

Getting Started on a Detention Utilization Study

One of the first steps in the JDAI process is to produce a Detention Utilization Study to help guide your detention reform work. Creating a detention utilization study is a three-step process:

- First, sites collect **aggregate data** on basic measures like admissions, average daily population, and length of stay. Those measures are disaggregated (i.e., broken down) by race, gender, age, and offense type.
- Second, JDAI sites dig deeper into **case-level data** to examine trends that might not be reflected in existing detention reports (e.g., involvement with the child welfare system, specific behavior treated as a VOP, etc.).
- Third, sites **synthesize, analyze, and present** both types of data into an illustrated report that brings the numbers to life. The final product should allow all stakeholders to draw data-driven conclusions about policies and practices that may need to be re-examined.

This document and the accompanying Excel workbook only cover the first step -- the aggregate data. Each description below corresponds to a table in the workbook, which includes multiple spreadsheets. More information about detention utilization studies can be found in *Planning for Juvenile Detention Reform: Data Collection Handbook* on the JDAI Help Desk.

The purpose of an aggregate data analysis is to provide a big picture overview of referral and admissions trends over a multi-year period. The tables in the workbook call for five years of annual data and eighteen months of monthly data. This document will guide you through the production of tables and cross-tabs that will ultimately allow you to paint a picture of each jurisdiction's youth population, DJJ referrals, detention admissions, length of stay, average daily detention population, and bed utilization.

As indicated by the Excel workbook, each dataset should be organized into crosstabs so that the data can be disaggregated in several ways - by year, by month, by race, by ethnicity, by gender, by age, and by offense (or other reason for detention). Once it is complete, the aggregate section of a detention utilization study should give the reader a broad understanding of county-wide trends in referrals and admissions.

POPULATION

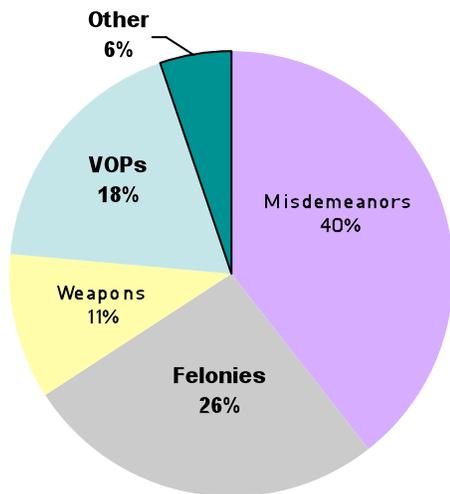
Table 1: Provides a breakdown of each jurisdiction's youth population over the past three years, which will give you a baseline against which you can measure referrals and detention admissions. 2006-2009 census data is available online from Easy Access to Juvenile Populations: http://ojjdp.ncjrs.gov/ojstatbb/ezapop/asp/comparison_selection.asp?selState=1. 2010 data should be available to you locally.

Table 2: Compares trends in youth population numbers, overall referrals, and detention admissions, and shows the relationship between all three measures. Graphs will depend on the numbers.

REFERRALS

Table 3: Cross-tabs on referrals: calendar year numbers by gender, ethnicity, race, offense category, and age. We have suggested some generic offense categories, but we encourage sites to modify the categories as necessary to make them useful. Below is an example of how you might graph and begin to interpret a single year's referrals, by offense category.

Total Referrals by Offense Type



Key Deductions:

- Nearly half of all referrals to the juvenile justice system in County X are for misdemeanor offenses.
- A significant amount of referrals to the JJ system in County X are for Violations of Probation.

Table 4: Referrals by month over 18 months. Same cross-tabs as Table 3.

Table 5: Allows you to begin to examine case flow by comparing the number of referrals to the number of formal juvenile petitions and criminal complaints filed. Same cross-tabs as Table 3.

DETENTION RATES

Table 6: Compares total referrals to total admissions to arrive at overall detention rates for the past 5 years.

Table 7: Compares detention rates by race. Shows whether youth of color are more, less, or equally likely to be detained. Bar graphs provide the clearest way to graph comparative detention rates.

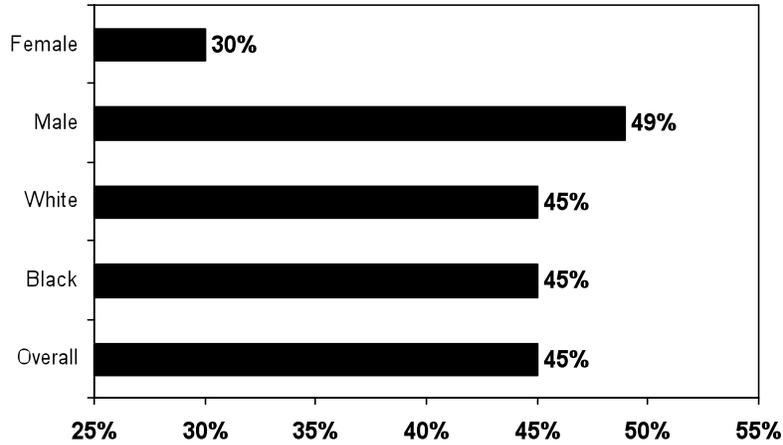


Table 8: Compares detention rates, including secure detention and home detention, by reason for detention. Shows differences in detention decisions between various offense categories.

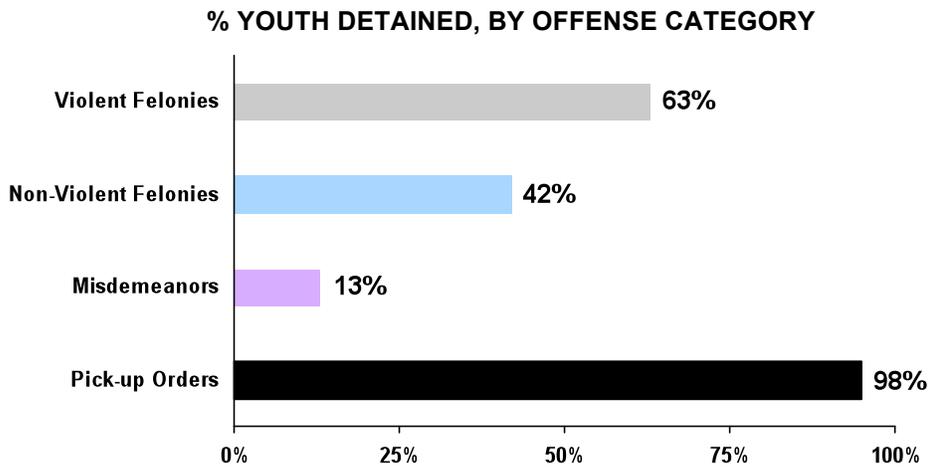


Table 9: Focuses on the five most common reasons that youth are detained, and compares detention rates among that top five.

Table 10: Detention admissions by year over 5 years. Based on cross-tabs from Table 3, but adds FTAs, other capias, and other court orders as offense categories.

Table 11: Length of stay by year over 3 years. Same cross-tabs as Table 10. This table is based on youth discharged during the relevant fiscal year. Table should be accompanied by an explanation of whether/how the analysis distinguished between temporary releases – e.g., for court dates – and actual discharges. Because outliers can significantly inflate the average length of stay, it’s important to provide sites with mean and median figures. An example of how to graph length of stay is below:

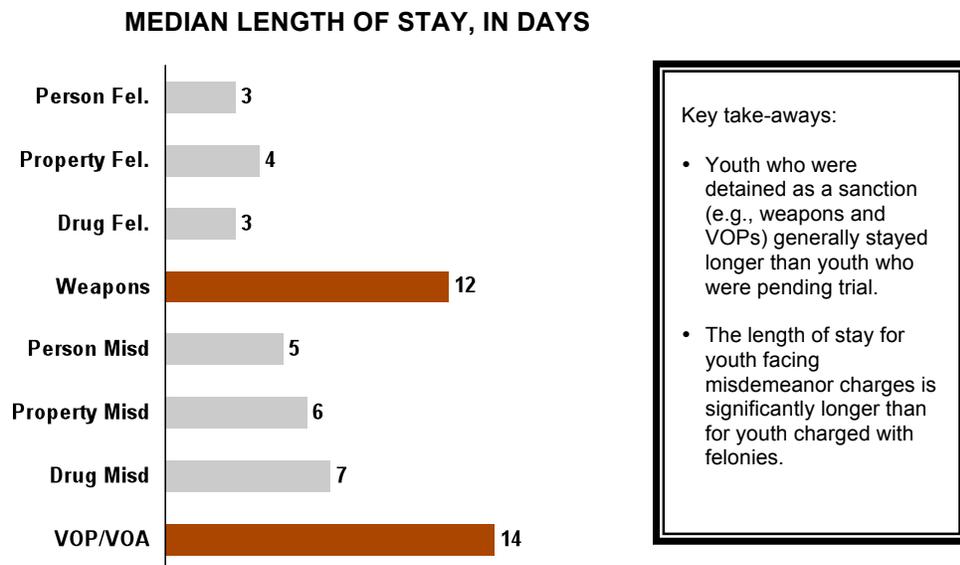


Table 12: A “bed utilization table” is a tool that sites can use to *illustrate and experiment with* the population impact of possible changes in admissions and length of stay. Population numbers are always driven by two things:

- (1) How many youth are being admitted to detention?
- (2) How long are those youth staying in detention?

This table uses admissions and length of stay to indicate what percentage of bed days are used for different offense categories. The highlighted columns of the table provide sample formulas that will allow you to experiment with the “bed day impact” of various changes in admission and length of stay.

Table 13: Detention admissions by month over 18 months. Plugging these figures into a two-dimensional column graph will make it easier to spot trends. For example:

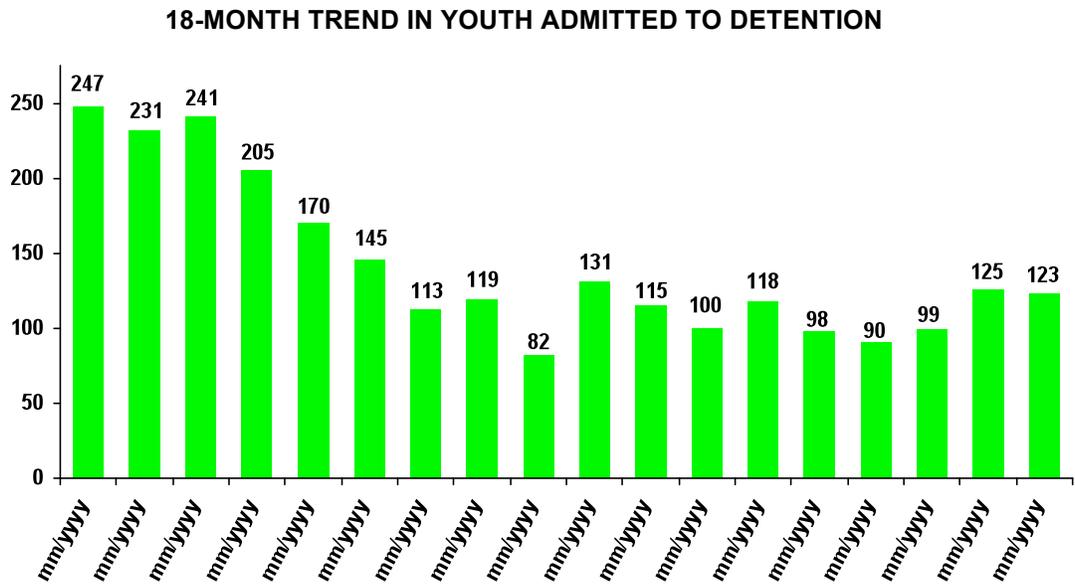
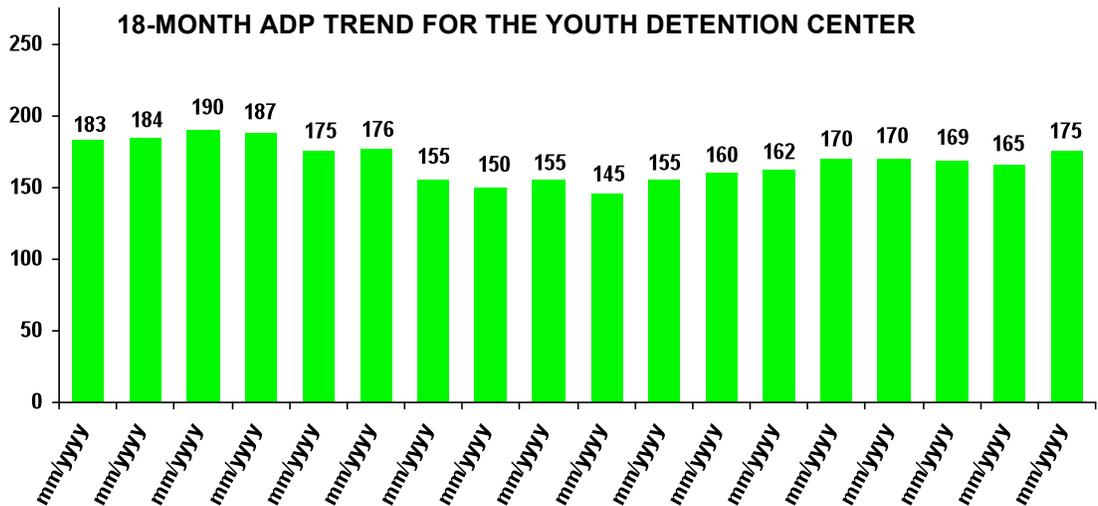


Table 14: Whereas table 13 reflects total monthly admissions, table 14 measures average daily population (ADP) by month.



Key take-away from comparing tables 13 and 14: Although there was a substantial decrease in detention admissions over the 18 month time span (table 13) the ADP remained relatively constant (table 14). These trends suggest that while admissions have been decreasing, lengths of stay have been increasing.

Important note about Table 14: In addition to the race, ethnicity, gender, offense, and age cross-tabs used in the rest of the workbook, the ADP table also includes a sixth set of breakdowns, which relate to the youth's stage in the court process: pre-adjudication (juvenile), adjudicated, pre-trial (county), and sentenced.

We recognize that it may be more difficult to collect precise ADP data about the youth's status in the process, especially over an 18-month time period. Remember that the Excel workbook is only a tool to help you organize information. If you cannot calculate accurate ADP data at this point in the JDAI process, don't let that delay the rest of your work. Instead of attempting to manually calculate ADPs for an 18-month time period, you may want to choose a particular day of the month (the 1st, the 15th, etc.), review population sheets from those 18 days to determine the breakdown by status in court process, and use that "snapshot" data as a temporary proxy for ADP.