
What We Know about Certified Youth: Descriptive Statistics

Certification Research Brief #3
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BACKGROUND

As discussed in the Certification Research Brief #1, *disproportionately* more African American youth are certified compared to Caucasian youth. Caucasian youth alleged to have committed only 66 percent of the felonies, but they only make up 35 percent of the certified population. African American youth alleged to have committed 31 percent of the felonies but make up 62 percent of the certified population.

The purpose of this research brief is to report the descriptive statistics for certified youth. The statistics describe certified youth in terms of demographic information (race, gender, age, location, etc.), juvenile justice information (level of offense, kind of offense, offense type, risk assessment data, and secure detention), and background information on the youth's history. These summary statistics will provide insight into the issues surrounding race in the Missouri juvenile justice system by demonstrating that African American youth are over-represented in the certification court contact point. It is important to note that *disproportionality* itself is not good or bad. However, *disparity* is problematic because it indicates unequal treatment based on race. Please see Certification Research Brief #4 for a discussion of the multivariate analysis (inferential statistics) which addresses *racial disparity*.

METHOD

Please see Certification Research Brief #1 for a discussion of the method of the certification study. This brief discusses a subset of that data which includes all certified youth. Extraordinary efforts were made to verify the information of "potentially" certified youth¹. All of the cases of the potentially certified youth were reviewed by the juvenile office to verify: 1) the finding of the case, 2) the major allegation of the case,² 3) the reason for certification, 4) the number of informally processed felonies, and 5) the number of previously adjudicated felonies³ prior to the referral for certification. The number of youth certified between 2008 and 2011 was 368.

Because only a small number of cases were non-Caucasian and non-African American, all other racial/ethnic categories were combined into a generic "Other" category. Not all youth who were certified had a risk assessment completed. The risk assessment data were only available for 279 youth.

Chi square analyses were conducted to identify significant *associations* between race and juvenile justice and risk characteristics. Only statistically significant findings at the level of ($p < .001$) are reported. In other words, we are 99.9 percent confident that the findings are not due to chance alone.

FINDINGS

Demographic Information

- African American youth were over-represented in terms of being certified. A total of 368 youth were certified, 228 were African American and 129 were Caucasian. See Table 1.

Table 1: Racial/Ethnic Breakdown for Certified Youth
OSCA Extract of JIS Data
2008-2011

Race/Ethnicity	Youth	% by Race
Caucasian	129	35.1%
African American	228	62.0%
Other	11	3.0%
Total	368	100.0

- *Salient area of disproportionality:*
 - Five percent of African American youth who had a felony offense were certified, but only 1 percent of Caucasian youth were certified.
 - Males made up 82 percent of the youth who had a felony allegation, but they made up 96 percent of the youth certified.⁴

- The majority of certified youth were age 16 at the time of the referral. (See Table 2).
- Thirty percent of the youth certified were 17 or older at the time of the referral.
- A larger percentage of African American youth were certified at age 16.⁵
- The average age for a certified African American youth was 16.5 (range 14-34 years of age).
- The average age for a certified Caucasian youth was slightly older, 17.1 (range was 13-35 years).

Table 2: Age at the Time of the Offense for Certified Youth by Race/Ethnicity
OSCA Extract of JIS Data
2008-2011

Age	Caucasian		African American		Other		Total	
	Youth	Percent	Youth	Percent	Youth	Percent	Youth	Percent
13	1	0.8%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	0.3%
14	3	2.3%	3	1.3%	1	10.0%	7	1.9%
15	8	6.2%	18	7.9%	1	10.0%	27	7.3%
16	67	51.9%	151	66.2%	6	60.0%	224	60.9%
17	24	18.6%	38	16.7%	2	20.0%	64	17.4%
Over 17	26	20.2%	18	7.9%	0	0.0%	45	12.2%
Total	129	100.0%	228	100.0%	10	100.0%	368	100.0%

Location

- The majority of youth (57%) were certified in urban circuits including the 11th (St. Charles County), 16th (Jackson County), 21st (St. Louis County), 22nd (St. Louis city) and 31st (Greene County). See Table 1A in the appendix.
- The 16th (Jackson County), 21st (St. Louis County) and 22nd (St. Louis city) had the most certifications, and 74 percent of African American certifications were processed in these three circuits.
- The four non-urban circuits with the most certifications were 13th (Boone and Callaway counties), 19th (Cole County), 33rd (Scott and Mississippi counties), and 35th (Stoddard and Dunklin counties) circuits.
- Six circuits which are 1st (Schuyler, Scotland and Clark counties), 2nd (Adair, Knox and Lewis counties), 4th (Atchison, Nodaway, Worth, Gentry and Holt counties), 27th (Bates, Henry and St. Clair counties), 40th (Newton and McDonald counties), and 44th (Wright, Douglas and Ozark counties) did not certify any youth between 2008 and 2011.

Juvenile Justice Background Statistics

Level of Offense (Referring to Table 3)

Descriptive Statistics for Certified Youth

- More than a third of certified youth had a Felony A allegation.
- One fourth of the certified youth had a Felony C allegation.
- Youth who had a Felony B or an unclassified felony⁶ offense accounted for 17 percent and 15 percent of the certified cases, respectively.

Race Findings

- Almost half of all certified African American youth had a Felony A offense.
- A third of Caucasian youth were certified for a Felony C offense.
- Caucasian youth were certified at a higher percentage for all levels of felonies, except Felony A.
- Therefore, African American youth were *over-represented* for more serious allegations helping to explain why more African American youth were certified.

Table 3: Type of Felony for Certified Youth by Race/Ethnicity
OSCA Extract of JIS Data
2008-2011

Type of Felony	Caucasian		African American		Other		Total	
	Youth	% of Total Offenses	Youth	% of Total Offenses	Youth	% of Total Offenses	Youth	% of Total Offenses
Felony (Unclassified)	24	18.6%	31	13.6%	1	9.1%	56	15.2%
Felony A	22	17.1%	112	49.1%	6	54.5%	140	38.0%
Felony B	26	20.2%	35	15.4%	1	9.1%	62	16.8%
Felony C	47	36.4%	44	19.3%	3	27.3%	94	25.5%
Felony D	7	5.4%	6	2.6%	0	0.0%	13	3.5%
Misdemeanor	3	2.3%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	3	0.8%
Total	129	100.0%	228	100.0%	11	100.0%	368	100.0%

Pearson Chi Square 43.518 $p < 0.001$

Kind of Offense (Referring to Table 4)

- Two-thirds of certified youth were certified for a person offense.
- Almost one-fourth of certified youth were certified for property crimes

Table 4: Kind of Offense for Certified Youth by Race/Ethnicity
OSCA Extract of JIS Data
2008-2011

Kind of Offense	Caucasian		African American		Other		Total	
	Youth	Percent	Youth	Percent	Youth	Percent	Youth	Percent
Person	72	55.8%	172	75.4%	8	72.7%	252	68.5%
Property	45	34.9%	38	16.7%	2	18.2%	85	23.1%
Weapon	2	1.6%	12	5.3%	1	9.1%	15	4.1%
Drug and other	10	7.8%	6	2.6%	0	0.0%	16	4.3%
Total	129	100.0%	228	100.0%	11	100.0%	368	100.0%

Pearson Chi Square 25.566 $p < 0.001$

Race Findings

- A higher percentage of both African American and Caucasian youth were certified for a person offense compared to a property offense, using a weapon, or a drug/other offense.
- This pattern corresponds with the intention stated in statute and helps to explain why more African American youth were certified.
- A higher percentage of Caucasian youth allegedly committed property or drug/other offenses which are considered less serious allegations.

Offense Type (Referring to Table 5)

- Almost one quarter of the youth were certified for robbery allegations.
- Fifteen percent were certified for burglaries and sexual assaults.
- Assaults and homicides are the top five offense types.

Race Findings

- Almost two-thirds of the African American certified youth had robbery, assault or homicide offenses.
- The top three offense types for certified Caucasian youth, making up more than half of the cases, were burglary, sexual assault, and assault.
- A higher percentage of African American youth allegedly committed robbery, assault, homicide and weapons.
- Seriousness of the offense is one of the criteria considered at the certification hearing, a fact that helps to explain why more African American youth were certified.

Table 5: Offense Type for Certified Youth by Race/Ethnicity
OSCA Extract of JIS Data
2008-2011

Offense Type	Caucasian		African American		Other		Total	
	Youth	Percent	Youth	Percent	Youth	Percent	Youth	Percent
Robbery	9	7.0%	72	31.6%	4	50.0%	85	23.1%
Burglary	27	20.9%	28	12.3%	1	12.5%	56	15.2%
Sexual Assault	29	22.5%	24	10.5%	1	12.5%	54	14.7%
Assault	14	10.9%	38	16.7%	0	0.0%	52	14.1%
Homicide	10	7.8%	34	14.9%	3	37.5%	47	12.8%
Weapons	2	1.6%	12	5.3%	1	12.5%	15	4.1%
Sex Offenses	10	7.8%	3	1.3%	0	0.0%	13	3.5%
Property Damage	9	7.0%	4	1.8%	0	0.0%	13	3.5%
Dangerous Drugs	8	6.2%	4	1.8%	0	0.0%	12	3.3%
Stealing	5	3.9%	5	2.2%	1	12.5%	11	3.0%
Other	6	4.7%	4	1.8%	0	0.0%	10	2.7%
Total	129	100.0%	228	100.0%	8	100.0%	368	100.0%

Pearson Chi Square 81.027 p<0.001

Risk Assessment

- Almost half of certified youth scored at the high level on the risk assessment.
- Four out of 10 scored at the moderate level.

Table 6: Risk Level for Certified Youth by Race/Ethnicity
OSCA Extract of JIS Data
2008-2011

Risk Level	Caucasian		African American		Other		Total	
	Youth	Percent	Youth	Percent	Youth	Percent	Youth	Percent
Low	16	15.7%	15	8.8%	1	16.7%	32	11.5%
Moderate	45	44.1%	68	39.8%	3	50.0%	116	41.6%
High	41	40.2%	88	51.5%	2	33.3%	131	47.0%
Total	102	100.0%	171	100.1%	6	100.0%	279	100.0%

Secure Detention

Most youth who were certified (73%) were placed in secure detention prior to being certified. African American youth (81%) were more likely to be placed in secure detention.

Previous Adjudication History (Referring to Table 7)⁷

- The majority of certified youth (217 youth) did not have a previous felony adjudication prior to the referral that led to certification.⁸
- Another 58 youth only had one felony adjudication prior to the referral that led to certification.

Table 7: Previous Felony Adjudications for Certified Youth by Race/Ethnicity
OSCA Extract of JIS Data
2008-2011

Previous Felony Adjudications (Prior to the Referral that Lead to Certification)	Caucasian		African American		Other		Total	
	Youth	Percent	Youth	Percent	Youth	Percent	Youth	Percent
0	91	70.5%	121	53.1%	5	45.5%	217	59.0%
1	15	11.6%	41	18.0%	2	18.2%	58	15.8%
2	10	7.8%	23	10.1%	1	9.1%	34	9.2%
3	5	3.9%	16	7.0%	2	18.2%	23	6.3%
4	4	3.1%	8	3.5%	1	9.1%	13	3.5%
5	0	0.0%	6	2.6%	0	0.0%	6	1.6%
More than 5	4	3.1%	13	5.7%	0	0.0%	17	4.6%
Total	129	100.0%	228	100.0%	11	100.0%	368	100.0%

Mandatory Certification Hearing (Referring to Table 8)

- Sixty-four percent of the cases that were certified required a certification hearing by law.
- Half of the cases that required a certification hearing were due to a mandatory allegation and 13 percent of them were because it was the 3rd felony.
- Almost three-fourths of the African American certifications required a mandatory certification hearing,⁹ but only 44 percent of Caucasian certification cases required a certification hearing by statute.
- Therefore, more Caucasian youth were certified based on the juvenile office’s decision to request certification (a discretionary rather than mandatory certification).¹⁰

Table 8: Reason for Holding the Certification Hearing by Race/Ethnicity
OSCA Extract of JIS Data
2008-2011¹¹

Reason for Certification Hearing	Caucasian		African American		Other		Total	
	Youth	Percent	Youth	Percent	Youth	Percent	Youth	Percent
Permissive Certification Hearing JO Decision	73	56.6%	59	25.9%	2	18.2%	133	36.1%
Required Hearing By Statute Mandatory Offense	38	29.5%	141	61.8%	6	62.5%	186	50.5%
3rd Felony or More	18	14.0%	28	12.3%	3	12.5%	49	13.3%
Total Required by Statute	56	43.5%	169	74.1%	9	75.0%	235	63.8%
Total Youth Certified	129	100.0%	228	100.0%	11	100.0%	368	100.0%
Pearson Chi Square 35.017 p<0.001								

- Eighty-four percent of the 217 youth who did not have a prior felony adjudication allegedly committed a mandatory allegation.
- Almost half (45%) of the African American certified youth who alleged to have committed a mandatory allegation had previous felony adjudications whereas only 16 percent of Caucasian certified youth had one.
- Because previous history is one of the criteria considered at the certification hearing, this pattern may help to explain some of the reason why African American youth are over-represented among certified youth. However, without having adjudication data for all youth who had a mandatory allegation (this data was only collected for certified youth), more research is necessary to substantiate this claim.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the study demonstrate that African American youth are over-represented among the certified population. A higher percentage of African Americans had a Felony A offense and a person offense. A higher percentage of African American youth allegedly committed the following offense types: robbery, assault and homicide, all very serious offenses. A higher percentage of African American youth were placed in secure detention. A higher percentage of African American youth had one or more previous felony adjudications. A higher percentage of African American youth were required to have a certification hearing by statute. Because African Americans had more serious crimes and particularly crimes against a person, juvenile officers and courts *may be* certifying these youth more because of the nature and seriousness of the offense rather than because of race.

In Certification Research Brief #4, multivariate analysis (inferential statistics) will discuss the independent influence of race (holding all other variables constant) in the certification decision. This analysis will be able to determine whether the *racial disproportionality* discussed above reflects *racial disparity* or disparate treatment.

Because several studies have shown that African American youth are **not** more likely to commit certain crimes, but rather are more likely to be charged with certain crimes (Fagan, J., Slaughter, E., & Hartstone, E. (1987) and Pope, C. & Snyder, H., (2003)), more research is necessary to understand why African American youth are more likely to be charged with certain offenses. Robbery is a very good example because almost one-third of the African Americans were certified for this offense while only 7 percent of Caucasian youth were. What role do policing practices have on who is charged with an offense?

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REFERENCES

- Fagan, J., Slaughter, E., & Hartstone, E. (1987). Blind justice: The impact of race on juvenile justice process. *Crime & Delinquency*, 33(2), 224-258.
- Pope, C. & Snyder, H. (2003). Race as a factor in juvenile arrests. Washington, D.C.: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Certified youth were identified by whether or not the youth had either the finding of the referral indicating “sustained motion to dismiss for certification” on COASITE in JIS and/or had the formal case code of DJVCA, indicating that the youth was certified.
- ² Twenty percent of the major allegations of the “potentially” certified youth list in JIS were inaccurate. See Certification Technical Brief for an extended discussion of this issue. A recommendation is more training for frontline juvenile staff to ensure that the most serious allegation is included first on the referral. Periodic audits would help ensure the validity of the data.
- ³ A recommendation is to see clarification of the issue of adjudicated verses non-adjudicated felonies to ensure that all youth are evaluated by one consistent standard across the state.
- ⁴ Data is missing for gender for 2 certified youth.
- ⁵ Although African American youth are certified at younger ages, if they allegedly commit a crime when 17 or older, they are significantly more likely to be certified than 17 or older Caucasian youth. See Certification Research Brief #1.
- ⁶ Unclassified felonies tend to be very serious offenses. They have no classification other than being a felony.
- ⁷ The number of previous felony adjudications for certified youth was requested from the juvenile office because we were trying to determine how many circuits required the previous unrelated felonies to be adjudicated prior to certification.
- ⁸ The youth may have had a previous adjudication for a misdemeanor or a status offense. S/he may have also had a previous referral that was processed without court involvement (informally adjusted).
- ⁹ Unfortunately, OSCA does not have the ability to track youth who have had a certification hearing and the reason why the youth was not certified. OSCA also does not have the ability to reliably track whether this is the youth’s 3 *unrelated* felony. A recommendation is create codes to track certification hearings and the reasons why the youth was not certified.
- ¹⁰ Certification Research Brief #2 compared the number of youth who allegedly committed a mandatory allegation by race and the percentage certified.
- ¹¹ This data was collected directly from the juvenile officers rather than from JIS.

APPENDIX

Table 1A: Certified Youth by Reporting Circuit and Race/Ethnicity
OSCA Extract of JIS Data
2008-2011

Reporting Circuit	Caucasian		African American		Other		Total	
	Youth	% by Circuit	Youth	% by Circuit	Youth	% by Circuit	Youth	% by Circuit
3	5	3.9%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	5	1.4%
5	3	2.3%	2	0.9%	0	0.0%	5	1.4%
6	4	3.1%	2	0.9%	0	0.0%	6	1.6%
7	6	4.7%	3	1.3%	0	0.0%	9	2.4%
8	3	2.3%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	3	0.8%
9	1	0.8%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	0.3%
10	0	0.0%	2	0.9%	0	0.0%	2	0.5%
11	6	4.7%	8	3.5%	1	9.1%	15	4.1%
12	8	6.2%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	8	2.2%
13	3	2.3%	11	4.8%	1	9.1%	15	4.1%
14	1	0.8%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	0.3%
15	5	3.9%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	5	1.4%
16	9	7.0%	51	22.4%	4	36.4%	64	17.4%
17	0	0.0%	1	0.4%	1	9.1%	2	0.5%
18	2	1.6%	0	0.0%	1	9.1%	3	0.8%
19	2	1.6%	8	3.5%	0	0.0%	10	2.7%
20	1	0.8%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	0.3%
21	6	4.7%	71	31.1%	0	0.0%	77	20.9%
22	1	0.8%	46	20.2%	0	0.0%	47	12.8%
23	2	1.6%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	2	0.5%
24	1	0.8%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	0.3%
25	3	2.3%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	3	0.8%
26	2	1.6%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	2	0.5%
28	4	3.1%	1	0.4%	0	0.0%	5	1.4%
29	3	2.3%	1	0.4%	0	0.0%	4	1.1%
30	3	2.3%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	3	0.8%
31	4	3.1%	1	0.4%	0	0.0%	5	1.4%
32	3	2.3%	0	0.0%	1	9.1%	4	1.1%
33	5	3.9%	10	4.4%	1	9.1%	16	4.3%
34	1	0.8%	3	1.3%	0	0.0%	4	1.1%
35	7	5.4%	3	1.3%	0	0.0%	10	2.7%
36	3	2.3%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	3	0.8%
37	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	9.1%	1	0.3%
38	7	5.4%	1	0.4%	0	0.0%	8	2.2%
39	3	2.3%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	3	0.8%
41	1	0.8%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	0.3%
42	3	2.3%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	3	0.8%
43	1	0.8%	1	0.4%	0	0.0%	2	0.5%
45	7	5.4%	2	0.9%	0	0.0%	9	2.4%
Total	129	100.0%	228	100.0%	11	100.0%	368	100.0%