



SCOTTISH

CHILDREN'S REPORTER

ADMINISTRATION

★ Persistent Young Offenders

**A study of children identified as
persistent young offenders in Scotland
(2003-04, 2004-05 and 2005-06)**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Children's Hearings System is the care and justice system for children in Scotland. A child can be referred to the Children's Reporter by any concerned person if they are in need of compulsory measures of supervision for their care, protection, behaviour or they are alleged to have committed an offence. A small number of children are repeatedly referred to the Reporter for alleged offending behaviour. These "persistent young offenders" were defined by the Scottish Executive, for the purposes of monitoring, as those children with five or more offence referrals to the Reporter within the previous six months.

A set of national standards was developed by the Scottish Executive in 2002, with the aim of reducing the number of children identified as persistent young offenders in 2003-04 by 10% by 2005-06. Thereafter another target was set by the Scottish Executive of a further 10% reduction in persistent young offender numbers by 2008.¹ As part of the monitoring of this national standard, the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA) and the Scottish Executive produced quarterly and annual Youth Justice Performance Reports. The data for these monitoring reports were produced by SCRA from its Referrals Administration Database (RAD).

This SCRA study comprises a more detailed analysis of the data produced for the Youth Justice Performance Reports. It looks at trends in the children identified as persistent young offenders across the three years – 2003-04, 2004-05 and 2005-06; specifically:

- the gender, age and local authority areas of the children; and
- how long children continued to meet the "persistent young offender" definition.

Key findings

Numbers of persistent young offenders

- The number of persistent young offenders rose year on year; by 5% between 2003-04 and 2004-05 and by 10% between 2004-05 and 2005-06.
- There was a higher percentage increase in the number of girls than boys over the three years, a rise of 14% in each year for girls. Although girls continued to be a minority (14% to 16%) of persistent young offenders.
- The most common age for a child to be identified as a persistent young offender in each of the three years was 15 years.

¹ On 11 July 2007 the Scottish Executive announced that the national target, to reduce the numbers of persistent young offenders by 10%, had been reviewed and it had been decided that it should not be the primary measure of Government or agencies' performance. Instead a new set of measures are to be developed (Scottish Executive 11 July 2007).

- There were increases in the number of children aged 14 years and over who were identified as persistent young offenders across the three years. There was also an increase in the number of 12 year old boys. The number of 13 year olds and children aged 11 years and under either remained constant or decreased.

The same children?

- 45% of children aged eight to 14 years identified as persistent young offenders in 2003-04 ceased to persistently offend in either of the following years. A quarter persistently offended in each of the three years.
- Nearly one third of the children aged 12 years and under first identified between April and December 2003 were identified as persistent young offenders in each of the three years. Just under half met the definition in 2003-04 only.
- 19% of children aged 13 and 14 years first identified between April and December 2003 continued to persistently offend in each of the three years. This is a lower proportion than for the children aged 12 years and under identified during the same time period.
- Just under half of children aged between eight and 14 years identified as persistent young offenders in 2004-05 ceased to meet the definition in 2005-06.
- 35% of children aged 12 years and under identified as persistent young offenders between April and December 2004 continued to be in 2005-06.
- 47% of children aged 13 and 14 years identified as persistent young offenders between April and December 2004 continued to be in 2005-06. This is higher than the 12 years and under age group and therefore contrasts with the children identified as persistent young offenders in 2003.

INTRODUCTION

The Children's Hearings System

The Children's Hearings System is the care and justice system for children in Scotland. A child can be referred to the Children's Reporter by any person or agency if they are concerned about their care, protection, behaviour or if the child is alleged to have committed an offence. The Reporter will investigate each child's circumstances, and if he/ she is satisfied that one of the grounds for referral contained in section 52(2) *Children (Scotland) Act 1995* exist and that compulsory measures of supervision may be necessary, the child will be referred to a Children's Hearing (SCRA, 2006a).

Offence referrals to the Children's Reporter

In 2005-06 17,624 children were referred to the Reporter for allegedly having committed an offence. 40,931 children were referred on non-offence grounds.

TABLE 1: Number of children referred on offence grounds and offences referred to the Reporter in 2003-04, 2004-05 and 2005-06.

2003-04		2004-05		2005-06	
No. children	No. offences	No. children	No. offences	No. children	No. offences
16 470	52 960	17 494	57 058	17 624	59 600

Persistent young offenders

A small number of children are repeatedly referred to the Reporter for alleged offending behaviour. However these small numbers of children are responsible for a disproportionate number of offence referrals to the Reporter. For example in 2005-06, 8% of children referred to the Reporter on offence grounds were identified as persistent young offenders but as a group were responsible for nearly one third (32.5%) of all offence referrals to the Reporter (SCRA, 2006a).

In June 2002 the Scottish Executive published the '10-Point Action Plan for Tackling Youth Crime and Disorder'. Three of the ten points were aimed specifically at tackling persistent youth offending. A persistent young offender was defined as a child with five or more offence referrals to the Reporter within the previous six months.² A set of national standards was developed, with the aim of reducing the number of children persistently offending in 2003-04 by 10% by 2005-06. A further target has been set by the Scottish Executive – a further 10% reduction in persistent young offender numbers by 2008.³ As part of the monitoring of this national standard the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA) and the Scottish Executive

² One offence referral to the Reporter can include allegations of more than one offence having been committed.

³ On 11 July 2007 the Scottish Executive announced that the national target, to reduce the numbers of persistent young offenders by 10%, had been reviewed and it had been decided that it should not be the primary measure of Government or agencies performance. A new set of measures are to be developed (Scottish Executive 11 July 2007).

produce quarterly and annual Youth Justice Performance Reports (SCRA, 2006b).

SCRA research on offending patterns over one year, found that there were differences based on the age and gender of persistent young offenders. Girls reduced their offending behaviour more than boys. Children aged between eight and 12 years were the least likely to reduce the number of offences they committed in the year after being identified as persistent young offenders; while young people aged 15 years and over were the most likely to reduce their offending (SCRA, 2006c).

To better understand the trends in offending by persistent young offenders, SCRA undertook a detailed analysis of the data produced for the Youth Justice Performance Reports covering three years - 2003-04, 2004-05 and 2005-06; and more specifically looked at:

- The gender, age and local authority areas of the children; and
- Whether the children continued to be persistent offenders in subsequent years.

This study used the same data as the Youth Justice Performance Reports, and is intended to be a complement to these.⁴

⁴ The latest Scottish Youth Justice Performance Report covering 2006-07 was published by SCRA and the Scottish Executive on 11 July 2007 (SCRA, 2007). The data from the monitoring report were produced after this analysis was completed and are not included in this report.

METHODOLOGY

A list of all children identified as persistent young offenders was extracted from SCRA's Referral Administration Database (RAD) for each of the three years – 2003-04, 2004-05 and 2005-06. Each child was then traced to see if they had met the definition in the following year or years.

This data was analysed using SPSS (a statistical software package developed for the social sciences) by the age, gender and local authority area of the child.

Within the study cohorts of children were analysed according to when they first met the persistent young offender definition. At times these cohorts have also been divided into different age groups for analysis. Age groups are described as eight to 12 year olds or 13 to 14 year olds. The age groups stated denote the ages of the children when they first met the definition and do not show the exact ages of the children as the cohort gets older.

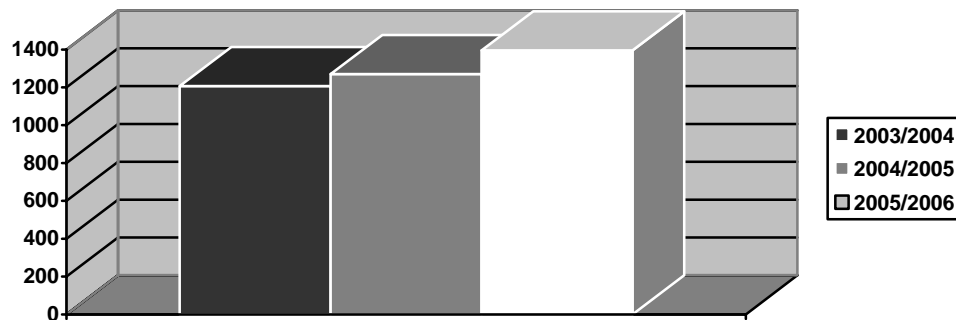
It should be noted that this study only considers whether children meet, or do not meet, the definition of a persistent young offender. It does not consider changes in the number of referrals to the Reporter (beyond the number required to meet the persistent young offender definition) or changes in the types of alleged offences referred to the Reporter. These are important limitations to this study.

FINDINGS

Age, gender and local authority area

The numbers of children identified as persistent young offenders increased year on year; by 5% between 2003-04 and 2004-05 and 10% between 2004-05 and 2005-06.

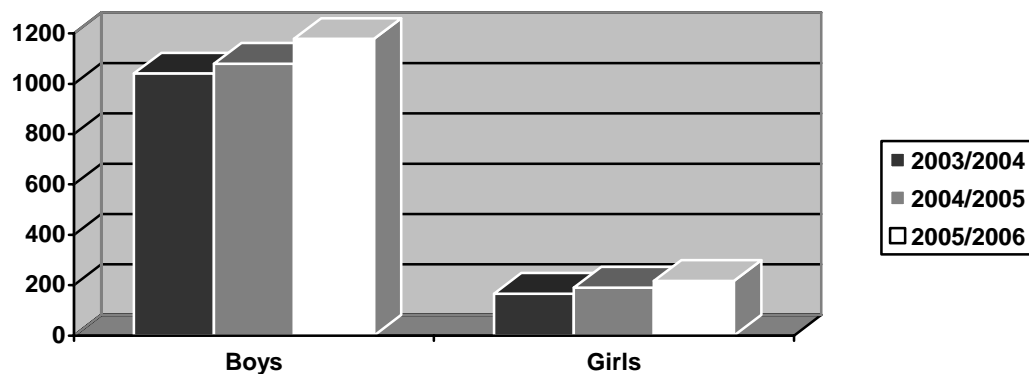
CHART 1: Numbers of children identified as persistent young offenders in 2003-04, 2004-05 and 2005-06



Gender

Within each year the proportion of boys and girls identified as persistent young offenders remained similar, with boys being the majority. The percentage of boys was 86% in 2003-04, falling to 85% and 84% in 2004-05 and 2005-06 respectively. The proportion of girls in 2003-04 was 14%. This increased to 15% and 16% respectively in each of the two subsequent years.

CHART 2: Gender of persistent young offenders for 2003-04, 2004-05 and 2005-06



When the figures for boys and girls were looked at individually there was a larger increase in the proportion of girls, a rise of 14% in each year compared to the number of boys, which increased by 4% between 2003-04 and 2004-05 and by 9% between 2004-05 and 2005-06. However, whilst the number of girls increased at a higher rate than boys, this did not have a significant impact on the proportion of the two genders as the number of boys remained much greater.

Age

The age of the children at the date they were identified as persistent young offenders for each year is illustrated in Table 2. A similar pattern of ages is seen for each year, the most common age being 15 years.

TABLE 2: Ages of children identified as persistent young offenders – 2003-04, 2004-05 and 2005-06

Age (years) ⁵	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06
8	Less than 5 (less than 1%)	Less than 5 (less than 1%)	Less than 5 (less than 1%)
9	9 (1%)	5 (less than 1%)	6 (less than 1%)
10	26 (2%)	15 (1%)	14 (1%)
11	33 (3%)	29 (2%)	32 (2%)
12	74 (6%)	98 (8%)	110 (8%)
13	183 (15%)	183 (14%)	181 (13%)
14	312 (26%)	313 (25%)	390 (28%)
15	479 (40%)	491 (39%)	535 (38%)
16	79 (7%)	102 (8%)	108 (8%)
17	8 (1%)	32 (3%)	16 (1%)
Total ⁶	1207	1270	1395

The percentage of the overall number of children identified as persistent young offenders in that year is shown in brackets.

Across each of the three years there were increases in the numbers of persistent offenders (boys and girls) aged 14 years and over. With the exception of the 12 year old group, the numbers of persistent young offenders within the lower ages remained constant or decreased. However, it was the number of 12 year old boys which accounted for the overall increase in the number of 12 year old persistent young offenders, and not girls (Table 3).

⁵ The age of criminal responsibility in Scotland is eight years; therefore a child below that age cannot be referred to the Reporter for allegedly having committed an offence and so cannot meet the persistent young offender definition.

⁶ When the total number of children identified as persistent young offenders is collated, no account is taken of the fact that a small number of children may move local authority areas during the year. Therefore if a child does move area, and continues to be referred to the Reporter, he or she will be recorded as a persistent young offender twice within the total figures for Scotland.

Number of children identified as persistent young offenders						
Age (years)	Boys			Girls		
	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06
8	Less than 5	Less than 5	Less than 5	0	0	0
9	9	5	6	0	0	0
10	24	14	14	Less than 5	Less than 5	0
11	31	28	31	Less than 5	Less than 5	Less than 5
12	62	90	100	12	8	10
13	152	151	146	31	32	35
14	267	255	316	45	58	74
15	414	420	462	65	71	73
16	70	85	88	9	17	20
17	8	30	12	0	Less than 5	Less than 5

The increase in numbers of 16 and 17 year olds may be an indication that larger numbers of these young people remained subject to Supervision Requirements in the Children's Hearings System as opposed to an actual increase in the number of persistent young offenders in this age group.

Local authority area

The numbers of persistent young offenders in each local authority area in each of the three years is shown in Table 4.

TABLE 4: Numbers of children identified as persistent young offenders by local authority area

Local authority area	Numbers of children identified as persistent young offenders		
	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06
Aberdeenshire	Less than 5	10	12
Angus	29	20	44
Argyll & Bute	18	19	21
City of Aberdeen	41	35	54
Clackmannan	17	26	24
Dumfries & Galloway	45	47	44
Dundee	109	93	80
East Ayrshire	26	52	48
East Dunbartonshire	14	7	11
East Lothian	Less than 5	8	5
East Renfrewshire	9	8	Less than 5
Edinburgh	89	90	92
Falkirk	37	64	52
Fife	50	61	78
Glasgow	218	210	252
Highland	57	68	37
Inverclyde	21	21	14
Midlothian	15	17	28
Moray	16	19	33
North Ayrshire	46	64	60
North Lanarkshire	73	89	105
Orkney	Less than 5	Less than 5	5
Perth & Kinross	31	23	28
Renfrewshire	25	18	26
Shetland	Less than 5	Less than 5	Less than 5
South Ayrshire	31	34	24
South Lanarkshire	54	49	72
Stirling	34	35	35
The Scottish Borders	20	17	21
West Dunbartonshire	34	32	37
West Lothian	23	17	29
Western Isles	14	12	16

- Seven of the 32 local authority areas met the national target of reducing the number of persistent young offenders by 10%.
- Dundee and East Renfrewshire had decreases in the numbers of persistent young offenders both between 2003-04 and 2004-05, and 2004-05 and 2005-06.
- Inverclyde had the same number in 2003-04 and 2004-05, before a decrease by a third in 2005-06.
- Twelve areas had decreasing numbers between 2003-04 and 2004-05, before these increased in 2004-05 and 2005-06.
- Eight areas had increases in 2004-05 from 2003-04, but then had decreases in 2005-06.
- Nine areas had increases in the numbers of children identified as persistent young offenders in both years.

Fast Track Children's Hearings Pilot

The Fast Track Children's Hearings pilot was part of the Scottish Executive's '10 point action plan for tackling youth crime and disorder'. The pilot began in February 2003 and finished in September 2005. Its aim was for the Children's Hearings System to respond quicker to children identified as persistent young offenders and to provide guaranteed access to services based on a thorough assessment (Scottish Executive, 2003, 2005). The pilot operated in six local authority areas. These pilot areas were compared to three other local authority areas, chosen as comparison areas for the purposes of the pilot, to see if there were any differences in trends in numbers of children identified as persistent young offenders.

TABLE 5: Children identified as persistent young offenders in the Fast Track Children's Hearings pilot and comparison areas between 2003-04, 2004-05 and 2005-06.

Local authority area	% Change between 2003-04 and 2004-05	% Change between 2004-05 and 2005-06	Overall % change between 2003-04 and 2005-06
Pilot areas			
Dundee	- 15%	- 14%	- 27%
East Ayrshire	+ 100%	- 8%	+ 85%
East Lothian	+166%	- 38%	+ 66%
North Ayrshire	+39%	- 6%	+30%
The Scottish Borders	- 15%	+23%	+5%
South Ayrshire	+10%	-29%	- 23%
Comparison areas			
Fife	+22%	+28%	+56%
Perth & Kinross	-26%	+22%	-10%
Renfrewshire	-28%	+44%	+ 4%

Although the pilot finished in September 2005, the number of children identified as persistent young offenders in pilot areas had decreased more by the end of 2005-06 than between 2003-04 and 2004-05 when the pilot was in operation. Only the Scottish Borders had an increase in the number of children identified as persistent young offenders between 2004-05 and 2005-06.

Key findings

- The number of children identified as persistent young offenders rose year on year; by 5% between 2003-04 and 2004-05 and by 10% between 2004-05 and 2005-06.
- There was a greater increase in the numbers of girls than boys - a rise of 14% in each year.
- The most common age for a child to be identified as a persistent young offender in each of the three years was 15 years.

- There was an increase in the number of children aged 14 years and over who were identified as persistent young offenders across the three years. This was true for both boys and girls. There was also an increase in the number of 12 year old boys. The number of 13 year olds and children aged 11 years and under either remained constant or decreased.

- Two local authority areas had lower numbers of children identified as persistent young offenders in their areas in both 2004-05 and 2005-06, than in 2003-04. Most areas showed a decrease in 2004-05 before an increase in 2005-06. The number of children who met the persistent young offender definition from the Fast Track pilot areas decreased more in 2005-06 than in 2004-05 despite the pilot ending in September 2005.

The Same Children?

This section looks at whether children identified as persistent young offenders continued to meet the definition in subsequent years.

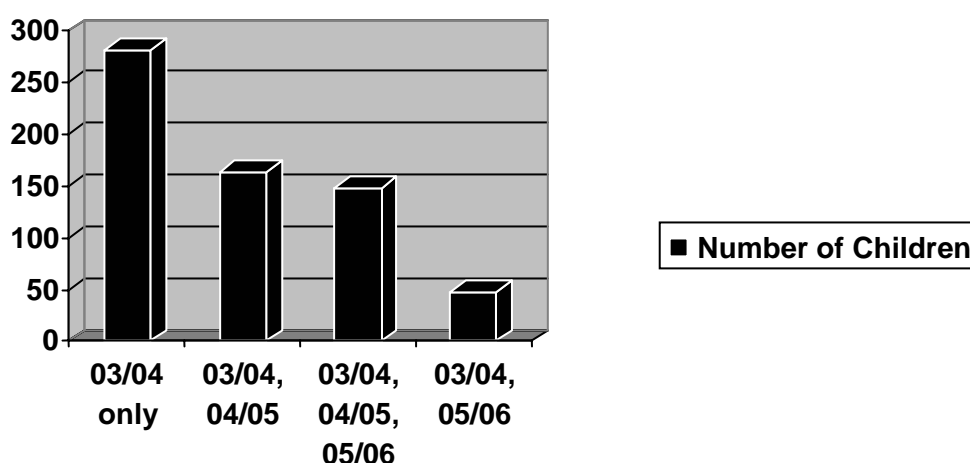
All ages

Each of the children aged between eight and 14 years in 2003-04 and 2004-05 was traced to establish if they had ceased to meet the persistent young offender definition⁷. This gives an indication of whether they had either stopped offending or reduced their offending behaviour to the extent where they did not continue to meet the persistent young offender definition.

Children identified as persistent young offenders in 2003-04

A breakdown of all children aged eight to 14 years identified as persistent young offenders in 2003-04 is detailed in Chart 3.

CHART 3: Children aged 8 to 14 years identified as persistent young offenders in 2003-04



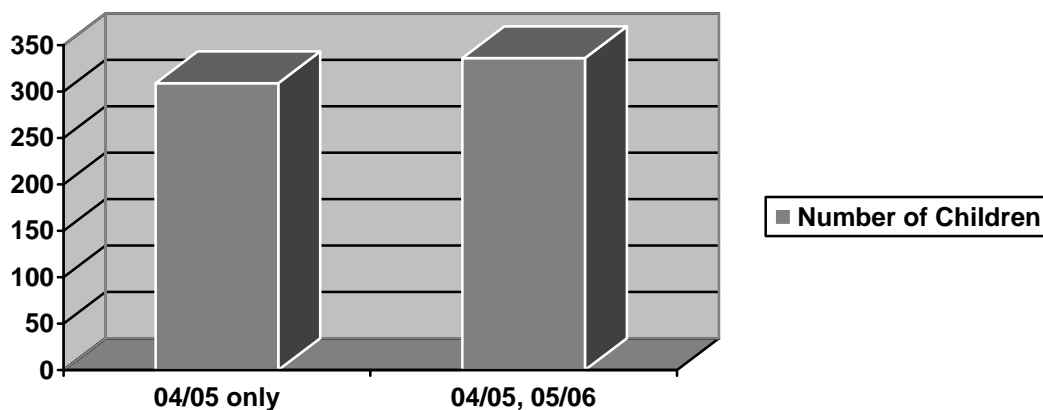
- 282 children aged between eight and 14 years (45%) identified as persistent young offenders in 2003-04 ceased to meet the definition in both of the following years.
- A quarter of the children continued to meet the definition in 2004-05 only. An important caveat to this is that children referred late in 2003-04 were not excluded at this point. Therefore there may be some children, albeit a very small minority, who had not yet received interventions to reduce their offending behaviour prior to 2004-05.
- Just under a quarter of the children aged eight to 14 years first identified as persistent young offenders in 2003-04 also met the persistent young offender definition in 2004-05 and 2005-06.
- 7% of the children ceased to be persistent young offenders in 2004-05 but met the definition again in 2005-06.

⁷ Those aged 15 years and over were excluded from this analysis to take account of the fact that they may have moved to the adult criminal justice system shortly after being identified as a persistent young offender, by virtue of their age; thus a referral would not automatically be made to the Reporter and recorded on RAD

Children identified as persistent young offenders in 2004-05

A breakdown of all children aged eight to 14 years identified as persistent young offenders in 2004-05 is shown in Chart 4:

CHART 4: Children aged 8 to 14 years identified as persistent young offenders in 2004-05



- Nearly half (48%) of the eight to 14 year olds identified as persistent young offenders in 2004-05 did not meet the persistent offender definition in 2005-06. This is slightly higher than those identified in 2003-04; however it does include children who were first identified in 2003-04. In the analysis of all persistent young offenders carried out by the Scottish Executive in 2006, 37% identified in 2004-05 did not continue to meet the definition in 2005-06. This is a lower figure than for the eight to 14 year olds in this research.

Different age groups

Children were separated into two groups based on age: eight to 12 year olds, and 13 to 14 year olds.⁸ Within each group the children who had been identified as persistent young offenders in the months January, February and March 2004 were excluded, to take account of the limited amount of time available for any intervention to have an effect on offending behaviour.

⁸ The selection of these age groups mirrors the approach taken in 'Further Down the Track. Fast Track Children's Hearings Pilot: Offending Patterns One Year On', to allow comparison.

2003-04

13 and 14 year olds

- There were 410 children aged 13 and 14 years identified as persistent young offenders between April and December 2003, 347 boys and 63 girls.
- 45% of these children were identified as persistent young offenders in 2003-04 only (i.e. they stopped persistently offending) and a further 29% were persistent young offenders in 2003-04 and 2004-05.
- 19% were persistent young offenders in 2003-04, 2004-05 and 2005-06. This is lower than for the 12 years and under age group.
- 8% first identified in 2003-04 stopped being persistent offenders in 2004-05, but were again identified as persistent young offenders in 2005-06.

8 to 12 year olds

- There were 131 children aged 12 years and under who were identified as persistent young offenders between April and December 2003, 118 boys and 13 girls.
- Nearly half (49%) were persistent young offenders in 2003-04 only.
- 9% were also identified as persistent young offenders in 2004-05.
- 11% first identified as persistent young offenders in 2003-04 stopped being persistent offenders in 2004-05 but were again identified in 2005-06.
- 31% were persistent young offenders in 2004-05 and 2005-06 as well as 2003-04.

Nearly one third of the 12 years and under age group, were identified as persistent young offenders in all three years, compared to 19% of the 13 and 14 year old age group. Further analysis of the 12 years and under age group was undertaken to try to identify whether there was a particular age group or area responsible for this trend.

TABLE 5: Children aged 12 years and under identified as persistent young offenders in 2003-04 who continued to be persistent young offenders in 2004-05 and 2005-06.

AGE	Total number of persistent young offenders identified in:	
	2003-04 (all)*	2003-04 and continued to be PYOs in all three years
8	Less than 5	Less than 5
9	9	Less than 5
10	26	8
11	31	8
12	62	22

* excluding January to March 2004

There were two girls amongst this group of 41 children.

Fifteen of the 41 children aged 12 years and under who were identified as persistent young offenders in all three years (2003-04, 2004-05 and 2005-06) came from Dundee. So nearly two thirds (65%) of all children from Dundee aged 12 years and under when they were identified as persistent young offenders in 2003-04, continued to meet the definition in 2004-05 and 2005-06. This contrasts with the overall reduction in the number of persistent young offenders in Dundee. Previous SCRA research concluded that a large proportion of persistent young offenders aged nine to 12 years who did not reduce their number of offences were from Dundee (SCRA, 2006c). Although the numbers from other local authority areas are low, one third of children aged 12 years and under from Glasgow (seven children) continued to meet the definition for all three years and similarly 42% (five children) from Edinburgh, indicating that this pattern is more widespread.

2004-05

13 and 14 year olds

There were 283 children aged 13 and 14 years *first* identified as persistent young offenders between April and December 2004, 226 boys and 57 girls. 53% were persistent young offenders in 2004-05 only, while 47% were also identified as persistent offenders in 2005-06.

8 to 12 year olds

There were 100 children aged 12 years or under *first* identified as persistent young offenders between April and December 2004, 93 boys and seven girls. 65% of these children were persistent young offenders in 2004-05 only, and 35% also persistently offended in 2005-06.

In 2004-05 the proportion of children who continued to meet the persistent young offender definition in the subsequent year was higher in the older age group. This contrasts with the children in the 2003-04 group, where higher proportions of younger children were persistent young offenders in subsequent years. It is also notable that of the twelve children aged 12 years and under from Dundee, first identified as persistent young offenders between April and December 2004, six did not meet the definition in 2005-06.

Key findings

- 45% of children aged eight to 14 years identified as persistent young offenders in 2003-04 stopped persistently offending in either of the following years. A quarter of the group continued to meet the definition in 2004-05. Just below one quarter were persistently offending in 2004-05 and 2005-06. This figure is higher than a similar analysis carried out in relation to persistent young offenders of all ages which found that 15% continued to meet the definition in each of the subsequent years (SCRA 2006b).
- 48% of persistent young offenders aged between 8 and 14 years in 2004-05 were not persistently offending in 2005-06.
- Nearly one third of persistent young offenders aged 12 years and under in 2003 continued to meet the definition in 2004-05 and 2005-06. Just under half were persistently offending in 2003-04 only.
- Two thirds of persistent young offenders aged 12 years and under from Dundee identified between April and December 2003 continued to be persistent young offenders in each of the subsequent years. This contrasts with the general picture of reducing numbers of persistent young offenders in Dundee.
- 19% of children aged 13 and 14 years identified as persistent young offenders between April and December 2003 continued to be in 2004-05 and 2005-06. This is a lower figure than for the children aged 12 years and under.
- 35% of children aged 12 years and under identified as persistent young offenders between April and December 2004 continued to be in 2005-06.
- 47% of children aged 13 and 14 years identified as persistent young offenders between April and December 2004 continued to be in 2005-06. This is higher than the 12 years and under age group and therefore contrasts with the children identified as persistent young offenders in 2003.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to gain a greater understanding of the children identified as persistent young offenders in the years 2003-04, 2004-05 and 2005-06, specifically their age, gender, local authority area and whether they continued to persistently offend in subsequent years.

The number of children who met the persistent young offender definition rose between each of the three years. The proportion of girls, however, increased at a higher rate than boys. This reflects the overall trend of offence referrals to the Reporter which have seen a higher proportionate increase in the number of girls referred than boys.

The greatest increases observed for both boys and girls were in the older age group, children aged between 14 and 17 years, and in the number of 12 year old males. In contrast, the number of children aged eight to 11 years and 13 years remained constant or declined. Yet in 2003-04 it was children from the younger age groups who continued to be persistent young offenders for longer. This was not the case in 2004-05 where a higher proportion of children aged 13 and 14 years continued to be persistent young offenders in 2005-06. This may suggest that interventions could be beginning to have an effect in helping younger children to address their offending behaviour.

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