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**A STATISTICAL SNAPSHOT
OF YOUTH AT RISK AND YOUTH
OFFENDING IN CANADA**

NATIONAL CRIME PREVENTION CENTRE / CENTRE NATIONAL DE PRÉVENTION DU CRIME

**ACTING TO PREVENT
CRIME
AGIR POUR PRÉVENIR**

Canada 

**A STATISTICAL SNAPSHOT OF YOUTH AT RISK
AND YOUTH OFFENDING IN CANADA**

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La présente publication est aussi disponible en français. Aperçu statistique des jeunes à risque et de la délinquance chez les jeunes au Canada.

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A Statistical Snapshot of Youth at Risk and Youth Offending in Canada

Juvenile delinquency is a complex, multi-faceted issue. In order to devise effective prevention and intervention strategies for youth at risk, it is important to understand the context in which this behaviour occurs.

Of the population of youth in Canada, the majority of them will experience normal transitions to adulthood. However, some will be exposed to adverse factors that negatively impact their psycho-social development, and which may even contribute to offending behaviour. This, in turn, may lead to their involvement with the criminal justice system.

Part I: Youth in Canada

Children and youth under the age of 20 represent almost one in four people (23%) in the Canadian population. As of July 1, 2010, there were approximately:

- 3.7 million children under the age of 10;
- 1.9 million youths aged 10 to 14; and
- 2.2 million youths between 15 and 19 years of age ¹.

In 2006, 48% of Aboriginal people were less than 25 years old, compared to 31% for non-Aboriginals ².

Canada's population of young Aboriginals is one of the fastest growing demographics. By 2026, the number of 15-19 year old Aboriginal youth is projected to be 37% larger than in 2001, compared to 6% for the same age group in the general population ³.

Family structure

In 2006, approximately 16% of Canadian families were headed by a single parent ⁴.

Compared with their non-Aboriginal peers, Aboriginal children aged 14 and under were more likely to live with:

- a lone parent of either sex (17% vs. 35% respectively);
- a grandparent with no parent present (0.4% vs. 3% respectively); or
- another relative (0.5% vs. 4% respectively) ⁵.

About 28% of Inuit children, 17% of First Nations children living off reserve, and 11% of Métis children were living in families with 4 or more children. This is compared to 8% of non-Aboriginal children in Canada ⁶.

Aboriginal children are more likely to be raised by younger parents than non-Aboriginal children. Among children under six years old, 26% of Inuit children, 27% of First Nations children living off reserve and 22% of Métis children had mothers between the ages of 15 to 24; this is compared to 8% of non-Aboriginal children ⁷.

Income

In 2006, census data showed that 11.4% of the Canadian population (3,484,625 individuals) lived in after-tax low-income situations. Of these, 865,795 (13%) were youth 17 years of age and under ⁸.

Low-income rates are highest among children and young people. 15% of all children aged 5 and under were part of a low-income family. The rate dropped to 13% for children aged 6 to 14 and to 11% for teens aged 15 to 17 ⁹.

In 2009, 9.5% (634,000) of all children aged 18 and under lived in low-income families in Canada. This proportion has decreased by approximately half since peaking in 1996 at a rate of 18% ¹⁰. Among the provinces ¹¹, the lowest child poverty rate was in Prince Edward Island (6.4%) and highest in British Columbia (12.0%) ¹².

196,000 (31%) of children in poverty lived in a lone-parent family headed by a woman. Approximately 22% of children living with a single mother were in low income in 2009, compared with 56% in 1996 ¹³.

Compared to non-Aboriginal children (18%), a greater proportion of young Aboriginal children under the age of 6 were living in low-income economic families ¹⁴:

- 49% of off-reserve First Nations children; and
- 32% of Métis children ¹⁵.

The differences are particularly pronounced in urban areas. Over half (57%) of First Nations children in census metropolitan areas (CMAs) were living in low-income economic families, as were 45% of Inuit children and 42% of Métis children. This is compared to 21% of non-Aboriginal children in CMAs ^{16, 17}.

Employment

In 2009, the unemployment rate was 15% for youth aged 15 to 24, the highest among all age groups (7% for adults aged 25 to 54 and 55 to 64, and 4% for people aged 65 and over) ¹⁸.

Unemployment rates of Aboriginal youth were at least twice as high as non-Aboriginal youth in the western provinces in 2006 ¹⁹.

Mental Health

According to the Canadian Mental Health Association ²⁰:

- An estimated 10–20% of Canadian youth are affected by a mental illness or disorder.
- The number of 12- to 19-year-olds in Canada at risk of developing depression is 3.2 million.
- Mental disorders among youth are ranked as the second highest hospital care expenditure in Canada, surpassed only by injuries.
- In Canada, only 1 in 5 children who need mental health services receive them.
- In 2007, the suicide rate was 1.6 per 100,000 population for children aged 10 to 14, and 8.3 per 100,000 population for youth aged 15 to 19 ²¹.

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

Each year in Canada, between 123 and 740 babies are born with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) and an estimated 1,000 babies are born with Fetal Alcohol Effects (FAE) (based on 370,000 births per year) ²².

Estimates of the prevalence of FAS/FAE among Aboriginal people vary widely, from .52 to 190 cases per 1,000 live births, depending on the community ^{23, 24}.

Victimization

In 2008, there were 1,111 victims of violent crime reported to the police per 100,000 children and youth in Canada. The rates of violent victimization were highest among youth aged 15 to 17 ²⁵.

For children under the age of 6, the majority of police-reported physical assaults were committed by someone known to the victim, with 6 in 10 assaults being perpetrated by a family member. Older children (9 to 17 years) were most likely to be assaulted by an acquaintance or a stranger ²⁶.

The rate of violent victimization reported by 15- to 24-year-olds in the 2009 General Social Survey (284 per 1,000 population 15 years and older) was almost 15 times higher than the rate for individuals 65 years or older (19 per 1,000) ²⁷.

In the 15 to 24 age group, 425 of every 1,000 Aboriginal people were victims of violent incidents (excluding spousal violence); the corresponding rate for non-Aboriginal people was 268 per 1,000 ²⁸.

Families-at-risk

As of March 31, 2004, there were about 72,000 ²⁹ children in care (i.e., cases where there has been a transfer of custody and/or guardianship) in Canada ³⁰.

The Office of Child and Family Service Advocacy interviewed 250 youths in open custody and open detention facilities in Ontario. Of the 240 youths who responded to the question about previous child welfare history, 48% said that they had a previous history of child welfare ³¹.

In Ontario, a study of 378 adjudicated male youth suggested that child welfare/alternative care involvement was associated with high-rate, chronic offending ³².

The International Youth Survey, which was administered to a sample of Toronto students (more than 3,200 youths in grades 7 to 9) in 2006, found that the prevalence of delinquent behaviour was:

- lowest among youth who were living with both parents (18%); and
- higher among those from single-parent families (25%) and step-families (35%) ³³.

In 2007, an estimated 357,604 Canadian children were affected by paternal incarceration, or 4.6% of the total Canadian population aged 19 and younger. Children of federally sentenced fathers are two to four times more likely to be in conflict with the law than Canadian children in general ³⁴.

Substance Use

In 2010, Health Canada administered the Canadian Alcohol and Drug Use Monitoring Survey to 13,615 Canadians 15 years of age and older³⁵. Of the 3,989 youths aged 15 to 24 who responded:

- the prevalence of past-year cannabis use has decreased significantly since 2004, from 37.0% to 25.1%. However this rate (25.1%) was three times higher than that of adults (7.9%);
- the average age of initiation for cannabis use has remained unchanged over the past six years at approximately 15.7 years of age;
- 7.0% reported using at least one of five illicit drugs [cocaine or crack, speed, ecstasy, hallucinogens (excluding salvia), or heroin]. This rate is almost nine times higher than that reported by adults (0.8%), but has decreased since 2004 (11.3%);
- they were approximately six times more likely than adults (25 years and older) to report harm³⁶ due to illicit drug use in the past year (6.9% and 1.2%, respectively);
- there was a significant decline in past-year alcohol use, from 82.9% in 2004 to 71.5% in 2010. The corresponding 2010 rate for adults was 78.0%;
- there was no change in the average age of first alcohol use (15.9 years of age) over the past six years; and
- they were three times more likely to report higher rates of harm due to alcohol use in the past year than adults 25 years and older (12.8% versus 4.3%).

The International Youth Survey found that delinquent behaviour was significantly more prevalent among youth who:

- reported having consumed alcohol (35% vs. 9%);
- reported having consumed drugs (60% vs. 16%);
- had delinquent friends (27% vs. 11%); and
- indicated having little parental supervision (56% vs. 12%)³⁷.

School Dropout Rates

In 2009–2010, 10% of young men and 7% of young women were dropouts (defined as 20- to 24-year-olds without a high school diploma and not in school)³⁸.

Young Aboriginal people were more likely to drop out than non-Aboriginal people, with the 2007 to 2010 dropout rates among off-reserve First Nations, Métis and Inuit at 23%, compared with 9% for non-Aboriginal people³⁹.

Only 44% of children in foster care graduate from high school compared to 81% of their peers⁴⁰.

Part II: Youth Offending

How Many Youths Commit Crimes?

The issue of youth crime is a concern for many communities across Canada. However, there is no single source of information to determine the number of youths who commit crimes in Canada. Estimates can be obtained using various methods (e.g., self-reports, official records of convictions, charges, victimization surveys), each providing a slightly different picture of the phenomenon.

One way to measure levels of delinquency is through self-reported crimes. The International Youth Survey ⁴¹ found that:

37% of youth reported having engaged in one or more delinquent behaviours in their lifetime, either acts of violence, acts against property or the sale of drugs.

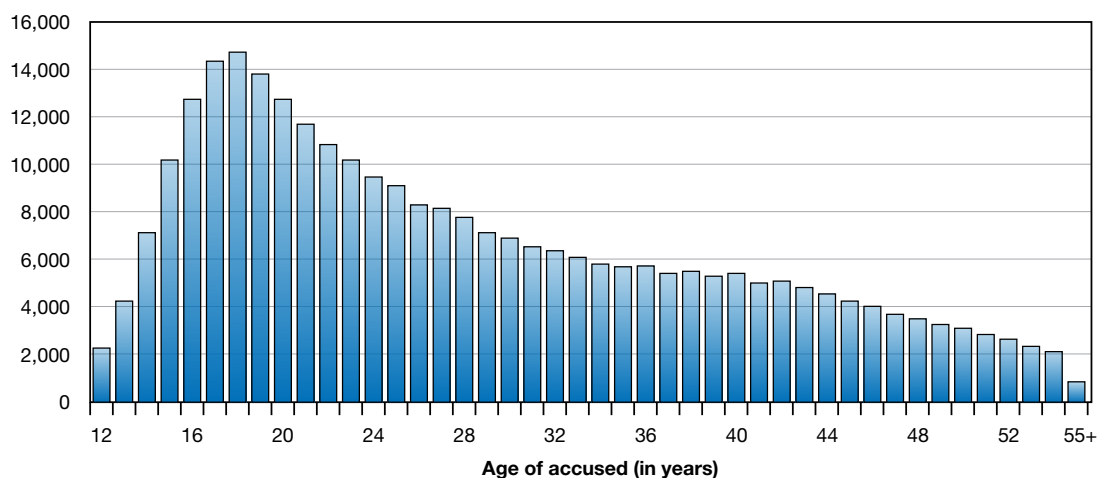
- Boys (30%) were twice as likely as girls (15%) to have engaged in violent ⁴² behaviour.
- Boys were also slightly more likely than girls to report that they had committed acts against property (30% versus 26%).
- The prevalence of delinquent behaviour reported by foreign-born youth was lower than it was for their Canadian-born peers (15% and 23% respectively).
- There was no significant difference in the prevalence of delinquency between Canadian-born children of immigrant parents (22%) and Canadian-born children whose parents were not immigrants (24%).

Another way to measure delinquent behaviour is through the use of the use of police-reported data. Every year, Statistics Canada conducts the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Survey, which has collected data on all criminal incidents known to, and substantiated by, Canadian police services since 1962.

In 2010, the rate of those accused of a Criminal Code offence peaked at 18 years of age and generally decreased with increasing age ⁴³.

PERSONS ACCUSED OF CRIMES, BY AGE, CANADA, 2010 ⁴⁴

rate per 100,000 population



Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR2) Survey.

In 2010, nearly 153,000 youths were accused of committing a crime:

- 42% were charged (or recommended for charging) by police; and
- 58% were dealt with by means other than the formal laying of a charge (e.g. youth diverted from the formal criminal justice system through the use of warnings, cautions and referrals to community programs) ⁴⁵.

This represents approximately 6% of the Canadian youth population ⁴⁶ aged 12-17 years of age.

In 2009, females accounted for about one-quarter of youth accused by police of having committed a *Criminal Code* offence. Overall, the rate of offending for female youth is still less than half of that of male youth (4,011 per 100,000 vs. 9,700 per 100,000) ⁴⁷.

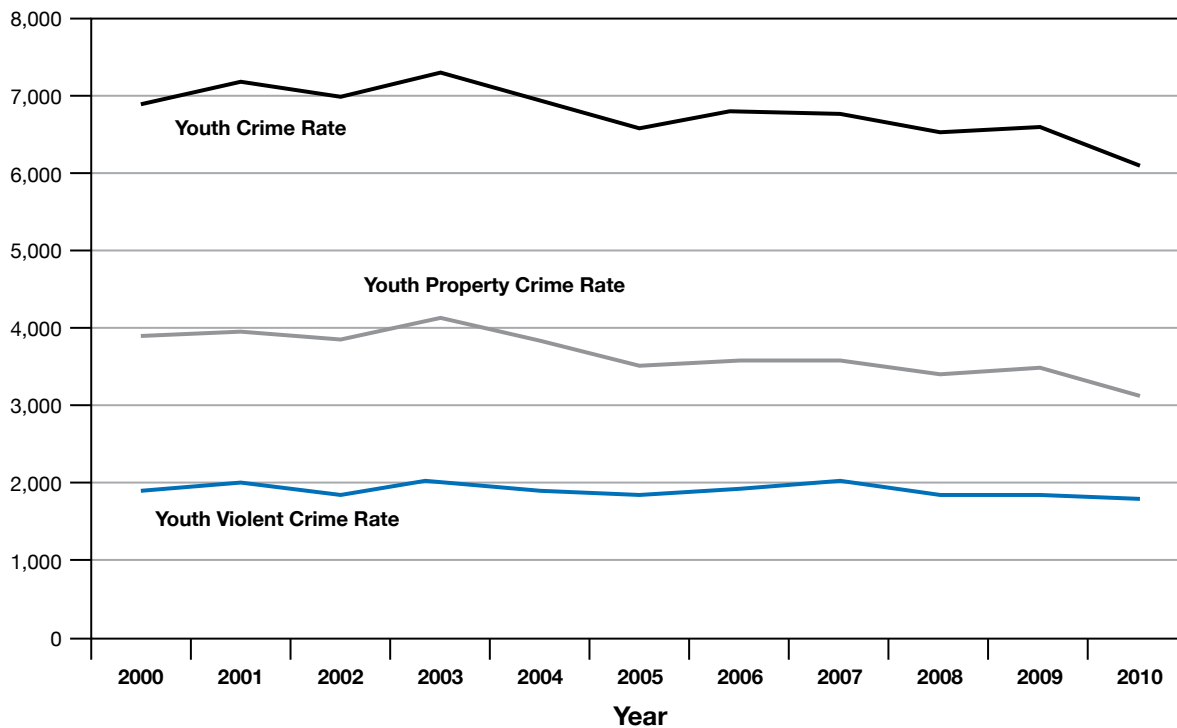
Youth crime continues to represent a small proportion of overall crimes. In 2010, of the 494,621 persons charged for *Criminal Code* violations (excluding traffic), 64,800 (13.1%) were youths ⁴⁸.

Over the past decade, there have been decreases in the:

- overall youth crime rate ⁴⁹ (from 6,914 to 6,147 per 100,000);
- property crime rate (from 3,909 to 3,155 per 100,000); and
- violent crime rate (from 1,944 to 1,838 per 100,000).

POLICE-REPORTED YOUTH CRIME RATES, CANADA, 2000 TO 2010 ⁵⁰

Crime Rate



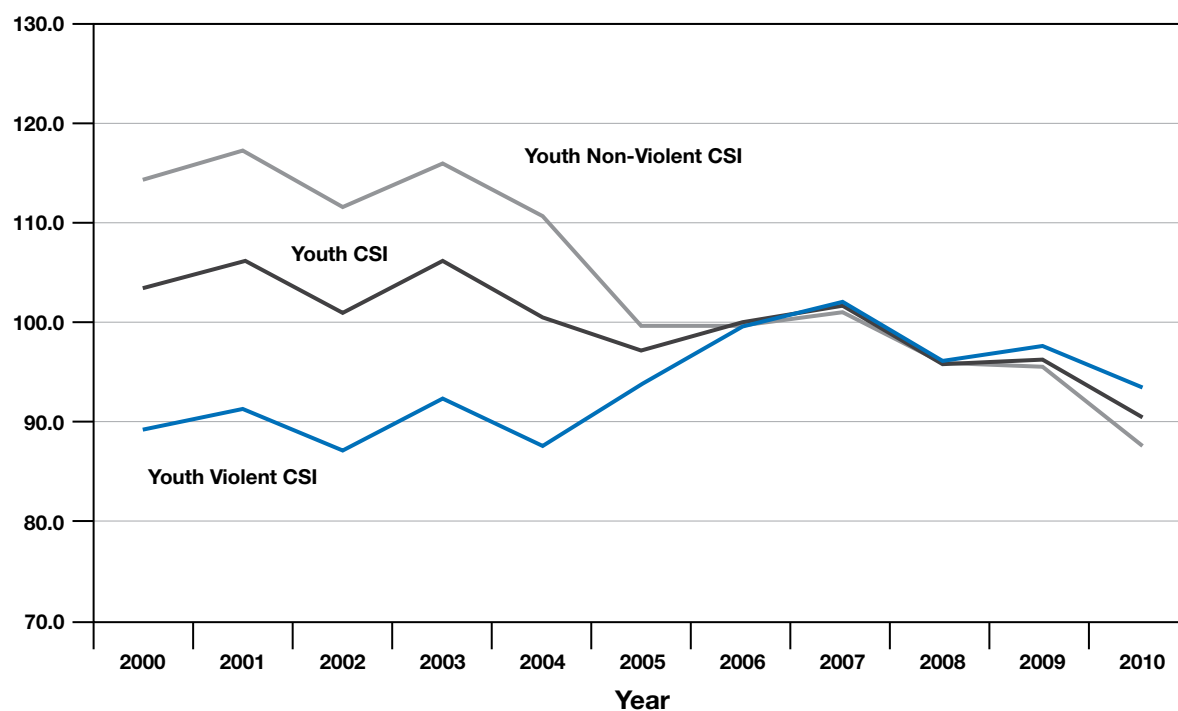
The severity of youth crime, as measured by the youth Crime Severity Index (CSI) ⁵¹, has also declined over the past 10 years, from 103.5 in 2000 to 90.5 in 2010.

A similar trend is evident for the youth non-violent CSI, which fell from 114.4 in 2000 to fell to 88.0 in 2010.

Conversely, over the same period, there was a slight increase (5%) in the severity of youth violent crime, from 89.3 in 2000 to 93.7 in 2010.

POLICE-REPORTED YOUTH CRIME SEVERITY INDICES, CANADA, 2000 TO 2010 ⁵²

Index



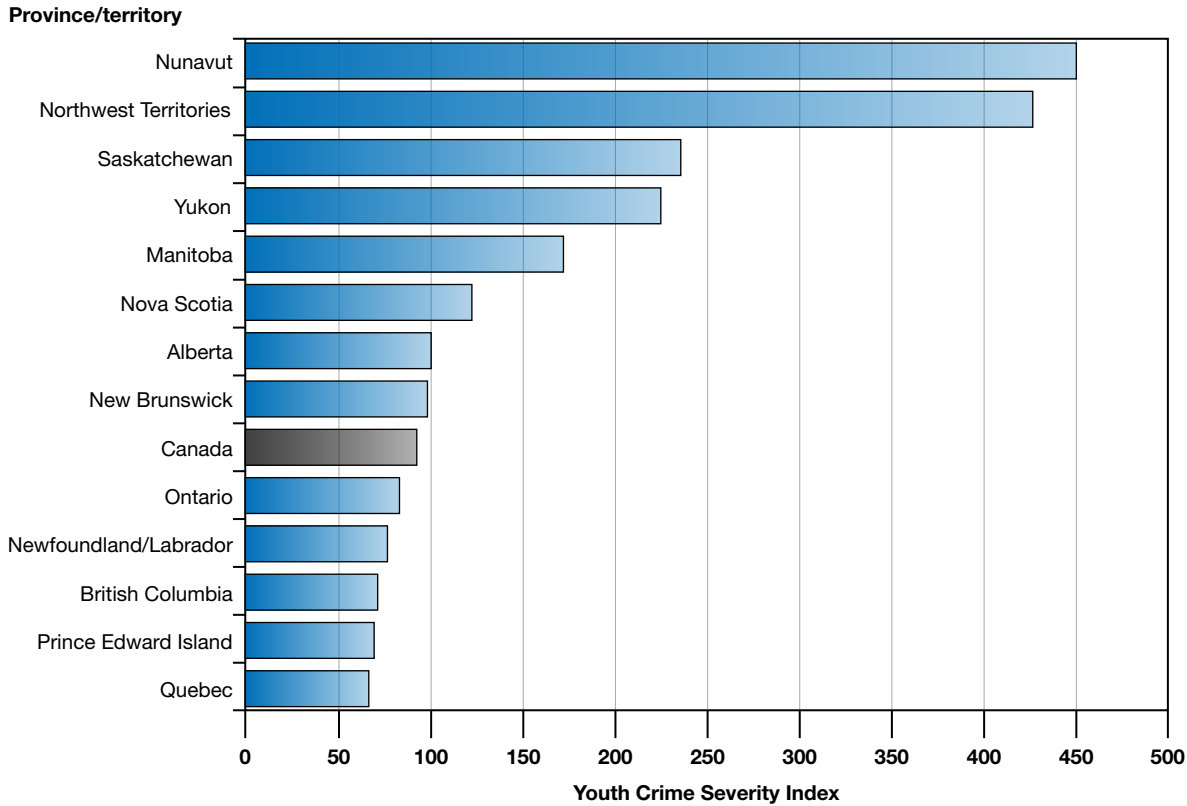
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR2) Survey.

Note: Refers to the number of youths aged 12 to 17 who were either charged (or recommended for charging) by police or diverted from the formal criminal justice system through the use of warnings, cautions, referrals to community programs, etc. Data on the youth crime severity indexes are available beginning in 1998.

Note: In the calculation of the police-reported CSI, each offence is assigned a weight, derived from sentences handed down by criminal courts. The more serious the average sentence, the higher the weight for that offence. As a result, more serious offences have a greater impact on changes in the Index. Indices have been standardized to a base year of 2006, which is equal to 100.

Youth CSIs are highest in the North (Nunavut: 449.3, Northwest Territories: 427.0 and Yukon: 222.7), and the Prairie provinces of Saskatchewan (235.2) and Manitoba (171.3). The national average is 90.5. Similar geographic crime trends were observed in youth violent and non-violent CSIs.

POLICE-REPORTED YOUTH CRIME SEVERITY INDEX, BY PROVINCE AND TERRITORY, 2010 ⁵³



Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR2) Survey.

Note: Refers to the number of youths aged 12 to 17 who were either charged (or recommended for charging) by police or diverted from the formal criminal justice system through the use of warnings, cautions, referrals to community programs, etc. Data on the youth crime severity indexes are available beginning in 1998.

Note: In the calculation of the police-reported CSI, each offence is assigned a weight, derived from sentences handed down by criminal courts. The more serious the average sentence, the higher the weight for that offence. As a result, more serious offences have a greater impact on changes in the Index. Indices have been standardized to a base year of 2006, which is equal to 100.

Youth crime on reserves ^{54, 55}

In 2004, 9,815 youths aged 12 to 17 were accused (charged or otherwise) of a criminal offence on a reserve. This rate (24,391 per 100,000) was more than three times higher than the average for the rest of Canada (7,023).

Approximately 41.3% of youth crimes committed on reserves were classified as other *Criminal Code* offences category. This proportion is similar to crimes committed outside reserves (37.1%).

Property crime offences constituted one-third of on-reserve youth crime and 41.9% of youth crime outside reserves in 2004.

In 2004, about one-quarter of on-reserve youth offences were violent crimes, compared with one-fifth elsewhere in Canada. The vast majority of violent offences, both on and outside of reserves were assaults.

Young offenders were accused of committing homicides on reserves at about 11 times the rate of young people so accused elsewhere in Canada, and were seven times more likely to be accused of break and enter and disturbing the peace.

The higher rates of crime committed on reserves speaks to the need to better understand the causes and characteristics of Aboriginal youth offending.

What are the Characteristics of Crime Committed by Youth?

In general, male and female youth accused of criminal behaviour tend to commit similar types of crimes ⁵⁶:

Most common offences for youth accused of a *Criminal Code* offence in 2009

| Females | Males |
|---|---|
| 1. theft under \$5,000 | 1. theft under \$5,000 |
| 2. common assault (level 1) | 2. mischief |
| 3. administration of justice violations ⁵⁷ | 3. drug offences |
| 4. mischief | 4. administration of justice violations |
| 5. other <i>Criminal Code</i> violations | 5. common assault (level 1) |

About 6 in 10 victims of a youth crime are children or youth under the age of 18. Individuals within the 18–24, 25–34 and 35–44 age ranges each make up about one-tenth of youth crime victims, with victims aged 45 and over constituting the remaining tenth ⁵⁸.

In 2008, the most common locations for youth crime were:

- private residences (32%);
- commercial establishments (23%); and
- outdoor public spaces (23%) ⁵⁹.

The peak times for youth crime were:

- after school hours (3 to 6 p.m.), for violent (22%) and non-violent (20%) crime;
- early afternoon (noon to 3 p.m.), for drug offences (24%); and
- night-time (9 p.m. to midnight), for youth traffic violations (28%) ⁶⁰.

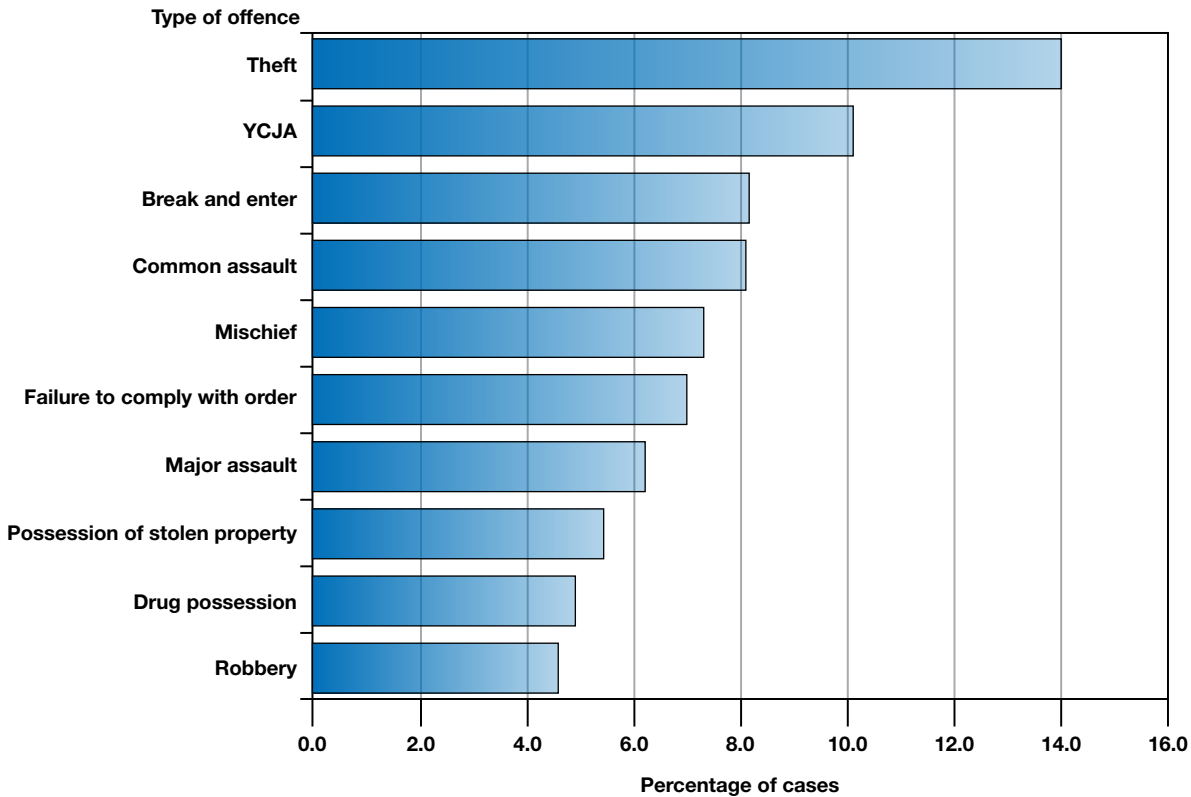
In 2006, around 5% of all *Criminal Code* violations committed by youth involved a weapon, most commonly a knife ⁶¹.

Who are the Youth Appearing Before the Courts? ⁶²

In 2008–2009, youth courts in Canada processed 58,379 cases involving 191,054 charges.

The most common cases processed were crimes against property (38%) and crimes against the person (26%).

Over three-quarters (76%) of the total youth court caseload involved the following 10 offences:



Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Youth Court Survey.

Note: The *Youth Criminal Justice Act* (YCJA) category includes inducing a young person, failure to comply with a sentence or disposition, publishing the identity of offenders, victims or witnesses and failure to comply with a designated temporary place of detention (s.136 -139 YCJA).

Youth who appear in court tend to be male and older.

| Gender | Total (%) |
|----------------|-----------|
| Male accused | 72% |
| Female accused | 21% |
| Unknown sex | 7% |

| Age (years) | Total (%) |
|-------------|-----------|
| 16–17 | 57% |
| 12–15 | 41% |

How are Youth Sentenced?

Youth found guilty can receive more than one sentence. Of the 34,434 guilty cases in 2008–2009, 60.3% included a sentence of probation, either alone or in combination with another (e.g., fines, community service) ⁶³.

In 2008–2009, 15.4% (5,307) of all guilty cases resulted in a custodial sentence, with a median sentence length of 36 days ⁶⁴.

Aboriginal youth represented only 6% of all youth in the 2006 general population, yet also represented, in 2008–2009:

- 27% of youth remanded;
- 36% of youth admitted to sentenced custody; and
- 24% of youth admitted to probation ⁶⁵.

End Notes

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- ²⁷ Perreault, S., & Brennan, S. 2010. "Criminal victimization in Canada — 2009," *Juristat*, 30(2). Ottawa, ON: Statistics Canada.
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- ³⁴ Withers, L. & Folsom, J. 2008. *Incarcerated fathers: A descriptive analysis* (Research Report No. R-186 2008). Ottawa, ON: Correctional Service of Canada.
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- ³⁶ At least one of 8 harms to: physical health; friendships and social life; financial position; home life or marriage; work, studies, or employment opportunities; legal problems; difficulty learning; housing problems.
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- ⁴⁵ Ibid.

- ⁴⁶ Estimated at 2,483,937 as of July 1, 2010 (CANSIM table 051-0001).
- ⁴⁷ Hotton Mahony, T. 2011. "Women and the criminal justice system." In: *Women in Canada: A gender-based statistical report* (6th edition, Catalogue no. 89-503-X). Ottawa, ON: Statistics Canada.
- ⁴⁸ Statistics Canada. 2011. Personal correspondence.
- ⁴⁹ The youth crime rate is a measure of the volume of youth aged 12 to 17 accused of a *Criminal Code* offence.
- ⁵⁰ Brennan, S., & Dauvergne, M. 2011. "Police reported crime statistics – 2010." Ottawa, ON: Statistics Canada.
- ⁵¹ In the calculation of the police-reported CSI, each offence is assigned a weight, derived from sentences handed down by criminal courts. The more serious the average sentence, the higher the weight for that offence. As a result, more serious offences have a greater impact on changes in the Index.
- ⁵² Brennan, S., & Dauvergne, M. 2011. "Police reported crime statistics – 2010." Ottawa, ON: Statistics Canada.
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- ⁵⁴ The term 'on reserve' refers strictly to the location of the offences committed and not to the residency of the victim or the perpetrator.
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