

A Snapshot of Young People in New South Wales Developed by Garner Clancey January 2008

Much is said about young people's involvement in crime. As a context for any discussion of youth crime, it is necessary to understand how many young people actually reside in New South Wales (NSW). The following Census 2006 data provides the number of young people in NSW by age and gender.

Table 1: Young people aged between 10 and 18 years in NSW by gender

Age	Male	Female	Total
10	44,873	42,554	87,427
11	45,783	43,864	89,647
12	45,913	43,589	89,502
13	46,157	43,818	89,975
14	46,588	43,422	90,010
15	46,620	44,217	90,837
16	46,852	43,878	90,730
17	45,460	43,237	88,697
TOTAL	368,246	348,579	716,825

Source: ABS 2068.0 Census Data 2006

Given that the total population of NSW at the time of the 2006 Census was 6,549,179, young people aged between 10 and 18 years represent approximately 11% of the total population. Males represent a slightly greater percentage (i.e. 51.37%) of the overall 10-18 year old population.

Table 2: Young people aged between 10 and 18 years in NSW by Indigenous status

Age	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	Not Stated	Total
10	3,675	78,736	5,016	87,427
11	3,750	80,871	5,026	89,647
12	3,623	80,973	4,906	89,502
13	3,639	81,366	4,971	89,976
14	3,576	81,605	4,828	90,009
15	3,506	82,641	4,690	90,837
16	3,246	82,802	4,681	90,729
17	3,001	81,108	4,588	88,697
TOTAL	28,016	650,102	38,706	716,824

Source: ABS 2068.0 Census Data 2006

Despite the very slight discrepancy between the totals in the two tables, it is apparent that young people identifying as Indigenous represent approximately 3.9% of the NSW population of young people aged between 10 and 18 years of age. In comparison, people identifying as Indigenous represented just 2.1% of the overall NSW population.

A Snapshot of Young People's Contact with the New South Wales Criminal Justice System Developed by Garner Clancey January 2008

It is often difficult to determine exactly how many young people come into contact with the criminal justice system. Media stories tend to routinely suggest that there has been an upsurge in juvenile crime. Understanding existing data helps to go beyond the headlines.

In NSW the criminal justice system can impose four types of interventions when young people aged above 10 and below 18 years of age commit an offence. To facilitate understanding of the data, a short explanation of these four types of formal interventions is provided below:

- *Warnings* are issued by police 'on the run' for summary offences (i.e. offensive language and behaviour).
- *Cautions* are issued (mostly) by police at the police station in the presence of parents / guardians and are given for more serious offences (including indictable offences that can be dealt with summarily, i.e. break, enter and steal; steal motor vehicle; malicious damage and assault). Three cautions is the maximum that a young person can receive.
- *Youth justice conferences* involve the victim and young offender coming together to repair the harm caused by the offence (which will mostly be similar to those offences for which cautions can be issued).
- *Court* is reserved for the most serious offences (i.e. murder, sexual offences, drug supply and trafficking) or when the young person does not admit guilt to an offence.¹

Table 1: Interventions by Year against Young People (10-18 years) in New South Wales

Intervention	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Court	15672	11237	9368	9000	8547	7903	8125	8428	8874
Youth Justice Conference	508	1075	1070	1148	1147	985	885	907	933
Caution	5616	7459	7626	9465	9797	9571	9114	9239	9072
Warning	2537	8472	13389	20265	34396	47094	48398	45754	46975

Source: NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research Annual Crime Statistics and Court publications

From the data presented in Table 1, it is clear that there have been some dramatic changes in the nature of formal interventions in NSW in the past 10 years. Perhaps of greatest interest is the dramatic fall in court appearances. The decline from 15,672 in 1998 to less than 9,000 in 2006 represents a reduction of slightly greater than 55%. This is largely a consequence of the introduction of the *Young Offenders Act*, which is also responsible for the increase in diversionary interventions (warnings, cautions and youth justice conferences).

Furthermore, it is clear that the actual number of young people who are formally dealt with in NSW for their involvement in offending is quite small. Leaving warnings aside (given the generally trivial circumstances under which a warning can be issued), less than 20,000 young people receive a caution, participated in a youth justice conference or attended court annually in the most recent years in NSW. Given that there are in excess of 700,000 young people aged between 10 and 18 years of age in NSW, this represents quite a small percentage of the total population of young people.

¹ See the *Young Offenders Act 1997 (NSW)* for a more detailed explanation of warnings, cautions and youth justice conferences. A good publication which provides a comprehensive overview of the law as it pertains to young people is Sanders, J. and Grainger, R. (2003) *Youth Justice: Youth Guide to Cops and Court in NSW*, 3rd Edition, Macquarie Legal Centre, Federation Press, Annandale.