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KEYWORDS

- Disproportionate minority contact • Disproportionate minority confinement
- Juvenile delinquency • Racial disparities

KEY POINTS

- Disproportionate minority contact (DMC) has persisted over the past 20 to 30 years despite legislation intended to reduce this problem.
- Several individual, family, community, institutional, and sociolegal factors explain the presence and persistence of DMC.
- To reduce DMC, intervention strategies must address factors in multiple domains.
- Although DMC remains a problem on a national level, several jurisdictions have instituted interventions that successfully reduced DMC.
- More research is needed on the causes of DMC in multiple ethnic groups over the life course in order to inform the development of more broadly effective interventions.

INTRODUCTION

In 2013, juvenile courts nationwide processed 1,058,500 cases. Of the youth processed in juvenile court, 76% were male and 24% were female. Sixty-two percent were white, 35% were black, and less than 3% were American Indian or Asian/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. Most were between the ages of 15 and 17 years (**Fig. 1**).¹

Definition

Disproportionate minority contact (DMC) occurs when the proportion of African American, Hispanic, southeast Asian, Pacific Islander, Native American, and other disadvantaged ethnic minority youth at any given stage in the juvenile justice process exceeds the proportion of their respective group in the general population and exceeds white youth at the same stage in the juvenile justice process.²⁻⁴ In

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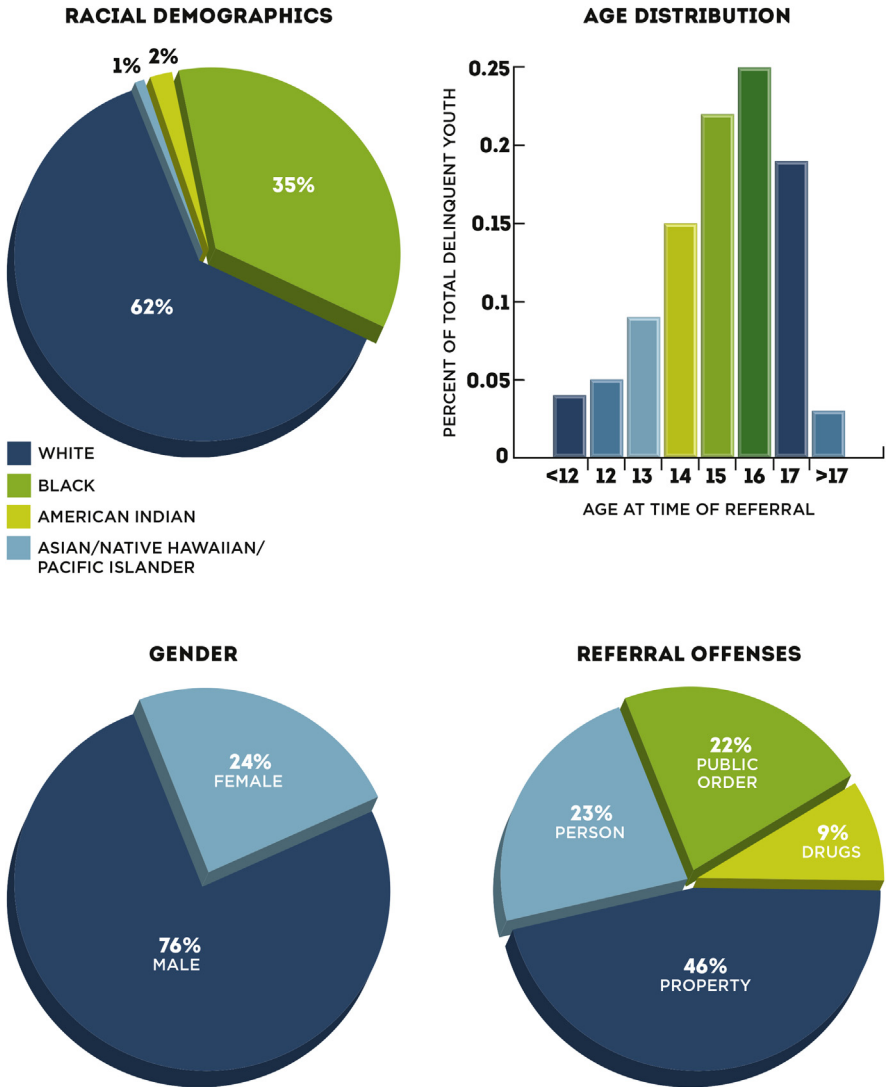


Fig. 1. Demographics of youth involved in the national juvenile court system, 2013. (Data from The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Available at: <http://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/>. Accessed June 10, 2015.)

2013, 3 times as many black youth between the ages of 10 and 17 years were in the juvenile justice system, relative to their proportion in the general population, compared with white youth.¹ Hispanic, southeast Asian, Pacific Islander, and Native American youth are over-represented in some stages of the juvenile justice system, as well.⁴⁻⁶ Several studies relate DMC to several individual, social, and system factors; its presence suggests racial disparities in society. It also suggests disparities in the treatment of minority youth in the juvenile justice system compared with white youth with similar individual and social risk factors, including risk factors for involvement in crime.²

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