

Trends in Youth Offending

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Introduction

Youth crime receives considerable media attention. Some of the below headlines demonstrate the tenor of much of this commentary:

- Youth crime making Queensland town ‘hell’ⁱ
- Fears over the rise of teenage crime gangsⁱⁱ
- The rise and rise of child crimeⁱⁱⁱ
- Police concern with African youth crime^{iv}

But what are the recent trends in youth crime? The following information draws together different data on youth crime, revealing a very different picture than might be suggested by these and other headlines.

Police Statistics

Police statistics provide one method of understanding trends in youth crime. Data from the NSW Police Force shows that the numbers of juvenile offenders proceeded against by police for property and violent offences fell respectively by 7.1% and 9.8% on average between 2007 and 2013.^v

Court Statistics

Statistics from the NSW Children’s Courts also reveal falls in recent years.

Year	Children’s Courts - Persons with Proven Offences
2001	8,562
2002	8,547
2003	7,903
2004	8,125
2005	8,428
2006	8,874
2007	9,141
2008	8,298
2009	9,810
2010	8,630
2011	8,633
2012	7,919
2013	7,401

Source: BOCSAR Annual Court Statistics Publications 2001-2014

The most recent figures show that the number of young people with proven offences was at the lowest level in 2013 for the last 13 years.

Juvenile Justice Supervision

Of those young people appearing in Children’s Courts in NSW, some will be sentenced to either community supervision by Juvenile Justice NSW or to serve a period of imprisonment.

Year	Community	Detention	All
2001/2	2863	1939	3653
2002/3	2930	1950	3668
2003/4	2849	1902	3547
2004/5	2760	1948	3484
2005/6	2839	2126	3687
2006/7	2392	2317	3561
2007/8	No data	No data	No data
2008/9	3788	2536	4018
2009/10	3300	2568	4447
2010/11	3399	2428	4317
2011/12	3281	2274	4030
2012/13	2916	1970	3594

Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Publications 2007-2014^{vi}

After peaking around 2009/10, the number of young people receiving supervision (either in the community or through a period of imprisonment) has fallen in recent years.

Taken together, these data sources suggest that there has been a reduction in youth offending in NSW in recent years. Despite the limitations of each type and source of data, there is strong evidence that there has been a fall in youth crime.

Exercises

- What are the possible explanations for this overall fall in youth crime in NSW?
- What might explain the apparent rise in youth crime between approximately 2003/4 and 2007/8?
- Would you expect trends in youth crime to move in the same direction as population-wide trends in crime?
- What might explain the positive correlation between youth property crime and violent crime noted above? Might levels of property offending be generally expected to move concomitantly with levels of violent offending?
- What trends in or aspects of youth crime might the above statistics conceal?
- What are the policy implications of a decline in youth crime?

Inter-Jurisdictional Comparisons

- To place these falls in some context, there is evidence that similar trends have been experienced internationally. For example,
- Youth crime in the UK has undergone a long-term trend decline since the early 1990s. In 2012, the number of children receiving a substantive disposal was 67% lower than in 1992. From 2003-2007, there was a marked departure from the longer term trend in the form of a rapid rise in youth offending of more than 20%. This rise was followed by a particularly pronounced decline in 2008 “which was so steep that the fall during 2008 alone was sufficient to compensate for the cumulative rises in the previous for years”.^{vii}
- In the US, crime rates have fallen dramatically for young people since the early 1990s. While the adult arrest rate has dropped almost 30% from 1995-2005, the youth rate has decreased almost 50%. Arrest rates for juveniles in 2005 were at their lowest point in over 40 years.^{viii}

Exercises

- Do these figures change any explanations provided for the decline in youth crime in NSW? If so, how?
- What further research is needed to better understand these trends in youth crime?
- What might influence future trends in youth crime?
- Why might the crime decline in other jurisdictions have started earlier than the decline in Australia?

ⁱHall, M 2012, ‘Youth crime making Queensland town ‘hell’’, ABC News, 10 October, viewed 17 September 2012, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2012-10-09/youth-crime-making-far-north-town-27hell27/4303932>.

ⁱⁱStyles, A 2011, ‘Fears over the rise of teenage crime gangs’, WA News, viewed 17 September 2014, <http://www.watoday.com.au/wa-news/fears-over-the-rise-of-teenage-crime-gangs-20111111-1nbnxm.html>.

ⁱⁱⁱMcCulloch, D 2013, ‘The rise and rise of child crime’, Monash Journalism, viewed 17 September 2014, <http://artsonline.monash.edu.au/moj/the-rise-and-rise-of-child-crime/>.

^{iv}Williams, N 2012, ‘Police concern with African youth crime’, Star Community, viewed 17 September 2014, <http://dandenong.starcommunity.com.au/journal/2012-08-23/police-concern-with-african-youth-crime/>.

^vNSW Bureau of Crime and Statistics Research 2014, Is juvenile crime increasing?, viewed 8 September 2014, http://www.bocsar.nsw.gov.au/bocsar/bocsar_fastfact_03.html.

^{vi}See Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2014, Youth justice in Australia 2012-13, Government of Australia, viewed 25 August 2014, <http://www.aihw.gov.au/publication-detail/?id=60129546738>; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2013, Youth justice in Australia 2011-12: an overview, Government of Australia, viewed 25 August 2014, <http://www.aihw.gov.au/publication-detail/?id=60129543149>; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2012, Juvenile justice in Australia 2010-11, Government of Australia, viewed 25 August 2014, <http://www.aihw.gov.au/publication-detail/?id=10737422554>; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2011, Juvenile justice in Australia 2009-10, Government of Australia, viewed 25 August 2014, <http://www.aihw.gov.au/publication-detail/?id=10737420208>; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2010, Juvenile justice in Australia 2008-09, Government of Australia, viewed 25 August 2014, <http://www.aihw.gov.au/publication-detail/?id=10737418606>; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2009, Juvenile justice in Australia 2007-08, Government of Australia, viewed 25 August 2014, <http://www.aihw.gov.au/publication-detail/?id=6442468301>; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2008, Juvenile justice in Australia 2006-07, Government of Australia, viewed 25 August 2014, <http://www.aihw.gov.au/publication-detail/?id=6442468142>; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2007, Juvenile justice in Australia 2005-06, Government of Australia, viewed 25 August 2014, <http://www.aihw.gov.au/publication-detail/?id=6442468010>; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2007, Juvenile justice in Australia 2004-5, Government of Australia, viewed 25 August 2014, <http://www.aihw.gov.au/publication-detail/?id=6442467954>.

^{vii}All data for the UK taken from Bateman, T 2014, ‘Where has all the Youth Crime Gone? Youth Justice in an Age of Austerity’, Children & Society, vol. 28, no. 5, pp. 416-424, viewed 25 August 2014, Wiley Online Library.

^{viii}All data for the US taken from Wilson & Petersilia 2011, Crime and Public Policy, Oxford University Press, New York.