CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

By the end of this chapter you should have a clearer understanding of:

• historical definitions of crime and young people;
• young people as offenders and victims of crime;
• the nature of youth offending;
• risk factors and predictors of offending by, and victimisation of, young people.

LINKS TO STANDARDS

The material in this chapter links to the Skills for Justice, National Occupational Standards Policing and Law Enforcement (2010).

HA1 (MLA1) Manage your own resources.
HA2 (MLA2) Manage your own resources and professional development.
POL 4C1 Develop one's own knowledge and practice.
SFJ AE1 Maintain and develop your own knowledge, skills and competence.

Introduction

This chapter considers patterns of crime and young people both as offenders and as victims. It includes a historical perspective, considering perceived changes over time, and a discussion of possible explanations for the patterns found. In particular, attention is given to important factors that appear to influence young offenders and victims and the extent to which these also change over time. The chapter further discusses risk factors considered to influence young people to become offenders and factors that may influence young victims of crime.
Young people and crime

Defining young people

The legal definition of a young person is not as straightforward as you might think. For example, the Children Act 1989 (Home Office, 1989) defines a ‘child’ as a person under the age of 18, while the Management of Health and Safety Regulations 1999 (Home Office, 1999) regard a ‘child’ as a person who is not over the minimum school-leaving age and a ‘young person’ as a person who has not attained the age of 18.

REFLECTIVE TASK


Why do you think these definitions differ, and why have they evolved?

Young people and crime in context

The notion of childhood and children as we understand them is a fairly recent concept. In the past, paintings tended to show children as angelic forms, perhaps as a reminder of the very high mortality rate prevalent until recent times. Up until the Middle Ages, children were depicted as little adults and regarded as such in society, being granted no special favours for their age (Aries, 1996). In Victorian times, many children were still regarded as small adults and were expected to work and be treated as such by the law, police and the whole of the criminal justice system (Chesney, 1991). Understanding what Brown (1998) refers to as the pre-history of youth and crime is important as it helps us understand that we have existing perceptions based upon different states of human development. For many people, middle age is aligned to respectability, while old age stands for vulnerability. Similarly, for many, the concept of youth is viewed as being problematic and something to be feared. In more recent times, however, the identification and targeting of children and young persons for proactive policing has been typically justified in the name of child welfare, crime prevention and public protection (Muncie, 2009).
Historical perspective

The presence of young people has always attracted the concern and attention of adults. Pearson (1983) highlights the concerns in a report on the question of juvenile crime and misbehaviour published in 1898. The words in the report may almost have been written today.

_The general impression running through its pages was a riot of impunity, irresponsible parents, working mothers, and lax discipline in schools, with magistrates and police believing themselves to be impotent before a rising tide of mischief and violence._

(Pearson, 1983, p 55)

Long before this report was published, however, young people and their involvement in criminal activity drew attention. In 1585, it is reported that in London, a man called Wooton, once a merchant but falling on hard times, took to running a school for thieves. Young boys learned to cut purses from passers-by in the streets, and merchants complained of gangs of young people entering their premises, and while being distracted by one or two of them, the remainder would steal articles (Salgado, 1999).

Throughout history, therefore, some young people have been associated with forms of undesirable activity: think about the ‘Teddy Boy’ craze in the United Kingdom in the 1950s (Pearson, 1983) and the Mods and Rockers of the 1960s (Cohen, 1973). A historical line can be traced which links many activities undertaken by young people and which appears to cause consternation among society. Nothing is new. For example, a recent activity known as ‘Happy Slapping’ was reported by the media as being of major concern.

CASE STUDY: HAPPY SLAPPING

_The BBC news website on the 12 May 2005 reported that ‘a new trend of violent assaults, in which teenagers attack unsuspecting bystanders and capture it on mobile phones, has spread to Kent. “Happy slapping” first began as a craze in south London, but has now become a nationwide phenomenon, according to police and anti-bullying organisations. Footage passed to the BBC showed an assault at a Ramsgate skateboard park. A school in Tonbridge has also warned that a boy’s hearing has been damaged’ (http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/4539317.stm)._

Clearly, the idea of ‘youth annoyance’ and illegal activities committed by young people is not a new one, and the idea that there is a decline in the standards of behaviour of young people needs to be viewed in this light.

Young people, culture and locations

Police and young people predominantly seem to interact in public locations such as the street, and invariably this involves disputes over ownership of ‘turf’, language
used, etc. Typically, this involves the street-corner scenario or outside shops, city centres and other high-profile locations. Many of these locations have significance for young people, which can promote a sense of territory and an area for their own brand of entertainment (Webster, 2006). In such circumstances, interactions between police and young people appear to be highly racialised and gendered. In the United Kingdom, black young people appear especially vulnerable to ‘proactive’ policing, being up to six times as likely to be stopped and searched as white youths. When black young people come into contact with the police, whether as victims or witnesses, their perceptions and experiences of police tend to be worse than for white young people.

Further, Loader (1996) suggests that from interviews conducted with police officers, one of the most common and consistent views is that young people hanging about in groups will be either directly or indirectly involved in criminal behaviour. This view tends to affect the perceptions of the general public as well, irrespective of what the evidence suggests.

**Public perceptions of young people and crime**

Much of what we know statistically regarding young people as offenders and as victims comes from official documents such as that produced by the National Association for the Care and Rehabilitation of Offenders (NACRO, 2009) which in turn is based upon official crime statistics (Ministry of Justice, 2007), and the British Crime Survey (available at www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/bcs1.html).

Despite falling levels of victimisation, most members of the public at a national level continue to believe that crime is rising. During 2007–08, almost two-thirds of those surveyed considered that crime had risen in the past two years, while 35 per cent thought that it had increased ‘a lot’ (a two per cent rise over the previous 12 months). Despite the perception that crime is rising, fear of crime – for a range of offence types – is steadily falling. For instance, the proportion of people expressing high levels of worry about violent crime has declined from 25 per cent in 1998 to 15 per cent in 2007–08. Over the same period, concern about burglary has also fallen from 19 per cent to 12 per cent of those surveyed (NACRO, 2009).

Concern about crime is highest among:

- those who have been a victim within the past 12 months;
- residents of areas classified as ‘hard pressed’;
- black and minority ethnic respondents;
- women.

Those surveyed considered that the main causes of offending were drugs (30 per cent) and lack of discipline from parents (29 per cent), both of which might be thought to indicate that offending by younger people is a particular focus of disquiet. The third most frequently cited causal factor was sentencing being too lenient (11 per cent) (NACRO, 2009).
At the same time, public confidence in the ability of the criminal justice system to deal with young people accused of crime is considerably lower than any other function about which questions were posed: while 80 per cent of those surveyed considered that the criminal justice system respected the rights of people accused of crime, just one in four thought that it was able to deal effectively with young people who offend.

**Young people as offenders**

**The characteristics of young people who offend**

Research conducted on young people who come into contact with the youth justice system has found that they are statistically more likely to share certain characteristics than those who do not.

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**PRACTICAL TASK**

*Think about the risk factors that may be prevalent for young people and that may influence their involvement with the criminal justice system as offenders. Write down what you think they are.*

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These ‘risk factors’ are typically presented as clustering around four domains.

1. **Family** – including inadequate, harsh or inconsistent parenting.
2. **School/education** – such as low educational attainment, truancy or exclusion.
3. **Community** – including residence in areas with low community cohesion and easy access to drugs.
4. **Individual/personal** – such as being male, having an offending peer group, poor physical or mental health or misuse of alcohol or drugs.

Such risk factors are generally familiar to those who work within the youth justice system. They are at the heart of the assessment model used by Youth Offending Teams (visit [www.yjb.gov.uk/en-gb/yjs/YouthOffendingTeams/](http://www.yjb.gov.uk/en-gb/yjs/YouthOffendingTeams/) for more about Youth Offending Teams). They also constitute the basis for the development of the Youth Justice Board’s ‘scaled approach’ which seeks to link the intensity of intervention to the risk of reoffending, indicated by the score derived from Asset, the Board’s assessment tool. While this approach is useful, it must be remembered that many individuals identified as ‘high risk’ do not offend. Similarly, many children identified as ‘low risk’ do offend, and inevitably, the picture is rather more complex than frequently suggested.

It is sometimes suggested that a focus on the four domains, described above, as separate clusters of risk of equal weight tends to underestimate the impact of the area in which young people grow up. Pitts (2007) in his study of gangs has
argued persuasively that involvement in certain sorts of serious crime may be more closely associated with residence in disadvantaged neighbourhoods than with the individual, familial or educational characteristics of the children who live there. Indeed, to a large extent, concentrations of poverty within communities are themselves likely to have a negative impact on parenting capacity within resident families and on the educational achievement of children in the area, and may increase the risk that young people will come into contact with drugs or groups of offending peers.

**Victimisation and young people**

Finally, one individual risk factor merits further attention. It is well established that teenagers have a significantly higher risk of victimisation than adults. Moreover, within the younger age group, the chances of being a victim are not evenly distributed. Rather the characteristics of those most likely to be victimised mirror closely the risk factors for offending. One study (Stewart et al., 2002) has suggested that, in relation to violent crime at least, the pathways from victimisation to offending – and vice versa – are so closely intertwined that frequently it makes little sense to talk in categorical terms about victims or offenders but rather winners or losers in any given incident. Certainly, in 2006, half of 10- to 15-year-olds who admitted offending had experienced criminal victimisation within the previous 12 months compared to just 19 per cent of those who had committed no offence. Conversely, victims were more likely to admit offending (42 per cent) than those who had no experience of victimisation within the previous 12 months (14 per cent) (NACRO, 2009).

Whatever model is used to identify children and young people who may be at risk of offending, it is clear that the majority of those who come to the attention of the youth justice system are typically socially excluded, come from the most disadvantaged sections of the community and have the fewest opportunities open to them.

**Detected youth crime**

As discussed previously, public perception is not necessarily a good indicator of trends in crime. In addition, discovering the extent of youth crime is not as straightforward as it would seem. There are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, only a minor percentage of those children who admit committing offences come into contact with the youth justice system. During 2006, for instance, 30 per cent of young people aged 10–17 years admitted having committed an offence within the past 12 months, but just 5 per cent were arrested. In part, this difference can be explained by the fact that most crimes are not reported to the police anyway. During 2007–08, for instance, well under half of all offences (42 per cent) were brought to police attention. Three-quarters of victims who did not report an offence indicated that this was because the incident
was too trivial, the loss involved was minimal or there was little that the police could do.

In the case of violent crime, 35 per cent of respondents considered that it was a private matter that they would deal with themselves. It seems likely, therefore, that a significant proportion of self-reported offending by young people, similar to all other types of offenders, is at a level of seriousness such that the victims do not pursue the matter formally through the criminal justice system. Where crimes are reported, detection rates remain low. During 2007–08, the proportion of offences recorded by the police that were 'cleared up' was 28 per cent, and where the perpetrator was not caught (as is the case for almost three-quarters of crime reported to the police), it was not possible to attribute responsibility for an offence or determine whether it was committed by a young person or an adult. The figures for detected crime, thus, only tell part of the story but they do, nonetheless, suggest that young people are more likely than adults to offend (NACRO, 2009).

**Age and detections**

During 2007, the peak age of offending was 17 years for males and 15 years for females, and there were 6,433 and 2,203 indictable offences per 100,000 of the population in those two age groups, respectively; the comparable rate for all ages was 1,082 offences per 100,000. At the same time, adults account for the major part of the total volume of crime simply because there are more people over the age of 18 years. So during 2007, children and young people committed fewer than one in five of all detected offences. Adults aged 21 years and above, by contrast, were responsible for more than two-thirds of offences. The bar chart in Figure 2.1 illustrates the differences in detections by age.

![Figure 2.1 Percentage of detected offending by age](source: NACRO (2009))

**Trends in youth crime**

From the early 1990s until 2003, *Criminal Statistics* (Ministry of Justice, 2007) showed a substantial decline in detected youth crime. Over that period, despite
public concerns that youth crime was rising, the volume of youth offending fell by 27 per cent. However, more recently, there has been a reversal of that trend, as shown in the chart in Figure 2.2 below. During 2007, 126,000 children and young people aged 10–17 received a reprimand, final warning or conviction for an indictable offence, and this, while still some 12 per cent lower than the equivalent figure for 1992, represents an increase of 20 per cent since 2003.

![Figure 2.2 Children and young people cautioned, reprimanded, warned or sentenced for indictable offences, 1992–2007](image)

Source: NACRO (2009)

The above shifts are not fully explicable in terms of fluctuations in the youth population. The fall and subsequent rise in youth crime appear as sharp even when demographic change is taken into account. So the proportion of 15- to 17-year-old males receiving a substantive disposal for an indictable offence was 7,065 for every 100,000 of the population in that age group in 1992 compared with 5,360 in 2003. As the volume of detected offences has risen for this age group in the more recent period, so too has the rate of offending: to 5,959 per 100,000 of the population in 2007.

Until 2003, the pattern of detected crime committed by young adults, aged 18–20 years, followed a trajectory similar to that for children and young people. The recent departure for the latter group from the trend dominant in that earlier period has not been accompanied by an equivalent increase in detected offending by young adults, or persons over the age of 21 years, which has remained comparatively stable.
Cessation of offending


Consider and evaluate the various explanations that are given as to why people cease to offend, and why the impact of these factors might change over time.

Age and offenders

Between 1988 and 2002, the peak age of detected offending for boys was consistently 18 years. In 2002, it rose to 19 before falling to 18 again in 2003. It has been 17 in each of the four subsequent years for which data are available. The peak age for detected female offending was 15 years in 2007, as it has been for a considerable number of years. As a consequence, two-thirds of young people coming into contact with the youth justice system fall within the 15- to 17-year age bracket, 31 per cent between 12 and 14 years and just 3 per cent below the age of 12 (NACRO, 2009).

There has nonetheless been a significant age-related shift since 2003. While the number of young people aged 15–17 years who received a reprimand, final warning or conviction for an indictable offence grew by 20 per cent between 2003 and 2007, the equivalent increase for younger children aged 10–14 years was 31 per cent. As the chart in Figure 2.3 below illustrates, the overall rise in detected

![Figure 2.3 Relative increases in detected crime by age, 2003–07](Source: NACRO (2009))

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crime in the recent period involves a disproportionate criminalisation of children below the age of 15 years.

This pattern is most readily explained as a consequence of changes in police decision-making pursuant to the sanction detection targets which will be discussed at some length in the chapter dedicated to anti-social behaviour. It is consistent with the use of formal responses to children’s behaviour that would previously have been dealt with outside of the youth justice system since one would expect any such change to be reflected most sharply among younger children who would previously have been most likely to benefit from informal action.

**Gender**

Girls are consistently less likely than their male counterparts to come into contact with the youth justice system. During 2007, almost three-quarters (74 per cent) of young people convicted, warned or reprimanded for an indictable offence were male. Girls also tend to stop offending at an earlier age, and desistance is more rapid than among boys.

There is a common perception that the involvement of girls in offending has been rising for some years. Despite increases in detected female crime since 2003, the official statistics over the earlier period do not support a sustained trend in that direction over the longer term; indeed, between 1992 and 2002, the number of girls receiving a caution, reprimand, warning or conviction for an indictable offence fell from 33,700 to 23,300, a decline of almost 31 per cent. A possible source of the misconception is that while girls’ detected offending was falling, the number convicted at court rose sharply from 4,200 to 6,000. The divergence between the two trends is explained by a relative reduction in the use of pre-court disposals, generating a higher level of prosecution: the proportion of girls’ offending resulting in a reprimand, final warning, or, prior to June 2000, a caution declined from 88 per cent in 1992 to 72 per cent a decade later. No doubt the increased visibility associated with such a rapid expansion in the female court population has contributed to the perception that girl’s offending is a greater concern than hitherto.

Since 2003, there has been a growth in girls’ detected offending, coinciding with the introduction of the sanction detection target. The increase is considerably sharper than that for boys. In 2007, girls’ detected offending was 35 per cent higher than in 2003; the equivalent rise for boys was 16 per cent. The chart in Figure 2.4 (opposite) illustrates this point.

Again, this pattern is more likely to reflect a reduced use of informality in responding to girls’ misbehaviour rather than a sudden expansion in offending by that group.

**Race**

The youth justice system has long been characterised by the over-representation of black and minority ethnic young people. Children classified as black or black British are less likely to receive a pre-court disposal, more likely to be remanded
to custody or secure accommodation and disproportionately represented among those receiving a custodial sentence. During 2007–08, for instance, while black or black British young people made up 3 per cent of the general 10–17 population, they accounted for 7 per cent of those coming to the attention of the youth justice system, 14 per cent of those receiving a custodial sentence and almost one in three of those given a sentence of long-term detention (NACRO, 2009).

The Home Affairs Committee in its extensive inquiry into young black people and the criminal justice system concluded that the primary cause of such over-representation was social exclusion. However, the Committee also found evidence of discriminatory treatment by the youth justice system and noted elements within the black community itself – such as a lack of positive adult male role models – that might compound the negative impact of socio-economic disadvantage.

**PRACTICAL TASK**

Go to the Ministry of Justice report ‘Statistics on Race and the Criminal Justice System 2008/09’ (available at www.justice.gov.uk/stats-race-and-the-criminal-justice-system-2008-09c1.pdf) and read the summary and chapter 3 (‘Suspects; Stops and Arrests’).

A number of explanations for the over-representation of BME individuals at various stages of the criminal justice system have been advanced. Write down what you think they might be.
Once you have done this, look at the Equality and Human Rights Commission (2010) report on the operation of stop and search powers. Section 3 of the report provides a detailed discussion of various explanations for the disproportionate number of stop and searches undertaken on BME individuals and their feasibility (‘Stop and Think; A Critical Review of the Use of Stop and Search Powers in England and Wales’ available at www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded_files/raceinbritain/ehrc_stop_and_search_report.pdf)

The nature of youth offending

The majority of offences committed by young people are directed against property, despite a relative decline of such offending during the 1990s. In 2007, theft, handling stolen goods, burglary, fraud or forgery and criminal damage comprised more than 62 per cent of indictable offences committed by young people. Indeed, theft and handling offences alone represented almost half (46 per cent) of the total and accounted for the largest rise in detected youth crime over the previous 12 months. Violent offending, which understandably generates high levels of public concern, is by comparison less common and accounts for fewer than one in five (17 per cent) of indictable offences committed by children and young people. While offences of violence can, of course, be very serious in nature, it should not be assumed that all are. An analysis of this category suggests that a majority related to incidents towards the lower end of the scale of seriousness. During 2007, almost two-thirds of violent offending resulted in a reprimand or final warning, a higher proportion than for any offence type other than theft and handling stolen goods. In the recent period, concern over young people carrying knives has attracted considerable attention.

Robbery is another offence tending to generate the highest levels of public concern. It too has risen in the recent past, and the figures for 2007 show a slight increase for the third successive year. Nonetheless, robbery remains relatively rare, accounting for fewer than 1 in 20 indictable offences committed by young people.

Sexual offending likewise accounts for a very small proportion, less than 1 per cent, of the total volume of youth crime. Moreover, offences of a sexual nature fell – both in terms of absolute numbers and as a proportion of all indictable offences – during early 1990s and have remained relatively stable in the more recent period. As with violent offending, measured by outcome, many sexual incidents appear to be less serious than might be anticipated: in 2007, for instance, well over half (55 per cent) of such offences resulted in a pre-court disposal rather than prosecution.

If the majority of offences processed through the youth justice system are not towards the top end of seriousness, it is also the case that the large preponderance of serious crimes are committed by adults. During 2007, persons over the age of 18 years were responsible for almost four times as many violent offences and more than 5.5 times as many sexual offences as children and young people. Robberies were evenly distributed, with adults being responsible for half the total as shown in Table 2.1 (opposite).
Table 2.1 Analysis of selected serious offences by age of offenders, 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Offences</th>
<th>Children and young persons as offenders (per cent)</th>
<th>Adults as offenders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Violence against the person</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual offences</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robbery</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NACRO (2009)

CASE STUDY: KNIFE CRIME

Given the way that offences are classified, it is not possible to ascertain what proportion of those entering the youth justice system have been involved with knife-related offending. However, the Offending, Crime and Justice Survey (Roe and Ashe, 2008) confirms that carrying a weapon is far from commonplace. During 2006, just 4 per cent of children aged 10–17 indicated that they had carried a knife in the previous year. The MORI youth survey (Mori, 2008) shows a substantially higher level of knife carrying, with 17 per cent of young people in mainstream education admitting having carried a penknife in the past 12 months during 2008. However, that figure represents a significant decline from the response to the equivalent question in 2005 (24 per cent), and a third of respondents confirmed that the primary purpose for carrying a knife was for sporting or similar activity.

In part, this may be the impact of the Tackling Knives Action Programme (TKAP) phase 1 (Home Office, 2009) which aimed to reduce the carrying of knives, related homicides and serious stabbings among teenagers aged between 13 and 19 years in ten police force areas. This programme involved a number of interventions, involving approaches such as education and other preventative approaches such as stop and search.

Among the provisional findings of this programme were the following.

- Stop and searches increased in all ten areas, and there was a reduction in the number of recorded offensive-weapon offences.
- TKAP sharp instruments ‘all violence’ offences decreased by 17 per cent for victims aged 19 and under. A lower reduction was noted for victims aged 20 years and over (8 per cent).
- The number of robberies where sharp instruments were the main weapon reduced by 13 per cent for victims aged 19 years and under compared with an 11 per cent increase for victims aged 20 years and over.

Overall, the findings for this initiative are encouraging, suggesting that fewer young people are becoming victims of knife crime. However, this trend is not the way in which knife crime is being focused upon by the media, and this aspect will be discussed further in the chapter that looks at media depictions of young people, crime and disorder.
Chapter 2  Young people as offenders and victims

First-time offenders

The target to increase the number of sanction detections has effectively been replaced by a target to reduce the number of first-time entrants into the youth justice system. Whereas the previous performance measure provided an incentive to deal formally with behaviour that might otherwise have received an informal response, the logic of the latter indicator is precisely the opposite. One might as a consequence anticipate a future rise in the use of various informal measures or formal disposals that do not constitute first-time entry.

There is an increasing array of disposals available to young people who come to the attention of the police for offending behaviour prior to prosecution. In addition to the system of reprimands and final warnings introduced by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, the police can deal with offending behaviour in the following ways.

- A penalty notice for disorder.
- A youth restorative disposal, currently available in eight pilot areas.
- Recording no further action in areas where there is a system of ‘triage’ in place that allows a process of diversion in appropriate circumstances following a Youth Offending Team assessment.
- A youth conditional caution, to be introduced later this year in selected pilot areas for 16- to 17-year-olds.

The first three of these options do not count as first-time entry, and an increased use of each might accordingly be anticipated in the coming period as decision making is increasingly directed towards meeting the new target.

Figures released by the YJB show that there was a fall in first-time entrants between March 2005 and March 2008, and these indicate that the target for a reduction of 5 per cent over that period had been exceeded. Separate figures published by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) also confirm that the target was met. However, the latter data differ in certain respects from those provided by the Board. First, despite the fact that the DCSF figures relate to England alone, they are considerably higher than those released by the YJB. Second, whereas the Board’s data show a fall in both the two years from April 2006, those published by the DCSF show a rise in the first year followed by a reduction in the most recent 12 months. Finally, the DCSF data give information over a longer period, demonstrating that, despite the recent fall, the number of first-time entrants is still high by comparison with earlier years.

Young people as victims of crime

Having discussed at some length the idea of young people as offenders and perpetrators of crime and disorder, the following section discusses young people in a different light – as victims of crime. This category of victim is often underestimated due to the perception that young people are instigators of deviancy rather than being also victims of criminal and anti-social behaviour activity.
Personal crime

The 2003 Crime and Justice Survey (Home Office, 2005) found that those in the younger age groups were the most likely to have been the victims of personal crime (assault, robbery, theft from the person and other theft of personal property) in the previous 12 months. About a third of 10- to 15-year-olds and 16- to 25-year-olds had experienced one or more personal crimes (at 35 per cent and 32 per cent, respectively, the differences being not statistically significant). The prevalence of personal crime was considerably lower among the 26–65 age group (at 14 per cent).

Victimisation remained at around the same high level between the ages of 10 and 19 (between 33 per cent and 38 per cent) before declining, but there was variation within the types of crime experienced.

Theft and robbery

The level of victimisation of theft from the person peaked among 18- to 19-year-olds (12 per cent) and that of robbery peaked among 16- to 19-year-olds (6 per cent). This compared with 6 per cent for theft from the person and 2 per cent for robbery for 10- to 11-year-olds (still above the proportion of those aged 26–65 who were victims). Those aged 10–11 years were the most likely to have been victims of other thefts of personal property, such as thefts from changing rooms, with 16 per cent reporting this during the previous 12 months (NACRO, 2009).

Among 10- to 17-year-olds, money was most frequently the target of thefts (28 per cent of victims). Mobile phones were the target for 25 per cent of victims, followed by stationery (20 per cent) and bicycles (11 per cent). There was considerable variation within the 10–17 age group in the items stolen (likely to be linked to different patterns of ownership). Those aged 10–11 years were significantly less likely to have mobile phones or bank cards stolen and more likely to have stationery stolen.

Assault

The proportion of 10- to 15-year-olds experiencing assaults (21 per cent) was slightly higher than that of 16- to 25-year-olds (19 per cent) although this difference was not statistically significant. Older adults were far less likely to have been victims of assault (7 per cent). Assaults among younger age groups are often assumed to be more trivial. While the highest prevalence of more serious assaults (those that resulted in injury) was among 18- to 19-year-olds (14 per cent), this was not significantly different from the proportion for 10- to 11-year-olds (11 per cent). Prevalence was relatively similar up to the ages of 20–21 and fell away significantly above that age.

Threats and criminal damage

In addition to the offences included in the ‘personal crime’ category, threats and criminal damage to personal property were also covered. Respondents
were asked whether they had been threatened 'in a way that actually frightened' them. The level of threats was higher among the younger age groups (12 per cent for those aged 10–15 and 14 per cent for those aged 16–25) than among the age group of 26–65 (9 per cent). There were no significant differences between the younger age groups although the nature of threats may change. Criminal damage to personal property was about the same level for all age groups (4 per cent) although the target of the damage would be likely to change with patterns of ownership (NACRO, 2009).

Bullying

In addition to criminal victimisation, young people were also asked whether they had been ‘bullied in a way that frightened or upset’ them in the previous year and about the nature of these incidents (these may also have been recorded as crimes in the survey). Among 10- to 17-year-olds, 19 per cent said they had been victims of bullying. Those aged 10–11 were significantly more likely to be victims within this group (27 per cent compared with 9 per cent of 16- to 17-year-olds). Females were also more likely to experience bullying (21 per cent) than males (17 per cent). Just over half of those bullied (52 per cent) said it had involved face-to-face abuse or verbal offensiveness. Around a third (32 per cent) said it had involved a physical assault, and a fifth (19 per cent) said it had involved threats. Some of these incidents were, therefore, technically criminal in nature (it was not clear whether they were regarded as such by victims). It was not possible to calculate precisely the extent to which criminal incidents reported to the survey by young people were related to bullying. However, it is clear that only a proportion of criminal victimisation of young people is accounted for by bullying, as 59 per cent of victims of violent crime said they were not the victims of bullying.

Repeat victimisation

In addition to looking at the proportion of people who have been the victims of crime, the research also examined the extent to which individuals were repeatedly victimised. The highest level of repeat victimisation was within the violence categories (assault and robbery), and it was particularly high for the younger age group: 60 per cent of 10- to 15-year-olds who experienced violence in the previous 12 months did so on more than one occasion. A fifth (19 per cent) had experienced five or more violent incidents in the previous 12 months. Older age groups who had experienced violence were less likely to be repeat victims. Within the violence category, repeat victimisation was particularly common for assaults resulting in injury. Again, the youngest victims were most likely to experience more than one incident (43 per cent of 10- to 15-year-old victims were victimised more than once, 40 per cent of 16- to 25-year-olds and 30 per cent of those aged 26–65). Around a fifth (19 per cent) of victims aged 10–15 accounted for two-thirds (66 per cent) of all violent incidents in that age group.
CASE STUDY: VIOLENT CRIME PATTERNS IN SOMERSET

Between 2003–04 and 2004–05, violent crime figures in Somerset almost doubled. In contrast, other reported crimes (i.e., burglary and vehicle crime) had fallen markedly over the same period. As a result, the crime and disorder reduction partnership undertook research to understand the patterns in violent crime as part of their six-month strategic assessment. Crime data were looked at both spatially (in which area did the crimes occur) and temporally (at what time of day did crimes occur). The objective was to look beyond trends in the aggregate numbers and to uncover where there were crime concentrations or ‘hotspots’, uncover when in the day violent incidents occurred, establish the profile of victims and perpetrators and explain why the patterns observed in the analysis occurred.

The expectations were that violent crime would be focused around domestic abuse, hate crime and the night-time economy violence, a pattern that was subsequently largely confirmed. However, there was a surprise. Over Somerset as a whole, four drivers of violence were identified: youth violence (which accounted for 27 per cent of recorded incidents), night-time economy violence (23 per cent), domestic abuse (22 per cent) and hate crime (3 per cent).

The most surprising finding was the level of violence linked to young people. Much of the violence seen in the daytime involved young people on weekdays between 3 and 5 pm, associated with the end of the school day. Victims tended to be 14 years old. It was observed that there were strong links to bullying, criminal damage, anti-social behaviour and robbery. The hotspots in Somerset occurred in most town centres in the county and coincided especially with areas shown to have higher levels of deprivation.

(www.creatingexcellence.org.uk/regeneration-renewal-article228-p1.html)

Patterns and risk factors

Just as those who come into contact with the criminal justice system as offenders have been found to have statistically similar characteristics, so too can this approach be applied to young people who become victims of crime. For example, some of the variations discussed above between the younger age groups are likely to be driven by their fast-changing situation as Finkelhor and Hashima (2001) point out. Changes in physical size will play a part in changing the nature of incidents they experience or do not experience. As they grow, young people become progressively less dependent and are less likely to experience the particular types of crime that are related to dependency (in particular, crimes of maltreatment). In parallel with this change, there is usually a reduction in guardianship and an increasing exposure to lifestyles that will put young people at higher risk of other types of crime (for instance, robbery). In addition, the changing value and status of personal belongings is also likely to play a part. Further, other factors that are related to the risks for young people of being victims of crime come into play. Before reading on, try the task below.
Chapter 2 Young people as offenders and victims

We have already asked you in this chapter to identify factors related to young people’s involvement in crime. These ‘risk factors’ typically fell into four groups.

1. Family – including inadequate, harsh or inconsistent parenting.
2. School/education – such as low educational attainment, truancy or exclusion.
3. Community – including residence in areas with low community cohesion and easy access to drugs.
4. Individual/personal – such as being male, having an offending peer group, poor physical or mental health or misuse of alcohol or drugs.

**PRACTICAL TASK**

*Now think about the risk factors that may be prevalent in young people becoming the victims of crime. Write down what you think they are and why they might apply. To what extent do they differ from the risk factors outlined above?*

Personal characteristics, the type of area that people live in, aspects of their lifestyle and their upbringing all interact to produce different levels of risk. Differences in lifestyle may expose individuals in the same area and with the same demographic profile to different levels of risk through, for instance, bringing them into contact more frequently with offenders or situations where offending is prevalent. The types of behaviour include:

- noisy neighbours, teenagers hanging around, people sleeping rough, people being harassed in the street, people using or selling drugs and people being drunk or rowdy in public;
- whether school has clear rules, pupils hit teachers, teachers praise good work and easy to truant;
- whether parents praise, listen, treat fairly and want to know where young person is and whether parents often argue/fight with each other.

**Underlying predictors of victimisation**

However, it is not clear to what extent the apparently strong associations with lifestyle characteristics actually reflect a direct link with victimisation. As an example, drug taking may only be associated with victimisation because a third factor, such as the nature of a friendship circle, is driving both drug taking and victimisation. To understand more fully which factors are really important in victimisation, and therefore where interventions would be best directed, the risk factors which are predictive of victimisation independently of other factors need to be identified.
Offending behaviour and lifestyle
Committing a criminal offence in the previous year was the strongest predictor of personal crime victimisation among 10- to 15-year-olds (NACRO, 2009). The odds of being victimised for that group were 2.5 times higher than for those who had not offended, other things being equal. Those who had carried out at least one act of anti-social behaviour also had statistically significant higher odds of being victims, although this was a less strong predictor. This is consistent with the general findings from other studies (Aye Maung, 1995). There is interest in the literature in the possibility that the victimisation of young people leads to offending and offending to victimisation through the developmental process. However, rather than displaying this direct relationship, as the study reported here is cross-sectional and represents only one year, the association is likely to reflect shared risk factors between offending and victimisation.

Local area
The area, in terms of relative deprivation or whether urban, was not a significant predictor of personal crime victimisation. This is in line with findings elsewhere (Aye Maung, 1995). However, another measure of the local area, the perceived prevalence of anti-social behaviour, was the second strongest predictor. Those who said three or more types of anti-social behaviour were common in their area had odds of being victims of personal crime that were three times those of young people who said none were (other things being equal). This is consistent with Smith et al. (2001) who point out that levels of victimisation and delinquency tend to vary between neighbourhoods in parallel with each other.

This chapter has highlighted the different trends in young people as offenders and, just as importantly, as victims of crime. Clearly, the young person as offender and victim is not a new concept, and we have seen the historical precedence for such behaviour and for the reactions to young people engaged in what can be defined as deviant behaviour. Understanding the risks associated with becoming a young offender and/or victim appears to be an important idea if society is to prevent more young people becoming part of these categories.

'Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers'. A comprehensive account of the construction of moral panics is provided in Cohen's (1973) publication.

Chapter 2 Young people as offenders and victims


Reluctant Gangsters: Youth Gangs in Waltham Forest. An account of young people's involvement in gangs can be found in John Pitt's 2007 publication on youth gangs in North East London, available as a download at www.walthamforest.gov.uk/reluctant-gangsters.pdf


Hackney Youth Offending Team (2009) Pre-Court Disposals.


USEFUL WEBSITES

www.asb.homeoffice.gov.uk/article.aspx?id=9118 (Youth Offending Teams)

www.homeoffice.gov.uk/ords/bcs1.html (British Crime Survey)

www.jrf.org.uk/ (The Joseph Rowntree Foundation)

www.nacro.org.uk/ (National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders, NACRO)

www.ncvys.org.uk/ (The National Council for Voluntary Youth Services)

www.opsi.gov.uk/ (Office of Public Sector Information)

www.yjb.gov.uk/en-gb/ (Youth Justice Board)