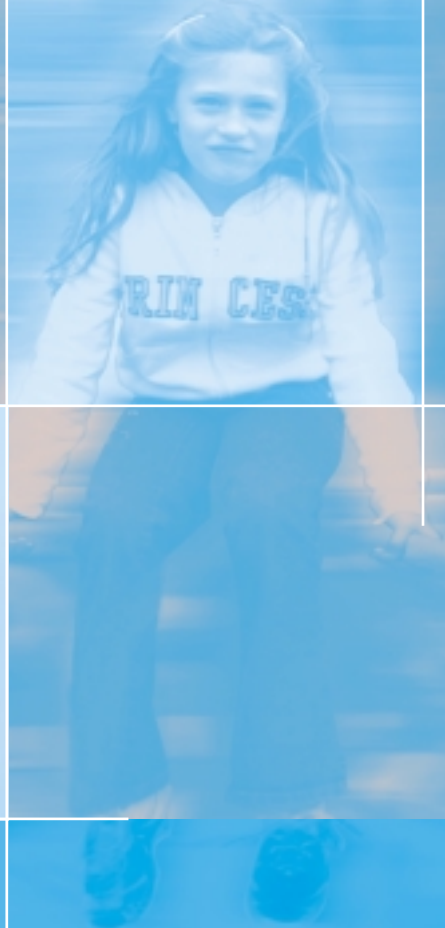




SCOTTISH
CHILDREN'S REPORTER
ADMINISTRATION

Study on Youth Offending in Glasgow

STUDY ON YOUTH OFFENDING IN GLASGOW



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Study on Youth Offending in Glasgow

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Summary

The Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA) carried out a study of children and young people in Glasgow referred to the Reporter for offending. The study examined the case files held by the Reporter in Glasgow to find out about patterns of offending and the care histories and social circumstances of these children.

Patterns of offending

Males were responsible for most (85%) of the offences referred. Most children were 14 and 15 years, with very few children under 12 years referred for offending. Most of the offences allegedly committed by these children were minor thefts, assaults and disorderly behaviour.

Care histories

The histories of children and young people with 10 or more offence referrals were examined in detail. These children had long and complex histories of concern about their welfare and offending. The majority was first referred to the Reporter on non-offence grounds at an average age of 8 years. Most had also been referred for alcohol or drug misuse, and/or truancy.

Action was being taken to address these children's behaviour and welfare. Most were subject to Supervision Requirements and about half were in residential accommodation.

Almost without exception, these children had experienced unstable or disrupted family relations. Most lived in families with violence and conflict and parents with alcohol or drug problems. They had been first referred because of physical abuse by their parents/carers, lack of parental care, or other reasons such as alleged sexual abuse.

Conclusions

The study provides further evidence that children who offend are very often children in need of care and protection. This reflects the underlying principles of the Children's Hearings System to address the 'needs' and 'deeds' of children, and supports the continuation of an integrated system of care and justice for Scotland's children.

Introduction

A study was carried out on children and young people referred to the Reporter in Glasgow for offending during a 3 month period between late 2000 and early 2001. It was carried out by Iain Gault, Authority Reporter Glasgow, who used the records held by the SCRA in Glasgow, and consisted of two main elements:

- General overview of offences referred to the Reporter in Glasgow.
- Detailed analysis of 'persistent' offenders and their backgrounds and care histories.

The study's main finding was that a large proportion of persistent young offenders were first referred to the Reporter due to concerns about their care and protection. Consequently, it emphasises the value of an 'integrated' system of care and justice for children and young people and, more specifically, supports the proposition that children in need of care and protection and children who offend are very often the same children.

Part 1 | Patterns of Offending

Records for all three teams in SCRA Glasgow were analysed for the period December 2000 to February 2001. Overall, these disclosed a total of 2,113 offences referred during this period. This figure is consistent with an annual total of between 8,000 and 9,000 offences being referred to the Reporter in Glasgow. For comparison, in the year to June 1999, the total number of offences referred to the Reporter in Glasgow was 8,498.

Source of Referrals

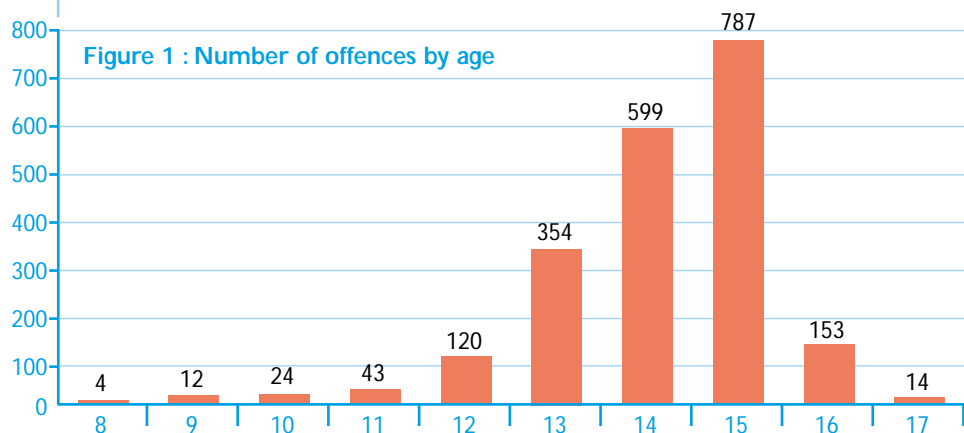
The great majority (92%) of the 2,113 offence referrals received during this period came directly from the police. With two exceptions, all the remaining referrals (i.e. 8%) came from the Procurator Fiscal.

Gender

Males were alleged to be responsible for 85% of the offences referred. This is similar to other comparable findings (e.g. in the UK in 1995 young men under the age of 21 accounted for 80% of recorded offences cleared up and attributed to this age group (Rutter et al., 1998, p.277¹)).

Age

A relatively small proportion (4%) of alleged offences were committed by children under 12 years old (see Figure 1). However, this requires to be set against the suggestion that an 'early' offence referral may constitute a significant indication of 'persistent' offending (see below).



¹ Rutter, M., Giller, H. & Hagell, A. (1998), *Antisocial Behaviour by Young People*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Part 1 | Patterns of Offending

The number of offences referred by age increased steadily until 15 years when it declined sharply. Given that there is evidence that the peak age of offending for males in the UK has increased from approximately 14 years in 1972 to 18 years in 1995 (Rutter et al., 1998, p. 75) this is not believed to reflect a comparable decline in offending behaviour at this point. Consequently, it would appear that the Hearings System in Glasgow is continuing to rapidly 'lose' young people over the age of 16 years who presumably are being dealt with by the adult Criminal Justice System. In particular, it may be a matter of some concern that only 14 offences by young people aged 17 years were referred to the Reporter during this 3 month period (see Table 1 below).

Table 1. Number of Offences Referred by Age

Age (years)	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
No. of offences	4	12	24	43	120	354	599	787	153	14
% of total	0%	1%	1%	2%	6%	17%	28%	37%	7%	1%

(n=2110, 3 not known)

Types of Offences

The bulk of offences reported fell into 4 or 5 main categories and the overall pattern was consistent with the observation that "[o]nly a small number of young people commit the most serious types of crime" (Waterhouse et al., 2000, p.83²). More particularly:

- The most common offence reported was Breach of the Peace which comprised 28% of the total (n=589).
- There were 237 thefts (not including thefts by housebreaking or theft by opening a lockfast place) which represented 11%.
- The other main categories were Contravention of the Criminal Law (Consolidation) (Scotland) Act 1995 [principally possession of an offensive weapon or criminal damage] (11%), Assault (11%) and Vandalism (7%).
- There were 90 offences under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, principally in connection with possession of cannabis, and 89 offences connected to the possession or consumption of alcohol.

Notwithstanding the relatively 'minor' nature of most of the reported offences, a small number of serious offences were referred to the Reporter during the period; these included Robbery (22 offences), Serious Assault (6 offences), Abduction (4 offences) and Rape (3 offences).

² Waterhouse, L., McGhee, J., Whyte, B., Loucks, N., Kay, H. & Stewart, R. (2000). *The Evaluation of Children's Hearings in Scotland*, Volume 3, Children in Focus, Scottish Executive.

Part 2 | 'Persistent' Offenders

Defining the term 'persistent offender' is fraught with difficulties (Rutter et al., 1998, pp.58-61). For the purposes of the study, it was decided to use following working definition: any child or young person referred to the Reporter for an offence³ 3 times in the 6 month period prior to the study (i.e. September 2000 to February 2001)⁴. The records of two of the three Reporter teams in Glasgow (North & South) were examined in the light of this definition. Overall, a sample of 171 children and young people was obtained.

For the purposes of analysis, this group was subsequently divided into three, depending on the number of offence referrals for these children during their entire period of contact with the Reporter:

- 49 children and young people who had been referred more than 20 times to the Reporter for offences ('the 20+ group');
- 43 children and young people who had been referred for offences between 10 and 19 times ('the 10-19 group'); and
- the remaining group of 79 children and young people who had been referred less than 10 times.

The following remarks focus particularly on the characteristics of these first two groups. However, it should be emphasised that these groups reflect a 'snapshot' of what is, necessarily, a dynamic and changing situation. In particular, young people move between groups over time, partly - although not exclusively - as a function of age.

³ For this part of the study, an offence 'referral' refers to a single report (or 'episode') that may, and indeed often will, disclose more than one offence.

⁴ There are other definitions of 'persistent young offender'. For example, in the Fast Track Hearings System Pilot a persistent offender is defined as a child or young person referred to the Reporter on offence grounds on at least 5 occasions in a 6 month period.

Part 2 | 'Persistent' Offenders

'The 20+ Group'

This group comprised the 49 individuals who had been the subject of 20 or more offence referrals during their entire period of contact with the Reporter. The number of referrals ranged from 20 to 106 with a mean of 37.8.

- 46 of the 49 (approximately 94%) were male.
- Their average age on 1st March 2001 was 15.5.
- The majority (65%) had originally been referred on non-offence grounds and 41% of these on 'care & protection' grounds⁵ (see Figure 2).

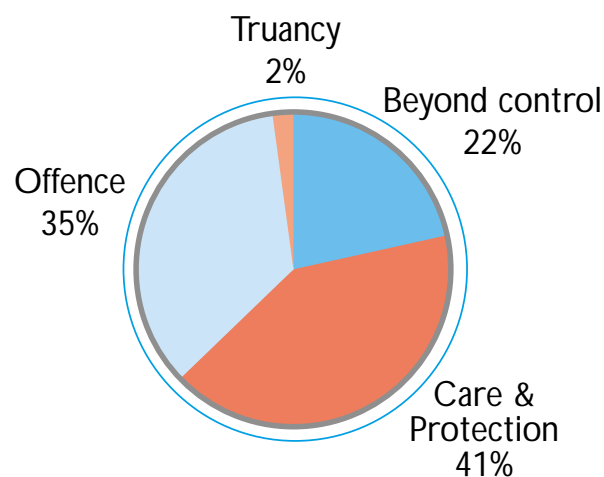


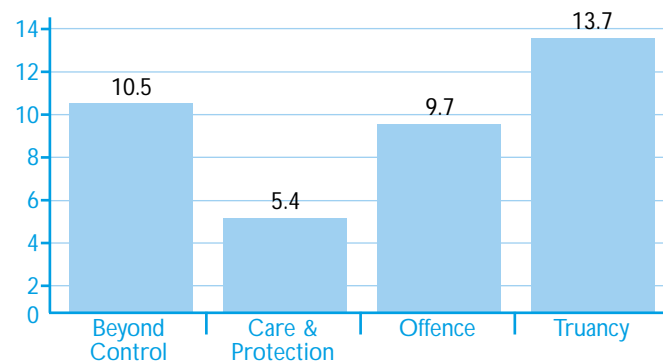
Figure 2 : Reasons for first referral - 20+ group

⁵ Generally, an alleged 'lack of parental care' or in relation to a 'Schedule 1' offence (as victim, or as a member of the same household as a victim or perpetrator of such an offence). See the *Children (Scotland) Act 1995* Section 52(2)(c)-(f)

Part 2 | 'Persistent' Offenders

The average age of first referral was 8.2 years. The average age of first offence referral was 10.9 years. The average age of first referral by grounds was as follows (Figure 3).

Figure 3 : Average age of First Referral by grounds - 20+ group



- 73% of the 20+ group had been formally referred at some point in relation to either alcohol or drug misuse.
- 67% had been referred in relation to non-attendance at school.
- 94% were subject to Supervision Requirements as of 1st March 2001 and 51% were required to stay in residential accommodation.
- 71% were, at some stage, the subject of a case 'jointly reported' to the Reporter and the Procurator Fiscal.

Part 2 | 'Persistent' Offenders

'The 10 to 19 Group'

There were 43 individuals who had been the subject of 10 to 19 reports (average 13).

- 36 (approximately 84%) were male.
- Their average age was 15 years.

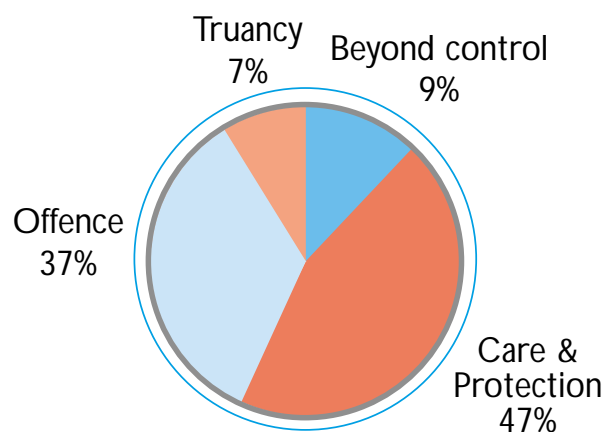
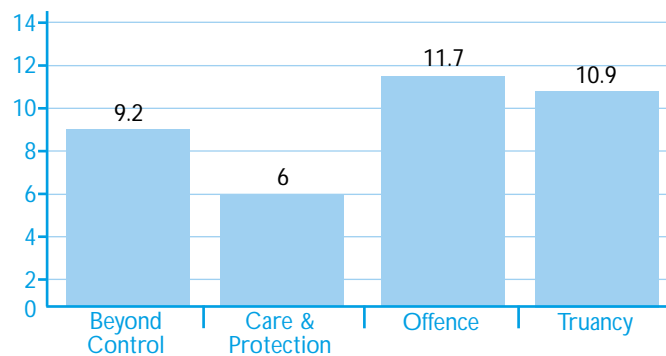


Figure 4 : Reasons for first referral - 10-19 group

- As with the 20+ group, the majority (63%) had originally been referred on non-offence grounds and some 47% of these in terms of 'care & protection' (see Figure 4).

Part 2 | 'Persistent' Offenders

Figure 5 : Average age of First Referral by grounds - 10-19 group



- The average age of first referral was 8.7 years. The average age of first offence referral was 11.9 years. The average age of first referral by grounds is shown in Figure 5 above.
- 56% of the 10-19 group had been formally referred at some point in relation to either alcohol or drug misuse.
- 58% had been referred in relation to non-attendance at school.
- 58% were subject to Supervision Requirements as of 1st March 2001.
- 26% were required to stay in residential accommodation.
- 9% had been, at some stage, the subject of a case 'jointly reported' to the Reporter and the Procurator Fiscal.

Part 2 | 'Persistent' Offenders

'The 20+ Group' and the '10-19 Group' Compared

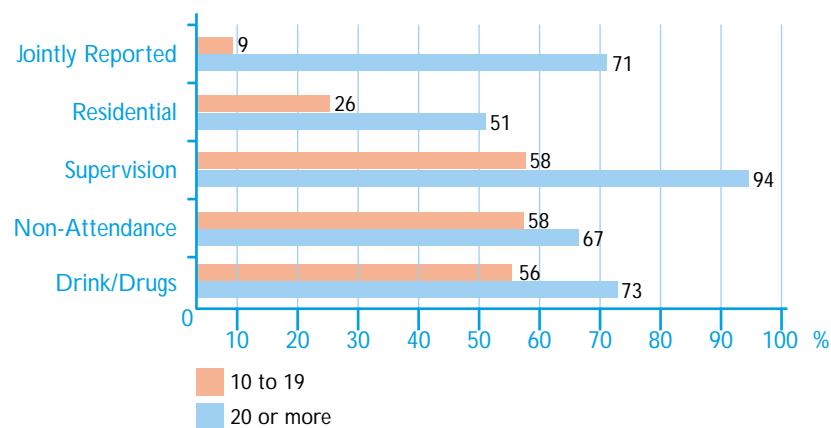
In comparing these two groups it is important to bear in mind that the distinction between less and more than 20 offence reports is an arbitrary one and that there is no hard and fast division between these two groups. In particular, children and young people who comprise the most persistent offenders must - as a matter of logic - have started with one offence, just as all those in the 20+ group must - at some stage - have been in the 10-19 group. Having said this, comparing the two groups does reveal some differences that do not appear to be a product of the method of sampling and which, consequently, may shed some light on the particular characteristics of the 'most persistent' group.

- In both groups, the majority of the children and young people were first referred on non-offence grounds. 'Care & Protection' grounds constituted the original reason for referral in over 40% of the 20+ group and for almost half (47%) of the 10-19 group. This finding is consistent with the important role attributed to 'family risk factors' in predicting offending behaviour (Farrington, 1996, pp.32-36).
- In the 20+ group about 1 in 5 were initially referred as being 'beyond parental control' as compared to roughly 1 in 10 of the 10-19 group.
- Overall, the average age of first referral was lower in the 20+ group. In particular, if first referred on offence grounds, the average age for the 20+ group was 9.7 years as compared to 11.7 years for the 10-19 group.
- Taking the groups as a whole, the average age of first offence referral in the 20+ group was 10.9 years as against 11.9 years for the 10-19 group.
- In other words, as well as being somewhat older at the point of comparison (15.5 to 15.0 years), young people in the 20+ group tended to begin their offending careers at an earlier age. This is consistent with studies that show that an early age of 'onset' of offending and/or other 'anti-social' behaviour may be indicative of subsequent 'persistent' offending (Farrington, 1996, p.24, see also Waterhouse et al., 2000)
- Other relevant comparisons are set out in Figure 6. It is worth noting that children and young people in the 20+ group are more likely to be subject to a Supervision Requirement; almost twice as likely to be in residential accommodation; and 7-times as likely to have been jointly referred to the Reporter and the Procurator Fiscal.

° Farrington, D. (1966), 'Individual, family and peer factors in the development of delinquency' in Hollin, C. & Howells, K., *Clinical Approaches to Working with Young Offenders*, Chichester, Wiley & Sons

Part 2 | 'Persistent' Offenders

Figure 6 : Percentage in Each Category - 20+ & 10-19 Groups



The Care History of Persistent Young Offenders

In order to obtain more information about the care history of some of the most persistent young offenders in the sample, reference was also made to individual case records. In particular, the case files held by SCRA in respect of those children and young people in the 20+ group first referred on care and protection grounds were reviewed. 15 case records were obtained from a possible 20. Particular attention was paid to the reasons for the initial referral to the Reporter and to the social circumstances of the child at this point in time. Some of the main findings were as follows:

- One third of the group were initially referred in relation to physical abuse by parents or carers. One third were referred due to a likely lack of parental care. The remainder were referred for other reasons, including alleged sexual abuse and serious physical neglect.
- Almost without exception, the case records reveal that the children in this group experienced unstable or disrupted family relations. Around the time of referral 11 of the 15 children were living with a single birth mother but in most of these cases there was some, albeit erratic, contact with fathers.
- Most of the children appear to have spent their formative years in an atmosphere of violence and conflict. More specifically, in 8 out of the 15 cases, background reports disclose the existence of domestic abuse.
- Parental alcohol or drug abuse was apparent in the majority of the cases.

Part 2 | 'Persistent' Offenders

Overall, it is evident this particular group of persistent young offenders had fundamental care needs which - in most cases - significantly predated the development of their offending behaviour. Typically, at the earliest stages of life they experienced unstable relationships, often characterised by a degree of violence and/or substance misuse. The parental relationship frequently appears to be, in the words of one report, "short lived and turbulent", whilst parental discipline as described by another is "erratic".

Examples of the type of physical neglect and abuse experienced by members of the group include:

- being left at the age of 18 months in the care of a 3 year old sibling and being fed by concerned neighbours through a letterbox
- being assaulted by a parent at the age of 6 months
- being sexually assaulted by a neighbour
and
- witnessing older siblings being beaten by a drunken parent.

Conclusions

A number of conclusions can be drawn about youth offending in Glasgow, which, as might be anticipated, are consistent with research into youth offending more generally.

With regard to general patterns of offending:

- Boys and young men are responsible for about 85% of alleged offences.
- Referral before the age of 12 years is unusual.
- Referrals to the Reporter peak sharply at 15 years.
- The bulk of youth offending comprises of minor thefts, assaults and disorderly behaviour.

With regard to more persistent offenders:

- Most have been referred earlier in terms of other grounds for referral.
- The most persistent offenders appear to be referred at a relatively early age.
- An 'early' offence or 'beyond control' referral may constitute a significant indicator of possible 'persistent offending'.
- A substantial proportion has also been referred in relation to drug/alcohol misuse and for non-attendance at school.
- The most persistent offenders would appear to be significantly over represented in 'jointly reported' cases, and being 'jointly reported' is a significant predictor of receiving a custodial sentence in later life (Waterhouse et al, 2000, pp 89-90).

Perhaps the most significant finding is the extent to which persistent offenders had already been formally identified as children in need of care and protection. As we have seen, very significant proportions (somewhere between 40% and 50%) of the most persistent offenders in this sample were first referred to the Reporter on 'care & protection' grounds. It is important to stress, however, that this group comprised only those children for whom formal identification of care concerns (i.e. sufficiently serious to lead to a referral to the Reporter) predated their first referral for an alleged offence. It does not include those children and young people for whom formal care concerns were identified subsequent to their first referral for other (non-care) reasons. Nor does it identify those children for whom there were care issues but who were not formally referred on this basis. In other words, these figures probably underestimate the extent to which these two areas overlap in the life histories of persistent young offenders.

It would therefore appear that one of the underlying principles of the Scottish Children's Hearings System, namely that children and young people who come to official attention for different reasons, frequently share a similar background of social and familial adversity, has a substantial measure of empirical support. And, in light of this, the potential advantages of sustaining an 'integrated' system of care and justice for children - able to respond to both the 'needs' and the 'deeds' of young people who offend - should not be underestimated.

Acknowledgements

This study was originally written for the Youth Justice Forum in Glasgow in April 2001, as a contribution to formulating a local multi-agency response to the problems of youth crime. The study was made possible by the co-operation and assistance of staff throughout the Glasgow SCRA.

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