

REOFFENDING PATTERNS FOLLOWING CASES WHERE YOUTH WERE WARNED BY POLICE

Executive Summary

PUBLISHED April 2018

Justice sector agencies are interested in better understanding the operation of the youth justice system in preventing children and young people from reoffending. This report presents information on the reoffending outcomes observed for cases involving youth who were warned by Police. Warnings are the least severe response to offending in the New Zealand youth justice system.

This report examines reoffending for the 20,626 cases where a Police warning was issued in the 2010/11 to 2013/14 fiscal years. The main focus of this report is on reoffending during the 12-month period after warnings. Reoffending two years post-warnings is also assessed in brief.

When interpreting results, it is important to note that reoffending outcomes in isolation do not provide evidence of an intervention's effectiveness. In addition, the data contained a number of issues that potentially introduced bias to the findings.

KEY FINDINGS

Warnings are most often given to low frequency offenders for theft-related or public order offences

- Nearly half (45%) of the warnings were for theft-related offences, most commonly shoplifting. Public order offences were the next most common offence type (18%).
- As well as having usually committed less serious offences, youth who are warned are generally low frequency offenders: in 72% of cases they were proceeded against for their first (53%) or second (18%) offence known to Police.

Nearly two-thirds of warned youth did not reoffend within 12 months

- In 36% of cases youth had reoffended within 12 months of being warned and in 64% they had not reoffended.
- Across the entire cohort, the average number of offences committed by each person in the 12 months post-warning was 26% lower than the 12 months prior. However, the average total offence seriousness increased 28%.
- The majority of the decrease in offence numbers after the warnings was due to a drop in theft-related offences (down 47%) and public order offences (down 34%). In contrast, burglary offences increased 36% and traffic offences more than doubled.
- In 73% of cases youth reduced their frequency of offending and in 77% they reduced the total offence seriousness in the 12 months post-warning compared to the 12 months prior. These figures include youth who did not reoffend. In contrast, 16% of youth offended more often and 20% committed more serious offences. Reoffending was at the same level as before in the remaining cases.

Just over half the warned youth did not reoffend within two years

- In 49% of cases youth had reoffended within two years of being warned and in 51% they had not reoffended.
- In 63% of cases youth offended less often and in 68% they had a reduced total offence seriousness in the two years after being warned compared to the two years before. In contrast, 25% offended more often and 28% committed more serious offences after the warning.

CONCLUSIONS

- This report showed that warnings are most often used for first or second-time offenders committing less serious offences.
 - In 36% of cases, youth reoffended within 12 months of the warning. Using the same methodology, another analysis found that 43% of youth reoffended within 12 months following Police Alternative Action cases, and 67% reoffended following intention-to-charge Family Group Conference (FGC) cases. However, these results do not imply that a warning is a more effective intervention. Measuring the relative effectiveness of interventions in reducing reoffending requires a robust statistical approach that controls for differences in the cohorts in key attributes such as offence history.
 - While this report does not allow us to comment on the effectiveness of warnings, in line with international research, we would expect to observe that reoffending rates following warnings would be lower than those following interventions targeted at more serious repeat offenders. The results above show this was the case.
-

Oranga Tamariki Evidence Centre Te Pokapū Taunakitanga,
Aurora Centre, 56 The Terrace, Wellington.

Email: research@ot.govt.nz

The Oranga Tamariki Evidence Centre works to build the evidence base that helps us better understand wellbeing and what works to improve outcomes for New Zealand's children, young people and their whānau.