



**Attorney General
& Justice**

YOUTH ON TRACK: PROJECTED VOLUMES AND NEEDS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of a review of the New South Wales juvenile justice system, the Department of Attorney General and Justice has proposed an increased focus on early intervention. In order to successfully implement an effective early intervention program, it is important to be able to estimate ahead of time the number of people that would benefit most from being provided services at an early stage, as well as identify which services these people are likely to need.

Using models developed by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research in recent years, a group of around 1,000 (which can be expanded to 1,500 or contracted to 300, depending on the desired resource allocation and intensity) young people that have a heightened risk of reoffending have been identified. This group can be identified using information that is easily gathered at the time of a caution. This group is likely to benefit from early intervention that addresses their needs.

The needs that this group has are likely to be varied and interrelated. There will need to be a strong emphasis on the provision of mental health services. Substance abuse disorders, conduct disorders, anger and violence issues, and interpersonal problems can be expected to be particularly prevalent. The group also have low academic achievement, very poor literacy and numeracy skills, and a history of disruption and lack of engagement at school, so education services that do not replicate traditional school structures are likely to be important.

Most young people in the target group are also likely to have multiple needs, which may require more intensive and holistic services. Any design of service provision must also take into account issues such as high rates of abuse and neglect, a history of non-attendance and disruption in school, non-conventional family structures, and a large proportion of young people who are of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent.

| Area | Issue | Estimated Number (Incl. 4+ Contacts*) | Estimated Number (Excl. 4+ Contacts*) |
|---------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Total | Total projected volume | 1,183 | 839 |
| Mental health | Substance use disorder | 468 | 262 |
| | Conduct disorder | 458 | 226 |
| | Anger/Violence | 267 | 143 |
| | Interpersonal problems | 131 | 75 |
| | ADHD | 311 | 190 |
| Education | Lowest ability range (composite) | 275 | 138 |
| | Lowest ability range (numerical) | 577 | 281 |
| | Lowest ability range (spelling) | 195 | 101 |
| | Lowest ability range (reading) | 195 | 101 |
| Other | Experienced abuse or neglect | 698 | 386 |
| | Live in out of home care | 216 | 105 |

Note: * As the *Youth on Track* program is focused on early intervention, it may be appropriate to exclude young people with long offending histories. Two alternative projections have been estimated: one including young people that had four or more contacts with the criminal justice system before receiving their current caution, and one excluding these young people.

INTRODUCTION

As part of a review of the New South Wales juvenile justice system, the Department of Attorney General and Justice has proposed an increased focus on early intervention. This would involve devoting significant resources to young people early on in their involvement in the criminal justice system, to attempt to address any offending-related needs they may have. If these needs are successfully addressed, the young person's risk of reoffending should decline, meaning future involvement in the criminal justice system is avoided. A successful early intervention will significantly improve lives, as well as save significant resources through avoiding costly events such as court appearances or imprisonment.

A caution is generally a young person's first contact with the criminal justice system, and is designed to avoid a criminal record and divert less serious offenders from being involved in costly punishments. Almost half of young people that receive a caution in NSW are not subsequently involved in the criminal justice system. This means that when implementing an early intervention service, it is important to be able to identify the young people most at risk of reoffending. The more accurately one can predict subsequent involvement in the criminal justice system, the more effectively resources on early intervention services will be spent.

Once a young person has been identified as having a higher risk of reoffending and their needs have been identified, a successful intervention will provide them with services to address their needs as soon as possible. Because of this need for timeliness in service provision, it is important to be able to estimate the numbers of young people that will need to be targeted, as well as the distribution of the needs that services will likely need to be able to address. This document aims to project the size of a sample that could be targeted by a Youth on Track early intervention program for young people at high risk of reoffending, describe characteristics of that sample, and determine what offending-related needs the program might need to address.

PROJECTED VOLUME

Of all young people receiving a caution in 2006, 52% had subsequent further contact with either the adult or the juvenile criminal justice system in the following three years (Lind, 2011). The rate at which these young people reoffended varied with a few key characteristics. These characteristics are known at the point of caution, and could easily be used to identify young people that are at a particularly high risk of reoffending. The probabilities of reoffending by characteristic for cautions issued by police are shown in Table 1, and the reoffending probabilities for cautions issued by a court are shown in Table 2.

Table 1: Reoffending probabilities for people receiving police cautions

| Gender | Indigenous Status | Prior Contacts | Probability of Reoffending |
|--------|-------------------|----------------|----------------------------|
| Male | Indigenous | 0 | 62% |
| | | 1 | 82% |
| | | 2-3 | 90% |
| | | 4+ | 94% |
| | Non-Indigenous | 0 | 32% |
| | | 1 | 56% |
| | | 2-3 | 72% |
| | | 4+ | 81% |
| Female | Indigenous | 0 | 37% |
| | | 1 | 61% |
| | | 2-3 | 76% |
| | | 4+ | 84% |
| | Non-Indigenous | 0 | 14% |
| | | 1 | 31% |
| | | 2-3 | 48% |
| | | 4+ | 59% |

Source: Modified from Lind (2011).

Table 2: Reoffending probabilities for people receiving court cautions

| Gender | Indigenous Status | Prior Contacts | Probability of Reoffending |
|--------|-------------------|----------------|----------------------------|
| Male | Indigenous | 0 | 82% |
| | | 1 | 93% |
| | | 2-3 | 96% |
| | | 4+ | 98% |
| | Non-Indigenous | 0 | 57% |
| | | 1 | 78% |
| | | 2-3 | 88% |
| | | 4+ | 92% |
| Female | Indigenous | 0 | 62% |
| | | 1 | 81% |
| | | 2-3 | 90% |
| | | 4+ | 93% |
| | Non-Indigenous | 0 | 31% |
| | | 1 | 55% |
| | | 2-3 | 72% |
| | | 4+ | 80% |

Source: Modified from Lind (2011).

Accurate predictions of the number of young offenders falling into higher-risk categories is difficult because cross-tabulations of each offender type were not published in the BOCSAR report. It is known,

for example, that 72% of those receiving a caution in 2006 were male, and 24% were Indigenous, but it is not known what proportion were both male *and* Indigenous. However, Lind (2011) does provide total numbers of young people receiving cautions that have given probabilities of reoffending. The report also notes that 7% of all young people receiving cautions had four or more prior contacts with the criminal justice system. As the intent of *Youth on Track* is to intervene early on in an offending career, it may be appropriate to exclude those young people who already have a relatively long offending history. Table 3 shows the estimated number of people receiving cautions in 2011 who would be targeted for intervention, depending on the reoffending risk threshold and whether offenders with four or more prior contacts were included.

Table 3: Estimated volume of target group, by minimum reoffending probability

| Minimum Probability of Reoffending | Number Targeted for Intervention | |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| | Including Offenders with 4+ Contacts | Excluding Offenders with 4+ Contacts |
| ≥70% | 1,485 | 1,142 |
| ≥75% | 1,183 | 839 |
| ≥80% | 1,060 | 716 |
| ≥85% | 648 | 476 |
| ≥90% | 535 | 363 |

Source: Modified from Lind (2011).

Using a minimum probability of 75% to determine eligibility for the intervention program, a volume of about 1,200 young people (850 young people if only targeting those with less than four prior criminal justice system contacts) can be expected. If the proposed intervention is relatively intensive, smaller numbers of higher risk offenders can be targeted by increasing the minimum probability criterion. Approximately 500 young people receiving cautions (350 if offenders with long histories are excluded) have a greater than 90% predicted probability of reoffending within the next three years

It should be noted that while the above model was developed to be highly accurate, the definition of 'accurate' is somewhat specific. This model maximises the probability that the offenders that are predicted to reoffend actually do reoffend sometime in the next three years. However, there are a large number of offenders that the model did not target but did reoffend. For example, using the 75% criterion for targeting, only about 150 of the 1,183 targeted offenders are expected to not reoffend in the next three years. However, there are expected to be another 2,529 young offenders who do not receive services but do reoffend. Although a large number of recidivists will not be identified using this method, the method does ensure that resources are used in the most effective way, because it minimises the amount of funding directed to young people who were not going to reoffend anyway.

CHARACTERISTICS OF TARGET GROUP

The remainder of this document will assume a minimum reoffending probability criterion of 75-80% for the program, which will target about 1,000 young people (or 700-800 if offenders with longer criminal histories are excluded). This sample will be disproportionately made up of young offenders that received their cautions from a court (rather than police), and are likely to be disproportionately male. Males already receive over two-thirds of all cautions, so the vast majority of the targeted sample are likely to be male. For the purposes of calculating needs that differ by gender (see below sections), it is assumed that this sample including people with four or more contacts is 90% male, and excluding people with four or more contacts is 85% male.

The sample is also likely to be disproportionately Indigenous. The only non-Indigenous demographic group that received a police sentence and have a probability of reoffending that is greater than 75% is non-Indigenous males with more than four prior contacts with the criminal justice system (which is a

relatively small number of people). The rest of the sample is likely to be Indigenous young people who received a police caution, or both non-Indigenous and Indigenous people who received a court caution. Almost all of the females in the targeted sample are likely to be Indigenous. This means that it is extremely important that any service selected for intervention is culturally appropriate, especially given that most services targeted at reducing reoffending in young people work extensively with families.

NEEDS OF TARGET GROUP

The types of needs that young people who receive cautions have are not well known. While there are many predictors of future offending that are collected by government agencies (see Weatherburn, Cush & Saunders, 2007), these have not yet been published for the sample of people who receive cautions. Furthermore, the information that is useful for predicting reoffending is often not useful in deciding what services to provide. For example, Weatherburn, Cush and Saunders (2007) find that young people appearing in the NSW Children's Court are more likely to reoffend if they:

- Are younger at their index court appearance
- Are of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent (borderline significant)
- Are not living with both natural parents
- Have experienced some form of trauma
- Have been placed in out-of-home care
- Have been the subject of a confirmed report of neglect or abuse
- Have one or both parents deceased
- Were not attending school at the time of the index court appearance (borderline significant)
- Have been suspended or expelled
- Associate with delinquent peers
- Have committed a theft or deception offence
- Have had more past contacts with the criminal justice system

However, many of these variables (such as their age, Indigenous status, offence type, and offending history) are static risks, which cannot be changed by a program such as *Youth on Track*. In order to be effective, interventions should focus on changing dynamic risks – characteristics or behaviours that increase the risk of offending *and are able to be changed* (NSW DAGJ, 2012).

There exists a large amount of information on dynamic risks of young offenders. However, almost all of this data is of young offenders undertaking custodial or community sentences. There is a large issue of bias in extrapolating needs from a sample of offenders undertaking court sentences to a sample of offenders receiving cautions. Since the offenders in custody and community sentences are likely to have committed more serious crimes and/or have significantly longer offending histories, they are much more likely to be associated with offending-related risk factors such as serious mental health disorders.

However, given that the target group for *Youth on Track* are the offenders with a high risk of reoffending, this may not be an issue. If the goal is to look at the offenders receiving cautions today and identify who will become the offenders receiving custodial and community sentences of tomorrow, then there is less issue with making estimates that are based on those serious offenders. The following analysis will compare the prevalence of issues in the general population of young people to the young people undertaking community and custodial sentences.

For the purposes of estimating the number of *Youth on Track* clients that will have particular needs, it is assumed that the group including those with long offending histories has rates of issues weighted as 25% of the general population rate and 75% of the population of young people undertaking community sentences, whereas the group excluding those with long offending histories has rates that are weighted

as 50% of the general population rate and 50% of the rate of those on community sentences. This adjustment is made to account for the idea that young people's needs are likely to become more pronounced as their offending history increases. These assumptions are necessarily made for the purposes of estimating volumes of people requiring particular needs. The more accurately the *Youth on Track* screening process can identify those at high risk of reoffending, the more similar the resulting target group will be to those young offenders receiving court sentences.

Mental Health Needs

Summaries of the types of mental health disorders and related issues that have been found in samples of young people in the general population (Sawyer et al, 2000; ABS, 2008), and undertaking community (Kenny et al, 2006) and custodial (NSW DJJ, 2003) sentences are shown in Table 4 (males) and Table 5 (females). It should be noted that the methodology for each of these surveys did not include diagnosing young people with particular disorders, but asked young people about symptoms, and then reported on the proportion of young people that report symptoms consistent with particular disorders. However, this gives a sense of the overall mental health of young offenders.

Table 4: Prevalence of mental health issues in males

| Disorder/Issue | General Population (13-17 years) | Community Sentence | Custodial Sentence |
|------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Substance use disorder | 15.5%* | 48% | 60% |
| Conduct disorder | 4.4% | 51% | 60% |
| Anger/Violence | 5% | 27% | 47% |
| Interpersonal problems | 3.8% | 12% | 42% |
| ADHD | 15.4% | Unknown | 28% |
| Psychological distress | 11% | 23% | Unknown |
| Major depression | 4.2% | 9% | 13% |
| Attempted suicide | Unknown | 8% | 9% |
| Anxiety disorder | 9.3%* | 3% | 9% |

Note: * Reported prevalence is for 16-24 year olds

Table 5: Prevalence of mental health issues in females

| Disorder/Issue | General Population (13-17 years) | Community Sentence | Custodial Sentence |
|------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Substance use disorder | 9.8%* | 46% | 77% |
| Conduct disorder | 1.6% | 43% | 72% |
| Anger/Violence | 4% | 42% | 56% |
| Interpersonal problems | 3% | 27% | 67% |
| ADHD | 6.8% | Unknown | 50% |
| Psychological distress | 12% | 35% | Unknown |
| Major depression | 3.2% | 24% | 22% |
| Attempted suicide | Unknown | 16% | 17% |
| Anxiety disorder | 21.7%* | 19% | 34% |

Note: * Reported prevalence is for 16-24 year olds

The most obvious point to note is that, with the exception of anxiety disorders in males, every type of mental health disorder or related issue for which data is available is far more prevalent among samples of young offenders than in the general population. This is to be expected, as problems with mental health are strongly related to increased offending (Smith & Trimboli, 2010). This means that a strategy of providing services to address mental health issues needs to be a core component of any intervention for high-risk young offenders, and that any other services that are likely to be provided to this group of people (for example, education, housing, family welfare, or health-related services) need to anticipate dealing with a large number of clients with comorbid mental health disorders.

Substance use disorders, conduct disorders, anger and violence problems, and interpersonal problems are all extremely prevalent in the offender samples, with between a quarter and three quarters of young people reporting symptoms consistent with these issues.¹ ADHD and associated disorders are also somewhat common, which may relate to increased learning difficulties (discussed in the following section).

Psychological distress, major depression, attempted suicide, and anxiety disorders were also much more common among offenders than the general public, and also more common among females than males. One issue with many of the factors relating to distress or mood is the direction of causality involved. While it may be the case that these factors lead to greater future offending, the degree that these problems are *caused by* attending court, receiving a punishment, and then undertaking that punishment (including being in detention) is unknown. If involvement in the criminal justice system, punishment, and associated stigma has some role in causing depression, then it is likely that young people at the caution stage have much lower rates of these issues, even if they are otherwise similar to offenders in custody.

Using assumptions about the gender makeup of the *Youth on Track* group, as well as how closely this group is likely to resemble the group of young people undertaking community sentences (discussed previously), the number of *Youth on Track* participants that have symptoms consistent with particular mental health disorders or related issues have been estimated. These estimated volumes are summarised in Table 6.

Table 6: Estimated Number of Target Group with Particular Mental Health Issues

| Disorder/Issue | Estimated Number (Incl. 4+ Contacts) | Estimated Number (Excl. 4+ Contacts) |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Substance use disorder | 468 | 262 |
| Conduct disorder | 458 | 226 |
| Anger/Violence | 267 | 143 |
| Interpersonal problems | 131 | 75 |
| ADHD | 311 | 190 |
| Psychological distress | 248 | 151 |
| Major depression | 105 | 64 |
| Attempted suicide | 104 | 77 |
| Anxiety disorder | 72 | 69 |

A key piece of information that is not known about the offending population is the degree to which someone with one mental health disorder is likely to also have other mental health problems. For example, it is unknown if the estimated 468 young people with substance use disorders are more or less the same group of people as the 458 with conduct disorders, or if they are a completely separate group. This is important for two reasons. Firstly, people with comorbid mental health issues are more likely to

¹ If juveniles are similar to adults, there may be a high prevalence of substance abuse disorders even among the non-serious offending population. Jones and Crawford (2007) report that 70% of offenders appearing in the Local Court (similar to the population receiving cautions in that most of them do not go on to receive custodial or supervised community sentences) met criteria for one or more measures of disordered/dependent substance abuse.

reoffend than people with just one problem. Trimboli and Smith (2010) found that adults with comorbid substance abuse and non-substance abuse disorders reoffended significantly more than adults with only substance abuse disorders and adults with only non-substance abuse disorders. This is particularly likely to be relevant for the target sample of *Youth on Track*, where a large proportion of participants may have substance abuse disorders. The second reason comorbidity of mental health disorders is important is that it is likely to be harder to treat people that have multiple issues. For example, many programs to treat substance use disorder may not be set up to also deal with problems with anger or violence.

While the degree of correlation between mental health disorders in young offenders is not known, it is likely to be relatively high, with a large number of young people that have complex and interrelated mental health needs. This is likely to impact on the types of services that are appropriate for these young people, as well as impact on what those services might cost.

Education Needs

Performance in education is extremely important for young people involved in the criminal justice system. Disengagement from school is a strong predictor of youth offending, but offending may also lead to reduced schooling, which may reduce employment opportunities and reinforce offending behaviours. Results of surveys testing basic literacy and numeracy skills of offenders undertaking community (Kenny et al, 2006) and custodial (NSW DJJ, 2003) sentences are summarised in Tables 7-10 and Figures 1-4.

Results of the tests show that young offenders perform well below average in all forms of educational achievement. The tests are calibrated such that 50% of the relevant age group scores in the average range of 90-109, with one quarter above that and another quarter below that score. Only 16% of young people undertaking community sentences and 15% of young people undertaking custodial sentences were able to score in the average range or above in the composite numerical, spelling, and reading test. About one third of young offenders achieved a composite score of less than 70, a range consistent with intellectual disability².

The numerical performance of the sample is a particular issue, with almost two thirds of young offenders undertaking a court sentence achieving a score consistent with intellectual disability, and less than ten percent in the normal range or above. There was a much larger proportion of the sample that achieved scores in the average or better range for spelling and word reading, but even in these cases performance fell well below expected norms, and a significant number of young people achieved the lowest score range.

² A diagnosis of intellectual disability requires tests of cognitive ability, as well as adaptive ability. Tests of academic performance assess only adaptive ability (Kenny et al, 2006). The survey of young people undertaking community sentences also assessed cognitive ability, and estimate that after combining those results, about 8% of the sample likely have an intellectual disability. The authors consider this an underestimate.

Table 7: Scores for education test (composite)

| Composite Score | General Population | Community Sentence | Custodial Sentence |
|-----------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| 69 and below | 3% | 30% | 37% |
| 70-79 | 7% | 30% | 27% |
| 80-89 | 15% | 25% | 21% |
| 90-109 | 50% | 14% | 13% |
| 110-119 | 15% | 2% | 2% |
| 120-129 | 7% | 0% | 0% |
| 130 and above | 3% | 0% | 0% |

Source: Kenny et al (2006)

Figure 1: Scores for education test (composite)

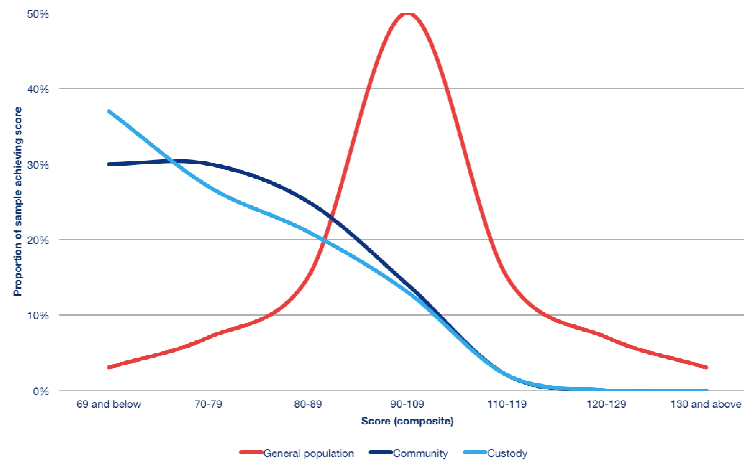


Table 8: Scores for education test (numerical)

| Numerical Score | General Population | Community Sentence | Custodial Sentence |
|-----------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| 69 and below | 3% | 64% | 64% |
| 70-79 | 7% | 21% | 19% |
| 80-89 | 15% | 9% | 9% |
| 90-109 | 50% | 5% | 7% |
| 110-119 | 15% | 1% | 1% |
| 120-129 | 7% | 0% | 0% |
| 130 and above | 3% | 0% | 0% |

Source: Kenny et al (2006)

Figure 2: Scores for education test (numerical)

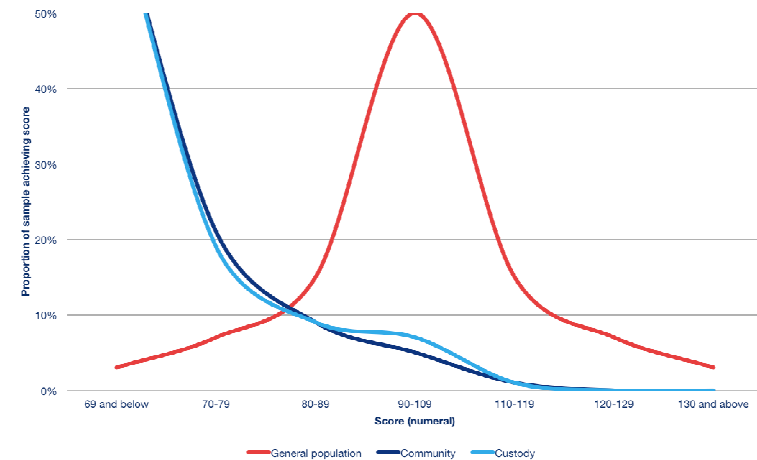


Table 9: Scores for education test (spelling)

| Spelling Score | General Population | Community Sentence | Custodial Sentence |
|----------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| 69 and below | 3% | 21% | 30% |
| 70-79 | 7% | 17% | 20% |
| 80-89 | 15% | 20% | 17% |
| 90-109 | 50% | 37% | 31% |
| 110-119 | 15% | 4% | 2% |
| 120-129 | 7% | 1% | 0% |
| 130 and above | 3% | 0% | 0% |

Source: Kenny et al (2006)

Table 10: Scores for education test (word reading)

| Word Reading Score | General Population | Community Sentence | Custodial Sentence |
|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| 69 and below | 3% | 21% | 28% |
| 70-79 | 7% | 17% | 12% |
| 80-89 | 15% | 18% | 18% |
| 90-109 | 50% | 39% | 34% |
| 110-119 | 15% | 5% | 7% |
| 120-129 | 7% | 0% | 1% |
| 130 and above | 3% | 0% | 0% |

Source: Kenny et al (2006)

Figure 3: Scores for education test (spelling)

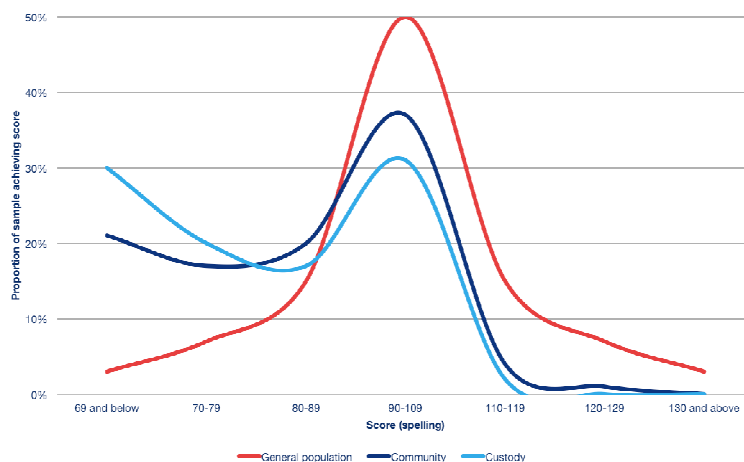
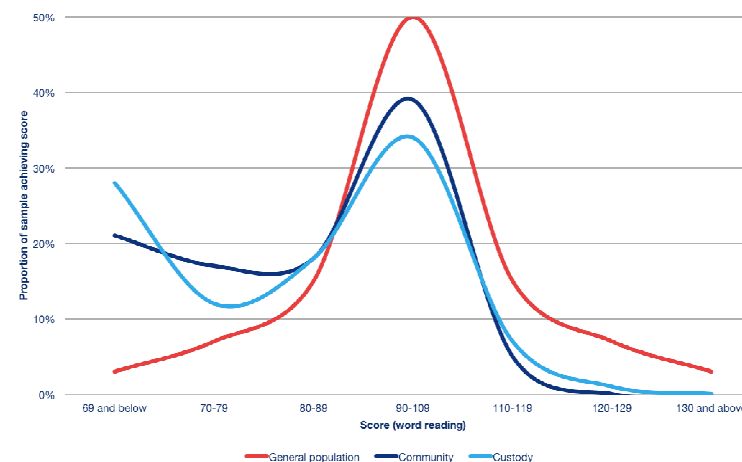


Figure 4: Scores for education test (word reading)



The estimated number of young people with academic abilities that are below average or in the lowest range are reported in Table 11.

Table 11: Estimated Number of Target Group with Educational Issues

| Area | Ability Range | Estimated Number (Incl. 4+ Contacts) | Estimated Number (Excl. 4+ Contacts) |
|--------------|---------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Composite | Below average | 828 | 461 |
| | Lowest range | 275 | 138 |
| Numerical | Below average | 908 | 499 |
| | Lowest range | 577 | 281 |
| Spelling | Below average | 589 | 348 |
| | Lowest range | 195 | 101 |
| Word reading | Below average | 571 | 340 |
| | Lowest range | 195 | 101 |

The high number of very low scores could be a result of the young people’s unwillingness to fully complete the test, as opposed to a lack of academic ability. However, this still has implications for the willingness of young people to participate in the mainstream education system. If the *Youth on Track* target sample is similar to young people undertaking court sentences, there are likely to be a number of serious barriers to re-integrating the young people in the educational system. In addition to literacy and numeracy skills that are well below their peers and a number of mental health issues, young offenders on community orders are particularly likely to regularly skip school (60%), be suspended from school (89%), and be perpetrators of bullying (56%). Any educational programs developed for this sample will need to take these factors into account.

Other Needs

There are other factors that contribute to reoffending and may need to be addressed by an intervention program (or at least kept in mind while designing the program). These issues are summarised in Table 12 and estimated volumes for the *Youth on Track* sample are reported in Table 13. Young people in the criminal justice system are particularly likely to experience abuse or neglect. Seventy-two percent of young people on community orders had experienced some form of abuse and neglect in their childhood, compared to estimates of 10-20% for the general population (Price-Robertson, Bromfield & Vassallo, 2010). Thirty-eight percent of females and 23% of males experienced some form of severe abuse or neglect.

Table 12: Prevalence of Other Needs

| Issue | General Population | Community Sentence | Custodial Sentence |
|----------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Experienced any abuse/neglect | 20% | 72% | Unknown |
| Experienced severe abuse/neglect | Unknown | 25% | 25% |
| Not living in the family home | Unknown | 36% | 33% |
| Live in out of home care | 1% | 24% | 28% |
| Deceased parent | Unknown | 10% | 9% |
| Parent currently in prison | Unknown | 5% | 11% |

Table 13: Estimated Number of Target Group with Other Issues

| Issue | Estimated Number (Incl. 4+ Contacts) | Estimated Number (Excl. 4+ Contacts) |
|---------------------------|---|---|
| Experienced abuse/neglect | 698 | 386 |
| Live in out of home care | 216 | 105 |

In addition, young offenders are more likely to have different family structures. About a third of young people on community and custodial orders do not live in the family home, a quarter live in out of home care (compared to 1% of the general population – see Lamont, 2011), and 10-15% report having at least one of their parents either deceased or in custody. This is an important issue for programs relating to young offenders, since most programs aiming to change behaviour need to heavily involve the young person's family in order to be successful.

CONCLUSION

Of the approximately 8,000 young people receiving cautions each year, there is a group of around 1,000 (which can be expanded to 1,500 or contracted to 300, depending on the desired resource allocation and intensity) that have a heightened risk of reoffending. This group can be identified using information that is easily gathered at the time of the caution. This group is likely to benefit from early intervention that addresses their needs.

The needs that the *Youth on Track* target group has are likely to be varied and interrelated. There will need to be a strong emphasis on the provision of mental health services. Substance abuse disorders, conduct disorders, anger and violence issues, and interpersonal problems can be expected to be particularly prevalent. The group also have low academic achievement, very poor literacy and numeracy skills, and a history of disruption and lack of engagement at school, so education services that do not replicate traditional school structures are likely to be important.

Most young people in the target group are also likely to have multiple needs, which may require more intensive and holistic services. Any design of service provision must also take into account issues such as high rates of abuse and neglect, a history of non-attendance and disruption in school, non-conventional family structures, and a large proportion of young people who are of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent.

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