



Families Helping Families

# Iowa's Mental Health Advocate for Children, Youth & Families

A statewide family advocacy organization  
focusing on the behavioral, emotional, mental,  
and social health of all children.

## Resources for Disproportionate Minority Confinement/ Overrepresentation of Youth of Color

### Fact Sheet: Punitive Policies Hit Youth Of Color Hardest

The current crackdown on youthful misconduct by legislators in many states and in Congress is ironic, since youth crime has been on the decline for the sixth straight year. The latest juvenile-crime report by the Department of Justice shows a 68 % drop in the juvenile murder rate from 1993 to 1999, reaching its lowest in recorded history. Juvenile arrests for violence fell 36 % from its 1994 peak to 1999, the lowest they have been in a decade. Despite the continuing decline of youth crime, nearly every state has changed its laws to make it easier to prosecute youth as adults.

And in virtually every state, the great weight of punitive justice policies falls disproportionately on youth of color, who are overrepresented and receive disparate treatment at every stage of the juvenile justice system, particularly in secure confinement. For example:

- A study in California found that compared to white youths, minorities were 2.8 times more likely to be arrested for violent crimes, 6.2 times more likely to be tried in adult court and 7 times more likely to be sentenced to prison once they get there.
- Nationally in 1997, African-Americans were 15% of youth under age 18 but were: 26% of juvenile arrests, 31% of referrals to juvenile court, 44% of the detained population, 34% of youth formally processed by the juvenile court, 46% of youth sent to adult court, 32% of youth adjudicated delinquent, 40% of youth in residential placement, and 58% of youth in state adult prisons.
- Between 1988 and 1997, the percent increase in the number of cases involving detention was more than two times greater for African-American than for white youth (52% versus 25%, respectively). In fact, among all offense categories, African-American youth were more likely to be detained than white youth during every year between 1988 and 1997.
- In 1997, three out of four youth admitted to state prisons were minorities, over a third of which were non-violent offenders.

These discrepancies are not the result of young people of different racial groups committing different types of crimes. A nationwide study found that African-American and Latino youths are treated more severely than white teenagers charged with comparable crime at every step of the juvenile justice system:

- For youths charged with violent offenses, the average length of incarceration is 193 days for whites, 254 for African-Americans, and 305 for Latino youth.

106 South Booth • Anamosa, IA 52205

Phone (319) 462-2187 • Fax (319) 462-6789

E-Mail: [help@iffcmh.org](mailto:help@iffcmh.org) • Website: [www.iffcmh.org](http://www.iffcmh.org)

## “Children’s Mental Health Matters”

- Among those not previously admitted to a secure facility, African-Americans are six times as likely as whites to be incarcerated -nine times more likely if charged with a violent offense.
- For drug offenses, African-Americans are 48 times more likely than whites to be sentenced to juvenile prison.

The disparities are even more apparent among various states across the country, especially when particular states are isolated and highlighted.

- In Arizona in 1997, 244 white youth were in custody in Maricopa and Pima counties. At the same time, 975 African-American youths, 515 Latino youths, 215 Native American youths and 74 Asian youths were incarcerated.
- In Colorado, the 1997 custody rate for African-American youths was five times the rate for white youths. For Latino youths, the custody rate was more than 2.5 times the rate for whites; for Native Americans, twice the rate.
- In Utah, 1 out of every 12 African-American youth had a likelihood of commitment to a state public facility by the age of 18 (compared to 1 out of every 136 White youth).

## Sources:

Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Uniform Crime Reports for the United States 1999*.

Males, M., and Macallair, D. 2000. *Color of Justice: An analysis of Juvenile Adult Court Transfers in California*. Published by Building Blocks for Youth.

Porter, G. 2000. *Detention in Delinquency Cases, 1988-1997*. Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

Sickmund, M. 2000. *Offenders in Juvenile Court, 1997*. Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

Snyder, H. 2000. *Juvenile Arrests 1999*. Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

Poe-Yamagata, E., and Jones, M. 2000. *And Justice for Some*. Oakland, CA: National Council on Crime and Delinquency.

***Building Blocks for Youth***  
***For a fair and effective youth justice system***  
*...a comprehensive effort to protect minority youth in the justice system  
 and to promote rational and effective juvenile justice policies...*

106 South Booth • Anamosa, IA 52205  
 Phone (319) 462-2187 • Fax (319) 462-6789  
 E-Mail: [help@iffcmh.org](mailto:help@iffcmh.org) • Website: [www.iffcmh.org](http://www.iffcmh.org)

**“Children’s Mental Health Matters”**