into account.

Bartusch and colleagues (1997) also find greater support for dynamic theories of offending (such as Moffitt's developmental taxonomy) than static explanations in the Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study, a birth cohort of over one thousand males and females in Dunedin, New Zealand. In particular, childhood antisocial behavior was related more strongly than adolescent antisocial behavior to low verbal ability, hyperactivity, and negative/impulsive personality, whereas adolescent antisocial behavior was related more strongly to peer delinquency. In addition, childhood antisocial behavior was more strongly associated with convictions for violence, while adolescent antisocial behavior was more strongly related to convictions for nonviolent offenses.

While these studies provide support for dynamic theories of offending, they offer different accounts regarding whether there is a single path to delinquency or whether there are multiple paths. Researchers interested in this question have usually turned to methods, such as trajectory analysis, to identify patterns of continuity and change in offending. Nagin and Land (1993) introduced this methodology to the study of delinquency and crime, seeking to determine whether individual offending trajectories matched the aggregate age–crime curve. Using conviction records for 411 South London males participating in the Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development, they identified four distinct offending trajectories: the never-convicted, adolescence-limited, high-level chronics, and low-level chronics. This four-group finding has been replicated in other samples of serious young offenders (Laub, Nagin, and Sampson 1998; Piquero et al. 2002), although some studies using a more general sample of youth have found as many as five trajectories (Chung et al. 2002; Moffitt 2006).

While trajectory studies have differed in the number of offending patterns, they share some findings in common. For instance, most studies identify a small group of offenders who begin early in life and persist well into adulthood. This group exhibits the features of early onset and persistence throughout life that are predicted by Moffitt's (1993) and Patterson et al.'s (1992) developmental theories. Most trajectory studies also identify the adolescent-peaked pattern predicted by both of these theories (see Piquero 2008). Regardless of the number of groups identified, however, each of these studies demonstrates considerable heterogeneity in the offending population where the vast majority of offenders desist by early (Piquero 2008) or middle (Laub and Sampson 2003) adulthood.

The third area of research that has received considerable attention has been the manner in which changes in life circumstances influence offender trajectories. In an early important study, Horney and colleagues (1995) examined short-term variations in offending and life circumstances in a group of 658 incarcerated male offenders. They found that changes in living arrangements, such as living with their wives, school attendance, and cessation of substance use, reduces the probability of offending at those particular times regardless of an individual's overall level of offending. Further, these circumstances produced the greatest effects in the most serious offenders.

Laub, Nagin, and Sampson (1998) used data from the five hundred Boston-area delinquents included in Glueck's study of criminal careers to study the effect of marriage on offending trajectories to age 32. They found that early marriages characterized by social cohesiveness promoted desistance from offending, and that the effect on offending of these "good" marriages, which were characterized by strong spousal attachment, became stronger over time.

Piquero and colleagues (2002) examined the relationship between local life circumstances and offending in emerging adulthood among a group of 524 serious offenders from the California Youth Authority whom they followed for seven years post-parole. They found four offending trajectories that exhibited different patterns of persistence and desistance from crime. Another significant finding from this study was that although those who ranked low on violent arrests also ranked low on

nonviolent arrests, this association did not hold for all groups. For instance, the mean number of nonviolent arrests for one group declined with age at the same time that the average number of arrests for violent offenses increased. Inconsistent findings were obtained for the effects of local life circumstances on offending patterns. For example, a measure of stakes in conformity that included the presence of a marriage had a significant, negative effect on violent arrests in one group and a negative effect on nonviolent arrests for another group. In addition, heroin dependence had a significant and positive effect on nonviolent arrests for some groups, but not for others. A number of other studies have examined similar issues and have yielded similar findings (Paternoster et al. 1997; Chung et al. 2002).

The above research highlights several summary statements. First, although less parsimonious explanations of crime, dynamic theories of offending appear to provide more useful explanations of continuity and change about the nature of offending over the life course when compared to more static theories. At the same time, there still remains mixed evidence with respect to the nature of the pro-dynamic conclusion, as the dynamic/general theory of Sampson and Laub provides a very good portrayal of crime over the life course without the added complexity of offender groups which are characteristic of dynamic/developmental theories. Second, studies that have used the trajectory method to study offending over the life course suggest there is greater heterogeneity in the offending population than current developmental theories would predict. While all of these studies identify a small group of early-onset offenders who persist throughout life, and a larger group of adolescent-onset offenders who desist in early adulthood, other patterns of offending are observed that remain to be explained. Further, the evidence on whether these different trajectories represent different etiologies and causal process at work or whether they reflect differences in the level of severity of the same risk factors is inconsistent. It may be that methodological differences between studies may be partially responsible for these conflicting results. These include, but are not limited to, differences in sample size and the population from which the sample is drawn: whether official records, self-reports, or multi-agent reports are used; the types of crime under study; the length of the study period; and the life stage(s) that the study focuses on (e.g., childhood, adolescence, adulthood). Nonetheless, these differences in offending trajectories suggest there may be multiple pathways to offending. Finally, changes in life circumstances beyond adolescence can alter offending trajectories regardless of offending propensity, although not all offenders may be affected in the same manner.

## VI. Future Research Directions

This chapter was designed to provide a very brief overview concerning the heterogeneity that is evident in delinquent and criminal careers. Beginning with the criminal career framework and after reviewing some of the findings associated with research on the various criminal career dimensions, we turned to a brief overview of some of the

theories that emerged as a result of the articulation of the criminal career paradigm and its focus on the longitudinal patterning of criminal activity. This was then followed by a short summary of some of the main research studies designed to assess the merits of dynamic and static theories of crime, as well as the differences within dynamic theories, some of which attribute importance to distinct offender typologies. Clearly, a detailed review of the theories and research studies is beyond the scope of this chapter, but fortunately, detailed treatments of this literature already exist (Moffitt et al. 2001; Piquero, Farrington, and Blumstein 2003, 2007; Farrington 2005; Loeber et al. 2008). Thus, while much has been recently learned about offenders and offending over the life course—especially as longitudinal studies continue to gather such information, there remains much more to uncover about the nature and progression of offenders and their offending. We close out this chapter with an identification of some of the most pressing and emerging areas of research that will help fill some of the important gaps in both theory and research on the longitudinal patterning of criminal activity and the heterogeneity that is evidence in delinquent and criminal careers.

First, due to a constellation of historical factors, much of the empirical data and subsequent research findings have been based on samples mainly comprising white males. This has had the unfortunate consequence of limiting our knowledge about offenders and offending over the life course with respect to race/ethnic (Piquero and Brame 2008; Maldonado-Molina et al. 2009) and gender differences (Moffitt et al. 2001; D'Unger, Land, and McCall 2002; Piquero, Brame, and Moffitt 2005). Whether findings based on white male samples replicate to other demographic groups is not only an empirical question, but also highly relevant for existing theories and the extent to which current explanations are applicable across individual characteristics.

Second, many of the older longitudinal studies were based on official data and thus only contain information on offending that emerges from police contact, arrest, and/or conviction files. Only recently have studies begun the expansive and expensive task of collecting self-report records (Loeber et al. 1999; Mulvey et al. 2004). The collection and analysis of offenders and their offending that compares official and self-report records is an important issue in the effort to examine how study conclusions vary according to instruments of data collection (Nagin, Farrington, and Moffitt 1995; Brame et al. 2004; Farrington et al. 2007).

Third, although significant findings have emerged with respect to the relationship of local life circumstances to persistence and desistance from crime, data constraints have limited attention to events like marriage and employment. Other life events, particularly incarceration experiences and neighborhood changes, appear to be important life circumstances worthy of examination (Bhati and Piquero 2008; Nieuwbeerta, Nagin, and Blokland 2009).

Fourth, it has been the case that much of the information concerning offenders and their offending has emerged via quantitative examinations—and recently through the use of sophisticated methodological techniques that permit investigation and identification of distinct typologies. Yet there is much to be gained from qualitative investigations of crime over the life course. As a case in point, Laub and Sampson's (2003) recent life history narratives identified and highlighted important

factors and decision-making styles among very active offenders with respect to how various life circumstances influenced their offending behavior, many of which would not have been uncovered with traditional empirical methods. Clearly, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data for the same subjects will permit investigation of important crime over the life-course questions.

Fifth, and in a related manner, the advent of methodological and statistical techniques has permitted researchers to examine the heterogeneity among offenders and their offending patterns. Yet there is a pressing need for methodological investigations into the assumptions and limitations underlying these methods and the implications these issues have for conclusions drawn about offenders and their offending over the life course (Nagin 2005).

Sixth, for the most part, there has not been much recent theoretical development in this area since the introduction of the theories articulated by Moffitt, Patterson, Loeber, and Sampson and Laub. Of course, there may be no reason that "new" theories need to be developed, however, there is a need for unpacking the sequence and meaning of how life circumstances relate to persistence and desistance from crime. For example, why is it that an incarceration stint serves as a deterrent to some offenders but backfires for other offenders, leading to continued criminal activity (Laub and Sampson 2003)? Further, there exists opportunity for fleshing out the notion of human agency in Sampson and Laub as well as the cognitive transformations associated with desistance identified by Giordano, Cernkovich, and Rudolph (2002) and others. An additional point with respect to theory concerns the role and influence of biological factors in the genesis of criminal activity (Peskin et al, Chapter 4 in this volume). Only recently has the knowledge base on biological and biosocial characteristics made headway into criminology, and this information has generated important insight into some of the origins of particular types of offending styles. The integration of these explanations into criminal career research may prove beneficial as criminologists continue to understand the heterogeneity in delinquency and crime over the life course.

Lastly, all of the directions outlined above and the research that will hopefully ensue as a result should be considered in light of current developmental/life-course theories, and any challenges to existing theories should be carefully considered and lead to modifications of the theories as results are replicated. Moffitt (2006) in particular has revised her developmental taxonomy in light of extant research findings identifying other typologies (i.e., low-level chronic) that were not originally anticipated in the original exposition of the theory.

## VII. Policy Implications

Theoretical and empirical knowledge about delinquent and criminal careers suggests that there is important heterogeneity in the nature and patterning of criminal offending over the life course. That is, some offenders offend sparingly and for only

a brief period of time, while others are much more persistent as their offending continues across multiple phases of the life course. Further, the characteristics associated with different offenders and their offending patterns appear to evince some similarities but also reveal important differences. In short, a one-size-fits-all prevention and intervention policy aimed at delinquent and criminal offending may not yield significant benefits likely because programmatic efforts may not be addressing the key risk factors for offending onset and offending continuation.

Research that pays attention to the heterogeneity between offenders and follows along the paths suggested above will also be relevant for public policy and programmatic efforts designed to prevent initial criminal activity and intervene in the midst of existing criminal careers so as to deflect offenders away from persistent involvement in crime and related negative outcomes over the life course. In this regard, some programs have attained modest success at addressing risk factors early in the life course, and these efforts have paid dividends across several life-course domains (Greenwood 2006). One particular strategy revolves around early family and parent training efforts, including nurse home visitation programs. A recent meta-analysis of these programs showed that participation in such programs early in the life course evinced significant reductions in delinquency and crime in adolescence and positive gains in other, noncrime life-course domains (Piquero et al. 2009). Given the cost associated with serious and lengthy criminal careers (Cohen and Piquero 2009), it remains important to continue basic research on offenders and their offending over the life course, as the information generated will serve as the backbone to the development and implementation of successful programs designed to turn offenders away from their initial and continued involvement in criminal activity. Further, policy makers must recognize that addressing the correlates of delinquent and criminal activity as early as possible in the life course will pay more dividends than dealing with delinquents well after they have accumulated a healthy stock of offending experience. The classic Quaker State "you can pay me now, or you can pay me later" adage holds true not only for motor oil, but for juvenile delinquency and adult crime as well.

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