

DC-OMM Discussion: Youth Crime and Justice

Youth crime and justice continues to capture public attention despite rates of youth offending declining in Australia and New Zealand in the past decade. Several high-profile incidents have recently re-focused attention on young people, specifically youth gangs, youth violence and the age of criminal responsibility. Black Lives Matter (BLM) has also centered attention on Indigenous and Māori youth overrepresentation in the justice system. Against this backdrop, ANZPAA is seeking DC-OMM input through this Discussion Paper on what work the agency can undertake that will be of value for policing.

Distinguishing between Youth Crime and Youth Justice

ANZPAA undertook research and scoping on youth crime and justice to identify the main areas of concern for policing. Through this scoping, ANZPAA recognised a distinction between youth crime and youth justice challenges. This distinction is important to better define and focus policing efforts:

- **Youth crime** falls within police's scope of practice, representing areas where police have **more control**.
- **Youth justice** involves areas where other institutions typically have greater power and police focus on influencing.

Youth Crime

This scoping examined the following issues within Youth Crime:

- **Knife Crime:** Knife-related offending has become a major issue among young people in several jurisdictions, with recent fatal stabbings involving young people drawing public attention.
- **Youth Gangs:** Public perceptions of dangers posed by youth gangs has caused mounting pressure on police to respond to 'gang behaviour'.
- **Property Crime:** Young people are frequently apprehended for offences against property, most commonly theft and car theft. There have been several recent high-profile fatalities involving young people driving stolen vehicles at high speeds.

Youth Justice

This scoping examined the following issues within Youth Justice. These challenges require greater levels of strategic engagement within jurisdictions and input from other non-policing stakeholders.

- **Age of Criminal Responsibility:** Raising the age of criminal responsibility has been discussed at the Federal level amongst Attorney-Generals, however there is concern that this may impact policing's ability to arrest and hold young offenders.
- **Youth Bail:** Police are routinely challenged by a small cohort of recidivist youth offenders who account for a disproportionate amount of crime. Several jurisdictions have recently strengthened youth bail laws to mitigate youth reoffending.
- **Indigenous Youth:** Indigenous youth are over-represented within the criminal justice system. This over-representation has been acknowledged as a challenge through several inquiries into youth justice.

DISCUSSION POINT:

Is the differentiation between Youth Crime and Youth Justice broadly supported?

Youth Crime Focus

DISCUSSION POINT:

Which of the following Youth Crime challenges would be most beneficial for ANZPAA to explore?



Knife Crime: Knife-related offences have increased significantly across several jurisdictions in recent years. Research indicates knife carrying among young people is largely associated with prior victimisation and self-protection. This underpins the importance of understanding risk perceptions amongst young people and the circumstances that may lead to knife carrying in local communities. Additionally supporting young people to feel safe may be crucial to reducing and preventing knife crime.



Youth Gangs: Sustained media focus on youth gangs and the danger they pose to communities has seen mounting public and political pressure for police to respond to 'gang behaviour'. While there is widespread public perception that youth gangs are a major and growing issue, there is ambiguity around the definition of a 'youth gang' and what amounts to 'gang behaviour'. As such, the true extent of the risk they pose is largely unknown.



Property Crime: Property crime is a key entry point for young people into the criminal justice system. It is also the reason some young people may interact with police. Given property crime is opportunistic in nature, approaches that address the causes of crime more generally (such as interventions that focus on anti-social behaviour) may already be well placed to respond to this challenge. However, while COVID-19 resulted in significant declines in youth offending, police may encounter a resurgence of youth driven property crime due to the anticipated easing of COVID-19 restrictions.

DISCUSSION POINT:

What work (as outlined below) would be of most value when exploring the Youth Crime challenge identified?

01. Literature review on identified challenge to provide collective evidence base and gap analysis.
02. Bespoke monitoring through the ANZPAA e-Scan on current trends impacting youth crime.
03. Creating a virtual workshop platform for policing experts to share current initiatives.