

An Interpretation of the National DMC Relative Rate Indices for Juvenile Justice System Processing in 2005

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Introduction

The National Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) Databook is designed to give users an understanding of the Relative Rate Index (RRI) and an assessment of the levels of disproportionate minority contact at various stages of juvenile justice system processing at the national level. New users should review the sections entitled “What is an RRI?” and “Constructing an RRI Matrix.” The first briefly discusses the benefits in using an RRI Matrix to investigate disproportionate minority contact within a jurisdiction. The second discusses how an RRI Matrix can be prepared using available information and the compromises that at times need to occur. For a more detailed discussion of these topics, users are encouraged to review Chapter One of the online *Disproportionate Minority Contact Technical Assistance Manual, 3rd Edition*. [Available from http://www.ncjrs.gov/html/ojjdp/dmc_ta_manual/dmcch1.pdf].

In the National DMC Databook, users can review the raw counts and rates that characterize the processing of delinquency cases by the juvenile justice system and then study the RRI Matrix that helps to pinpoint and quantify the levels of racial disparity introduced at various decision points within the system. For those who need assistance, some possible interpretations of the most current RRI Matrices are given, as are interpretations of the trends in the level of disparity for each decision point. It is hoped that users can develop a better understanding of the RRIs from these interpretations and can apply this understanding when studying the many other RRIs that are available for review in this data dissemination tool or the RRIs developed locally to capture the nature of disproportionate minority contact in their own communities.

What is an RRI?

At its simplest, the RRI is a means of comparing the rates of juvenile justice contact experienced by different groups of youth. The RRI is best explained by example. For the Databook, the first decision point that is assessed with an RRI Matrix is the arrest decision. For this decision point, the RRI compares the arrest rate for white youth with the arrest rate for all racial minorities as a group (and for each racial minority group individually). To calculate an arrest rate (or any rate), you need a numerator and a denominator. Typically an arrest rate for a racial group uses a measure of their arrests in a year as the numerator and a measure of population as the denominator. Many arrest counts could be used depending on the process that one wishes to study (e.g., all arrests, violent crime arrests, drug arrests). Let’s assume we want to study the juvenile justice system’s handling of all delinquency matters as a whole, so we must find a count of all delinquency arrests for each racial subgroup we wish to study.

At times, what we want and what is available may not be the same. The production of an RRI or the RRI Matrix is always limited by the quality of available data. For our work we used arrest counts from the FBI’s *Crime in the United States* reports. These reports give us estimates on the annual number of delinquency arrests for persons under age 18 by the racial groups: (1) White, (2) Black or African American, (3) American Indian and Alaska Native, and (4) Asian/Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander. With these data it was not possible to study racial disparities in arrest experiences involving Hispanic youth because the available data did not support this distinction (Hispanic identity). So we are limited to the four racial groupings. For the denominator we used population estimates from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention available in *Easy Access to Juvenile Population* (<http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/ojstatbb/ezapop/default.asp>). The question we had here was what population we should use in the denominator. Certainly we

should match the racial group to the racial group in the numerator, but what age range should we use? The arrest data captures arrests for all persons under age 18, so we could use their population counts as the denominator; but that seemed somewhat problematic because very few persons under the age of 10 are arrested in the U.S. So we chose to use as a population base ages 10 through 17. It would not have been “wrong” to use 0 through 17; we chose 10 through 17.

So now we can calculate the arrest rates. For simplicity, let’s talk about only two: the arrest rate for white juveniles and for black juveniles. By dividing their counts of delinquency arrests in 2005 by their 10 to 17 population in 2005, we find the white arrest rate was 49.1 arrests for every 1,000 white persons ages 10–17 in the U.S. population, and the black arrest rate was 101.0. The Relative Rate Index for arrest is simply the black rate divided by the white rate, yielding an RRI of 2.1. This means that the black arrest rate in 2005 was more than double the white rate, documenting a racial disparity at arrest. Does this imply a racial bias in the arrest process? Not necessarily. There could be many reasons other than racial bias that produced this racial disparity at arrest (e.g., different levels of delinquency behavior by white juveniles and black juveniles). All the RRI can say is that disparity exists and additional exploration is needed to determine the source of the bias.

Constructing an RRI Matrix

If you think of the juvenile justice system as a set of individual decisions, the RRI concept can be used to assess the level of racial disparity introduced at each decision point — if the numerator and denominator used to construct the rates are carefully selected. For example, what should be the numerator and denominator to assess disparity at the point of referral to juvenile court? The numerator is rather obvious, some measure of referrals to juvenile court (e.g., number of referrals disposed in 2005 or the number of offenses referred in 2005). One possibility for the denominator is juvenile population, the same as we used at the arrest decision; but this choice has inherent problems — and understanding this point is key to developing and appropriately interpreting the RRI. Using population as the denominator for the juvenile court referral rate yields a rate whose magnitude could depend on many factors (e.g., the level of delinquency behavior, the level of reporting crime to law enforcement, and any disparities or biases in the arrest process). But we already have a measure of disparity at the arrest decision; so by using population as the denominator in the court referral decision rate, the rate will really be a combination of the disparity at the arrest decision plus any additional disparity added at the court referral decision. To isolate the disparity introduced at the court referral decision, a better denominator for the court referral would be the number of arrests. Using this, the court referral rate for each racial group would answer the question “For every 100 arrests of white youth in our jurisdiction, how many court referrals occurred in 2005?” Using this denominator, any disparity in the arrest decision is removed from the calculation, and any resulting disparities between the white and the minority juvenile court referral rates can be attributed to the referral process and not disparities in the amount of crime juveniles commit or disparities with the arrest process.

Therefore, the general rule in creating the rates to be used in an RRI is to select a denominator that captures the decisionmaking stage immediately preceding the stage measured by the numerator or, in other words, the stage that feeds the numerator. For example, to a great extent arrests feed juvenile court referral; if arrests increase, most likely juvenile court referrals will increase. There are certainly other paths to juvenile court beyond arrest (e.g., parents may refer the youth or a probation officer may refer a youth back to court on a probation violation); but arrest is the most controlling preceding stage. Using this logic, a measure of:

- ◆ juvenile court referrals is the denominator for pre-disposition detentions
- ◆ juvenile court referrals is the denominator for diversion
- ◆ juvenile court referrals is the denominator for petitions
- ◆ petitions is the denominator for adjudications
- ◆ adjudications is the denominator for formal probation
- ◆ adjudications is the denominator for out-of-home placements
- ◆ petitions is the denominator for waivers

For each racial group, using a set of decision process rates (e.g., arrest rate, juvenile court referral rate, detention rate, diversion rate, petition rate, adjudication rate, waiver rate, etc.) an RRI can be developed. By dividing one group's rate for a decision point by another group's rate at the same decision point, the relative rate (or the relative size of one rate to the other) can be calculated. Some decisions increase the extent of minority youth contact with the justice system. Other decisions (those with Relative Rate Indices equal to 1.0) neither increase nor decrease disparity but maintain the level of disparity that resulted from prior decisions. And some decisions may actually counteract or reduce the extent to which minority youth are overrepresented in the juvenile justice system. The magnitude of cumulative or overall racial disparity at any decision point in the juvenile justice system is a combination of the disparities introduced at prior decision points plus that added by the decision point of interest. Studying the set of Relative Rate Indices for a specific decision process enables us to see the unique contributions made by each decision point to the overall disparity in the system.

Case Processing Summary of Relative Rate Indices for Delinquency Offenses

Relative Rate Indices¹ for Delinquency Offenses, 2005

	Minority	Black	AIAN*	AHPI**
Arrest rate	1.7	2.1	1.1	0.3
Referral rate	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.2
Diversion rate	0.7	0.7	0.9	0.8
Detention rate	1.4	1.5	1.1	1.2
Petitioned rate	1.2	1.2	1.1	1.1
Adjudicated rate	0.9	0.9	1.0	1.0
Probation rate	0.9	0.9	0.9	1.0
Placement rate	1.2	1.2	1.3	1.1
Waiver rate	1.1	1.1	1.9	0.6

¹ All Relative Rate Indices are relative to whites

* AIAN: American Indian or Alaskan Native

** AHPI: Asian, Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander

Interpretations

The cumulative disparity experienced by minority youth at any decision point in the juvenile justice system is a combination of the disparities introduced at prior decision points and that added by the decision point of interest. Studying the set of Relative Rate Indices for a specific decision process enables us to see the unique contributions made by each decision point to the overall disparity in the system. Some decisions (those with Relative Rate Indices greater than 1.0) increase disparity in the system. Some decisions (those with Relative Rate Indices equal to 1.0) neither increase nor decrease disparity but maintain the level of disparity that resulted from prior decisions. And some decisions (those with Relative Rate Indices less than 1.0) reduce the level of disparity in the system.

With this background, we can review the set of Relative Rate Indices (RRI) that capture disproportionate minority contact (DMC) in the juvenile justice system's handling of delinquency cases in 2005. The decision point that contributed the most to the overall level of disparity in the system is the point of arrest. The Relative Rate Index of the arrest decision point was significantly greater than 1.0 when comparing the overall minority arrest rate to that of white youth. This RRI of 1.7 means that the minority youth arrest rate was about 70% greater than the white arrest rate. The arrest decision's RRI is even greater (2.1) when comparing black youth to white youth. The arrest RRI for American Indian or Alaskan Native (AIAN) youth indicates that the arrest rates for AIAN and white youth were roughly equal, suggesting there was little racial disparity at the arrest stage for these two groups. The arrest RRI for Asian, Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander (AHPI) youth (0.3) indicates that their arrest rate was far below that of white youth, signifying an arrest disparity for these two groups that brings a disproportionately smaller number of AHPI youth into the juvenile justice system for a delinquency offense.

There are several possible reasons for these racial disparities at the point of arrest. For example, minority youth may commit delinquencies at a greater rate than white youth, with the greater arrest rate simply reflecting these behavioral differences. It may also be that even when minority and white youth commit crimes at similar rates, the crimes of minority youth are more likely to be reported to law enforcement, also resulting in a higher arrest rate. Or it could be that even when both groups commit crimes at similar rates and these crimes are equally likely to be reported to law enforcement, law enforcement is more likely to arrest minority youth. Using only data available for calculating the RRI, it is not possible to determine which or how much each of these factors contribute to racial disparities reflected by the RRIs at the arrest decision point.

The RRI for referral to juvenile court (which is greater than 1.0 for all racial groups) indicates that the level of racial disparity in the juvenile justice system was further increased as a result of this decision. In 2005, even after controlling for possible disparities up to the arrest decision, minority youth were more likely than white youth to be referred to juvenile court for a delinquent offense.

The RRI for the detention decision indicates that there were racial disparities at this decision point also in 2005 that resulted in a greater proportion of minority youth than white youth who were referred to juvenile court being securely detained. Many factors could have lead to this racially disparate decision.

The petitioning decision further added to the level of racial disparity in the processing of delinquency cases. In 2005 minority youth referred to juvenile court for a delinquent offense were, in general, more likely to be processed formally (and less likely to be diverted from the formal court process) than were white youth referred to juvenile court. Once again, the disparities added at this decision point could be the result of several factors (e.g., differential severities in the nature of their crimes, differences in the youths' prior delinquency histories, and/or decisionmaker bias); only further research can establish the most likely causes.

The RRI for the adjudication decision indicates that these decisions actually helped somewhat to reduce the overall level of racial disparity in the processing of delinquency referrals by the system given that the RRI for minority youth was less than 1.0. Once petitioned, minority youth charged with a delinquent offense in 2005 were somewhat less likely to be adjudicated than were white youth. One of the many possible reasons for this pattern could be that the screening decision used to petition these cases may have sent a greater proportion of legally weak or less serious cases of minority youth to an adjudication hearing and these cases were screened out at the adjudication decision.

Once adjudicated, the RRIs indicate that minority youth were more likely to be placed out of the home and less likely to be placed on probation than were adjudicated white youth in 2005. Once again, there could be many reasons for these racially-disparate decisions, factors that only additional research can identify.

Finally, the RRI for the waiver decision indicates that there were racial disparities at this decision point in 2005 that resulted in a greater proportion of the minority youth than white youth who were referred to juvenile court being judicially transferred to criminal court. Again, many factors could have lead to this racially-disparate decision.

In all, in 2005 many decisions made in the juvenile justice system processing of delinquency cases were racially disparate. However, this racial disparity may not be the result of racial bias in the decisionmaking process. Only more targeted research can uncover the most likely causes. For example, DMC Relative Rate Index Matrices could be developed separately for various types of delinquency cases (e.g., violent, property, drugs, and public order) or various types of juvenile offenders (e.g., males and females, young and old) or various locations (e.g., urban, suburban, and rural areas) to see if the disparity

patterns are linked more strongly to some types of delinquency cases than to others. In addition, considerations of the magnitude of the various RRI's highlight the decision points where the contribution to disparity was greatest in the processing of delinquency cases in 2005 (e.g., arrest, detention, and waiver) and can help to prioritize the points at which further study is most warranted.

Trends

Arrest rate

The minority RRI for the arrest decision in delinquency offense cases increased between 1990 and 1993 and then fell, reaching a low point in 2000 and remaining essentially constant through 2004, before increasing slightly in 2005. While relatively large, the RRI in 2005 was below the levels of the early 1990s. This pattern indicates a decline between the mid-1990s and 2005 in the degree of racial disparity at this decision point. The delinquency arrest rates for white youth and minority youth both increased from 1990 through 1994 and then declined. The relative decline in the minority arrest rate was greater than in the white arrest rate, resulting in an overall drop in the RRI during this period. This overall minority pattern generally reflects that of black juveniles. The RRI's for AIAN juveniles show there to be little, if any, racial disparity for them at arrest compared with white juveniles; while the RRI's for AHPI juveniles indicate they were far less likely to be arrested than were white juveniles.

Referral rate

The minority RRI for the court referral decision in delinquency offense cases remained essentially constant and near 1.0 between 1990 and 2005, with a slight increase in the latter years. In general, this pattern indicates that the level of racial disparity at the point of court referral was relatively low and stable most of this time period. This overall minority pattern generally reflects that of black and AHPI juveniles. In contrast, the RRI that compares AIAN with white juveniles shows a greater level of disparity in the early 1990s; however, by 2005, the court referral RRI for AIAN youth was similar to that of the other racial minorities.

Diverted rate

The minority RRI for the diversion decision in delinquency offense cases was below 1.0 and relatively stable between 1990 and 2005. This pattern was generally found in the RRI's for each racial minority, with the set of RRI's for black juveniles being consistently lower than those in the other two minority groups. This means that a white juvenile being processed for a delinquency offense was more likely than a minority (and especially black) juvenile to be diverted from the juvenile justice system in the early stages of system processing.

Detention rate

The minority RRI for the detention decision in delinquency offense cases was high in the early 1990s and declined slightly through 2005; however, the RRI in 2005 was still rather large. This pattern was generally found in the RRI's for each racial minority. The decline in the RRI for delinquency offense cases for black youth was less over the period than for AHPI youth. The RRI for AHPI youth in the early 1990s was above that of black youth, and over the period reduced to a level below that of black youth by 2005. The RRI for delinquency cases for AIAN youth began the 1990s lower than those of the other two racial groups and also declined; over most of the period, the delinquency RRI for AIAN youth stayed close to 1.0.

Petition rate

The minority RRI for the petitioning decision in delinquency offense cases changed little between 1990 and 2005. This pattern was found in the RRIs of each racial minority. In each year the RRI for black youth was greater than the RRIs for the other two racial minorities.

Adjudicated rate

The minority RRI for the adjudication decision in delinquency offense cases remained constant between 1990 and 2005 at a level below 1.0; this indicates that minority youth petitioned for a delinquency offense were less likely to be adjudicated delinquent than were white youth. This RRI pattern was identical to that for black youth. The RRIs for the other two racial minorities also showed no clear pattern of change during this period, but their average values were at or very near 1.0 for the period.

Probation rate

The minority RRI for the probation decision following adjudication in delinquency offense cases stayed at or below 1.0 between 1990 and 2005, indicating that there was little racial disparity at this decision point. This general pattern was found in the RRIs for black and AIAN youth. The trend of RRIs for AHPI youth was also relatively constant, but did fluctuate at times above 1.0 especially in the early portion of the period.

Placement rate

The minority RRI for the placement decision following adjudication in delinquency offense cases declined slightly between 1990 and 2005. This general minority RRI pattern was similar to that for black and AHPI youth. The RRIs for AIAN youth fluctuated during this period showing no obvious trend.

Waiver rate

The annual values of the minority RRI for the waiver decision in delinquency offense cases were relatively high in the early 1990s and declined through 2005. The small numbers of waived cases involving AIAN and AHPI youth made the value of their annual RRIs unstable over the period and any summary of their trends unadvisable.

Case Processing Summary of Relative Rate Indices for Person Offenses

Relative Rate Indices¹ for Person Offenses, 2005

	Minority	Black	AIAN*	AHPI**
Arrest rate	2.8	3.6	1.1	0.3
Referral rate	1.0	0.9	1.2	1.1
Diversion rate	0.7	0.7	0.9	0.7
Detention rate	1.2	1.2	1.0	1.3
Petitioned rate	1.2	1.2	1.0	1.2
Adjudicated rate	0.9	0.9	1.1	1.1
Probation rate	0.9	0.9	0.9	1.0
Placement rate	1.2	1.1	1.4	1.2
Waiver rate	1.2	1.2	1.8	0.8

¹ All Relative Rate Indices are relative to whites
 * AIAN: American Indian or Alaskan Native
 ** AHPI: Asian, Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander

Interpretations

The cumulative disparity experienced by minority youth at any decision point in the juvenile justice system is a combination of the disparities introduced at prior decision points and that added by the decision point of interest. Studying the set of Relative Rate Indices for a specific decision process enables us to see the unique contributions made by each decision point to the overall disparity in the system. Some decisions (those with Relative Rate Indices greater than 1.0) increase disparity in the system. Some decisions (those with Relative Rate Indices equal to 1.0) neither increase nor decrease disparity but maintain the level of disparity that resulted from prior decisions. And some decisions (those with Relative Rate Indices less than 1.0) reduce the level of disparity in the system.

With this background, we can review the set of Relative Rate Indices (RRI) that capture disproportionate minority contact (DMC) in the juvenile justice system's handling of person offense cases in 2005. The decision point that contributed the most to the overall level of disparity in the system is the point of arrest. The Relative Rate Index of the arrest decision point was significantly greater than 1.0 when comparing the overall minority arrest rate to that of white youth. This RRI of 2.8 means that the minority youth arrest rate was about 180% greater than the white arrest rate. The arrest decision's RRI is even greater (3.6) when comparing black youth to white youth. The arrest RRI for American Indian or Alaskan Native (AIAN) youth indicates that the arrest rates for AIAN and white youth were roughly equal, suggesting there was little racial disparity at the arrest stage for these two groups. The arrest RRI for Asian,

Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander (AHPI) youth (0.3) indicates that their arrest rate was far below that of white youth, signifying an arrest disparity for these two groups that brings a disproportionately smaller number of AHPI youth into the juvenile justice system for a person offense.

There are several possible reasons for these racial disparities at the point of arrest. For example, minority youth may commit person offenses at a greater rate than white youth, with the greater arrest rate simply reflecting these behavioral differences. It may also be that even when minority and white youth commit crimes at similar rates, the person offense crimes of minority youth are more likely to be reported to law enforcement, also resulting in a higher arrest rate. Or it could be that even when both groups commit crimes at similar rates and these crimes are equally likely to be reported to law enforcement, law enforcement is more likely to arrest minority youth for their person offense crimes. Using only data available for calculating the RRI, it is not possible to determine which or how much each of these factors contribute to racial disparities reflected by the RRIs at the arrest decision point.

The RRI for referral to juvenile court for minority youth overall indicates the level of racial disparity in the juvenile justice system for minorities was maintained as a result of this decision. In 2005 minority youth were, in general, as likely as white youth to be referred to juvenile court for a person offense.

The RRI for the detention decision indicates that there were racial disparities at this decision point in 2005 that resulted in a greater proportion of minority youth than white youth who were referred to juvenile court being securely detained. Many factors could have lead to this racially-disparate decision.

The petitioning decision also added to the level of racial disparity in the processing of person offense cases in 2005. Minority youth referred to juvenile court for a person offense were, in general, more likely to be processed formally (and less likely to be diverted from the formal court process) than were white youth referred to juvenile court. Once again, the disparities added at the petitioning decision point could be the result of several factors (e.g., differential severities in the nature of their crimes, differences in the youths' prior delinquency histories, and/or decisionmaker bias); only further research can establish the most likely causes.

The RRI for the adjudication decision indicates that these decisions actually helped somewhat to reduce the overall level of racial disparity in the processing of person offense referrals by the system given that the RRI for minority youth was less than 1.0. Once petitioned, minority youth charged with a person offense in 2005 were somewhat less likely to be adjudicated than were white youth. One of the many possible reasons for this pattern could be that the screening decision used to petition these cases may have sent a greater proportion of legally weak or less serious cases of minority youth to an adjudication hearing and these cases were screened out at the adjudication decision.

Once adjudicated, the RRIs indicate that minority youth charged with a person offense were more likely to be placed out of the home and less likely to be placed on probation than were

adjudicated white youth in 2005. Once again, there could be many reasons for these racially-disparate decisions, factors that only additional research can identify.

Finally, the RRI for the waiver decision indicates that there were racial disparities at this decision point in 2005 that resulted in a greater proportion of minority youth than white youth charged with a person offense being judicially waived to criminal court. Again, many factors could have lead to this racially-disparate decision.

It is informative to compare the Relative Rate Index Matrices for all delinquency cases and for person offense cases. In general, the RRIs at the various decisions points are quite similar with two important exceptions. The racial disparity at the arrest decision is substantially greater in the handling of person offense cases. In contrast, while there is some racial disparity in the decision to refer youth to juvenile court in the handling of delinquency cases in general, there is none found in the processing of person offense cases.

In all, in 2005 some decisions made in the juvenile justice system processing of person offense cases were racially disparate. However, this racial disparity may not be the result of racial bias in the decisionmaking process. Only more targeted research can uncover the most likely causes. For example, DMC Relative Rate Index Matrices could be developed separately for various types of juvenile offenders (e.g., males and females, young and old) or various locations (e.g., urban, suburban, and rural areas) to see if the disparity patterns are linked more strongly to some person offense cases than to others. In addition, considerations of the magnitude of the various RRIs highlight the decision points where the contribution to disparity was greatest in the processing of person offense cases in 2005 (e.g., arrest and waiver) and can help to prioritize the points at which further study is most warranted.

Trends

Arrest rate

The minority RRI for the arrest decision in person offense cases declined between the early 1990s and 2005, indicating a decline in the high degree of racial disparity at this decision point. This decline was the result of the minority arrest rate falling much more from the mid-1990s through 2000 than the white rate. Between 2000 and 2005 the minority RRI increased but not back to the levels of the early 1990s. This overall minority pattern generally reflects that of black juveniles. In contrast, the RRIs for AIAN juveniles show there to be little, if any, racial disparity at arrest when compared with white juveniles. The RRI trend for AHPI juveniles indicate they had much lower person offense arrest rates than white juveniles through the period.

Referral rate

The minority RRI for the court referral decision in person offense cases was slightly less than 1.0 during most of the 1990s and reached 1.0 in 1998. This means there was little, if any, racial disparity at the point of court referral for person offense cases during these years. This general minority RRI pattern held for black and AHPI juveniles, but not for AIAN youth. For AIAN

youth, the values of their court referral RRI indicate that there was substantial racial disparity at court referral in the earlier part of the 1990s; following a modest decline over the last 10 years, AIAN youth were being referred to court at rates similar to those of other racial minorities in 2005.

Diverted rate

The minority RRI for the diversion decision in person offense cases was below 1.0 and relatively consistent between 1990 and 2005. This pattern was generally found in the RRIs for each racial minority. This means that a white juvenile being processed for a person offense was more likely than a minority juvenile to be diverted from the juvenile justice system at an early stage of system processing.

Detention rate

The minority RRI for the detention decision in person offense cases was relatively high in the early 1990s and declined through 2005 period. This pattern was generally found in the RRIs for each racial minority. The decline in the RRI for person offense cases for black youth was less over the period than for AHPI youth. As a result, the RRI for the detention decision involving AHPI youth was higher than that of black youth in all but two years during the period. The detention RRI for person offense cases for AIAN youth in the early 1990s was lower than those of the other two racial groups; it declined during the early 1990s and stayed close to 1.0 through 2005.

Petition rate

The minority RRI for the petitioning decision in person offense cases changed little between 1990 and 2005. This pattern was found in the RRIs of each racial minority. In general the AIAN RRI was near 1.0 for most of the period, while the RRIs for the other two minority groups reflected a degree of racial disparity at this decision point.

Adjudicated rate

The minority RRI for the adjudication decision in person offense cases remained constant between 1990 and 2005 at a level below 1.0. This indicates that minority youth petitioned for a person offense were less likely to be adjudicated delinquent than were white youth. This general minority RRI pattern was identical to that for black youth. The RRIs for the other two racial minorities also showed no clear pattern of change, but their average values were at or slightly above 1.0 for the period.

Probation rate

The minority RRI for the probation decision following adjudication in person offense cases stayed at or below 1.0 between 1990 and 2005, indicating that there was little racial disparity at this decision point. This general pattern was found in the RRIs for black, AIAN, and AHPI youth.

Placement rate

The minority RRI for the placement decision in person offense cases remained relatively stable between 1990 and 2005, varying between 1.1 and 1.3. This general minority RRI pattern was similar to that for black youth. Unlike the pattern for black youth, the placement RRI for AHPI youth varied considerably throughout the 1990s and has since stabilized. The RRIs for AIAN youth fluctuated over the period showing no obvious trend.

Waiver rate

The annual values of the minority RRI for the waiver decision in person offense cases were relatively high in the early 1990s and declined somewhat through 2005. This RRI pattern was similar to that for black youth. The small numbers of waived cases involving AIAN and AHPI youth made the value of their annual RRIs unstable over the period and any summary of their trends inadvisable.

Case Processing Summary of Relative Rate Indices for Property Offenses

Relative Rate Indices¹ for Property Offenses, 2005

	Minority	Black	AIAN*	AHPI**
Arrest rate	1.6	1.9	1.0	0.4
Referral rate	1.1	1.1	1.3	1.2
Diversion rate	0.8	0.7	0.9	0.9
Detention rate	1.5	1.6	1.0	1.2
Petitioned rate	1.2	1.2	1.0	1.0
Adjudicated rate	0.9	0.9	1.0	1.0
Probation rate	0.9	0.9	0.9	1.0
Placement rate	1.2	1.2	1.3	1.0
Waiver rate	0.7	0.7	2.1	0.4

¹ All Relative Rate Indices are relative to whites
 * AIAN: American Indian or Alaskan Native
 ** AHPI: Asian, Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander

Interpretations

The cumulative disparity experienced by minority youth at any decision point in the juvenile justice system is a combination of the disparities introduced at prior decision points and that added by the decision point of interest. Studying the set of Relative Rate Indices for a specific decision process enables us to see the unique contributions made by each decision point to the overall disparity in the system. Some decisions (those with Relative Rate Indices greater than 1.0) increase disparity in the system. Some decisions (those with Relative Rate Indices equal to 1.0) neither increase nor decrease disparity but maintain the level of disparity that resulted from prior decisions. And some decisions (those with Relative Rate Indices less than 1.0) reduce the level of disparity in the system.

With this background, we can review the set of Relative Rate Indices (RRI) that capture disproportionate minority contact (DMC) in the juvenile justice system's handling of property offense cases in 2005. The decision point that contributed the most to the overall level of disparity in the system is the point of arrest. The Relative Rate Index of the arrest decision was significantly greater than 1.0 when comparing the overall minority arrest rate to that of white youth. This RRI of 1.6 means that the minority youth arrest rate was about 60% greater than the white arrest rate. The arrest decision's RRI is even greater (1.9) when comparing black youth to white youth. The arrest RRI for American Indian or Alaskan Native (AIAN) youth indicates that the arrest rates for AIAN and white youth were equal, suggesting there was no racial disparity at the arrest stage for these two groups. The arrest RRI for Asian, Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander

(AHPI) youth (0.4) indicates that their arrest rate for property offenses was far below that of white youth, signifying an arrest disparity for these two groups that brings a disproportionately smaller number of AHPI youth into the juvenile justice system for property crimes.

There are several possible reasons for these racial disparities at the point of arrest. For example, minority youth may commit property crimes at a greater rate than white youth, with the greater arrest rate simply reflecting these behavioral differences. It may also be that even when minority and white youth commit crimes at similar rates, the property offense crimes of minority youth are more likely to be reported to law enforcement, also resulting in a higher arrest rate. Or it could be that even when both groups commit crimes at similar rates and these crimes are equally likely to be reported to law enforcement, law enforcement is more likely to arrest minority youth for their property offense crimes. Using only data available for calculating the RRI, it is not possible to determine which or how much each of these factors contribute to racial disparities reflected by the RRIs at the arrest decision point.

The RRI for referral to juvenile court (which is greater than 1.0 for all racial groups) indicates that the level of racial disparity in the juvenile justice system was somewhat increased as a result of this decision. In 2005 minority youth were, in general, slightly more likely to be referred to juvenile court for a property offense than were white youth.

The RRI for the detention decision indicates in 2005 that the decision to detain a youth referred for a property offense resulted in a much greater proportion of minority youth than white youth being securely detained.

The petitioning decision in the processing of property cases added to the level of racial disparity in the handling of these cases. In 2005 minority youth referred to juvenile court for a property offense were, in general, more likely to be processed formally (and less likely to be diverted from the formal court process) than were white youth referred to juvenile court. Once again, the disparities added at this decision point could be the result of several factors (e.g., differential severities in the nature of their crimes, differences in the youths' prior delinquency histories, and/or decisionmaker bias); only further research can establish the most likely causes.

The RRI for the adjudication decision indicates that this decision actually helped to reduce the overall level of racial disparity in the processing of property offense referrals by the juvenile justice system, given that the RRI was less than 1.0. Once petitioned, minority youth charged with a property offense in 2005 were somewhat less likely to be adjudicated than were white youth. One of the many possible reasons for this pattern could be that the screening decision used to petition these cases may have sent a greater proportion of legally weak or less serious cases of minority youth to an adjudication hearing and these cases were screened out at the adjudication decision.

Once adjudicated, the RRIs indicate that minority youth charged with a property offense were more likely to be placed out of the home and less likely to be placed on probation than were adjudicated white youth in 2005. Once again, there could be many reasons for these racially-disparate decisions, factors that only additional research can identify.

Finally, the RRI for the waiver decision indicates that these decisions actually helped somewhat to reduce the overall level of racial disparity in the decision to judicially waive to criminal court youth charged with a property offense in 2005, given that the RRI for minority youth was less than 1.0.

It is informative to compare the Relative Rate Index Matrices for all delinquency cases and for property offense cases. In general, the RRIs at the various decisions points are quite similar with one important exception. While there was racial disparity in the waiver decision in the handling of delinquency cases in general, the waiver decision helped somewhat to reduce the overall level of racial disparity in the processing of property offense cases.

In all, in 2005 some decisions made in the juvenile justice system processing of property offense cases were racially disparate. However, this racial disparity may not be the result of racial bias in the decisionmaking process. Only more targeted research can uncover the most likely causes. For example, DMC Relative Rate Index Matrices could be developed separately for various types of juvenile offenders (e.g., males and females, young and old) or various locations (e.g., urban, suburban, and rural areas) to see if the disparity patterns are linked more strongly to some property offense cases than to others. In addition, considerations of the magnitude of the various RRIs highlight the decision points where the contribution to disparity was greatest in the processing of property offense cases in 2005 (e.g., arrest and detention) and can help to prioritize the points at which further study is most warranted.

Trends

Arrest rate

The minority RRI for the arrest decision in property offense cases changed little between 1990 and 2005, holding at relatively high levels. Over this period the arrest rates for white youth and minority youth both declined substantially. This overall minority RRI pattern generally reflects that of black juveniles. In contrast, the RRIs for AIAN juveniles show there was little, if any, racial disparity at arrest when compared with white juveniles; while the RRIs for AHPI juveniles indicate they were far less likely to be arrested than were white juveniles.

Referral rate

The minority RRI for the court referral decision in property offense cases was at or near 1.0 during most of the 1990 through 2005 period, meaning there was little, if any, racial disparity at the point of court referral for property offense cases during these years. This general minority RRI pattern held for black and AHPI juveniles, but not for AIAN youth. For AIAN youth, their court referral RRI indicates that there was a substantial degree of racial disparity at court referral in the earlier part of the 1990s; following a modest decline in the last 10 years, AIAN youth were being referred to court for property offenses at rates similar to those of other racial minorities in 2005.

Diverted rate

The minority RRI for the diversion decision in property offense cases was consistently below 1.0 between 1990 and 2005. This minority RRI pattern was generally found in the RRIs for each racial minority. This means that during this period, a white juvenile being processed for a property offense was more likely than a minority juvenile to be diverted from the juvenile justice system at an early stage of system processing.

Detention rate

The minority RRI for the detention decision in property offense cases changed little between 1990 and 2005, holding at relatively high levels. This pattern was generally found in the RRIs for black youth. The property offense RRI for AHPI youth began the 1990s at a higher level than that for black youth, but by 2005 had declined to a level below that for black youth. In contrast, the detention RRI for property cases for AIAN youth began the 1990s at a lower level than the other two racial minorities, and remained at or below 1.0 since 1994.

Petition rate

The minority RRI for the petitioning decision in property offense cases changed little between 1990 and 2005. This pattern was found in the RRIs of each racial minority. The yearly RRIs for black youth were greater than the RRIs for the other two racial minorities. From 2003 to 2005, the RRIs for AIAN and AHPI youth were at 1.0 for the petitioning decision in property cases, meaning there was little apparent racial disparity between white youth and these two racial groups, while the RRI for black youth remained relatively high.

Adjudicated rate

The minority RRI for the adjudication decision in property offense cases remained constant between 1990 and 2005 at a level below 1.0 for all but one year (1996); this indicates that minority youth petitioned for a property offense were less likely to be adjudicated delinquent than were white youth. This general minority RRI pattern was identical to that for black youth. The RRIs for the other two racial minorities also showed no clear pattern of change, but their average values were slightly above those of black youth for most of the period.

Probation rate

The minority RRI for the probation decision following adjudication in property offense cases stayed at or below 1.0 each year between 1990 and 2005, indicating that there was little racial disparity at this decision point. This general pattern was found in the RRIs for black, AIAN, and AHPI youth.

Placement rate

The minority RRI for the placement decision following adjudication in property offense cases declined somewhat between the early portion and the latter portion of the 1990 through 2005

period. This general minority RRI pattern was similar to that for black and AHPI youth. In contrast, the trend of RRIs for AIAN youth fluctuated over the period showing no obvious trend.

Waiver rate

The annual values of the minority RRI for the waiver decision in property offense cases between 1990 and 2005 were relatively small (compared with other offenses) and displayed a general pattern of decline over the period. This general minority RRI pattern was similar to that for black youth. The small numbers of waived cases involving AIAN and AHPI youth made the value of their annual RRIs unstable over the period and any summary of their trends inadvisable.

Case Processing Summary of Relative Rate Indices for Drug Offenses

Relative Rate Indices¹ for Drug Offenses, 2005

	Minority	Black	AIAN*	AHPI**
Arrest rate	1.6	2.0	0.7	0.2
Referral rate	0.8	0.8	1.5	1.2
Diversion rate	0.5	0.5	0.9	0.8
Detention rate	2.1	2.2	1.0	1.2
Petitioned rate	1.3	1.4	1.0	1.1
Adjudicated rate	0.9	0.9	1.0	1.0
Probation rate	0.9	0.8	1.1	1.0
Placement rate	1.9	2.0	1.3	1.2
Waiver rate	1.5	1.5	2.1	0.4

¹ All Relative Rate Indices are relative to whites
 * AIAN: American Indian or Alaskan Native
 ** AHPI: Asian, Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander

Interpretations

The cumulative disparity experienced by minority youth at any decision point in the juvenile justice system is a combination of the disparities introduced at prior decision points and that added by the decision point of interest. Studying the set of Relative Rate Indices for a specific decision process enables us to see the unique contributions made by each decision point to the overall disparity in the system. Some decisions (those with Relative Rate Indices greater than 1.0) increase disparity in the system. Some decisions (those with Relative Rate Indices equal to 1.0) neither increase nor decrease disparity but maintain the level of disparity that resulted from prior decisions. And some decisions (those with Relative Rate Indices less than 1.0) reduce the level of disparity in the system.

With this background, we can review the set of Relative Rate Indices (RRI) that capture disproportionate minority contact (DMC) in the juvenile justice system's handling of drug offense cases in 2005. The arrest decision contributed substantially to the level of disparity in the processing of drug offense cases. The Relative Rate Index of the arrest decision point was significantly greater than 1.0 when comparing the overall minority arrest rate to that of white youth. This RRI of 1.6 means that the minority youth arrest rate was about 60% greater than the white arrest rate. The arrest decision's RRI was even greater (2.0) when comparing black youth to white youth. The arrest RRI for American Indian or Alaskan Native (AIAN) youth (0.7) and Asian, Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander (AHPI) youth (0.2) were both lower than that of white

youth, suggesting an arrest disparity for these two groups that brings a disproportionately larger number of white youth into the juvenile justice system for a drug offense.

There are several possible reasons for these racial disparities at the point of arrest. For example, minority youth may commit drug offenses at a greater rate than white youth, with the greater arrest rate simply reflecting these behavioral differences. It may also be that even when minority and white youth commit crimes at similar rates, the drug offense crimes of minority youth are more likely to be reported to law enforcement, also resulting in a higher arrest rate. Or it could be that even when both groups commit crimes at similar rates and these crimes are equally likely to be reported to law enforcement, law enforcement is more likely to arrest minority youth for their drug offense crimes. Using only data available for calculating the RRI, it is not possible to determine which or how much each of these factors contribute to racial disparities reflected by the RRIs at the arrest decision point.

The RRI for referral to juvenile court for minority youth overall indicates the level of racial disparity in the juvenile justice system for minorities decreased as a result of this decision. In 2005 minority youth were, in general, less likely to be referred to juvenile court for a drug offense than were white youth. This pattern held for black youth whose RRI was less than 1.0 (0.8); however, this pattern did not hold for AIAN youth or AHPI youth whose court referral RRIs were both greater than 1.0 (1.5 and 1.2, respectively).

Different than in the processing of other types of delinquencies, the RRI for the detention decision in the handling of drug offense cases in 2005 was much greater than the RRI for the arrest decision. The decision to detain youth referred for a drug offense resulted in a much greater likelihood that minority youth would be securely detained.

Based on the RRI for minority youth overall, the petitioning decision added to the level of racial disparity in the processing of drug offense cases. In 2005 minority youth referred to juvenile court for a drug offense were, in general, far more likely to be processed formally (and less likely to be diverted from the formal court process) than were white youth referred to juvenile court. Looking at the racial groups separately, this pattern was found primarily in the processing of black youth. Once again, the disparities added at this decision point could be the result of several factors (e.g., differential severities in the nature of their crimes, differences in the youths' prior delinquency histories, and/or decisionmaker bias); only further research can establish the most likely causes.

The RRI for the adjudication decision indicates that this decision actually helped to reduce the overall level of racial disparity in the processing of drug offense referrals within the juvenile justice system given that the RRI was less than 1.0 for minorities overall. Once petitioned, minority youth charged with a drug offense in 2005 were somewhat less likely to be adjudicated than were white youth. This pattern was most predominant in the handling of black youth; in contrast, AIAN and AHPI youth charged with a drug offense were as likely as white youth to be adjudicated in 2005. One of the many possible reasons for this pattern could be that the screening decision used to petition these cases may have sent a greater proportion of legally weak or less serious cases of minority youth to an adjudication hearing and these cases were screened out at the adjudication decision.

Once adjudicated the RRIs indicate that minority youth charged with a drug offense were far more likely to be placed out of the home and less likely to be placed on probation than were adjudicated white youth in 2005. Once again, there could be many reasons for these racially-disparate decisions, factors that only additional research can identify.

Finally, the RRI for the waiver decision indicates that there were racial disparities at this decision point in 2005 that resulted in a greater proportion of minority youth than white youth charged with a drug offense being judicially waived to criminal court. Again, many factors could have lead to this racially-disparate decision.

It is informative to compare the Relative Rate Index Matrices for all delinquency cases and for drug offense cases. In general, while some are similar, the RRI for referral to juvenile court is lower in drug offense case processing, while the RRIs for the detention, placement decisions, and waiver were substantially greater than their corresponding RRIs in delinquency case processing.

In all, in 2005 most decisions made in the juvenile justice system processing of drug offense cases were racially disparate. However, this racial disparity may not be the result of racial bias in the decision-making process. Only more targeted research can uncover the most likely causes. For example, DMC Relative Rate Index Matrices could be developed separately for various types of juvenile offenders (e.g., males and females, young and old) or various locations (e.g., urban, suburban, and rural areas) or crime types (e.g., drug possession or drug selling) to see if the disparity patterns are linked more strongly to some drug cases than to others. In addition, considerations of the magnitude of the various RRIs highlight the decision points where the contribution to disparity was greatest in the processing of drug offense cases in 2005 (e.g., arrest, detention, petition, waiver, and placement) and can help to prioritize the points at which further study is most warranted.

Trends

Arrest rate

The minority RRI for the arrest decision in drug offense cases dropped precipitously between the early 1990s and 2005, indicating a large decline in the degree of racial disparity at this decision point. This overall minority pattern generally reflects that of black juveniles. In sharp contrast, the RRIs for AIAN and AHPI juveniles indicate they were far less likely to be arrested for drug offenses than were white juveniles.

Referral rate

The minority RRI for the court referral decision in drug offense cases was consistently below 1.0 between 1990 and 2005. This means that during this period it was more likely to send white juveniles than minority juveniles arrested for a drug offense into the juvenile justice system. This pattern held for black youth and also somewhat for AHPI youth but not for AIAN juveniles.

For AIAN youth, the substantially higher values of their court referral RRIs indicate that there was considerable racial disparity at court referral during much of the 1990 through 2005 period.

Diverted rate

The minority RRI for the diversion decision in drug offense cases was far below 1.0 each year between 1990 and 2005. This general minority pattern was primarily found in the RRIs for black youth. The RRIs for AIAN and AHPI youth over this period were substantially greater than those of black youth, wavering above and below 1.0 over the period. This means that a white juvenile being processed for a drug offense was far more likely than a black juvenile to be diverted from the juvenile justice system at an early stage of system processing between 1990 and 2005, but less likely to be diverted than AIAN and AHPI youth.

Detention rate

The minority RRI for the detention decision in drug offense cases was relatively high and consistent between 1990 and 2005. This general pattern was seen in the RRI for black youth. Over the period the RRIs for black youth were consistently above those of AHPI youth and substantially above those of AIAN youth. In fact, the RRI for AIAN youth was close to 1.0 for most of the years in this period.

Petition rate

Even though there was some decline, the minority RRI for the petitioning decision in drug offense cases remained relatively high between 1990 and 2005. This pattern was reflected in the RRI for black youth. In sharp contrast, the RRIs for AIAN and AHPI youth remained essentially constant, hovering around 1.0 for most of the period.

Adjudicated rate

The minority RRI for the probation decision following adjudication in drug offense cases held slightly below 1.0 between 1990 and 2005, indicating that there was little racial disparity at this decision point. This general minority pattern was found in the RRI for black youth. The RRIs for the other two racial minorities showed no clear pattern of change, but the average values for AIAN youth were slightly above those of the other two racial groups for most of the period.

Probation rate

The minority RRI for the probation decision following adjudication in drug offense cases held slightly below 1.0 between 1990 and 2005, indicating that there was little racial disparity at this decision point. This general minority pattern was found in the RRI for black youth. The RRIs for AIAN and AHPI youth also remained relatively constant through this period, but in general closer to 1.0 than the RRIs of black youth.

Placement rate

The minority RRI for the placement decision following adjudication in drug offense cases increased between 1990 and 2005. This general minority RRI pattern was similar to that for black and AIAN youth. In contrast, the RRI for AHPI youth displayed no clear pattern of change during this period.

Waiver rate

The annual values of the minority RRI for the waiver decision in drug offense cases were far greater than in other offenses and showed a general pattern of decline between 1990 and 2005. This general minority RRI pattern was similar to that for black youth. The small numbers of waived cases involving AIAN and AHPI youth made the value of their annual RRIs unstable over the period and any summary of their trends inadvisable — although it is clear that the average RRI for AHPI youth was far lower than those of the other two racial minorities.

Case Processing Summary of Relative Rate Indices for Public Order Offenses

Relative Rate Indices¹ for Public Order Offenses, 2005

	Minority	Black	AIAN*	AHPI**
Arrest rate	1.4	1.7	1.2	0.3
Referral rate	1.5	1.5	1.0	1.4
Diversion rate	0.8	0.8	0.7	0.6
Detention rate	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.1
Petitioned rate	1.1	1.1	1.2	1.2
Adjudicated rate	0.9	0.9	1.0	1.0
Probation rate	0.9	0.9	0.9	1.2
Placement rate	1.1	1.1	1.1	0.9
Waiver rate	0.8	0.7	1.8	0.7

¹ All Relative Rate Indices are relative to whites

* AIAN: American Indian or Alaskan Native

** AHPI: Asian, Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander

Interpretations

The cumulative disparity experienced by minority youth at any decision point in the juvenile justice system is a combination of the disparities introduced at prior decision points and that added by the decision point of interest. Studying the set of Relative Rate Indices for a specific decision process enables us to see the unique contributions made by each decision point to the overall disparity in the system. Some decisions (those with Relative Rate Indices greater than 1.0) increase disparity in the system. Some decisions (those with Relative Rate Indices equal to 1.0) neither increase nor decrease disparity but maintain the level of disparity that resulted from prior decisions. And some decisions (those with Relative Rate Indices less than 1.0) reduce the level of disparity in the system.

With this background, we can review the set of Relative Rate Indices (RRI) that capture disproportionate minority contact (DMC) in the juvenile justice system's handling of public order offense cases in 2005. As the RRI indicates, there is racial disparity at arrest in these cases. The Relative Rate Index of the arrest decision point was greater than 1.0 when comparing the overall minority arrest rate to that of white youth. This RRI of 1.4 means that the minority youth arrest rate was about 40% greater than the white arrest rate. The arrest decision's RRI is even greater (1.7) when comparing black youth to white youth. The arrest RRI for American Indian or Alaskan Native (AIAN) youth was lower than the RRI for black youth but still greater than 1.0, indicating some racial disparity at the arrest stage for white and AIAN youth. The arrest RRI for Asian, Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander (AHPI) youth (0.3) indicates that their arrest

rate was far below that of white youth, signifying an arrest disparity for these two groups that brings a disproportionately smaller number of AHPI youth into the juvenile justice system for a public order offense.

There are several possible reasons for these racial disparities at the point of arrest. For example, minority youth may commit delinquencies at a greater rate than white youth, with the greater arrest rate simply reflecting these behavioral differences. It may also be that even when minority and white youth commit crimes at similar rates, the crimes of minority youth are more likely to be reported to law enforcement, also resulting in a higher arrest rate. Or it could be that even when both groups commit crimes at similar rates and these crimes are equally likely to be reported to law enforcement, law enforcement is more likely to arrest minority youth. Using only data available for calculating the RRI, it is not possible to determine which or how much each of these factors contribute to racial disparities reflected by the RRIs at the arrest decision point.

The RRI for referral to juvenile court indicates that the level of racial disparity in the juvenile justice system was further increased as a result of this decision. In 2005, based on the magnitudes of their arrest rates, minority youth were substantially more likely to be referred to juvenile court for a public order offense than were white youth. In fact, in 2005, the RRI for this decision point indicates that more racial disparity was introduced into the processing of youth charged with public order offenses at the point of court referral than at any other decision point in the processing system including the arrest decision.

The RRI for the detention decision indicates that there were racial disparities at this decision point in 2005 that resulted in a greater proportion of minority youth than white youth referred to juvenile court for a public order offense being securely detained. Many factors could have led to this racially-disparate decision.

The petitioning decision added somewhat to the level of racial disparity in the processing of public order offense cases, although its contribution was lower than in other types of delinquency cases. In 2005 minority youth referred to juvenile court for a public order offense were, in general, a little more likely to be processed formally (and a little less likely to be diverted from the formal court process) than were white youth referred to juvenile court. Once again, the disparities added at this decision point could be the result of several factors (e.g., differential severities in the nature of their crimes, differences in the youths' prior delinquency histories, and/or decisionmaker bias); only further research can establish the most likely causes.

The RRI for the adjudication decision for minority youth overall indicates that this decision actually helped to reduce the overall level of racial disparity in the processing of public order offense referrals by the juvenile justice system in 2005, given that the RRI was actually less than 1.0. Once petitioned, minority youth charged with a public order offense in 2005 were somewhat less likely to be adjudicated than were white youth. One of the many possible reasons for this pattern could be that the screening decision used to petition these cases may have sent a greater proportion of legally weak or less serious cases of minority youth to an adjudication hearing and these cases were screened out at the adjudication decision.

Once adjudicated, the RRIs indicate that minority youth charged with a public order offense were more likely to be placed out of the home and less likely to be placed on probation than were adjudicated white youth in 2005. Once again, there could be many reasons for these racially-disparate decisions, factors that only additional research can identify.

Finally, the RRI for the waiver decision indicates that these decisions actually helped somewhat to reduce the overall level of racial disparity in the decision to judicially waive to criminal court youth charged with a public order offense in 2005, given that the RRI for minority youth was less than 1.0.

In all, in 2005 many decisions made in the juvenile justice system processing of public order offense cases were racially disparate. However, this racial disparity may not be the result of racial bias in the decisionmaking process. Only more targeted research can uncover the most likely causes. For example, DMC Relative Rate Index Matrices could be developed separately for various types of juvenile offenders (e.g., males and females, young and old) or various locations (e.g., urban, suburban, and rural areas) to see if the disparity patterns are linked more strongly to some attributes of public order offense cases than to others. More specifically, given that the category of public order offenses includes such a diverse set of offenses (e.g., weapons possession, disorderly conduct, underage drinking, obstruction of justice, and technical violations of probation and parole), it would be informative to develop separate Relative Rate Index Matrices for the processing of each of the higher volume offenses to determine which disparity pattern is common across the set of offenses. In addition, considerations of the magnitude of the various RRIs highlight the decision points where the contribution to disparity was greatest in the processing of public order offense cases in 2005 (e.g., arrest, court referral, detention, and placement) and can help to prioritize the points at which further study is most warranted.

Trends

Arrest rate

The minority RRI for the arrest decision in public order offense cases peaked in the early 1990s and generally declined afterwards. While still substantial, the RRI for public order arrests was closer to 1.0 in 2005 than for any of the other offense categories. This indicates that the level of racial disparity at arrest in 2005 was less in public order offense cases than in other offense categories. This overall minority pattern only reflects that of black juveniles. Over the period the RRIs for AIAN juveniles show there to be little, if any, racial disparity at arrest when compared with white juveniles. And in contrast to both other minority groups, the RRIs for AHPI juveniles were far below 1.0, indicating that these youth were far less likely to be arrested for public order offenses than were white juveniles.

Referral rate

The minority RRI for the court referral decision in public order offense cases was larger than the RRI for any other offense between 1990 and 2005 and changed little. This means that the level of racial disparity at this decision point was relatively high and persistent during the period. This

pattern held for black youth. In contrast, after being high in the early 1990s, the RRI for AIAN youth fell to a relatively low level, averaging 1.0 from 1999 to 2005. Also, for much of the period, the court referral RRI for AHPI youth involved in public order offense cases was at or just below 1.0, indicating low levels of racial disparity when compared with the processing of white juveniles — although it must be noted that the RRI for AHPI youth increased slightly between 2000 and 2005.

Diverted rate

The minority RRI for the diversion decision in public order offense cases was below 1.0 each year between 1990 and 2005. This overall minority pattern reflects that of black juveniles. For the period, the RRI for AIAN and AHPI youth averaged around 1.0 in the early 1990s and fell to a value below 1.0 after 1995, meaning that by 2005 the RRIs for each racial minority were similar.

Detention rate

The minority RRI for the detention decision in public order offense cases declined marginally between 1990 and 2005. The RRI for AHPI youth declined over the period, in contrast to the RRI for black youth that remained relatively constant. Over the period the RRI for AIAN youth showed no consistent pattern of change. By 2005 the RRIs for each racial minority were similar and indicating racial disparity at this decision point.

Petition rate

The minority RRI for the petitioning decision in public order offense cases declined in the early 1990s and then remained at its relatively low level through 2005. This pattern was found in the RRI for black youth. In contrast, the trends in the RRIs for AIAN and AHPI youth bounced around within a small range over the period. For the period the RRIs for AIAN youth averaged around 1.0, while the RRIs for AHPI youth averaged slightly greater and similar to the level of black youth.

Adjudication rate

The minority RRI for the adjudication decision in public order offense cases stayed at or below 1.0 between 1990 and 2005, indicating that there was little racial disparity at this decision point. This general pattern was found in the RRIs for black and AHPI youth. The trend of RRIs for AIAN youth was also relatively constant, but did fluctuate at times above 1.0 especially in the early portion of the period.

Probation rate

The minority RRI for the probation decision following adjudication in public order cases declined somewhat from 1990 to 2005, staying near 1.0 for most of the period. This RRI pattern was very similar to that for black and AIAN youth. For AHPI youth the annual RRI pattern was more erratic and the RRIs tended to be somewhat larger than those in the other racial groups.

Placement rate

The minority RRI for the placement decision following adjudication in public order offense cases remained essentially constant from 1990 to 2005. This general minority RRI pattern was also found in the RRIs for black youth. In contrast, the trends in the RRIs for AIAN and AHPI youth bounced around within a limited range between 1990 and 2005. For the period the RRIs for AIAN youth averaged slightly greater than 1.0. The RRIs for AHPI youth spent much of the period below 1.0 and displayed no clear trend.

Waiver rate

The annual values of the minority RRI for the waiver decision in public order offense cases declined substantially from the early to the latter portions of the 1990 to 2005 period. This RRI pattern was similar to that for black youth. The small numbers of waived cases involving AIAN and AHPI youth made the value of their annual RRIs unstable over the period and any summary of their trends inadvisable.