

NACRO YOUTH CRIME SECTION FACTSHEET

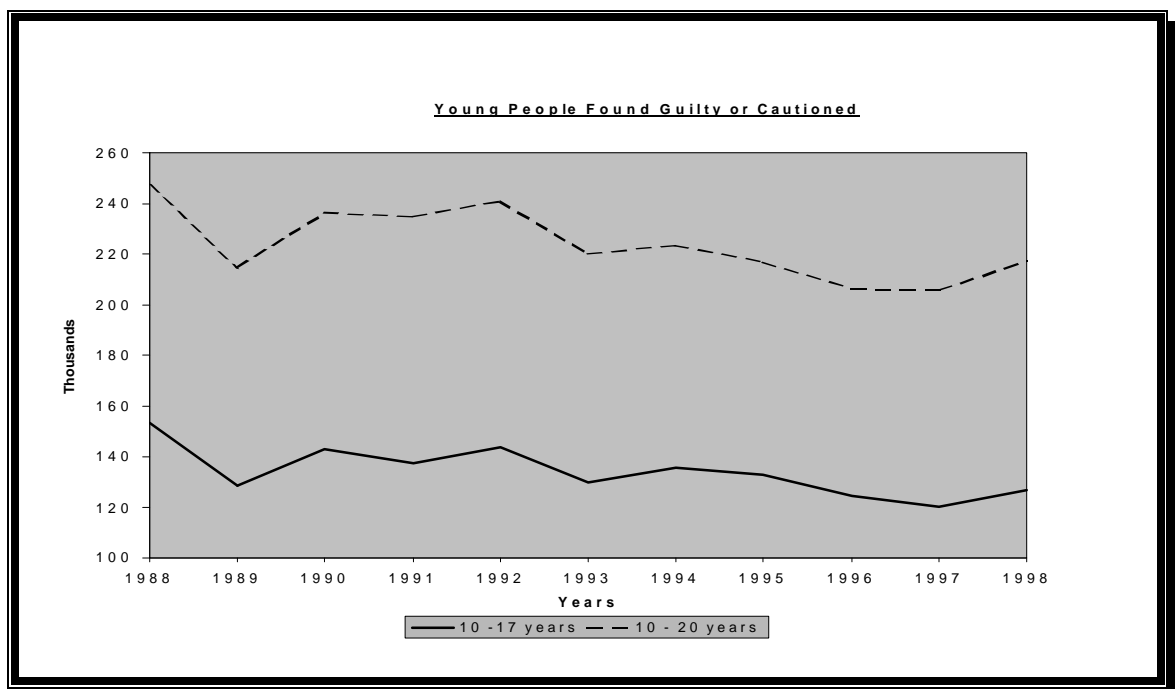
Some Facts about Young Offenders

Offending is common

According to a 1998 MORI survey of 11-16 year olds, reported in the Youth Justice Board's 'Annual Report', only seven out of 10 school children can say with certainty that they have not offended in the past year and a quarter (24%) admit to committing an offence during that time. However, only one in six of those who admitted offending said their last offence had been detected by the police. In its 'Crime Reduction Strategy', the Government estimates that young people under 18 commit around seven million offences a year.

'Known offending' is falling

However, youth crime as measured by 'known offending' is falling. For instance, the number of juveniles (defined here as 10-17 year olds) convicted of or cautioned for indictable offences has fallen from 153,100 in 1988 to 126,900 in 1998, a fall of 17% (see table 1 in appendix). The number of young people aged 10-20 convicted of or cautioned for indictable offences has also fallen from 247,100 in 1988 to 217,500 in 1998, a fall of 12%.



Most known offenders are adults

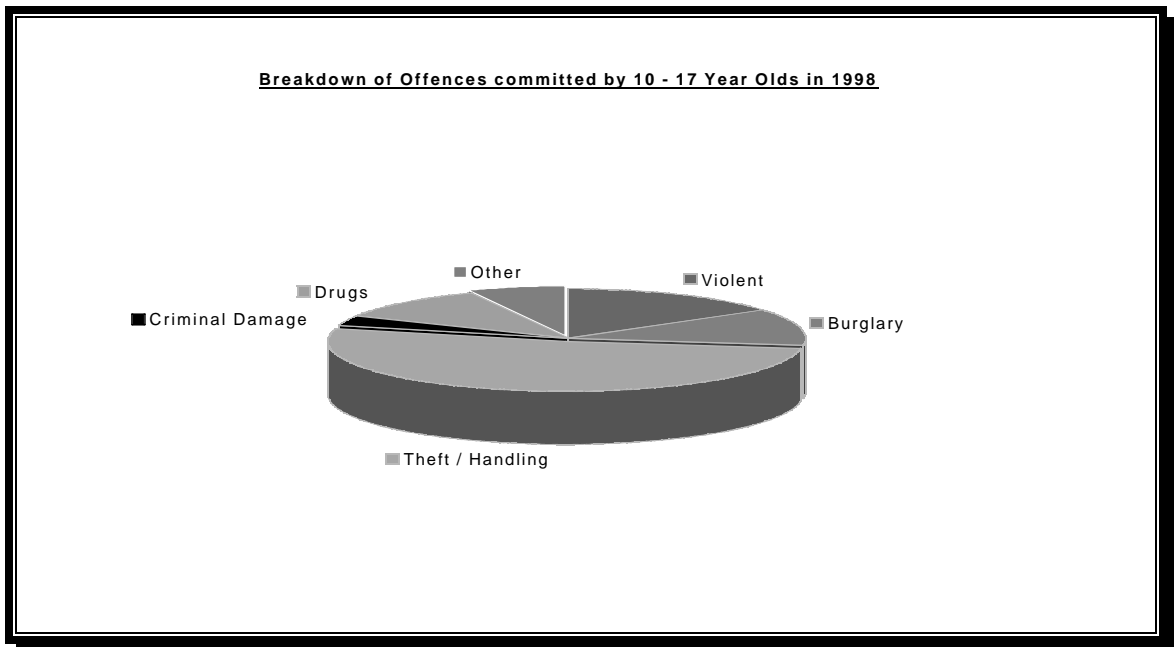
According to Home Office research into 'Attitudes to Crime and Criminal Justice', the public believes that most offenders are juveniles. In fact, juveniles constituted only a quarter (24%) of known offenders in 1998. Young people aged 10-20 constituted 40% of known offenders. The peak age for known offending is now 18 for males and 19 for females.

Young people are not more violent

Young people are not committing more violent offences, as measured by known offending rates. For instance, there were 19,300 juveniles found guilty or cautioned for violent or sexual offences in 1998, compared to 19,600 in 1993, a fall of 2% (see table 2). Figures prior to 1993 were compiled on a different statistical basis and so are not comparable. There were 30,500 young people aged 10-20 found guilty or cautioned for violent or sexual offences in 1998, compared to 30,900 in 1993, a fall of 1% (see table 3).

Most crime is non-violent

Most youth crime is in fact property, rather than violent, crime. In 1998, for instance, 69% of indictable offences committed by juveniles were burglary, theft, handling, fraud, forgery and criminal damage (see table 4). A further 11% were drugs offences. 61% of indictable offences committed by young people aged 10-20 were burglary, theft, handling, fraud, forgery and criminal damage. A further 17% were drugs offences. In 'Trends in Crime Revisited', Dr Simon Field estimates that for every 1% increase in the number of males aged between 15 and 20, burglary and theft increases by about 1%.



Drug use is common

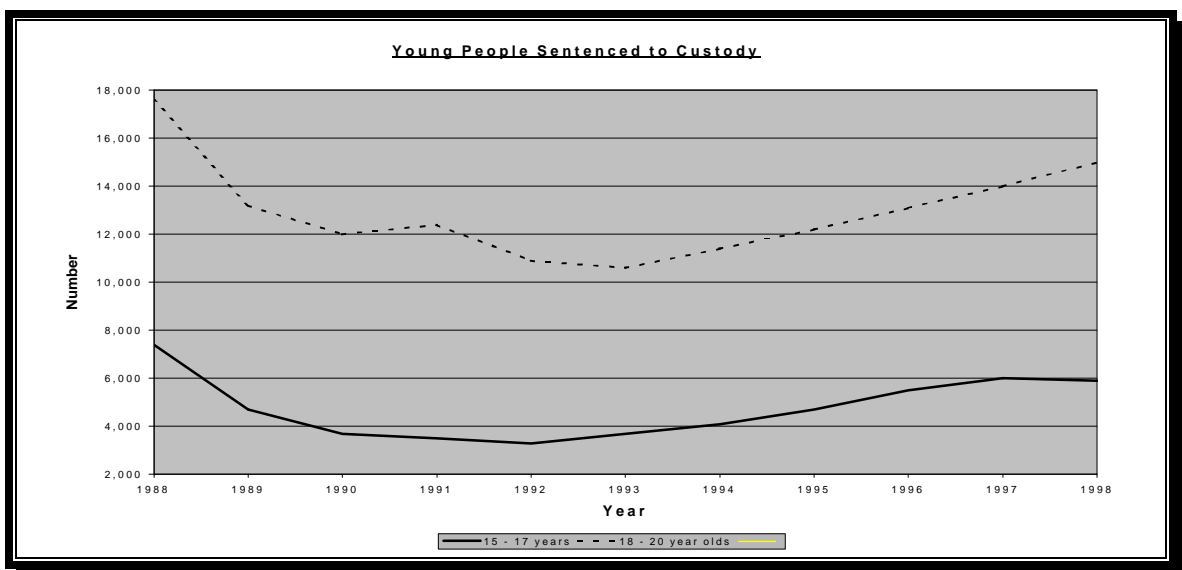
Drug use is very common among young offenders, as it is among young people generally. More than a third of young people involved in serious or persistent offending are judged to have problems with drug or alcohol, according to a Nacro report on 'Drug-driven Crime'. According to the Social Exclusion Unit's report on 'Young People', one in two 16-29 year olds have tried drugs; the prevalence of drug use among 12-13 year olds and 14-15 year olds has increased fivefold and eightfold respectively since 1987; and the UK has more 15-16 year old drug users than any other EU country. In its report on 'New Heroin Outbreaks Amongst Young People', the Home Office cite findings from Avon Probation Service which indicate that 25% of 18-25 year old offenders with convictions for burglary have a drug problem dominated by heroin.

Black people face discrimination

Young black people face discrimination at many stages of the criminal justice process. For instance, research into seven police force areas, published by the Commission for Racial Equality in 'Cautions v Prosecutions', found that 'in the majority of forces proportionately more ethnic minority young people – and particularly African-Caribbeans – were referred for prosecution than white young people; in inner city areas the difference was very substantial indeed'. A large proportion of young prisoners comes from ethnic minority groups. For instance, 21% of young people aged 10-20 serving prison sentences on 30 June 1998 were of black, South Asian, Chinese or 'other' origin.

Custody is increasing

According to 'Attitudes to Crime and Criminal Justice', three out of four people think that the youth courts (and the police) are too lenient in their treatment of juvenile offenders. 40% of people said the courts and police were much too lenient. Yet increasing numbers of young people are being given custodial sentences. For instance, the number of 15 -17 year olds given custodial sentences rose by almost two-fifths (79%) between 1992 and 1998, from 3,300 offenders to 5,900 (see table 5). The number of 15-20 year olds given custodial sentences rose by more than two-fifths (42%) between 1993 and 1998, from 10,600 offenders to 15,000.



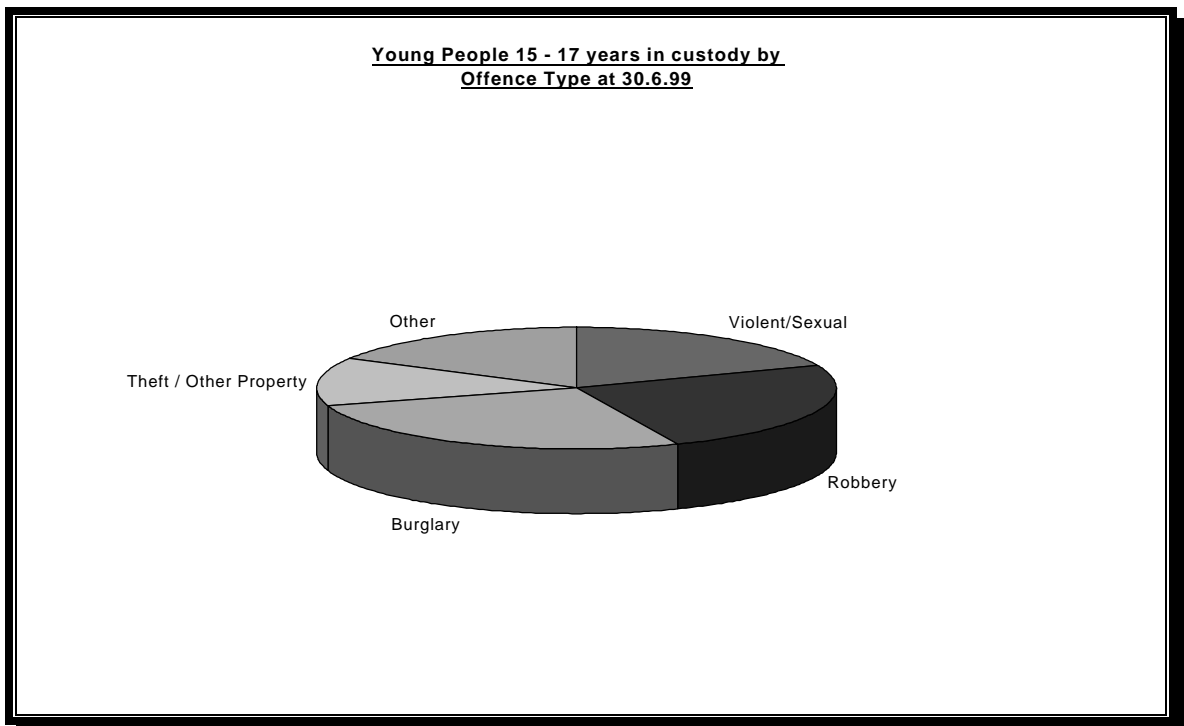
The number of young people aged 15-20 year olds under sentence on 30 June rose by almost two-thirds (64%) between 1993 and 1999, from 5,081 offenders to 8,343 (see table 6). The population of young offenders aged 15-17 under sentence more than doubled (122%) between 1993 and 1999, from 769 offenders to 1,710. Figures prior to 1993 were compiled on a different statistical basis and so are not comparable.

Sentences are getting longer

Not only are more 15 -17 year olds being given custodial sentences, sentences are longer than a decade ago. For instance, the average sentence given to 15 -17 year old boys increased from 5.6 months in 1989 to 11.6 months in 1997 and 10.3 months in 1999. The average sentence given to 15-17 year old girls increased from 5.5 months in 1989 to 10 months in 1995. In 1999 it was 7.1 months.

Most are inside for non-violent offences

Many young people are imprisoned for non-violent offences. For instance, on 30 June 1999, 26% of 15-20 year olds were serving sentences for burglary and a further 11% were serving sentences for theft, handling, fraud and forgery (see table 7). 43% were serving sentences for violent or sexual offences. On 30 June 1999, 27% of 15-17 year olds were serving sentences for burglary and a further 13% were serving sentences for theft, handling, fraud and forgery. 43% were serving sentences for violent or sexual offences.



Conditions are often unsatisfactory

While there are many examples of good practice to be found in young offender institutions, there are problems with some aspects of regimes and conditions in all establishments. For instance, only 30% of young prisoners were benefiting from the education programme at the otherwise 'healthy' Hatfield YOI, according to the Chief Inspector of Prisons in his last report on the establishment. Education delivery at Huntercombe YOI was 'unsatisfactory' while it was an 'acute' problem at Feltham YOI, where only 10% of young prisoners were attending classes. A third of inmates in young offender institutions (34%) are below level one (GCSE standard) in reading ability while 54% and 45% are below level one in writing and numeracy respectively.

Feltham's ability to tackle drug misuse among the 25% of inmates coming into the establishment who have been taking crack cocaine was undermined by having 'virtually no resources' to address the problem. The Chief Inspector noted that life 'for the vast majority of young adults at Feltham was a deprived and frustrating experience, where providing decent conditions and personal hygiene was a low priority and the boredom and isolation of spending long hours in cell was overwhelming'.

Amidst the good work taking place in Reading prison and YOI, the Chief Inspector has found an 'impoverished regime' for vulnerable young prisoners. There had been three suicides of young prisoners in Reading during 1998 and 11% in young offender institutions for males during 1999. During the past eight years, notes the Chief Inspector, 14 boys aged 15-17 have committed suicide in prisons in England and Wales, along with 65 young men and women aged 18-20.

Custody is expensive

Custody is expensive. For instance, according to the Prison Service's 'Annual Report' the cost of locking up 15-17 year old boys in 1998/9 was £26,113. The Social Exclusion Unit's report on 'Schools Plus' noted that secure training orders cost £126,000 a year.

Reconviction rates are high

Despite the heavy costs, reconviction rates are high. For instance, 76% of young men aged 14-20 discharged from custody in 1996 were reconvicted within two years. 85% of 14-16 year old boys discharged from custody in 1996 were reconvicted within two years. 51% of young male prisoners released from custody in 1996 were sentenced to imprisonment again within two years.

Prisons are simply not best equipped to deal with the underlying causes of offending such as poor parenting, family conflict, low achievement, truancy and exclusion, low income and poor housing. According to the Social Exclusion Unit's report on 'Young People', 25% of young male prisoners are homeless prior to imprisonment or living in insecure accommodation; over half under 18 year olds have been in care and over half have been excluded from school. Nearly two-thirds have no qualifications (80% of 15-17 year olds), and two-thirds are unemployed on entry. Almost two-thirds misuse drugs or have had drinking problems (three-quarters of whom never received any help). One in six admit to having been abused and one in 10 admit to self-harm. 38% of prisoners aged under 21 had been in local authority care, according to the 'National Prison Survey'.

Diverting young people from court works

Contrary to popular belief, diversion works. Most young people given a caution never re-offend. For instance, according to Home Office statistics on 'The Criminal Histories of those Cautioned in 1985, 1988 and 1991', four out of five young people aged 14 -20 cautioned for a standard list offence are not convicted of another offence within two years of the caution. Despite this, the use of cautions has decreased in recent years. For instance, the use of cautions for 18 -20 year old females fell from 52% of young offenders in 1993 to 46% in 1998.

Cautioning varies between police forces. For instance, 12% of 18-20 year old male offenders in Durham were cautioned in 1998, compared to 49% in Surrey. The average for England and Wales was 34% in 1998.

Under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, the cautioning scheme for juveniles has been replaced by a reprimand and final warnings scheme. In 1998, 1,700 juveniles were given reprimands or warnings under the Act in the seven areas piloting them.

Community programmes work

In 'Opportunity for All', the Department of Social Security noted that the Dalston Project in London, started in 1994, targets high-risk young offenders aged 11-18 and provides, among other things, a mentoring scheme which encourages and supports young people to return to education and training. More than 80% of young people who join have a criminal record. 70% of the 15-18 year olds have gone on to college; others have gone on to training or a job. More than 60% do not reoffend in the year after they leave the project.

The report also noted Barnardos' Freagarrach Project, which runs a cognitive behavioural therapeutic programme for 12-16 year olds aimed at addressing offending. To be evaluated over five years, initial findings indicate that reoffending rates have been cut by over 60%. In its report on 'Alternatives to Prison Sentences', the Home Affairs Committee cited the example of Sherborne House in South London. This probation scheme which deals with young male offenders who would otherwise have received a custodial sentence has, said the Committee, a reconviction rate 15% lower than would be predicted for such offenders.

Youth projects can work

Projects outside prison can prevent young people from offending in the first place by alleviating the underlying causes of offending (and anti-social behaviour) through motivating young people, stimulating their interests, and building-up their skills and self-esteem. For example, the Social Exclusion Unit's report on 'Anti-Social Behaviour' noted that in Bradford, vandalism during the 1999 school holidays was significantly reduced and £100,000 was saved as a result, after the housing department adopted a range of initiatives to combat anti-social behaviour. The Social Exclusion Unit's report on 'Arts and Sport' noted that The Venture organisation on the Caia Park Estate in Wrexham cut juvenile crime on the estate by 54% within four years.

A Nacro report on 'Making a Difference' noted a youth project in Southwark, South London, involving over 200 young people, 80% of whom had committed a criminal offence and nearly a quarter had committed eight or more crimes. One year on, an evaluation of the project revealed a decrease in criminal damage and of motor vehicle theft of 39% and 62% respectively. A Nacro project in Bolton, aiming to resolve conflicts between adults and groups of young people and acting as a consultant to all the city's youth initiatives to ensure they engaged young people who are liable

to get into trouble, found that one year on there was a drop in youth-related crime of nearly 30% and a marked reduction in calls to the police about nuisance behaviour by young people.

New measures introduced

On 1 April 2000, youth offending teams were extended from 10 pilot areas throughout England and Wales. Other youth justice reforms associated with the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 were also implemented during 2000. These include detention and training orders, reparation orders, action plan orders, child safety orders and parenting orders as well as reprimands and final warnings.

With its introduction under the Criminal Justice and Courts Services Bill, the Government is planning to abolish the sentence of detention in a young offender institution for 18-20 year old offenders and replace it with the sentence of imprisonment.

In addition, under the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999, most first time offenders pleading guilty will be referred to youth offending panels. These panels will meet with the young offenders and draw up programmes to address their offending behaviour. Currently, this scheme is being piloted in selected areas.

The information contained in this factsheet is derived from the most recent published Government data concerning young people who offend. Nonetheless, it predates the implementation of the new provisions by some way and the impact of the new measures upon the youth justice system remains to be ascertained.

A wide range of briefing papers detailing the new provisions and the suggesting some possible implications is available from Nacro's youth crime section on request.

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Nacro's Youth Crime Section

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Appendix

Note: The following tables have been assembled from the sources listed on the previous page.

Table 1 Number of young persons found guilty or cautioned

Year	No. of 10-17 year olds (000s)	No. of 10-20 year olds (000s)
1988	153.1	247.1
1989	128.6	214.4
1990	142.9	236.4
1991	137.5	234.7
1992	143.6	240.9
1993	129.6	220.1
1994	135.8	223.4
1995	132.8	216.7
1996	124.4	206.2
1997	120.1	205.7
1998	126.9	217.5

Table 2 10-17 year olds found guilty or cautioned by offence in 1993 and 1998

Type of offence	1993 (000s)	1998 (000s)
Indictable offences		
Violence against the person	16.0	15.6
Sexual offences	1.5	1.0
Robbery	2.1	2.7
<i>Total violent crime</i>	<i>19.6</i>	<i>19.3</i>
Burglary	19.1	15.2
Theft and handling	73.1	65.9
Fraud and forgery	1.7	2.5
Criminal damage	4.3	4.0
Drugs offences	7.5	13.7
Other(1)	3.8	5.7
Motoring offences	0.3	0.4
All offences	129.5	126.9

(1) Excluding motoring offences

Table 3 10-20 year olds found guilty or cautioned by offence in 1993 and 1998

Type of offence	1993 (000s)	1998 (000s)
Indictable offences		
Violence against the person	25.4	24.9
Sexual offences	2.2	1.5
Robbery	3.3	4.1
<i>Total violent crime</i>	30.9	30.5
Burglary	30.7	22.7
Theft and handling	111.0	97.2
Fraud and forgery	5.2	6.4
Criminal damage	6.5	6.2
Drugs offences	21.9	37.5
Other(1)	12.0	15.3
Motoring offences	1.7	1.5
All offences	220.0	217.5

(1) Excluding motoring offences

Table 4 Offenders found guilty or cautioned by indictable offence in 1998

Type of offence	% of 10-17 year olds	% of 10-20 year olds
Indictable offences		
Violence against the person	12	11
Sexual offences	1	1
Robbery	2	2
<i>Total violent crime</i>	15	14
Burglary	12	10
Theft and handling	52	45
Fraud and forgery	2	3
Criminal damage	3	3
<i>Total property crime</i>	69	61
Drugs offences	11	17
Other(1)	4	7
Motoring offences(2)	(less than 0.5%)	1
Total	100	100

(1) Excluding motoring offences

(2) Offenders found guilty only; motoring offences may attract written warnings

Table 5 Sentenced to immediate custody for indictable offences

Year	No. of 15-17 year olds(1)	No. of 18-20 year olds(2)
1988	7,400	17,600
1989	4,700	13,200
1990	3,700	12,000
1991	3,500	12,400
1992	3,300	10,900
1993	3,700	10,600
1994	4,100	11,400
1995	4,700	12,200
1996	5,500	13,100
1997	6,000	14,000
1998	5,900	15,000

Table 6 Population in prison under sentence on 30 June (1)

Year	No. of 15-17 year olds	No. of 15-20 year olds
1993	769	5,081
1994	840	5,276
1995	988	5,842
1996	1,319	6,615
1997		7,949
1998	1,689	8,521
1999	1,710	8,343

(1) Including fine defaulters

Table 7 Population in prison under sentence by offence on 30 June 1999

Type of offence	% of 15-17 year olds	% of 15-20 year olds(1)
Violence against the person	16	19
Sexual offences	3	3
Robbery	25	22
<i>Total violent crime</i>	43	43
Burglary	27	26
Theft, handling, fraud, forgery	13	11
Other offences	13	17
Not recorded	4	3
Total	100	100

(1) Excluding fine defaulters

Note: The above tables have been assembled from the sources listed on page 5 above