

POLICING AND PATHWAYS TO DIVERSION AND CARE AMONG VULNERABLE YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAVE SUBSTANCE USE ISSUES

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Juvenile offending in Australia

- Rate of juvenile offending is usually twice that of adults (AIC 2009)
- One in every 420 young people aged between 10 and 17 years was under supervision on an average day in 2012-13 (AIHW 2014)
- The majority (83%) were male (ABS 2014)
- 79% aged between 14 -17 years. (ABS 2014)
- Aboriginal young people over-represented

“Life-course persistent” vs “adolescent limited” offending

(Moffitt 1993)

Two trajectories (Patterson and colleagues (2002):

“Transient and peer-related offending beginning in late adolescence and usually desisting in adulthood”

“Persistent anti-social behaviour beginning in preschool years that progresses from early arrest, and chronic and violent offending in juvenile years, to career adult criminality”

Young offenders and complexity

Issues experienced among a cohort of 75 young Victorian offenders (aged 16-30 years):

- intellectual disability,
- mental health issues,
- substance use,
- financial, relational, and housing instability;
- few pro-social extracurricular activities;
- major barriers in the areas of education and employment.

Fougere, Thomas and Daffern (2013)

(Past) involvement in the child protection system common
(CSRE and Department of Corrections, 2010)

Project aims

- Identify **characteristics** of young AOD users who offend
- Determine **diversion and treatment needs** of this group
- Document the **challenges** for police when encountering young offenders
- Investigate the **effectiveness** of current diversion and referral processes
- Identify **barriers and facilitators** to accessing diversion and treatment
- Explore how these might be addressed

Method

1) Background review

- Relevant literature
- Policy documents, and legislation NSW and Victoria

2) Analysis of secondary data

Victoria: **The Youth Cohort Study (YoCo)**: longitudinal cohort design (3 time points) and non-probability convenience sampling (n=150 baseline)
 → BEST, D., WILSON, A., REED, M., HARNEY, A., PAHOKI, S., KUTIN, J. & LUBMAN, D. I. 2012. Youth Cohort Study: Young people's pathways through AOD treatment services. Melbourne: Turning Point, Eastern Health.

- NSW: **The Exposure and Transition Study (ET Study)**: cross-sectional design, non-probability convenience sampling (one time point only) (n=219).
 → BRYANT, J., ELLARD, J., FISHER, D. & TRELOAR, C. 2012. The Exposure and Transition Study: Exposure to injecting and Hepatitis C among young people at risk. Sydney: National Centre in HIV Social Research, The University of New South Wales.

Method (cont'd)

3) Semi-structured interviews (N = 64):

- **Clients** of youth specialist alcohol and other drug services (n = 23)
- **Police employees**, NSW Police Force and Victoria Police (n = 25);
- **Staff** of youth specialist drug and alcohol services (n = 16)

AOD clients – interview sample

Young clients (n = 23)

- Majority (n = 17) 18 years or younger
- Majority male (n = 18)
- Vast majority (n = 20) grew up in Australia
- n = 10 no fixed address
- Five had spent time in juvenile detention (all male)
- Drug use typically began at around age 12 years

Some factors that inform and shape individual pathways:

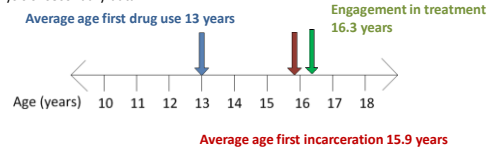
- Age
- Seriousness of the offence
- Decisions made by apprehending officer (especially re eligibility)
- Number of times apprehended
- Whether parental consent can be obtained
- Whether and when they are engaged by therapeutic services
- Availability of services and programs
 - varies according to postcode of residence
 - many programs are pilots

The system...

- Is complex, there are some **inconsistencies**, it changes, there are gaps...
 E.g. young people can be involved in the juvenile and adult systems simultaneously
- **Delays** have an impact on young people
 E.g. delay between offending and court date

Small window between first drug use and incarceration

Analysis of secondary data...



Challenges discussed by police re making referrals and 'diversion'

- Recidivism, rapid escalation of offending
- Police are time poor, heavy workloads
- No e-system in NSW
- Perception that young people "don't want help" from police (however, cooperation and consent is necessary)

Engagement of this client group in treatment is difficult but worthwhile

- Interviewees reported that engagement in therapeutic programs is difficult among young justice clients.
- However, secondary data analysis indicates that **if young people do stay in treatment they display some marked positive outcomes** in relation to their drug use, risk and social functioning.

Collaboration

... between police and other professionals who work with vulnerable young people

Finding viable ways for both professional groups to work together more closely without being too onerous remains an obvious challenge.

In conclusion...

- Strong support for **early intervention** approaches.
- The ongoing issue of funding e.g. crisis accommodation
- Funding so that there can be collaborative efforts between the system – ensure that the system does give young people the support they need to effectively divert them away from a pathway of adult offending.

Thank you!

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