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Downward trend in the number of young offenders, 2006 to 2015

The Crime Statistics Agency's (CSA's) statistical release for the year ending June 2015 identified that the annual number of unique alleged offenders aged under 25 has been decreasing over the past five years, alongside a corresponding increase in the number of offenders aged 25 and older. Figure 1 illustrates that these divergent trends are only apparent over the past five years.

Figure 1: Annual number of unique offenders aged under 25 and 25 or older, 2006 to 2015



To further examine the apparent decrease in young offenders in particular, the CSA conducted analyses to identify age-specific trends in the number of all alleged offenders, offending incidents and offences over the past ten years (from July 2005 to June 2015). The analyses compared two groups of offenders: (1) those individuals who were recorded by police for at least one offence in the period from 2006 to 2010 and (2) those recorded for at least one offence in the period from 2011 to 2015. Offenders in each of these periods were categorised into five year age cohorts, based on their year of birth. This enabled comparison of unique five-year age cohorts of people across the two five-year time periods. For example those born between 1992 and 1996 (aged 10 to 14 in 2006) are a completely separate group of offenders compared to those born between 1997 and 2001 (aged 10 to 14 in 2011). For the purpose of this paper, 'cohort 1' will be used to describe age groupings in 2006 and 'cohort 2' will be used to describe age groupings in 2011.

The number of unique offenders aged 10 to 14 decreased by 37% from 2006-10 to 2011-15.

Between 2011 and 2015, cohort 2 included 17,830 unique 10 to 14 year old offenders. This is 37.4% lower than the number of unique 10 to 14 year old offenders that comprised cohort 1 between 2006 and 2010. Though not described in detail here, the number of unique offenders across all other age cohorts increased over the ten year period, with the exception of those aged 15 to 19. The size of this group remained relatively stable, comprising 44,949 unique offenders between 2006 and 2010 and 44,607 between 2011 and 2015.

Table 1: 2006-10 to 2011-15 comparison of age-specific unique offenders, offences and average number of offences per unique offender¹

Age category in 2006		10-14	15-19	20-24
Years of birth		1992-96	1987-91	1982-86
Time period 1: 2006-2010	Unique offenders (n)	28,494	44,949	33,558
	Incidents (n)	73,499	117,937	81,645
	Incidents per offender (m)	1.8	1.7	1.6
	Offences (n)	109,676	196,518	156,792
	Offences per offender (m)	3.8	4.4	4.7
Age category in 2011		10-14	15-19	20-24
Years of birth		1997-2001	1992-96	1987-91
Time period 2: 2011-2015	Unique offenders (n)	17,830	44,607	45,035
	Incidents (n)	59,082	132,981	119,000
	Incidents per offender (m)	2.2	1.9	1.7
	Offences (n)	96,337	221,623	216,129
	Offences per offender (m)	5.4	5.0	4.8
Percentage change (%)	Unique offenders	-37.4	-0.8	34.2
	Incidents	-19.6	12.8	45.8
	Incidents per offender	22.9	10.4	6.6
	Offences	-12.2	12.8	40.4
	Offences per offender	40.4	13.6	2.7

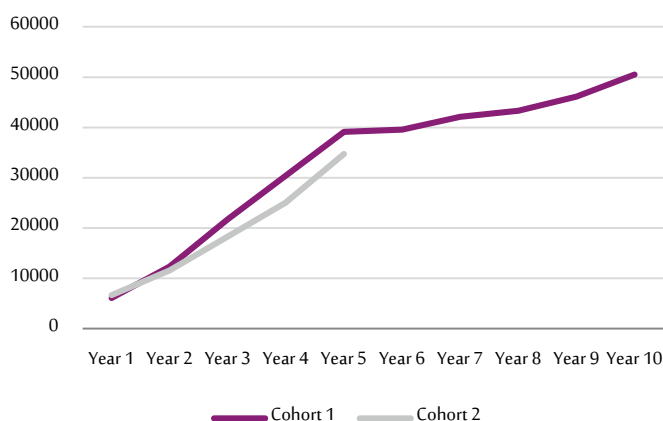
The average number of offences and offending incidents per offender increased for 10 to 14 year olds from 2006-10 to 2011-15

Despite the decrease in the number of young offenders over the past ten years, the average number of offending incidents and offences recorded per unique offender increased for those aged 10 to 14 from 2006-10 to 2011-15. There was a 22.9% increase in the average number of offending incidents per unique offender across these cohorts, and a 40.4% increase in the average number of offences recorded per unique offender.

The total number of offences recorded for 10 to 14 year olds in 2011-15 was lower than the total number of offences recorded for 10 to 14 year olds in 2006-10.

Figures 2 and 3 illustrate the number of offences and offending incidents over the first five years of offending for cohort 1 compared to cohort 2 of 10 to 14 year olds. Figure 2 shows that the number of offences recorded for both groups follows a similar pattern over their first five years of offending, and that only slightly fewer offences were recorded each year for cohort 2, despite the fact that this cohort comprised 37.4% fewer individuals.

Figure 2: Number of offences recorded for 10-14 year olds



In their fifth year of offending, the latter cohort of 10-14 year olds had 23% less offending incidents recorded than the earlier cohort of 10-14 year olds.

Figure 3 shows that there is a greater difference between the number of offending incidents for cohorts 1 and 2 of 10 to 14 year olds. At the peak of their offending to date (the fifth offending year), those in cohort 1 had 25,697 incidents recorded, while those in cohort 2 had 22.9% less incidents recorded (19,800).

Over half of all 10 to 14 year olds continue to be recorded for only a single offence over their first five years of offending.

Figure 4, however, shows over half of the young people in both cohorts 1 and 2 had only a single offence recorded against them, with a slightly higher proportion of offenders in cohort 2 committing five or more offences over their first five years of offending.

Figure 3: Number of incidents recorded for 10-14 year olds

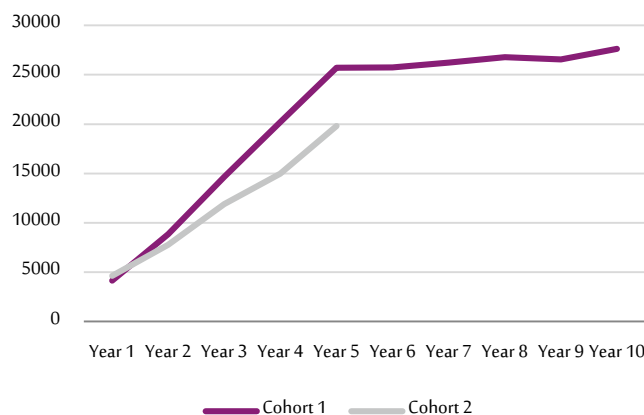
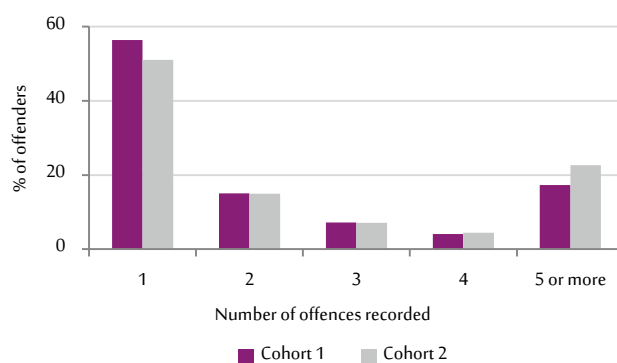


Figure 4: Number of offences recorded per 10-14 year old offender over first five years of offending



The identified drop in the number of young people offending is not unique to Victoria, with reports of similar declines in New South Wales² and internationally in the United States³ and the United Kingdom⁴. Further research is required to determine whether there are demographic or offence type differences between the two cohorts of young people, and the impact of policing practices on the number of young offenders and their rate of offending.

¹ The same cohort of offenders (by year of birth) is indicated by the same column colour across the two time periods.

² Weatherburn, D., Freeman, K. & Holmes, J. (2014). Young but not so restless: Trends in the age-specific rate of offending. Sydney: NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research.

³ Farrell, G., Laycock, G. & Tilley, N. (2015). Debuts and legacies: the crime drop and the role of adolescence-limited and persistent offending. *Crime Science*, 4(16).

⁴ Bateman, T. (2014). Where has all the youth crime gone? Youth justice in an age of austerity. *Child and Society*, 28(5).