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# Co-offending among young Victorian offenders in 2016

Previous research has shown that young people frequently commit offences in the company of their peers and are more likely to commit offences in groups than older age groups. McCord and Conway (2005)1 identified that co-offending behaviour amongst young people is related to increases in the rate of recidivism and seriousness of offending and a lower age at onset of offending. The objective of this paper is to explore how many young Victorians offend with others, compared to the number that offend on their own, and whether the rate of co-offending amongst young people has changed over time. This paper also examines the characteristics of young co-offenders, who they offend with and the types of offences they commit.

In this paper, young offenders are defined as those who were recorded by Victoria Police for at least one non-family violence related offence in any year, and were aged between 10 and 17 years at the time of that offence. These young offenders were classified as ‘co-offenders’ if they were recorded as offending with at least one other person on one or more occasions during a single year. If they were not recorded as offending with any other people during the year, they were classified as individual offenders.

This paper also refers to the number of ‘co-offender offences’ which are the number of alleged offences involving a young offender and at least one other offender. The number of ‘individual offences’ are those recorded as involving only one alleged young offender.

## 1. Has the proportion of young offenders who co-offend changed over time? How does this compare with the proportion of older offenders?

*In 2007, 62.6% of 10 to 17 offenders were co-offenders. This decreased to 56.1% in 2016, compared with 29.7% of 18 to 24 year olds.*

In 2016, there were 6,819 unique alleged young offenders recorded by police and 3,828 (56.1%) of them were classified

as co-offenders. As shown in Figure 1, over the last ten years, the proportion of young people classified as co-offenders has been relatively stable with a slight decrease from 62.6% in 2007 to 56.1% in 2016. Older age groups exhibited a different pattern: the proportion that were co-offenders aged 18 to 24 and 25 or older dropped between 2007 and 2010 and then remained relatively stable to 2016 (with 29.7% of 18 to 24 year olds classified as co-offenders in 2016 and 18.6% of those aged 25 or older).

Figure 1: Annual proportion of offenders classified as co-offenders by age group, 2007 to 2016

## 2. How many other offenders do young co-offenders offend with?

*The vast majority of young co-offenders offended with a maximum of one or two others in 2016.*

Figure 2 shows the maximum number of other offenders each young co-offender offended with in 2016. The largest proportion of co-offenders (43.0%) only offended with one other person, while 17.4% offended with 4 or more people.

Figure 2: Proportion of young co-offenders by number of others offended with, 2016

## 3. Who do young people offend with?

*More than 70% of young co-offenders only offended with other young people.*

Figure 3 illustrates that the majority of young co-offenders were only recorded for offences with other young offenders. The proportion who only offended with young people decreased as the age of the offender increased. Almost all young offenders aged 10 to 12 years (92.2%) only committed offences with other young people, while just over half of the 16 to 17 year old offenders (56.9%) only offended with other young people.

Figure 3: Proportion of young co-offenders by age group of those they offended with, 2016

\* Note that this figure excludes offenders with an unknown age (n=30).

## 4. What are the characteristics of young co-offenders?

*Young co-offenders are more likely to be male, aged between 10 and 12 years and reside in the 30% most disadvantaged postcodes in Victoria.*

The characteristics of young co-offenders were compared with the characteristics of young individual offenders using chi-square tests, the results of which are detailed in Table 1. Males were more likely to be co-offenders: 57.7% of all young male offenders were classified as co-offenders in 2016 compared to 52.0% of females.

Amongst young offenders, 10 to 12 year olds were slightly more likely to co-offend: 61.5% of 10 to 12 year olds were recorded for at least one co-offence in 2016 compared to 59.4% of 13 to 15 year olds and 52.3% of 16 to 17 year olds.

Offenders’ levels of socio-economic disadvantage were determined based on where the offender resided as at their earliest offence in 2016, using the Australian Bureau of Statistics Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage. Those who resided in the 30% most disadvantaged postcodes were the most likely to co-offend: 58.5% were co-offenders compared to 55.6% of those who resided in the middle 40% of postcodes and 51.1% of those who resided in the 30% least disadvantaged postcodes.

Table 1: Characteristics of young individual offenders and co-offenders

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Individual offenders** | | **Co-offenders** | | **Signif.** |
|  | **n** | **%** | **n** | **%** |  |
| **Sex\*** |  |  |  |  | <.00011 |
| Male | 2,099 | 42.3 | 2,867 | 57.7 |  |
| Female | 882 | 48.0 | 956 | 52.0 |  |
| **Age group** |  |  |  |  | <.00012 |
| 10-12 | 177 | 38.5 | 283 | 61.5 |  |
| 13-15 | 1,253 | 40.6 | 1,834 | 59.4 |  |
| 16-17 | 1,561 | 47.7 | 1,711 | 52.3 |  |
| **Socio-economic disadvantage** |  |  |  |  | <.00013 |
| 30% most disadvantaged postcode | 1,105 | 41.5 | 1,556 | 58.5 |  |
| 40% middle postcode | 1,096 | 44.4 | 1,370 | 55.6 |  |
| 30% least disadvantaged postcode | 602 | 48.9 | 628 | 51.0 |  |
| \*Excludes young offenders with an unknown sex | | | | | |
| 2(2) = 21.00 *p*<.0001, Cramer's V = 0.06 | | | | | |
| 2 2(2) = 38.49 *p*<.0001, Cramer's V = 0.08 | | | | | |
| 3 2(2) = 18.98 *p*<.0001, Cramer's V = 0.05 | | | | | |

## 5. How many offences are recorded for young co-offenders and has this changed over time?

*In 2016, 27.6% of all offences recorded for young offenders involved more than one offender, which decreased from 37.2% in 2007.*

In 2016, a total of 23,788 offences were recorded that involved at least one young offender. Of these, less than a third (27.6%, n=6,570) involved two or more offenders as depicted in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Annual proportion of youth offences that involve more than one offender, 2007 to 2016

The proportion of offences recorded for young people involving two or more offenders has been declining over the last decade. It was highest in 2008 at 38.8% and gradually dropped to 27.6% of offences in 2016.

## 6. What offences are most likely to involve a young co-offender?

*The offence type most likely to involve co-offenders was robbery.*

Though offences recorded for young offenders are more likely to involve just one alleged offender overall, chi-square analysis showed that certain offence types had a higher likelihood of involving more than one offender in 2016.

As shown in Table 2, robbery was the offence most likely to be a co-offender offence (61.3%), followed by burglary/break and enter (46.7%). On the other hand, breach of order offences were, unsurprisingly, most likely to be individual offences in 2016 (98.2%).

Table 2: Top 5 most likely and least likely offence types that involve more than one offender, 2016

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Individual offences** | | **Co-offender offences** | |
|  | **n** | **%** | **n** | **%** |
| **Most likely to be co-offender offences:** |  |  |  |  |
| 1. Robbery | 274 | 38.7 | 434 | 61.3 |
| 2. Burglary/Break and enter | 980 | 53.3 | 857 | 46.7 |
| 3. Public nuisance offences | 222 | 59.4 | 152 | 40.6 |
| 4. Arson | 192 | 59.6 | 130 | 40.4 |
| 5. Theft | 5,343 | 66.1 | 2,740 | 33.9 |
| **Least likely to be co-offender offences:** |  |  |  |  |
| 1. Breaches of orders | 1,006 | 98.2 | 18 | 1.8 |
| 2. Justice procedures | 590 | 93.5 | 41 | 6.5 |
| 3. Drug use and possession | 914 | 90.0 | 102 | 10.0 |
| 4. Weapons and explosives offences | 772 | 89.8 | 88 | 10.2 |
| 5. Sexual offences | 385 | 89.1 | 47 | 10.9 |

2 (18) = 1,972.11 p<.0001, Cramer's V = 0.29

\*Note: Excludes offence subdivsions with less than 50 offences recorded

Additional analysis was conducted to examine the proportion of offences involving co-offenders across specific offence types including serious assault, theft of and from a motor vehicle and residential burglary (aggravated burglaries that occurred at a residential location). Figure 5 shows that the proportion of these offences types that involved co-offenders has been declining over the last decade. The number of serious assault offences involving co-offenders had the largest proportional decrease, dropping from 41.3% of all serious assault offences recorded for young people in 2007 to 29.3% in 2016.

Figure 5: Annual proportion of youth offences that involved co-offending for selected offence types, 2007 to 2016

There were more modest decreases in the proportion of offences involving co-offenders across the other offence types examined over the ten year period. The proportion of motor vehicle theft offences recorded for young people involving more than one offender dropped from 61.5% to 51.8%, the proportion of theft from a motor vehicle offences dropped from 48.3% to 36.8%; and the proportion of residential burglary offences dropped from 50.9% to 49.5% in 2016. There was an increase in the proportion of residential burglaries involving co-offenders from 2014 to 2016. However, this proportional increase was somewhat exaggerated due to relatively small numbers of residential burglaries overall (increase from 47 to 189).

The brief analysis here supports previous research into co-offending amongst young people1, demonstrating that young offenders are more likely to commit offences in groups of two or more people when compared with older offenders. Co-offending amongst young offenders appears to have been gradually decreasing over the past ten years. Nevertheless, in 2016 more than half of all young Victorian alleged offenders were recorded for at least one offence that involved other offenders.

McCord, J. and Conway, K. (2005). *Co-Offending and Patterns of Juvenile Crime.* U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice.