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Are more first-time young offenders being recorded for serious crimes than in the past?

Over recent years the Victorian community has expressed concern about young offenders, especially those who commit violent or serious crimes such as assault, motor vehicle theft, robbery or burglary. This issue has also been the subject of media coverage¹, which has suggested police are recording more first-time young offenders for serious crimes than in the past.

This analysis examines the offences recorded by police for alleged young offenders aged between 10 and 17 years old on the first day they were ever recorded for offences, where that day was between 1 January 2012 and 31 December 2016. This sample included 23,973 unique alleged first-time young offenders. Kendall's rank order correlations were used to determine if any changes observed over time were statistically significant.

The number of alleged first-time young offenders fell from 5,654 in 2012 to 4,414 in 2016, an average decrease of 5.8% per year. Their average age at the time of their first recorded offending day was stable across the five years at approximately 15 years old.

1. Have the types of offences recorded for first-time young offenders changed over time?

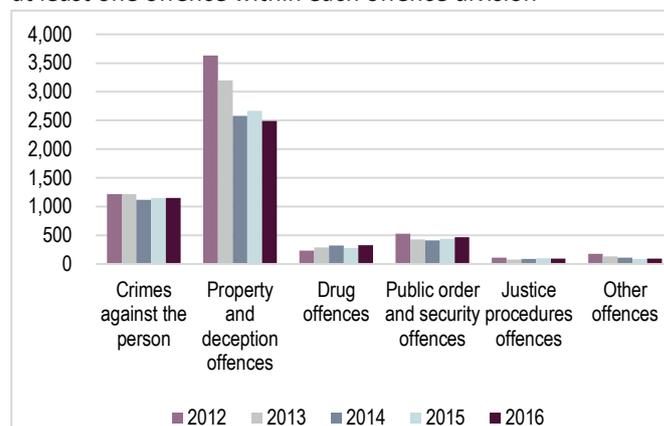
The number of first-time young offenders recorded for crimes against the person has remained stable over time.

Figure 1 shows the number of first-time young offenders recorded by police for an offence within each of the high-level offence divisions used by the Crime Statistics Agency (CSA). The number of first-time young offenders recorded for crimes against the person remained stable over time, while the number recorded for a property and deception offence significantly decreased by an average 8.6% per year. Further analysis showed this was primarily driven by a drop in those recorded for stealing from a retail store.

The number recorded for a drug offence significantly increased from 235 offenders in 2012 to 329 in 2016, an average increase of 9.6% per year. Further analysis showed this was mostly driven by growth in those recorded for a drug possession offence. The number of young offenders recorded

for a public order and security offence or a justice procedures offence remained stable over the five years, while the number recorded for other offences decreased significantly by 13.3% per year on average.

Figure 1: Number of first-time young offenders recorded for at least one offence within each offence division



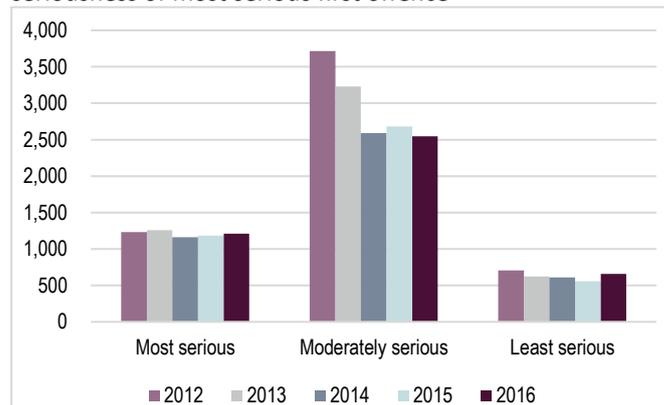
* Offenders may be recorded for offences in more than one division

2. Are more first-time young offenders being recorded for very serious offences?

The number of first-time young offenders recorded for very serious offences has remained stable over the past five years.

Each first-time young offender's most serious recorded offence was identified using the CSA's Offence Index², which ranks offences according to their seriousness. These ranks were divided into three equal categories: *Most serious* (including offences such as murder, assault, or robbery), *Moderately serious*, (for example, stealing from a retail store, or criminal damage), and *Least serious* (for example, drug possession, or trespass). As shown in Figure 2, the number of first-time young offenders whose most serious first recorded offence was in the *Most serious* group remained stable over the five years, as did the number in the *Least serious* group.

Figure 2: Number of first-time young offenders by seriousness of most serious first offence



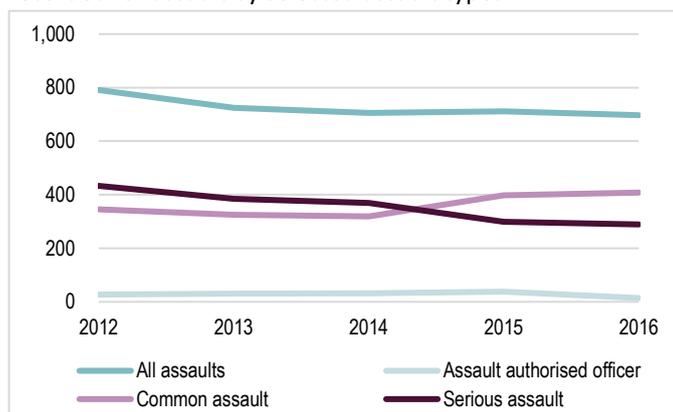
The number whose most serious first offence was in the *Moderately serious* group significantly declined over the five years by an average 8.6% per year. Further analysis showed this drop was primarily driven by the decline in the number of young offenders recorded for stealing from a retail store.

3. Are more first-time young offenders being recorded for assault, sexual assault, motor vehicle theft, robbery or burglary?

There has been a shift towards less serious assaults over the past five years.

Figure 3 shows the number of first-time young offenders recorded for any type of assault declined slightly over the past five years, though this trend was not statistically significant. However, the number recorded for serious assault significantly decreased by an average of 9.4% per year, and to a lesser degree, the number recorded for common assault significantly increased by an average 4.9% per year. This shift towards less serious assaults was most apparent in the past two years.

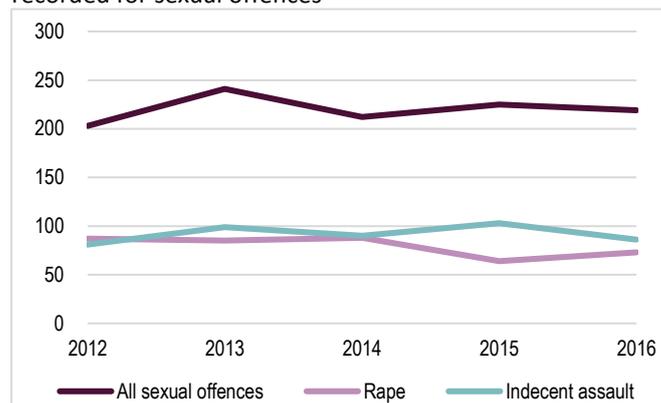
Figure 3: Number of alleged first-time young offenders recorded for assault by selected assault types



The number of first-time young offenders recorded for sexual offences has remained stable over the past five years.

Figure 4 shows the number of first-time young offenders recorded for a sexual offence has remained stable over the past five years. The number recorded for rape has declined slightly, though this trend was not statistically significant. The number recorded for indecent assault has risen slightly, though this trend was also not statistically significant. Numbers in the other sexual offence groups were too small to statistically test for trends.

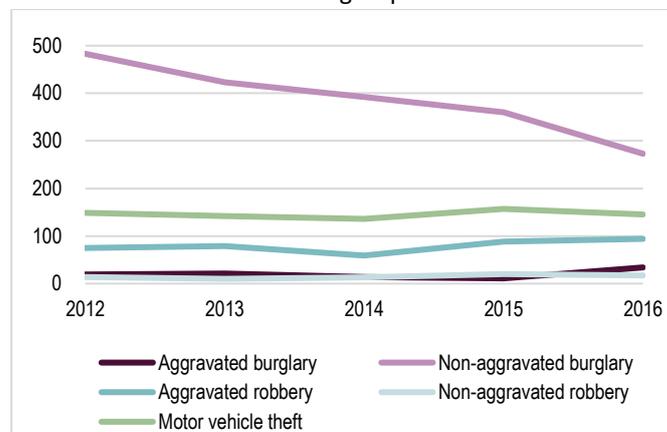
Figure 4: Number of alleged first-time young offenders recorded for sexual offences



The number of first-time young offenders recorded for non-aggravated burglary has decreased over the past five years.

As shown in Figure 5, the number of first-time young offenders recorded for non-aggravated burglary decreased significantly by an average of 13.0% per year. There was no statistically significant change in the number recorded for aggravated robbery or motor vehicle theft. The number recorded for either aggravated burglary or non-aggravated robbery was too small to statistically test for trends over time. Less than 0.8% of the first-time young offenders in any of the years had one of these offence types recorded against them.

Figure 5: Number of alleged first-time young offenders recorded for selected offence groups



Summary

The number of first-time young offenders recorded for very serious crimes has largely remained stable over the past five years. In addition, there is no evidence of recent increases in the number of assaults, sexual assaults, burglaries, aggravated robberies or motor vehicle thefts recorded for first-time young offenders in Victoria.

¹ "Victorian youths in hardcore wave of violence" – The Australian, 20 April 2017.

² For more information, visit our website at crimestatistics.vic.gov.au/about-the-data/explanatory-notes.