

Young People Committing Fewer Crimes in NSW?

Young people may be more law abiding than they were in the past, with NSW crime figures showing a decrease in arrest rates amongst this age group.

According to [figures](#) from the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR), released in December 2014, the number of young people detained by police for offences including robbery, motor vehicle theft, property crime and assault has reduced.

Drop in rates of arrest

Vehicle theft has shown a significant decrease amongst younger people. Rates of arrest fell 68.6% between 1995 and 2012 for those in the 15 to 17 age bracket, and 70.1% for those aged between 18 and 20.

Arrest rates for robbery have also declined. Arrest rates for those aged between 21 and 24 fell between 1999 and 2012. For those aged 18 to 20, the rate declined between 2005 and 2012.

Arrests for [serious assault](#) also declined among 15 to 20-year-olds between 2008 and 2012, after peaking in 2008.

According to the figures, the overall arrest rate for 15 to 17-year-olds and 18 to 20-year-olds declined between 1998 and 2004, and the biggest falls in the rates of young people being detained by police appear to be in urban areas, with rural areas less impacted.

What is the relationship between age and crime?

Figures from BOCSAR and other research organisations show that different groups of people are more prone to committing certain types of crimes at different periods in their life.

Younger people would appear to be more prone to becoming involved in certain types of criminal behaviour than older people. These are mainly vehicle theft, property offences like vandalism and graffiti, and serious assaults. The figures from [BOCSAR](#) show that there is an increased risk of offending from the age of 11 or 12 until the mid to late teens. After this, the rates drop off sharply until the mid twenties when they decline more gradually.

The spread of the offending rates varies slightly for different offences, with the average peak age for assault slightly higher than for other crimes. For older people aged between 25 and 34, the figures are far more stable over the previous decade than for younger people, remaining fairly steady with a gradual decrease in recent years.

Why are young people seemingly committing fewer crimes now?

A number of reasons have been suggested for the decrease in crime rates among those in their mid teens to mid 20s.

The decrease in crime rates for property crime can potentially be linked to a lack of new people being recruited into these types of crimes, possibly due to greater education and crime prevention measures. Other possibilities that have been mentioned include changes in the patterns of drug taking, especially heroin, which often leads to property crime and theft, and global economic changes.

It has also been suggested that technological advances have led to [increased security](#) for vehicles and property, which could go some way to explaining the overall reduction for these types of crimes. More security means less opportunity, which means fewer young people are able to participate in these activities.

These possible reasons suggest that an even greater emphasis on education, especially about drugs, and an increased use of security technology could lead to even greater falls in youth

crime in the future.

Detention rates also falling

As well as police figures showing a reduction in young people being arrested for certain offences, [detention figures](#) show a marked decrease in the number of children being held in detention across NSW. This is believed to be a result of policies implemented after a Royal Commission in 2008 revealed that children were being kept in detention unnecessarily and were being held on remand without charge because they weren't able to fulfil the conditions of bail.

Currently the number of children in detention in NSW is the lowest of any state, having decreased by more than 25% in the last five years. Many of this reduction is in children who are on remand, with more support being provided to help them find stable accommodation so that they can meet their bail conditions and be released back into the community. Unfortunately, Aboriginal children are still overrepresented in the system, with much of the decrease affecting non-Aboriginal children.

It would appear that young people are committing fewer [offences under criminal law](#) than previously, although the reasons are not altogether clear. It seems most likely that a combination of factors is contributing to this decrease in young people being detained by police, and hopefully the trend will continue into the future.