

# Detected Young Offenders

Dennis Challinger



VACRO

DETECTED YOUNG OFFENDERS

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VACRO  
1985

First published in 1985 by VACRO  
(Victorian Association for the Care and  
Re-settlement of Offenders)  
P.O. Box 273  
PASCOE VALE SOUTH VIC 3044

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National Library of Australia card number and ISBN: 0 9596450 1 2

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research of which this is a report was funded by the Criminology Research Council's Grant 21/81. Not only is the Council's support acknowledged but their patience is appreciated. I hope they are satisfied with the result of their generosity.

Access to the documentation used in this study was provided by the Chief Commissioner of Police in Victoria. His permission and the co-operation of members of the Force with whom I had to deal are much appreciated.

On reflection quite a number of people played a part in processing the police documentation and my earnest thanks are extended to all of them. However Andrea Klepac was the mainstay of the clerical work and her diligence and skill were particularly appreciated.

Finally, converting my somewhat idiosyncratic handwritten notes into this neat form was achieved through the sterling work of Lisa Jones whose application is acknowledged.

The comments that follow are of course my own alone. I believe they may well cause some debate, but if that helps us to more appropriately deal with young offenders in future, that is all to the good.

D.C.  
June 1985

CHAPTER 1  
DEFINING YOUNG OFFENDERS

AN OLD PROBLEM

Offending by the young is a phenomenon that is both eternal and universal and therefore does not merit uninformed or hysterical community reaction. Certainly it should not be ignored, but neither should it be unrealistically impugned. This book aims to provide hard data about youthful offending in Victoria in order to encourage appropriate responses, and to reduce the possibility of community overreaction, to it.

Throughout history there are numerous references to serious misbehaviour by the young in many different societies around the world. Simonsen and Gordon (1982) for instance, provide an historical overview of offending by the young. They proceed from the Hammurabic Code (circa 2270 B.C.) which allowed for a son who struck his father to have his hands cut off, through the laws of King Aethalstan (circa 900 A.D.) which required thieves above the age of 12 years to not "be spared", to the Connecticut Code of 1650 which required thieves who were children to be "openly whipped" if their parents would not pay "treble damage" to the victims of the theft.

The views and reactions of adults today to youthful offending are much affected by media reports of it. But those reports, as is well known, concentrate on extravagant if not bizarre incidents, and are not calculated to really educate the community. This unhelpful reporting is, of course, not new, and neither are the themes covered by the media.

Thus in the Melbourne "Herald" of 9 August 1950, a Children's Court Special Magistrate bemoaned the lack of parental discipline (which should be "firm but not heavy"), the lack of religious training and the "all too obvious lack of manners and self discipline in many homes today", all of which she saw as contributing factors to youthful offending. And in the same newspaper of 30 July 1983 the children appearing before the Court are described as having

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"had some form of family breakdown", with "magistrates, doctors, social workers and other experts attached to the Court agree(ing) that widespread instability in the home environment is the main reason" for offenders appearing at Court.

However the phenomenon of youthful offending has not brought upon any community the devastation that the pessimistic members of it might have forecast. Certainly if the same percentages of adults as juveniles were formally processed by police for offences, a community would outwardly have a severe crime problem. But what seems to happen is the majority of young offenders change their behaviour as they mature. Such a change may be prompted by detection of their offending by adults, including police officers, parents, teachers, neighbours or retailers with or without subsequent processing in the juvenile justice system.

But that change may not signal the termination of offending. Young offenders who themselves realise the folly of their behaviour, as well as those who have been apprehended, may simply become more subtle and sophisticated or shift their deviant activities - for instance to their workplace or to a different type of misbehaviour such as driving deviance. Thus a young petty thief whose activities were focussed in the public retail arena may, when he commences work at an older age, realise that it is possible to continue his light fingeredness, but with less public oversight, within his working environment. And this could occur irrespective of whether his stealing underwent a temporary pause following his apprehension as a juvenile. Moreover within his workplace, and in his leisure time where he might for instance be offered cheap merchandise that has "fallen off the back of a truck", the young adult may find himself in an adult community which accepts certain levels of misbehaviour by its members.

This is of course constitutes the double standard of which many young offenders are well aware. Parents may well demand perfect behaviour from their offspring but less of themselves, and a mother who has brought home

office stationery for the use of her children is in a weak position to reprimand them for taking money from Uncle's wallet. Young people have to learn the standards of behaviour that are acceptable within their community, and ideally these should be broadcast by example as well as through instruction, or remedial action if needed.

The ultimate remedial action in most contemporary societies is undertaken by the police and possibly other agencies in the criminal justice system. And it is that ultimate action which is described by analysis of official police records relating to young offenders. Such official statistics give only an indication of the prevalence of youthful offending, however they do give a fairly accurate measure of police procedures.

#### OFFICIAL ACTION

This study is based upon police documents relating to formal (that is, officially recorded) contacts between the Victoria Police and young offenders. The number of young offenders in Victoria is actually very large, as it has been well established through self-report research such as that of Belson (1974) and Warner (1982) that most youngsters engage in behaviour which could cause them to come to formal police notice. In most cases such behaviour comes to the notice of some adult who will take immediate action against the youngster. But in some smaller number of cases members of the Victoria Police may become aware of the behaviour, either because it is reported to them or because they actually observe it. However the police are not compelled to react formally to all such behaviour, and indeed, in cases of quite minor, but still illegal, behaviour an immediate informal reprimand from a police officer may well be the most appropriate action. And no formal records will be kept of that reprimand or that young person.

Nor are there necessarily any records kept if the police exercise their discretion and take a detected offender home, announcing to his parents the reason for their presence and leaving them to discipline the offender. Again

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this is probably a quite efficacious way of dealing with some young offenders. But neither of these options results in an addition to the official statistics of the level of youthful offending. The extent of this informal action by members of the Victoria Police is simply not known. Lundman et al (1978) have suggested in their American research that in excess of half of all young offenders coming to the attention of police are handled informally. However this is neither provable nor disprovable in the Victorian context.

To further complicate the issue, those young offenders who do actually come to the attention of the police are not necessarily representative of the offending population. Many adults who become aware of young offenders do not call the police to deal with them for a variety of reasons. These include a belief that they can more adequately deal with the youth themselves, a belief that official police action would constitute overkill or be damaging to the youth's future or self esteem, a pessimism about the efficiency of the police or a wish to avoid becoming personally involved in the criminal justice process.

In addition those young offenders who do fall into police hands, do so for a variety of reasons. In some instances their selection for police action seems almost random. For instance, a retailer may have suffered so much theft by customers that he resolves to hand the next detected thief (shoplifter) to the police. In other instances, the offence is so serious or has become so prevalent that police mount a vigorous investigation. In further instances police happen upon offending in progress which they simply cannot ignore. In an English study by Mott (1983) 50 per cent of offences by juveniles were reported to the police by the victim or an agent of the victim, with only 23 per cent of the sample of offences being directly detected by the police. And there is no reason why that would not seem to be a reasonable reflection of the Victorian situation.

In turn there are a multitude of reasons why individual members of the Victoria Police choose to use their discretion not to formally proceed against

a young offender who has come to their attention. But inevitably there occur instances where, on the face of it, police appear to have been somewhat heavy handed dealing with youngsters. From the sample of offenders in this particular study, the following youngsters appear to fall into this category:

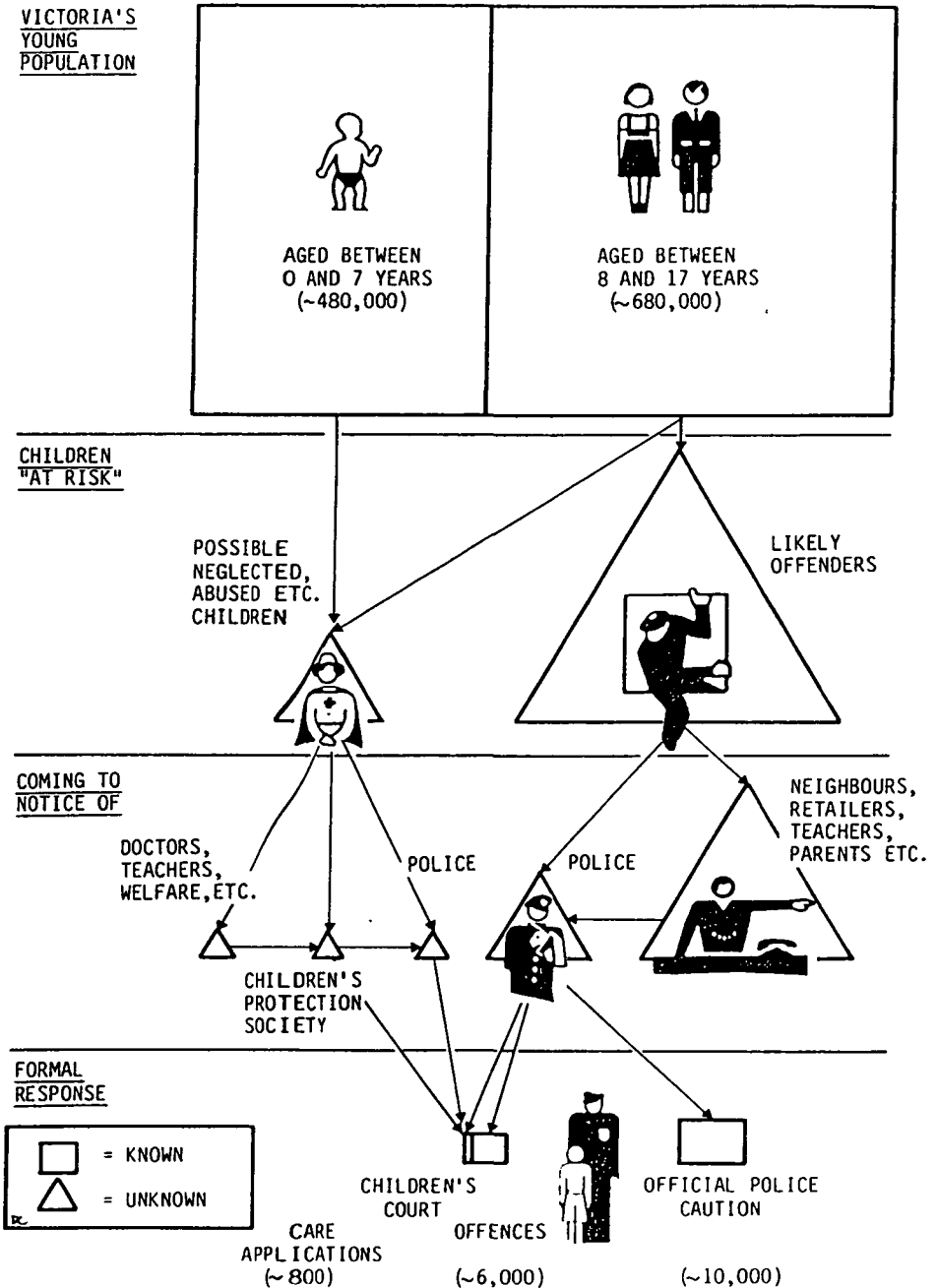
- two boys proceeded against for selling newspapers on the roadway in contravention of the road traffic act,
- the youth who left his bicycle with others in a heap on the footpath who was then formally dealt with for committing the offence of obstructing the footpath,
- the three youths charged with boating offences, all being charged with exceeding 8 kph, one at least travelling in an aluminium dinghy,
- the youth detained by the police leaving his local betting shop with tickets he had just bought.

Certainly the above have all apparently engaged in behaviour in contravention of the law, but given the frequency of such behaviour amongst young people it could be said that those above were particularly unlucky to have been formally dealt with by the police, with the consequential possible disadvantages that that brings.

There are others forms of proscribed behaviour for the young that are not only quite common, but, in some cases encouraged by adults. A case in point is that of underage drinking which some adult publicans appear to exacerbate by encouraging underage persons to their hotels to hear pop groups of particular appeal to them. In the twelve months under study a mere 152 youths were formally dealt with by the police. That group too, might realistically think that they were desperately unlucky to be formally dealt with by the police.

FIGURE 1

PATHS TO THE CHILDREN'S COURT, 1982



It is not being suggested here that the police should necessarily be striving to increase the numbers of underage drinkers, jay walkers, newsboys or careless bike riders they formally handle. All that is being illustrated is that not only are somewhat trivial offences sometimes formally dealt with, but those young offenders proceeded against comprise an undoubted minute percentage of all the young people actually committing those offences. Figure 1 provides a representation of the way in which youngsters eventually come to formal police attention, indicating the relatively low odds of a youngster coming to that end.

#### COURT OR CAUTION

A contact between young offenders and a member of the Victoria Police can be formally dealt with in one of two ways. Either the offenders can appear before a Children's Court Magistrate or else they can receive official police cautions.

The Victoria Police's Official Cautioning Program formally commenced in 1959 although recorded warnings of juvenile offenders had been instituted in some parts of the Victorian force as far back as 1940. The program is most easily described by the following extracts from the current Victoria Police Standing Order 5.3:

(1) The Police Cautioning Program has the paramount aim of assisting the child offender by diverting him from the formal sanction of Court proceedings. The program is intended to reduce child offending by -

(a) providing an alternative to Children's Court proceedings which avoids both the stigma that might be attached to appearing before a Children's Court and also a formal finding of guilt against the child;

(b) reducing the delay between the offence and disposition;

(c) giving support, assistance, encouragement and advice to the child and his parents;

(d) optimising communication in an informal atmosphere between an experienced Officer, the child and his family, and

(e) giving continuing help to the child and his family.



(2) The Police Cautioning Program is based on the discretion Police have to prosecute or not prosecute an offender and the belief that children have considerable potential for rehabilitation when given proper and timely guidance. The following guidelines are provided to ensure uniformity in application of the program -

(a) A child may be cautioned on more than one occasion providing the circumstances justify it.

(b) Formal Children's Court proceedings against child offenders should be instituted when in the best interests of the child and the community (including the complainant). In practice this means where -

(i) the facts of innocence or guilt are in dispute; or

(ii) an alleged offence is of a serious nature; or

(iii) the child's pattern of behaviour or his family situation indicate that a caution is not appropriate; or

(iv) the child's parents desire a Children's Court hearing or are unwilling to co-operate with the cautioning program.....

(5) Cautioning Officers should familiarise themselves with the aims and capabilities of social agencies, community groups or individuals who may be of assistance in furthering the aims of the cautioning program. It must be remembered that the major Police role is to prevent and suppress crime and not to "supervise" adult or child offenders. If necessary, however, the cautioning Officer may arrange for a member of the force to maintain an interest in the child. This process should not create an impression of Police surveillance, but aim at continuing friendly relations between the member and the family.

(6) The cautioning session should take the form of an informal private discussion between the Officer, the child and his parents. Where possible both parents should be present. The cautioning Officer should try to ensure that all parties join in the discussion, and that the underlying reasons for the offences are found. He should consider obtaining undertakings by offenders to reduce the chance of further offences.

In practice the member of the Victoria Police with whom a young offender comes into contact will make an initial recommendation for either an official police caution or a court hearing. An immediately senior officer then peruses, and usually endorses, the recommendation and in turn passes it on to a commissioned officer of the Force who will usually endorse the recommendation even though in most cases he will not have seen the child himself.

This decision-making procedure is an independent police action that makes the Victorian cautioning program different from some operated by English police forces. In them, the decision whether to administer a caution is often made with information from external sources including local social service departments and the local probation and after-care service, and may involve input from the offender's school headmaster and perhaps the local authority educational welfare service. (Mott, 1983). This information is then considered, not by the arresting police officer himself, but by another police officer who is either entitled a Juvenile Liaison Officer or is a member of a Juvenile Bureau who has probably never seen the offender and therefore not had the chance to personally assess him. Such programs are described by Tutt and Giller (1983) as indicating a 'welfare' approach to police decision-making in this area.

The alternative approach is the 'justice' approach where the offence rather than the offender is the focus for the police action. It is clear that the Victorian cautioning program reflects this latter approach despite the possibility of referring the offender and his family to external 'helping' agencies. However the formal aims of any program may not always be truly reflected in practice. In order to ascertain the practical aims of the Victorian program Higgins (1982) interviewed commissioned Victoria Police officers and found they perceived four major aims of the program.

The first, and most frequently mentioned, aim was to assist the child and his family by keeping the youth out of court, reinforcing parental responsibilities, promoting good family relationships or communication, or helping families identify the underlying reasons for the offence and to help find ways of rectifying the situation. Second, to prevent re-offending by deterrence or encouragement to better behaviour or pastimes. Third, to educate the youth encouraging social responsibility or good citizenship. Lastly, to improve police-public relations and encourage youths to see police in a positive light.

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In Victoria, no formal training is given to officers who administer cautions to young offenders and Higgins (1982) found that over 70 per cent of the officers she interviewed did not believe such training to be necessary. In practice then, Victoria Police cautions range from the avuncular to the disciplinary, and while in theory the notion of different approaches for different sorts of offenders is laudable, in practice it seems different police officers simply adopt styles of cautioning with which they feel most comfortable.

The only work examining styles of cautioning juveniles is that of Tweedie (1982) who arranged to have English police personnel either give an "admonitory" caution in a police station by a uniformed officer, or visit the offender's home in plain clothes aiming to give "guidance and advice". Tweedie assessed the effect of these two approaches through interviews with offenders and their families within about a month of the caution, followed by a check of offenders' re-offending after two years.

The interviews revealed that those youngsters who had been admonished recalled the event well and were generally shocked or contrite after it. Those offenders who had received a home visit recalled little of the event although it had had considerable impact on the parents, some of whom nevertheless would have preferred their children to have been dealt with more rigorously. After two years 22 per cent of the "advice group" had been found guilty of further offences in court, compared with only 9 per cent of the "admonished group". These facts suggest the merit of police using the rigorous approach and genuinely warning offenders to refrain from further offending.

In summary the Victoria Police cautioning program is predominantly aimed at keeping non-serious first offenders out of the Court system. It involves Police-Station-based intuitive interviewing by untrained but experienced police personnel, whose contact with the young offender is usually restricted to one occasion, and it rarely involves referral to any other agency.

## THE OFFICIAL PICTURE

The numbers of young offenders formally dealt with by the Victoria Police in recent years is presented in Table 1. Most notable in that Table is the quite dramatic increase in the use of cautions which is readily explained by a quite conscious and deliberate decision of the Victoria Police in recent years, to use their juvenile cautioning provisions. Considerable impetus was given to the program by unpublished research conducted in 1975 by a police officer which showed very low re-offending rates by young offenders to whom the police had issued official warnings (as cautions were then called). This also led to an official policy change in 1977 when members of the Victoria Police were instructed to institute court prosecutions against young first offenders only when they were in "the best interests of the child and the community".

The most interesting feature of Table 1 is that it shows that between the mid-seventies and the mid-eighties cautions and court appearances have changed places with respect to being the favoured disposal of the Victoria Police. And that reversal has occurred with little change in the total numbers of young offenders being dealt with - compare 1976 and 1983.

While the official caution is now the more frequently used police disposition for dealing with young offenders, examination of its use for particular types of offences is interesting. The major offences for which Victorian young offenders are dealt with are shown in Table 2 along with their cautioning rates. Thus young offenders dealt with by the Victoria Police for theft from shops (commonly known as shoplifting) are highly likely to be cautioned, whereas those offenders dealt with for vehicle theft are still more likely to be taken before a Children's Court Magistrate. Each of those rates has increased over time but relative to the total cautioning rate they maintain their respective positions.

TABLE 1  
OFFICIAL VICTORIA POLICE-JUVENILE CONTACTS 1960-1984

CALENDAR YEAR	CHILDREN'S COURT APPEARANCES	OFFICIAL POLICE CAUTIONS	TOTAL POLICE CONTACTS	PERCENTAGE OF CAUTIONS
1960	4295	650	4945	13
1961	4352	582	4934	12
1962	4971	721	5692	13
1963	5777	735	6502	11
1964	5085	914	5999	15
1965	5365	1195	6560	18
1966	4554	1413	5967	24
1967	5942	1276	7218	18
1968	5590	1486	7076	21
1969	6345	1591	7936	20
1970	7106	1642	8748	19
1971	7676	1948	9624	20
1972	7982	2283	10265	22
1973	8202	2524	10726	24
1974	8576	3440	12016	29
1975	8953	4281	13234	32
1976	7182	5201	12383	42
1977	6346	6396	12742	50
1978	5706	8376	14082	59
1979	5758	7664	13422	57
1980	5671	8388	14059	60
1981	6221	10085	16306	62
1982	4945	9207	14152	65
1983	4652	7635	12287	62
1984	4384	8134	12518	65

## Sources:

1960-1983, Victoria Police Annual Reports.

1983-1984, by courtesy Victoria Police Force Statistician.

The cautioning rates for traffic offences have increased rapidly and broadly speaking offences under this heading often relate to the recreational use of mini-bikes, that is low engine capacity motorbikes, and trail (motor)bikes. These were not a popular or frequent recreational passtime for youth say, ten years ago, but their mere increase in popularity has brought with it an increase in offences relating to adolescents' use of them. Predominantly the offences include unlicenced driving and/or using an

TABLE 2  
CAUTIONING RATES FOR SELECTED OFFENCES 1976-1984

Offence	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
Burglary	34		52		46	49	54	54	57
Shop theft					87	88	89	86	88
Other theft	51		72		56	59	62	63	68
Vehicle theft					29	34	35	37	41
Wilful damage	47		59		62	63	61	61	67
Street offences	25		34		41	47	45	46	54
Traffic	29		48		63	53	52	45	45
TOTAL	42	50	59	57	60	62	65	62	65

Sources:

1960-1982, Victoria Police Annual Reports.

1983-1984, by courtesy Victoria Police Force Statistician.

unregistered vehicle. In this instance then a social change in recreational preferences of the young has led to an increase in their offending. Without arguing the merits or not of police action against these sorts of offenders, the traffic offence group has accounted for an increasing number of offences; 1194 in 1976, 1390 in 1980 and 1544 in 1983 although the increase has not been uniform. Accordingly it has also accounted for a substantial number of cautions; 347 in 1976, 871 in 1980 and 702 in 1983.

This particular offence also provides a good example of the way in which the Victoria Police change their cautioning pattern to take into account community concerns. In a recent document they note that "strong pressures from the community and local authorities about the nuisance created by trail/mini bike riders has resulted in a preference for prosecuting these young offenders rather than cautioning them." (Victoria Police, 1983:73).

Further statistical information about young offenders is provided in the Victoria Police's main statistical report, the Statistical Review of Crime. The 1982 Review indicates that while only 19 percent of the Victorian

14.

population over 8 years old at that time were "juveniles", that is under 17; juveniles accounted for 40 percent of all "persons proceeded against" for major crime. In particular 55 percent of persons proceeded against for burglary, 44 percent for motor vehicle theft and 41 percent for theft, were juveniles.

But these statistics should not be interpreted as necessarily indicating that juveniles were responsible for, say, half of all the burglaries committed in Victoria in 1982. While those statistics do show that the majority of those "proceeded against" by the Victoria Police were juveniles, the fact that only 10,098 of the 67,888 reported burglaries were "cleared up" for that year plainly indicates that many burglars operated without detection at that time. And those undetected burglars may well be more mature and sophisticated offenders who avoid detection, with younger less careful burglars more likely to be dealt with by the Victoria Police.

CHAPTER 2THIS COLLECTION OF YOUNG OFFENDERSTHE OFFICIAL RECORD: THE FORM 276

A member of the Victoria Police who comes into contact with a young offender against whom formal action is to be taken must complete a Form 276 for that offender. This Form includes objective bio-data about the offender, details of the offence and prior offending, and some subjective data about attitude, school and family background. It is the basic source document for this research as it was for the earlier descriptive work on young offenders dealt with by the Victoria Police in 1972 and 1975. (Challinger 1977). (Any reference in this study to comparable statistics for young offenders in 1972 and 1975 comes from that reference.)

However the Form 276 has not remained unchanged over the last few years. In particular the Form was revised in 1978 after which it included a checklist of 21 "historical factors" which had not previously been explicitly included. Listed under three headings, these were:

Family

- Marital Breakdown in process
- Marital Breakdown in past
- Death of Parent(s)
- Lack of money
- Inadequate accommodation
- Conflict arising from adjusting to Australian society
- Parental alcoholism
- Parental ill-health including mental illness
- Family conflict generally
- Poor example of criminality of mother/father
- Inadequate supervision

School and Community

- Truancy
- Inability to cope (school)
- Lack of leisure facilities
- Influence of companions

Subject Child

- Medical problems (including mental health)
- Chronic behavioral problems
- Alcohol abuse
- Drug abuse
- Left home voluntarily/Forced to leave home
- Sexual promiscuity



It should be noted that all these factors on the checklist are negatively oriented. With respect to school life for instance, the reader of a completed form cannot learn from it if an offender is regular in school attendance, a keen and successful student, or regularly involved in outside activities which involve his interaction with "wholesome" others. True, an enterprising police officer could include information of this sort on the reverse of the form under the general heading "Additional Details", but it is distinctly possible for such material to be omitted.

In the context of the current research this has particular ramifications. While positive comments about school and other areas are included later in this work, they are based on precisely the enterprise (or initiative) of the police officer completing the Form 276. Statistics here relating to for instance, glue sniffing, are based on whether mention of that practice is included by the police officer on the Form 276. Plainly, if the officer believes it is irrelevant to the offence at hand, or if that officer does not discover or ask the offender about such behaviour, it will not be recorded. For this reason the details in Chapter 4 relating to some subjective factors, indicate a minimal statistic, or at best a conservative one.

On the other hand, there is a possibility of over-estimation of factors on the checklist, which problem arises directly from the design of the 1978 Form 276. The instruction for the "historical factors" part of the form is for police officers to "indicate any of the following factors in the child's background". To do this, police officers simply place ticks in boxes adjacent to the listed factors.

What this means is that a police officer need not explain or indicate why he thinks the offender's family shows "conflict generally"; he simply has to tick the box (or more usually type an X in it). Add to this non-necessity for justification, the notion that an officer may believe his form looks somehow

incomplete without some marked boxes, and the chances of over-indicating of these negative factors seem high.

While the majority of data in this study were extracted from the 1978 model Forms 276 as outlined, some data were extracted from a later revision of the Form which dispensed with the checklist of historical factors and included open ended questions covering the three headings on the 1978 Form. Thus the form provides the instruction

HISTORICAL FACTORS: Indicate any of the following factors  
in the child's background

FAMILY

Marital Harmony ....  
Health of Parents ....  
Financial Position ....  
Drug/Alcohol Abuse ....  
Type/Degree of Supervision ....

SUBJECT CHILD

Health ....  
Behaviour ....  
Drug/Alcohol Abuse ....  
Housing ....  
Sexual Promiscuity ....

SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY

Truancy ....  
Ability to Cope ....  
Companions .....

That form also leaves "character" of parents an open ended question but does include the specific question "was truancy a factor in this offence?".

Police officers completing this form thus had to identify and document the aspects relating to the offender and family that they believed were influential or contributory towards the child's offending. Because of this the data from these forms might be seen to be more accurate and reduce the likelihood of over-representation of some subjective factors.

The most recent change to the Form 276 occurred in early 1984 and reduced the amount of information required quite considerably. Gone are all the three

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subheadings listed above. Instead space is simply provided for police officers to provide information under a general heading: "historical factors" (e.g. marriage, breakdown of parents, alcoholism, etc.)".

But why has there been an effective reduction in the information about the young offender that police are now required to document? There are two possible answers. Firstly, the amount of police time spent in completing, say, the 1978 Form, was considerable if that task was undertaken conscientiously. And the belief that the collected information was of little if any importance in decision-making, may well have detracted from its conscientious completion.

Secondly, the police may well have felt unable to respond to some of the items on the earlier Form. While they may have been quite happy to note that say, father drinks a lot, they may have felt unhappy about describing that as an "alcohol problem". And indeed it could be argued that that sort of family factor, or more precisely the gravity of that factor, should be determined by someone professionally trained to make such judgements.

In the past it may well have been that in the absence of a comment about father's drinking on the Form 276, the Children's Court Magistrate may not have become aware of it. But today when pre-sentence reports are very often prepared for offenders appearing at Court, the necessity for the police to note such factors for the Court may well have passed, although an officer formally cautioning an offender should certainly be aware of them.

Additionally, as the Form 276 is invariably completed at the police station with the police officer typing an offender's verbal responses straight on to the Form 276, there is a distinct possibility of inaccurate information on those Forms. A probation officer visiting an offender at his home may well compile a more accurate statement of relevant factors affecting the offender.

The extent of inaccurate information on the Form 276 can be indicated by comparing completed Forms for the same offender, by different police officers in different places at different times. As an example one offender in the

current sample was apprehended on three occasions in the twelve month period with his birthdate being recorded as three different dates. But it is not only discrepancies in objective data that occur. Another example comes from documents relating to a boy apprehended in October and the following June. On the first occasion he was described as a first offender whose father is reported as telling the police that "he is top of the class at school and has probably been led astray by friends". In June, the October contact was noted, but so also was another, 21 months previously. Both these contacts had resulted in official cautions given at the same police station. The June documents also note that the "Parents do not know of there (sic) sons movements or friends ... offender is simple does not know his left from right but he can read and write".

Not only are objective items apparently inaccurately noted here, but there are contradictory comments about schooling and/or ability which do rather reduce confidence in the data over and above the basic caution concerning police forms or reports as a reliable data source as indicated in studies such as that of McCabe and Sutcliffe (1978). They point out that "to most uniformed men of any (police) force, the writing of any kind of report is a dreary chore". While they exempt police forms which comprise a "standardised summary" of an event from this general comment, the Form 276 by virtue of allowing for police officers' comments, may well be seen in such a light. In addition, if a police officer believes the bulk of information on the form to be unlikely to make much difference to the eventual disposal of the young offender involved, there may be no incentive to ensure the paperwork is complete and accurate.

#### THE CURRENT SAMPLE

Notwithstanding the above, Forms 276 completed after a contact between a young offender and a member of the Victoria Police were the basis for this study. After such a contact, police around the State are required to send a

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copy of the completed Form 276 relating to that contact, to the office of the Police Prosecutors at the Melbourne Children's Court. There, the accumulated documents are used to compile Victoria-wide statistics of youthful offending after which they are stored for a short period and subsequently destroyed.

The current research involved extracting data from the 16,069 Forms 276 which arrived at the Melbourne Prosecutors' office in the months of October 1981 to September 1982 inclusive. In order to identify individual offenders who had been dealt with by the police more than once in that twelve month period, all the Forms were alphabetically sorted. That exercise identified 175 duplicate Forms 276 that had somehow reached the Prosecutors' office and they were deleted from the sample. By way of including more contemporary data in this study an additional sample of 2,111 Forms 276 relating to the months of May and June 1984 were also collected. (For convenience these two data sets will be referred to hereafter as the 1982 and 1984 samples).

These collections of Forms 276 included formal contacts between police and young people which had led to either an official police caution or an appearance at Court. But as police personnel could take children or young people to court either charged with offences, or on care applications, some of the latter are included in the 16,069 Forms 276.

#### CARE APPLICATIONS

While the issue of whether the Victoria Police should be involved in taking "welfare" cases to the Children's Court still remains a topic for disagreement, the plain fact of the matter is that 591 Forms 276 in the main (1982) sample, and 48 in the 1984 sample related to care applications. These are itemised in Table 3 according to the sections of the Community Welfare Services Act which define grounds for making care applications. These grounds are different from those that existed when Leaper (1974) undertook her study of such applications. In particular the contentious grounds "likely to lapse into a career of vice and crime" and "being exposed to moral danger" have been

removed. In the past, those grounds seem to have been used to deal with offenders with a constellation of problems of which offending was seen as one manifestation. This explains why young persons appearing on such applications in 1972 were included in the earlier study of young offenders in Victoria. (Challinger 1977.) In that study of 13,084 contacts, 871 cases of "family based" care and protection applications were deleted from the sample of young offenders. Included in the sample were 1,059 care and protection applications where the child's own behaviour, whether or not an actual offence was alleged, was the prime reason for the application.

TABLE 3

GROUNDS FOR CARE APPLICATIONS IN 1982 AND 1984 SAMPLES

Grounds for Care Application as set out in Section 31(1) of the Community Welfare Services Act as at June 1982	Number of Cases	
	1982 Sample	1984 Sample
(a) The child or young person has been or is being ill-treated or is likely to be ill-treated or is being exposed or neglected or his physical, mental or emotional development is in jeopardy;	137	11
(b) The guardians of or persons having the custody or responsibility for the child or young person do not exercise adequate supervision and control over the the child or young person;	427	37
(c) The guardians of the child or young person are dead or incapacitated or are otherwise jeopardising the physical or emotional development of the child or young person and no other appropriate persons are available to care for the child or young person;	23	0
(d) The child or young person has been abandoned and his guardians or persons having the custody of or responsibility for him cannot, after reasonable inquiries, be found.	4	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>591</b>	<b>48</b>

It is notable that the percentage of care and protection applications in

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the collection of 1975 Forms 276 was 14.8%, whereas in 1982 it is only 3.7%. Plainly the care application is used far more prudently nowadays, although from inspection of the Forms 276 it appears that a number of applications on grounds that guardians "do not exercise adequate supervision and control over the child or young person" actually involve some sort of offending by that person. However that offending was often fairly minor, with the police officer often remarking on the high level of family conflict or such. Accordingly all care and protection applications were deleted from the samples as it was not simply their offending that caused the young person to be dealt with by the police. (And it may well have been that had the police officer not become aware of other problems experienced by the young person, their minor offending alone may have not attracted formal action).

#### ANOMALIES IN THE SAMPLE

A further group who were removed from the 1982 sample comprised twelve offenders who were aged over eighteen at the time they were formally dealt with by the police. A working definition of a Victorian young offender is one whose offence could cause him to appear in the Children's Court. That Court has the jurisdiction to deal with offenders aged over eight (the age of criminal responsibility) but under 18 years old, in the latter case as long as the offence was committed before the offender's 17th birthday.

Assuming that the details on the Forms 276 relating to these offenders are correct, then five of them incorrectly appeared in the Children's Court and the remaining seven who were officially cautioned were fortunate to be thus treated. About half of the twelve had committed offences some time before being formally dealt with by the police. For instance one youth had been "involved in car thefts during 1979", had left the district shortly after that and on his return in January 1982 was officially cautioned. Because of the definition of a young offender set out above, these 12 offenders were removed from the 1982 sample. In practice what appears to have occurred with these

youths is that the police have exercised a discretion not strictly available to them.

But this seems to have also occurred at the younger end of the spectrum with the appearance of three offenders who were not yet eight years old when formally dealt with. They were; a shop thief aged 7 years 10 months, another aged 7 years 8 months and a 7 year 10 month old found unlawfully on the premises. These last two were in the company of an older brother and sister respectively at the time they were detected. It seems plain that officially cautioning the older child and doing nothing with the younger would not give the younger child an appropriate view of the law. And in the case of the shop thief, according to the arresting police officer, the younger sibling was "the more aggressive of the two" anyway.

The alternative way of formally dealing with these younger children would have been a court appearance on a care application. But then, in the interests of fairness, the older child would have also had to appear in Court. And avoiding court, is precisely what the cautioning programme is intended to do. It appears then that the police have dealt with these situations in a way that, while not strictly correct, achieves the end of formally responding to reported offences with a minimum of intervention.

The first described offender was alone when he stole from a shop. He admitted to police that he had previously been handed to the police after stealing from a shop, had been informally warned by them and taken home. On this occasion, the arresting officer observed

The home environment is not good. Personally, myself, (sic) I have been to many domestics at the address. Both parents drink to excess and appear to be highly strung.

Given this, it would appear an official caution was used primarily because another informal warning was not seen as sufficient. And, presumably, appearance at court was seen as inappropriate. It should be remembered that while the investigating officer (who wrote the above), makes the first



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recommendation, the officer-in-charge of the local station and the Authorising Officer must also approve that recommendation for it to be carried through. The decision is not made by just one police officer but by three. So it is not simply on one officer's personal whim that an offender is formally cautioned.

One could take an absolute view of the law and say that a seven year old offender should never be cautioned for an offence because legally he could not be taken to court for that offence. But it is possible, from the point of view of the welfare of the child for that strict action to lead to negative results through forcing police to use the court or otherwise giving the impression that they don't care about the offending.

The police must decide what to do after considering the pros and cons of the situation bearing in mind the letter of the law. That they chose to issue official cautions to three underage offenders in a sample of over 10,000 offenders who were warned does not indicate a disregard for the law, but rather a genuine concern for the welfare of the very young offenders under consideration.

These younger offenders were left in the 1982 sample which finally numbers 15,294 a figure consistent with Table 1. However that Table shows 1981 and 1982 with noticeably higher numbers of police-youth contacts than years before and after them. The possibility that these years, and therefore this sample, are odd in some way should not be entirely discounted.

#### THE OFFENCES

The particular offences occasioning the 15,294 contacts in the twelve month period are determined by a decision of the police officers directly involved in those contacts. In fact, deciding with how many counts of what offences to charge a young person is simply another exercise in police discretion. While the Form 276 can accommodate any number of offences and any number of counts of a particular offence, the apprehending police officer

should only include on the Form 276 those offences for which he has a strong case for a prosecution in the Children's Court. There are four different groups into which the contacts can be sorted according to the police determination of appropriate offences.

First, there are contacts involving one count of one offence. Just over half, that is 8,322 of the 15,294 contacts in the sample fell into this group, hereafter called simple offences.

The second group involved a further 1317 contacts (8.6% of the whole sample) where the offender had been charged with committing only one type of offence a number of times. The most pronounced instance of this sort involved two boys charged with 73 counts of theft who were described on Forms 276 as having had, "over a six month period, rode bikes to car yards and stolen badges for their collections".

The third group comprises those dealt with for one count of each of a number of offences. 5,655 contacts resulted in more than one type of offence being listed on the Form 276, and 4,226 (or 27.6% of the whole sample) involved an offender being dealt with for only one count of each of those offences. Most common amongst this group were those proceeded against for one count of theft of a car and one of unlicensed driving.

The final group of 1429 contacts (9.3% of the sample) were dealt with for a number of counts of a number of offences. A pronounced example of this is the offender proceeded against for 73 counts of being unlawfully on premises and 69 counts of theft. According to his Form 276 he "over a period of time has had a hang up about gathering of ladies briefs from clotheslines" and had in his possession "77 pairs of pants, 9 bras and 2 pairs of panty hose". A more typical example is an offender dealt with for, say, three counts of car theft, six of burglary and two of theft.

Female offenders were significantly more likely to have been formally dealt with by the police for a simple offence; 75 percent of contacts involving girls fell into this group compared with 49% of those involving

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boys. But this does not necessarily reflect a different police attitude towards offence determination when a girl is concerned. Rather it reflects the sorts of offences for which boys and girls come to police attention. Girls are well represented in single incidents of theft from shops (a simple offence) and virtually absent from offences relating to motorbike breaches which invariably involve action for both unlicensed driving and having an unregistered vehicle.

In order to keep the analysis of the data manageable, it was necessary to determine a primary offence for each contact that involved multiple offences. To some extent this was done by reading the description of the offence and determining the primary offence according to what was deemed the major part of the offending incident. As an example consider a contact which resulted in a youngster being charged with school burglary, arson, wilful damage and theft. What had occurred was that the offender had broken into a school, vandalised it by throwing paint around, stolen some sports equipment, and splashed inflammable solvent around a classroom igniting it on leaving. As the resulting fire destroyed two classrooms the primary offence was determined in this study to be arson.

But in situations where the most important offence in a collection of offences was not quite so clear-cut the Victoria Police Major Crime Index was used as a guide and a contact involving multiple offences was classified according to the offence occurring first on the following list; robbery, rape, assault, burglary, theft, motor vehicle theft, and other property offences. In this way a contact resulting in an offender being dealt with for 1 count of burglary and two counts of theft would be classified for further analysis as having a primary offence of burglary.

Contacts involving multiple offences outside of the Major Crime Index were similarly classified according to whether the offence was "miscellaneous", a street offence or a driving offence, in that order of selection. Thus an offender dealt with for having an unregistered motorbike (a driving offence),

threatening words (a street offence), and being under 18 years of age and carrying an airgun (a miscellaneous offence) would be classified as constituting a "miscellaneous" offence.

But not only was it necessary to classify each contact according to some primary offence in order to keep the data manageable it was also necessary to group offences. This has been done in Table 4 where nine major offence groups and seven sub-groups appear. The precise constituent offences in each of the nine groups appear in Tables 5 to 13 that follow, but it is prudent to give a brief description of each group here.

- The offence group Offences Against Persons includes all assaults, sex offences, and robberies. (See Table 5).

- Burglaries is a self explanatory group and is subdivided into three subgroups; domestic burglary (i.e. from houses, and private property) commercial burglary (i.e. of factories and businesses) and burglary from public buildings (including schools, railway buildings etc.) (See Table 6).

- Thefts is also a self explanatory group and is split into the subgroups; thefts from shops, bicycle related thefts, thefts from motor vehicles and other theft (being the remainder). (See Table 7).

- Thefts of Motor Vehicles predominantly relates to motor car theft but also includes tampering with vehicles. (See Table 8).

- Minor Property Offences includes offences against property such as receiving or handling stolen goods and trespass. (See Table 9).

- Property Damage Offences includes wilful and criminal damage as well as fire related offences. (See Table 10).

- Street Offences include mainly behavioural offences in the public arena such as indecent language. (See Table 11).

- Driving Offences includes all road traffic related offences. (See Table 12).

- Miscellaneous Offences includes the remainder of offences not included in the above groups. Many of these offences are regulatory in nature the main

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constituent offences relating to firearms and underage drinking. (See Table 13).

Admittedly there is some subjectivity in the above classification process and in the definition of offence subgroups, however they are both basically sound, even though they are both based primarily on the legal labels of the offences. This itself can be somewhat misleading as the precise legal labels attached to events can tend to overstate them.

Table 4 indicates that the majority of contacts between members of the Victoria Police and young offenders relate to thefts and burglaries. Offence groups appear on Table 4 in descending order of the number of contacts they occasioned. It can be seen that contacts caused by thefts are the single largest group accounting for 45.6 per cent of all contacts, with theft from shops (commonly known as shoplifting) accounting for 72.3 per cent of all thefts, or a staggering 33.0 per cent of all contacts.

The Table also shows the distribution of these contacts according to the sex of the young person involved, and it shows that, in the 1982 sample, there were 2 female contacts for every 7 male contacts. (But because of multiple contacts for individuals this does not mean that there were 2 girls for every 7 boys). Most notably 75.8 per cent of all female contacts arose because of theft from shops compared with only 20.7 per cent of all male contacts. Plainly, this is a most significant difference, which leaves females well under-represented in all other areas of offending. In fact female contacts accounted for 22.3 per cent of all contacts, with maximum representation of 39.8 per cent in the theft subgroup, and a minimum representation of 2.2 per cent for driving offences. Figure 2 indicates the representation of females for all offence groups.

**TABLE 4**  
**CONTACTS BY SEX WITH CAUTIONING RATES**

Offence Group	Male		Female		Total	
	No. of Contacts	% Cautioned	No. of Contacts	% Cautioned	No. of Contacts	% Cautioned
<b>THEFTS</b>	<b>4198</b>	<b>74.80</b>	<b>2780</b>	<b>91.98</b>	<b>6978</b>	<b>81.64</b>
Comprising -						
Theft from Shops	2460	84.47	2587	93.47	5047	89.08
Bicycle Theft	454	64.54	21	90.48	475	65.68
Theft from Motor Cars	494	61.74	17	52.94	511	61.45
Unspecified, Other Theft and Fraud	790	58.73	155	71.61	945	60.85
<b>BURGLARIES</b>	<b>2629</b>	<b>54.28</b>	<b>208</b>	<b>58.17</b>	<b>2837</b>	<b>54.56</b>
Comprising -						
Domestic Burglary	1148	44.51	113	46.02	1261	44.65
Commercial Burglary	526	48.86	26	46.15	552	48.73
Burglary from Public Buildings	955	69.01	69	82.61	1024	69.92
<b>DRIVING OFFENCES</b>	<b>1228</b>	<b>53.01</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>70.37</b>	<b>1255</b>	<b>53.39</b>
<b>THEFTS OF MOTOR VEHICLES</b>	<b>1184</b>	<b>34.63</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>44.29</b>	<b>1254</b>	<b>35.17</b>
<b>MINOR PROPERTY OFFENCES</b>	<b>610</b>	<b>69.18</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>78.38</b>	<b>684</b>	<b>70.18</b>
<b>PROPERTY DAMAGE OFFENCES</b>	<b>597</b>	<b>63.82</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>63.16</b>	<b>635</b>	<b>63.78</b>
<b>MISCELLANEOUS OFFENCES</b>	<b>553</b>	<b>55.33</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>77.03</b>	<b>627</b>	<b>57.89</b>
<b>OFFENCES AGAINST PERSONS</b>	<b>518</b>	<b>32.24</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>31.08</b>	<b>592</b>	<b>32.09</b>
<b>STREET OFFENCES</b>	<b>365</b>	<b>50.41</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>43.28</b>	<b>432</b>	<b>49.31</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>11882</b>	<b>59.65</b>	<b>3412</b>	<b>85.55</b>	<b>15294</b>	<b>65.43</b>

**FIGURE 2**  
**DISTRIBUTION BY SEX OF YOUTH INVOLVED IN CONTACT**  
**FOR EACH OFFENCE GROUP**

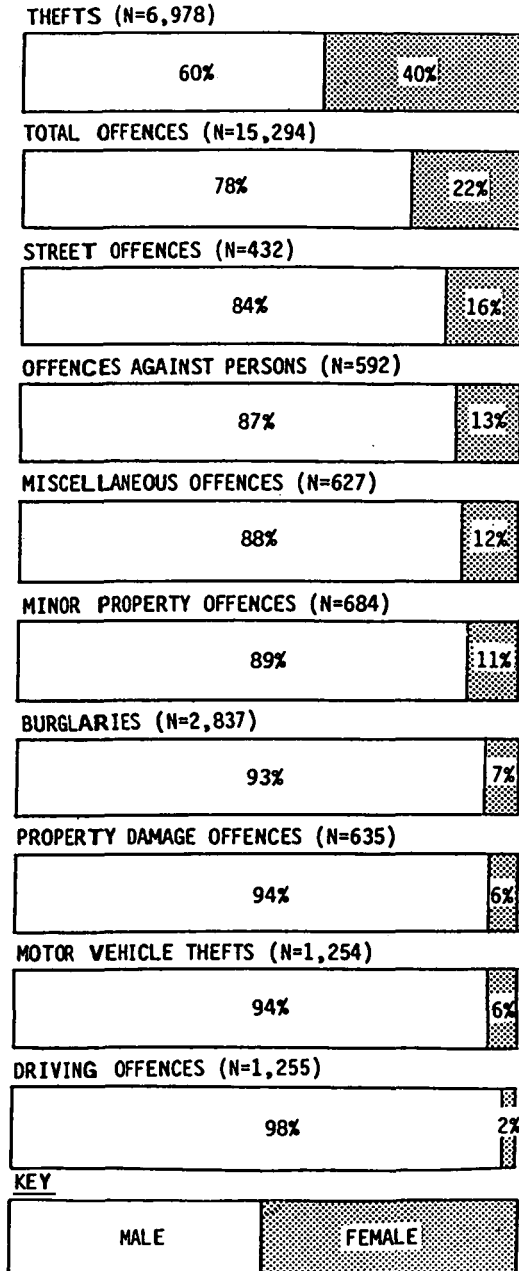


Table 4 also shows the percentages of contacts resulting in official cautions by the police rather than in court appearances. These figures show widely ranging cautioning rates for both offence types and for males and females. The different ways in which female Victorian young offenders are dealt with have been explored by Hancock (1980), but the different offences committed by females explain much of this. In particular the dominance of theft from shops by females causes a substantial increase in their overall cautioning rate. If thefts from shops were removed from Table 4 male offenders in this study would have an overall cautioning rate of 51.4 percent compared with females' rate of 57.3 percent.



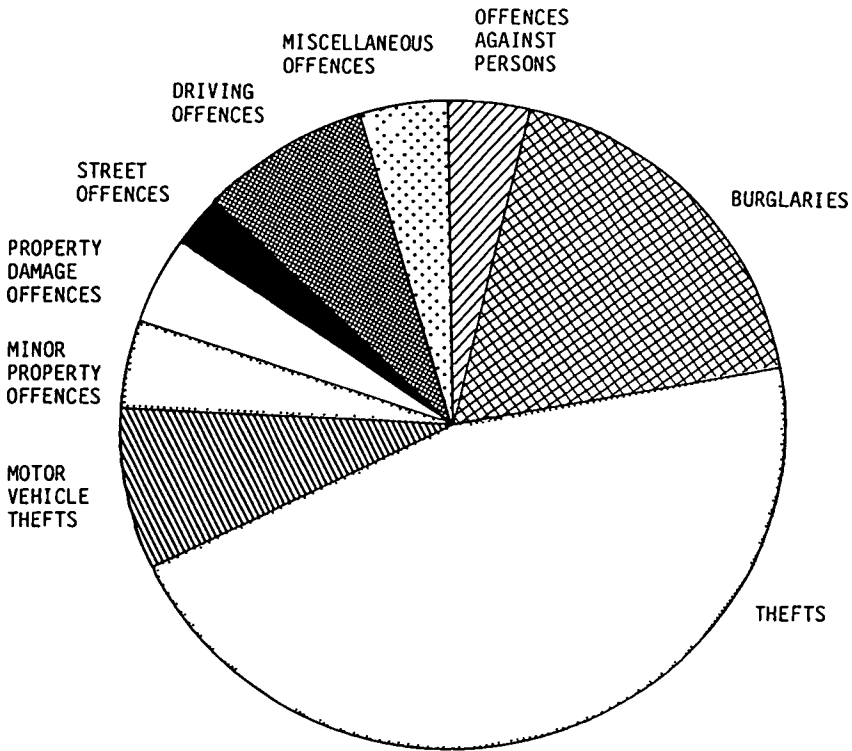
CHAPTER 3A CLOSER LOOK AT THE OFFENCES

While it is convenient (and interesting) to examine the 15,294 contacts by reference to the offences from which they resulted, it is not necessarily the case that typical offenders will emerge from such an exercise. Klein's (1984) review of research relating to almost 60 cohorts of young offenders concludes that specialisation of offending is uncommon. Indeed Klein's paper upholds the notion of cafeteria-style delinquency in which young offenders might choose, as if in a cafeteria, "to try a little petty theft, then a group assault, then some truancy (sic), then two varieties of malicious mischief and so on" (p.186).

Notwithstanding this, primary offences for each of the 15,294 contacts in this study were defined and have been presented in Table 4. Together they show a quite unexceptional pattern of youthful offending with 76 percent of the primary offences falling into the Major Crime Index as defined by the Victoria Police. The offence distribution is illustrated in Figure 3 which shows that almost half (45.6 percent) of all (primary) contacts resulted from theft, 18.5 percent from burglaries, 8.2 percent involved motor vehicle thefts and 8.6 percent related to other property offences. Overall then, more than 80 percent of offences involved property of some sort, compared with 79.0 percent of contacts in 1975 and 77.4 percent of contacts in 1972 (in each case excluding protection applications).

The remaining 1982 contacts resulted from what have been classified here as driving offences (8.2 percent), offences against persons (3.9 percent), street offences (2.8 percent) and other miscellaneous offences (4.1 percent). These group titles obscure the actual offences that have occurred, so it is valuable to look at each of the offence groups in more detail.

FIGURE 3  
DISTRIBUTION OF PRIMARY OFFENCES FOR ALL CONTACTS



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The following nine tables elaborate the nine offence groups in the order in which they were briefly defined before Table 4. They include details relating to the sex of the youth involved in the contact, the average age of youths for each offence, and the percentage of contacts involving youths who had not been noted on the Form 276 as having previously been involved in a formal contact with the police. The relevant statistics for the whole 15,294 contacts were: 77.7 percent involved male offenders, the average age of offenders was 14.65 years and at least 69.4 percent had not previously had a formal contact with the Victoria Police. This last statistic is a minimum figure as it seems likely that in many instances no official record check was completed. Indeed in this study there are Forms 276 for the same offender on which previous contacts are inconsistently noted.

In the remainder of this chapter these statistics will be used as the basis for describing groups of offenders as more predominantly male, older or having fewer first offences.

#### OFFENCES AGAINST PERSONS

Table 5 indicates that within the group of offences against persons, assaults accounted for 68.2 percent of these offences (7.9 percent being assaults against the police and 60.3 percent against civilians). Robberies accounted for 11.0 percent of the group and sex offences for a further 20.3 percent. The three contacts resulting from kidnapping incidents contributed the final 0.5 percent, but also reflect the way in which the legal charge used by the police does not give a good impression of what has actually occurred.

Each of the three kidnap contacts also involved charges of false imprisonment and other offences. Two related to the same event when a taxi driver was forced at gunpoint to drive two offenders to a distant country town. The other involved a youth who had by threat forced two others to join him in a burglary. None of these three amounts to the traditional public

notion of kidnapping, although all amount to serious offending by young people.

TABLE 5  
CONTACTS RESULTING FROM OFFENCES AGAINST PERSONS

Primary Offence	Number of Contacts	Percentage Male	Average Age	Percentage With No Previous Contact
<u>Kidnap</u>	3	100.00	14.28	0
<u>Assault Police</u>	47	87.23	16.30	19.15
Comprising:				
Unspecified Assault	37	89.19	16.42	18.92
By Kicking	1	0	15.42	100.00
With Knife	1	100.00	17.17	0
With Other Weapon	3	66.67	16.47	33.33
Causing Grievous Bodily Harm	5	100.00	15.32	0
<u>Assault Civilian</u>	357	83.19	15.47	45.38
Comprising:				
Unspecified Assault	251	78.88	15.38	45.02
By Kicking	9	100.00	16.18	22.22
With Knife	4	100.00	16.21	75.00
With other Weapon	11	90.91	15.50	72.73
Causing Grievous Bodily Harm	82	92.68	15.61	43.90
<u>Robbery</u>	65	89.23	15.29	43.08
Comprising:				
Robbery (under arms, with menaces, etc.)	28	89.29	15.33	35.71
Robbery with Wounding	1	100.00	13.50	100.00
Robbery in Company	6	100.00	15.14	66.67
Assault and Robbery	26	92.31	15.49	38.46
Assault with Intent to Rob	4	50.00	14.31	75.00

TABLE 5 (ctd)  
CONTACTS RESULTING FROM OFFENCES AGAINST PERSONS

Primary Offence	Number of Contacts	Percentage Male	Average Age	Percentage With No Previous Contact
<u>Sex Offences</u>	120	99.17	14.89	65.00
Comprising:				
Carnal Knowledge with Person under 10 years	2	100.00	16.09	50.00
Carnal Knowledge with Person aged 10-16	4	100.00	16.33	25.00
Incest	1	100.00	17.08	0
Indecent Assault on Female	69	98.55	14.62	59.42
Assault with Intent to Rape	3	100.00	14.86	33.33
Wilful Exposure	36	100.00	15.27	83.33
Buggery	1	100.00	14.00	100.00
Indecent Assault on Male	4	100.00	13.85	75.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>592</b>	<b>87.50</b>	<b>15.39</b>	<b>46.79</b>

The public notion of an assault serious enough to warrant police attention may also fail to be reached by many of the assaults appearing in Table 5. Unspecified or common assault (that is, an assault involving no weapon) comprise 71.2 percent (288 of 404) of all assaults. Those range from fights between acquaintances to an unprovoked punching attack on a stranger because the offender did "not like the way he looked at me", to group disputes. One such incident included in this study involved one group of eight girls following around another group of seven and finally assaulting them through punches to faces and threats to burn with cigarettes. Those youths charged

with assaulting police had invariably also been charged with resisting arrest, and the assaults, in most part, resulted from a scuffle, albeit very spirited in some instances.

The majority of robberies in this study were indeed serious, in one case involving three bank hold ups, the offender was dealt with in a higher court. However there were also a number of minor events which nevertheless were legally classified as robberies. These included an instance where the robbery victim, younger than the 12 year old offender, made "rude signs and gestures" at him while in the company of older boys. After they had departed, the offender, "decided to get even with him", assaulted him, and stole 30 cents from him. Others included the offender who "threatened to punch two girls" and gained \$4.50, and another who demanded money from a younger child and instead took a set of swap cards.

Even the single charge of robbery with wounding was described on the Form 276 as involving an offender who in the company of other youths assaulted a youth who was riding his bike. All of the youths apparently crowded around the victim, demanded money and then took \$1.00 from him. The victim then became scared as the offender threatened to stab him with a large knife. He ran off but was again caught by these youths, and the offender pressed a knife into the victim's stomach causing a wound for which he was admitted to hospital.

While this offender's behaviour could not possibly be condoned, the episode described does sound very much like the foolish and dangerous bullying of the sort that occurs from time to time amongst 13 or 14 year old boys. Although a very nasty incident, this offence undoubtedly does not fit the public stereotyped view of a robbery, yet alone a robbery with wounding. Qualitatively the event is quite different from a violent robbery in the course of which a person is wounded. There were however a small number of "typical" violent robberies in this sample.

Within the sex offences subgroup 57.5 percent of offences were indecent

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assaults on females and 30.0 percent were wilful or obscene exposure by males. In a similar way to robberies the great majority of the indecent assaults were serious, although some were trivial. The latter group included a number of boys who would ride on their bicycles alongside girls on foot and touch their breasts or private parts. The former group included a number of boys who were assaulting quite young children and others who (often in groups) were intimidating girls and removing their undergarments.

The majority of wilful exposures in this study involved lone boys exposing themselves in a variety of public situations, sometimes to younger children. But there are also group offences where a number of boys jointly exposed themselves in public, and one case where a group of young people were having a barbeque in a public place and one sixteen year old partygoer exposed himself and was "visible to all persons present".

As all the contacts in the "offences against persons" group have persons who are direct victims, they are serious enough, despite their sometimes trivial circumstances. But the folly of using data from Table 5 to elaborate upon the average juvenile "robber", "basher" or "flasher" should be plain enough from this brief description of the range of events which can be accommodated under a legal title.

Notwithstanding that, offenders against the person are predominantly male, slightly older in age and far more likely to have previous police contacts than are those involved in other offence groups.

### BURGLARIES

The locations for burglaries by the young were grouped into: domestic buildings (comprising 44.4 percent of the total); commercial properties (19.5 percent), and public buildings (36.1 percent). Overall, private houses were the single most frequent location for burglaries (43.0 percent), followed by educational institutions, mainly schools and kindergartens (25.0 percent).

TABLE 6

CONTACTS RESULTING FROM BURGLARIES

Primary Offence	Number of Contacts	Percentage Male	Average Age	Percentage With No Previous Contact
<b>Domestic Burglary</b> Comprising burglaries of:	<b>1261</b>	<b>91.04</b>	<b>14.34</b>	<b>52.97</b>
Houses	1220	90.74	14.33	53.28
Private Garages	33	100.00	14.68	39.39
Holiday Houses	5	100.00	14.85	40.00
Caravans	3	100.00	13.19	100.00
<b>Commercial Burglary</b> Comprising burglaries of -	<b>552</b>	<b>95.29</b>	<b>14.43</b>	<b>56.34</b>
Shops	285	92.63	14.59	54.39
Factories	119	98.32	13.73	59.66
Warehouses	40	97.50	14.61	62.50
Offices	32	96.88	15.05	40.63
Commercial Garages	29	100.00	14.70	72.41
Kiosks	22	100.00	14.46	68.18
Theatres, etc.	12	100.00	13.67	66.67
Hotels	6	100.00	15.05	33.33
Shops by Smash Grab	4	75.00	15.46	25.00
Guest Houses, etc.	3	100.00	15.17	0
<b>Burglaries of Public Buildings</b> Comprising burglaries of -	<b>1024</b>	<b>93.26</b>	<b>13.69</b>	<b>71.88</b>
Schools, etc.	709	92.67	13.51	75.60
Clubs or Halls	193	92.75	14.18	69.43
Government Buildings	75	96.00	13.85	53.33



TABLE 6 (ctd)  
CONTACTS RESULTING FROM BURGLARIES

Primary Offence	Number of Contacts	Percentage Male	Average Age	Percentage With No Previous Contact
Railway Buildings	32	100.00	14.37	59.38
Churches	10	100.00	13.99	40.00
Post Offices	3	100.00	15.36	33.33
Aerodromes, etc.	2	100.00	13.33	100.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2837</b>	<b>92.67</b>	<b>14.12</b>	<b>60.45</b>

Burglary proved to be a predominantly male offence, although females did account for 9 percent of the contacts for house burglary, and 7 percent of those for burglaries from shops, schools and halls.

It was noticeable that burglaries of public buildings more likely than not involved youths who had not previously come into formal contact with the police. That group also had a noticeably lower average age than the other burglars, and these two facts together suggest that public building burglaries are frequently committed by immature amateurs who choose a target - a school or local hall - with which they have familiarity.

While the 1982 Statistical Review of Crime indicates the average value of goods stolen in a burglary was \$580, analysis of single offence burglaries in this sample provides an average loss of \$210. This statistic should be interpreted with caution as single offence burglaries only comprised 550 of the 2837 burglary contacts, and values were only available for 347 of them. Contacts involving only multiple house burglaries averaged \$707 and there were a number of burglary contacts which accounted for substantial sums.

Shopbreaking was often a high value offence and two boys stealing motorcycles valued at \$20,000 after breaking into a motorbike retailer's

premises helped inflate the average value statistic. But over 30 house burglary contacts involved goods valued in excess of \$5000. Sometimes these also involved thefts of cars but pairs of young burglars were fortunate at least three times with hauls from houses of \$5400, \$6500 and \$8500 comprising jewellery and cash. It says something for the last mentioned burglary that the stolen jewellery was "thrown into the creek", not indicative of a professional planned burglary. At the other end of the spectrum there were a number of burglaries of loose change which appeared to be simply amateur fun seeking episodes.

### THEFTS

That theft constitutes the single largest reason for a youth's official contact with the police is no surprise. Virtually all studies of self-reported offending by young people have shown a heavy overall participation in stealing of some sort by them. Jackson (1984) goes so far as to say that "ninety-nine percent of children steal something at some time or another". (p.7).

By way of explaining why children steal Jackson (1984) outlines reasons under the headings: lack of detection, magnitude of the theft, reciprocity for deviancy, social (peer) pressure, revenge and the perceived expectations of others. And the somewhat transitory nature of these reasons helps explain why Jackson (1984) notes that "usually, however, we discover that a child steals only once or twice and never does so again". (p.8). And this is somewhat supported by the fact that over 80 percent of contacts resulting from theft involve youths not previously officially dealt with by the police.

This figure reaches 89 percent for customer theft from shops (also known as shoplifting). And shop thefts, as earlier indicated, account for 72.3 percent of all thefts in this study. In fact they account for 78.0 percent of all thefts that can be categorised, that is, excluding the 505 unspecified thefts from consideration. As it happens customer theft from shops is also

the only offence in this study in which females actually outnumber males (2585 to 2441). It is also the only offence in which the value of goods taken by girls is significantly higher than that taken by boys. Single offence contacts by female shop thieves average out at \$20.36, while boy shop thieves average a \$16.67 theft. This may well reflect the type of goods stolen by girls which, together with the number of such contacts, indicate that theft from shops remains adolescent girls major contribution to youthful offending.

TABLE 7  
CONTACTS RESULTING FROM THEFTS

Primary Offence	Number of Contacts	Percentage Male	Average Age	Percentage With No Previous Contact
<u>Unspecified Theft</u>	505	85.54	14.54	64.95
<u>Shop Theft</u> Comprising theft:	5047	48.74	14.08	89.02
by customers (shoplifting)	5026	48.57	14.08	89.16
from Shop Tills	21	90.48	13.27	57.14
<u>Bicycle Related Theft</u> Comprising theft of:	475	95.58	14.10	66.53
Bicycles	453	95.36	14.15	66.23
Bicycle Parts	22	100.00	13.07	72.73
<u>Thefts From Motor Cars</u> Comprising Theft of:	511	96.67	14.65	64.77
Goods from Cars	402	96.27	14.34	64.18
Car Parts	63	100.00	15.98	69.84
Petrol from Cars	31	93.55	16.15	61.29
Car Radios	8	100.00	14.97	50.00
Tools from Cars	7	100.00	13.07	85.71

TABLE 7 (ctd)  
CONTACTS RESULTING FROM THEFTS

Primary Offence	Number of Contacts	Percentage Male	Average Age	Percentage With No Previous Contact
<u>Other Thefts</u> Comprising:	341	84.75	14.82	59.24
Theft by employees	72	68.06	15.67	63.89
Public theft	79	89.87	14.28	59.49
Personal theft	52	86.54	14.63	44.23
Theft from slot machine	44	100.00	15.14	47.73
Theft from commercial establishments	34	91.18	14.38	70.59
Theft from private property	41	82.93	14.91	63.41
Theft of animals	16	87.50	13.99	75.00
Attempted theft	3	33.33	15.25	100.00
<u>Fraudulent Offences</u> Comprising -	99	69.70	15.29	67.68
Imposition	76	71.05	15.19	73.68
Forge and Utter	18	61.11	15.70	38.89
False Pretences	5	80.00	15.37	80.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6978</b>	<b>60.16</b>	<b>14.21</b>	<b>82.22</b>

While the other sorts of thefts included in Table 7 fade into numerical insignificance besides shop thefts they do themselves reflect some interesting features. For instance thefts from motor cars go beyond the theft of cameras, tape decks and clothing and reach considerable heights. Contacts under this heading involved several thefts of cash over \$1000 with two boys happening upon \$4800 in one car. Additionally the apparently trivial removal of car badges transpires to have a considerable financial element, no less than four

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contacts involved theft of badges of estimated value in excess of \$1000. Despite these high value contacts, the average value of single offence contacts in this category was \$147.

Personal thefts averaged \$621 mainly due to the two youths who over a period of months managed to remove no less than \$7500 from the handbag of "a senile old lady". And many other thefts were of high value as a result of luck or ignorance. The first includes the youngster who removed a case from an airport luggage collection only to find it contained over \$5000 worth of camera gear. The second includes the theft of a \$4000 piece of electrical equipment to be stripped down for a small motor in it.

Bicycle thefts averaged out at \$184 but these included nine contacts in which over \$1000 worth of bikes were involved. And several high value thefts by employees or as a result of fraudulently using credit cards many times, were also included. These last two offences certainly involve youngsters who have deliberately set out to steal. Using a credit card 27 times to steal \$1200 worth of goods, or undercharging friends at a discount store checkout to the tune of \$1350, are qualitatively different from the theft of a handbag from a public building and discovering it has \$1200 in it. Thus discussions about young thieves should incorporate a precise understanding of what was involved. Moreover the presence of some high value thefts makes interpretation of average values of thefts quite precarious.

#### THEFTS OF MOTOR VEHICLES

The average age of the (predominantly male) offenders whose theft of motor vehicles caused their official contact with the Victoria Police was 15.70 years. This is notably higher than the overall average age of 14.65 years and suggests that youths who steal cars are a more mature group with a particular interest. A considerable number of these youths were engaging in a practice often colloquially referred to as "joyriding", occasionally in their parents' car. Once again however, there were most serious offences included under this

group heading including youths who were part of a genuine car stealing racket or concluded their escapade by deliberately destroying a vehicle. In this sample there were eleven contacts involving cars valued at over \$20,000. Either they involved single luxury cars (in two cases owned by the offender's father) or a number of cars had been stolen.

TABLE 8  
CONTACTS RESULTING FROM THEFTS OF MOTOR VEHICLES

Primary Offence	Number of Contacts	Percentage Male	Average Age	Percentage With No Previous Contact
Theft of Motor Car	1014	94.18	15.86	40.53
Theft of Motor Cycle	141	97.87	15.30	44.68
Tamper with Motor Vehicle	94	91.49	14.62	58.51
Attempted Theft of a Motor Vehicle	2	100.00	15.50	0
Theft of Other Vehicle	3	100.00	16.72	33.33
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1254</b>	<b>94.42</b>	<b>15.70</b>	<b>42.26</b>

The notion that young car thieves are either a favoured group (which in America is suggested to comprise white middle class youths with easy access to cars) or a disadvantaged group (that is, poorer black youths) was not found provable by Higgins and Albrecht (1981). They also dispelled the suggestion that young American car thieves were 'specialists', finding with a self-report inventory that such offenders were active in other areas of offending, in particular in drinking offences. This of course is consistent with Klein's (1984) cafeteria style offender referred to earlier.

A particularly serious feature of the theft of motor vehicles by juveniles

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is the fact that drivers of stolen vehicles may often be unlicensed, and therefore possibly insufficiently skilled, as well as nervous. Each of these factors render them a distinct hazard to other road users, and make formal action against them necessary in order to emphasise the gravity of their misbehaviour.

#### MINOR PROPERTY OFFENCES

Receiving (or handling) stolen goods (50.3 percent) and being unlawfully on premises (46.5 percent) constitute the bulk of this offence group. While there is a marked tendency for these offences to more often involve males, this group is unremarkable with respect to either age or prior police contact of those involved in it.

The offence of handling stolen goods now not only includes purchasing or otherwise receiving the proceeds of another person's offence, but being a passenger in a stolen car. For this reason some unknown number of contacts in Table 9 might therefore have been better placed in Table 8.

TABLE 9  
CONTACTS RESULTING FROM MINOR PROPERTY OFFENCES

Primary Offence	Number of Contacts	Percentage Male	Average Age	Percentage With No Previous Contact
Handling or Receiving Stolen Goods	344	89.83	14.71	68.31
Unlawfully on Premises	318	87.74	14.50	70.44
Unlawful Possession	12	100.00	15.21	25.00
Possess Housebreaking Implements	5	100.00	15.75	80.00
Trespass	3	100.00	16.67	0
Possess Explosives	2	100.00	15.79	100.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>684</b>	<b>89.18</b>	<b>14.64</b>	<b>68.42</b>

PROPERTY DAMAGE OFFENCES

There is a quite considerable range of events reflected in this offence group, the majority of which are wilful damage offences. These range from fairly trivial offences including hitting a letter box with an iron bar causing \$3 worth of damage, through mid range offences such as setting fire to rubbish in a large industrial waste bin (\$157), to serious offences such as causing over \$10,000 worth of damage to a building under construction. The present sample also includes an offender who set a fire which destroyed part of a train valued at over \$200,000. This figure is not included in discussion of average value because of the unbalancing effect it would have.

The 1982 Statistical Review of Crime indicates that 20,391 incidents of wilful damage and 2899 incidents of criminal damage (excluding arson and damage to animals) were reported to the Victoria Police during that year. Of them, 2,145 and 835 respectively were cleared, giving clear up rates of 10.5 percent and 28.8 percent respectively. Of the 1303 and 374 people proceeded against, 546 (or 42 percent) and 88 (or 24 percent) were juveniles - the bulk of offenders in each case coming from the 17 to 20 year old age group. These statistics suggest that while juveniles are detained more often than adults for property damage offences, only a small proportion of young vandals are in fact detected.

The extent of vandalism amongst the young is indicated by Gladstone (1978) who undertook a self report study with 584 boys aged 11-15 years in an English city with a high incidence of vandalism. (Girls were excluded from the study as official statistics indicated low participation of girls in vandalism, a fact supported by the current data with only five percent of the 538 contacts involving females).

Only 22 of Gladstone's boys denied committing any of the twenty four damaging acts put to them, but 79 percent admitted breaking a bottle in the street, 32 percent breaking a window in a bus shelter, 20 percent damaging a



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phone in a phonebox, and 12 percent slashing train seats. While these figures may be higher because these boys were resident in a high vandalism area, they nevertheless indicate a widespread propensity to damage property amongst young people. As indicated the range of property damages in this study ranges from the quite minor to the particularly serious. But there is no doubt that those offenders whose contacts are listed in Table 10 do not adequately reflect the population of young Victorian vandals. This proposition is even more certain if research into police knowledge of acts of vandalism elsewhere approximates that in Victoria. Sturman (1978) for instance found that only one in thirty five incidents of criminal damage appeared in the published English criminal statistics.

TABLE 10  
CONTACTS RESULTING FROM PROPERTY DAMAGE OFFENCES

Primary Offence	Number of Contacts	Percentage Male	Average Age	Percentage With No Previous Contact
Wilful Damage	450	94.89	14.59	68.44
Vandalism	88	93.18	14.90	62.50
Arson	80	88.75	13.73	57.50
Light Fire During Ban	17	100.00	12.92	88.24
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>635</b>	<b>94.02</b>	<b>14.48</b>	<b>66.77</b>

STREET OFFENCES

These offences relate to public misbehaviour and all involve the use of considerable discretion by operational police. Those juveniles involved in these offences tend to be older than those in other offence groups, with an obvious exception in the case of "thrown missile" where quite young offenders are involved.

TABLE 11  
CONTACTS RESULTING FROM STREET OFFENCES

Primary Offence	Number of Contacts	Percentage Male	Average Age	Percentage With No-Previous Contact
Indecent Language	124	70.97	16.26	39.52
Offensive Behaviour	82	93.90	16.17	63.41
Throw Missile	75	94.67	13.85	74.67
Drunk and Disorderly	59	88.14	16.38	66.10
Loitering with Intent to Commit a Felony	29	96.55	15.53	55.17
Carry Offensive Weapon	22	100.00	16.00	68.18
Obstruct Police	12	66.67	16.25	58.33
Assume Designation of Police	1	100.00	15.50	0
Insulting Words	11	63.64	16.24	45.45
Threatening Words or Behaviour	3	100.00	15.75	0
Indecent Behaviour	3	100.00	15.00	100.00
Obstruct Footpath	1	100.00	14.67	100.00
Prostitute Soliciting	8	25.00	16.56	25.00
Live off Earnings of Prostitution	1	100.00	16.75	0
Male Soliciting	1	100.00	16.75	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>432</b>	<b>84.49</b>	<b>15.77</b>	<b>56.71</b>

Few of those youths dealt with for indecent language had previously come to police notice and nearly thirty percent of them were female. Most of these offences seem to involve the use of bad language in situations to which the police are called by angry members of the public, or situations where police

feel that they cannot let such public misbehaviour pass. In the first category are incidents when offenders are offensively vocal on trams or trains, causing annoyance by their antics in hotel bars or deliberately entering school grounds and abusing teachers in public. The second category include police coming upon large crowds of youngsters in public places and being brazenly abused by show-offs, or police simply being the target for anger as they go about their job removing friends of the offender for other reasons.

It is obvious that police discretion is enormously important with respect to this group of offences. A youngster whom one particular police officer might formally deal with, could be ignored by another. And an offender might see himself as most unlucky in some instances. As an example, one youth dealt with for offensive behaviour was a passenger in a car which did not move "for about 15 seconds" after traffic lights turned green. The driver of the police car immediately behind that car gave a "short burst" on his horn, following which the offender made a rude gesture to the police driver. It was that for which this first offender was then dealt with.

#### DRIVING OFFENCES

The largest single group of driving offences relates to motorcycle usage, and in particular to off-road and trailbike usage. Almost entirely male, this offence reflects a changing leisure pattern to which reference has been previously made. It will also be observed that a considerable number of driving offences come to police notice as a result of some accident or other to which they have been called. The number of instances of youthful driving deviance which do not result in attracting police attention is probably considerable.

TABLE 12  
CONTACTS RESULTING FROM DRIVING OFFENCES

Primary Offence	Number of Contacts	Percentage Male	Average Age	Percentage With No Previous Contact
Motorbike Offences	699	99.14	15.85	69.67
Unlicensed Driver	272	93.75	16.24	63.60
Fail to Give Name and Address after Accident	247	98.79	15.87	69.64
Drive over .05	13	100.00	16.48	23.08
Drive Unregistered Vehicle	7	100.00	15.77	71.43
Dangerous or Reckless Driving	6	100.00	16.67	16.67
Careless Driving	2	100.00	16.75	100.00
Drive Against Automatic Signal, Fail to Give Way	4	75.00	15.23	75.00
Speeding Offences	5	100.00	16.93	80.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1255</b>	<b>97.85</b>	<b>15.95</b>	<b>67.73</b>

#### MISCELLANEOUS OFFENCES

The 627 contacts resulting from miscellaneous offences cover a very wide range of law infractions. The largest subgroups are firearm offences, drinking offences, and escape offences. Only one girl was involved in the firearm offences, and she was formally dealt with for possessing an air gun while under the age of 18, the offence which accounted for over three-quarters of all the firearm offences.

Girls were outnumbered 3 to 1 by boys with respect to drinking offences despite Warner's (1982) and Figueira-McDonough's (1984) findings that girls

self report more underage drinking than boys. Only 181 youngsters were formally dealt with by the police for drinking offences and that is exceedingly modest given the apparent extent of this behaviour. However it approximates the Canadian situation described by Vingilis et al (1980) in their rather inconclusive research which had hoped to find particular characteristics for youngsters charged with underage drinking.

The majority of those youths charged with escape appeared to be walkaways from Youth Training Centre programmes rather than offenders meeting the public picture of an escapee. And the bulk of the drug offences related to the possession of marijuana.

The 40 breaches of the law relating to bicycles comprise another good example of possible bad luck on behalf of the youth involved. Given the numbers of young people who ride their bicycles on footpaths (sometimes it seems with parental encouragement), or ride bicycles without lights, 40 offenders reflects fairly selective enforcement. But without knowing the actual context of the cycling misdemeanours it is not possible to say much more than this.

Similar comments could be made about the three youths formally dealt with for what has been called jaywalking on Table 13. But the context of these offences is known from details provided on the respective Forms 276. One offender dashed across the road to a tram causing a collision between cars, one had been knocked down by a car for the second time within metres of a school crossing, and the third had foolhardily run straight in front of a car receiving a broken leg as a result. Each of these reflects a fairly serious breach of laws relating to pedestrians and although they would constitute a very small percentage of all 'active' juvenile jaywalkers, there appears some merit in emphasising through formal police action the gravity of their behaviour.

Overall this group comprises such an odd selection of offences that it is unwise to draw any general conclusions about the group as a whole.

TABLE 13  
CONTACTS RESULTING FROM MISCELLANEOUS OFFENCES

Primary Offence	Number of Contacts	Percentage Male	Average Age	Percentage With No Previous Contact
Carry Airgun Under 18	122	99.18	15.20	78.69
Discharge Firearm Without Permission	23	100.00	15.49	65.22
Shoot or Carry Firearm	9	100.00	16.05	77.78
Firearm without Certificate	3	100.00	16.33	66.67
No Permit for Pistol	3	100.00	16.20	100.00
Buy or Drink Liquor Under Age	153	77.12	16.43	74.51
Drink in Vicinity of Dance	28	78.57	16.21	64.29
Escape Legal Custody and Harbour Escapee	107	95.33	16.28	0
Drug Use, Possession etc.	55	85.45	16.16	54.55
No Bicycle Lights	26	84.62	15.44	53.85
Ride Bike on Footpath	14	100.00	14.85	64.29
Make False Report to Police	15	66.67	14.62	66.67
Breach Bylaws	14	92.86	15.65	50.00
Leave Glass on Roadway	8	100.00	14.15	50.00
Place Obstruction on Roadway	3	100.00	16.11	100.00
Nuisance Phone Calls etc.	8	62.50	14.83	75.00
Cruelty to Animals	4	100.00	15.98	75.00

TABLE 13 (ctd)  
CONTACTS RESULTING FROM MISCELLANEOUS OFFENCES

Primary Offence	Number of Contacts	Percentage Male	Average Age	Percentage With No Previous Contact
False Fire Alarm	4	75.00	14.52	75.00
Breach of Dog Act	3	66.67	16.25	100.00
Breach Railway Bylaws	5	100.00	15.58	40.00
Boating Offences	3	66.57	14.64	100.00
Indecent Phone Calls, Letters, Publication	4	100.00	14.98	50.00
Perjury	2	50.00	15.37	0
Fireworks Offences	2	100.00	15.79	100.00
Sell Papers on Roadway	2	100.00	13.42	50.00
Gaming Offences	1	100.00	17.08	0
Jaywalk	3	33.33	15.25	100.00
Breach Bond	1	100.00	15.17	0
Misuse Car Registration Plates	2	100.00	16.41	50.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>627</b>	<b>88.20</b>	<b>15.84</b>	<b>57.58</b>

#### OFFENCES OVERALL

The above nine tables do indicate that a lot of the offences for which these 15,294 contacts occurred, are fairly minor, especially if low value thefts are called minor. And it is because a lot of youthful offending is quite trivial that researchers like Reimer (1981) argue that much of it may well be frivolous, flippant fun.

It is not possible from the current data to say anything about the reasons or causes for youngsters offending as they did. But Belson discovered for his

sample of London schoolboys that

fun and excitement seeking appears to be an important contributing factor (to stealing) operating within a complex of other factors ... (which include) lack of money for buying what the boy wants; seeking prestige amongst boys already engaged in stealing; a feeling of need or want for what was stolen; being dared by mates already engaged in stealing. (1975: 169).

In addition, Warner (1982) in her Tasmanian self-report study also discovered that "enjoyment" was an important motive for offenders. Of all those who were able to suggest a motive, just on a quarter indicated enjoyment as their usual motive, which while not a massive figure does reinforce the notion that some amount of youthful offending is just adolescent fun, and therefore not something to which to over-react.



CHAPTER 4  
THE INDIVIDUAL OFFENDERS

The preceding chapter comprised an analysis of the offences that resulted in 15,294 formal contacts between police and young people. But some number of those young people were actually involved in a number of contacts over the twelve month period. And that fact makes it quite inappropriate to use the sample of contacts as a basis for analysis of characteristics of the youths involved in offending. Consider a boy born in Xanadu with whom police had six contacts in the twelve months. He would disproportionately inflate the statistics of Xanaduan offenders if he was counted six times.

Plainly then it is the sample of individual offenders who must form the basis of any analysis of personal characteristics. Sorting the 15,294 Forms 276 alphabetically by offender's name was undertaken (as previously described) and as a result 13,079 separate named individuals were found to be responsible for the 15,294 contacts in the 1982 sample.

THE CONTACT RATIO

Offenders who are responsible for multiple contacts are a worthy object of attention and in order to reflect their presence within any particular group of offenders a contact ratio is calculated. This is very simply the number of contacts within a group divided by the number of individuals within that group. Thus if all offenders within a group had only once come into formal contact with the police over the twelve month period, the contact ratio for the group would be 1.00. If all individuals in a group had had 2 contacts with the police, the contact ratio for the group would be 2.00. In this way the contact ratio for the whole sample of 13,079 individuals is .117, as they had had 15,294 contacts.

The contact ratio itself appears to be a fairly constant sort of statistic; previous studies of young offenders in Victoria have shown it to be

1.14 in 1972, and 1.19 in 1975. (Challinger 1977). Its main value then is its use as a way of comparing groups of offenders with respect to their involvement in offending, higher contact ratios than 1.17 indicating greater involvement than expected. And contact ratios lower than 1.17 reflect lower involvement, or more simply, a greater number of single contact offenders, within any group.

#### AGES OF THE OFFENDERS

The distribution by age of individual offenders is shown on Table 14. Sixteen year old boys constitute the single largest group of offenders comprising 17.65 percent of the sample. They were also the largest group in 1972 (19.70 percent) and 1975 (16.42 percent). The largest group amongst the girls in this study were the fourteen year olds, whereas it was the fifteen year olds who were the largest subgroup in the two earlier years.

Despite these differences over the years the average age of youngsters at the time of their official contact with the police is really quite stable. In the 1982 sample the average age for male contacts is 14.65 years (14.58 in 1975) and for females 14.39 years (14.41 in 1975). The difference between the average ages of the boys and girls in this study is actually statistically significant ( $t = 6.80, 13077 \text{ d.f.}, p < 0.01$ ).

These average ages are, once again, below the prescribed school leaving age of 15 years so McKissack's (1973) observation that the last year at school is always the peak year for youthful offending appears true here too. However, as pointed out earlier, there are numerically more 16 year olds than 15 year olds, and, more importantly, those committing offences after turning 17 years of age are dealt with in adult courts. Those 17 year olds who appear in this sample are those whose offences were committed prior to their seventeenth birthdays. It is quite possible then that seventeen year old offenders in any one year may exceed in number the sixteen year olds, all of whom are dealt with under police procedures for dealing with juveniles. As

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police statistics do not provide separate offending statistics for 17 year olds, it is not possible to be definite, but it seems that offending may not peak at school leaving age but keep increasing with offenders' age, until some other maturational stage. And that stage may not be reached until the mid-twenties. Victoria Police statistics show that 22 percent of persons proceeded against for major crime in 1982 were aged between 17 and 20 years. That statistic does not suggest that offending eases off beyond age 17.

TABLE 14  
NUMBERS AND CONTACT RATIO FOR OFFENDERS BY AGE AND SEX

Age in Whole Years	Sex of Offender		Total			
	Male No. of Persons	Contact Ratio	Female No. of Persons	Contact Ratio	No. of Persons	Contact Ratio
7	3	1.00	0	-	3	1.00
8	78	1.06	1	1.00	79	1.06
9	174	1.13	35	1.03	209	1.11
10	306	1.12	61	1.03	367	1.11
11	474	1.11	144	1.01	618	1.09
12	819	1.15	357	1.04	1176	1.11
13	1329	1.18	672	1.03	2001	1.13
14	1621	1.21	748	1.05	2369	1.16
15	1931	1.28	619	1.05	2550	1.22
16	2308	1.26	522	1.05	2830	1.22
17	764	1.15	113	1.09	877	1.14
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>9807</b>	<b>1.21</b>	<b>3272</b>	<b>1.04</b>	<b>13079</b>	<b>1.17</b>

A potentially more concerning situation occurs at the top of Table 14. While it is simply not known whether the offenders aged from 7 to 9 will re-offend in the future, it is known that commencing offending at a young age

is a doubtful prognosis for the future. Loeber (1982), for example, states "there is good evidence that youngsters who turn out to be chronic offenders start their anti social behavior at an early age" (p.1442). on the face of it the progress of those youngsters who are formally dealt with at an early age should be carefully monitored to help them avoid further offending. The possibility that this early monitoring might be forestalled as a result of the recently recommended increase in the age of criminal responsibility to 10, (Report, 1985) is of some concern.

#### SEX OF THE OFFENDERS

So much has been written recently about females and crime that the best that can be done with the current data is to present it with brief commentary. Figueira-McDonough (1984) provides a good state-of-the-art paper for this topic indicating the necessity for continuing research on the equal opportunity proportion, that is, "that equalisation of legitimate opportunities for both genders will be paralleled by equalisation of illegitimate opportunities producing similar behaviour (non-criminal and criminal)" (p.325).

To contribute to the research, that paper uses self report data for 491 American female 10th grade students. Figueira-McDonough concludes from her "causal and interactive analysis, that at best, a very weak and partial link (exists) between feminist orientation and delinquency" (p.339). In fact those analyses "support best a subcultural deprivation explanation of delinquency", with lower class portion depressing "aspirations leading to lower school performance and high social activity which strongly predict delinquency" (p.339).

That paper also reveals quite high self report figures for girls - 24.5 percent admitting minor theft, 11.7 percent admitting vandalism at school, 80.0 percent alcohol usage and 9.2 percent being in a "serious fight". Warner (1982) also finds substantial levels of offending by girls, although boys

admitted twice as many offences overall. While girls admitted more underage drinking and R rated film viewing, boys admitted significantly more vandalism, receiving stolen goods, stealing, assault and unlicensed driving. And these last differences are reflected in Table 15 which shows an offence distribution for individual offenders by sex.

TABLE 15  
OFFENCE GROUPS BY SEX OF OFFENDER

Offence Group	Number of Males (Contact Ratio)	Number of Females (Contact Ratio)	Total (Contact Ratio)
Against Person	414 (1.25)	62 (1.19)	476 (1.24)
Domestic Burglary	849 (1.35)	93 (1.22)	942 (1.34)
Commercial Burglary	412 (1.28)	21 (1.24)	433 (1.27)
Public Building Burglary	808 (1.18)	66 (1.05)	874 (1.17)
Theft From Shops	2272 (1.08)	2536 (1.02)	4808 (1.05)
Other Theft	1420 (1.22)	178 (1.08)	1598 (1.21)
Motor Vehicle Theft	857 (1.38)	59 (1.19)	916 (1.37)
Property Damage	497 (1.20)	33 (1.15)	530 (1.20)
Minor Property	515 (1.18)	66 (1.12)	581 (1.18)
Street Offences	278 (1.31)	58 (1.16)	336 (1.29)
Driving Offences	1027 (1.20)	27 (1.00)	1054 (1.19)
Miscellaneous Offences	458 (1.21)	73 (1.01)	531 (1.18)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>9807</b> <b>(1.21)</b>	<b>3272</b> <b>(1.04)</b>	<b>13079</b> <b>(1.17)</b>

Table 15 indicates that 25.0 percent of individuals (3272 of 13079) formally dealt with by the police were female. This continues the increase found in the last similar study of young offenders in Victoria (Challinger 1977) where the statistic was 19.9 percent in 1972 (1730 of 8686 individuals) and 22.6 percent in 1975 (2322 of 10,292 individuals). But the single most notable feature of the current study is the highly significant difference between the 3,272 girl offenders' contact ratio of 1.04 and the 9,807 boy offenders contact ratio of 1.21, although a similar difference in contact ratio of 1.09 to 1.21 was found for young offenders in 1975 (Challinger 1977).

As the girls' contact ratio is always lower than that of the boys for each offence type there is support for the notion that girls are more likely to cease offending (at least in the short term) after having been formally dealt with by the police. But the fact that 77.5 percent of individual girls in this study were dealt with for stealing from shops indicates that female offending is very closely related to an offence with a very low contact ratio for boys and girls. That is, the simple fact that the majority of what are commonly called shoplifters are most unlikely to be detected re-offending explains why girls have their notably lower contact ratio - the majority of girls are simply engaging in behaviour which seems likely to cease after police contact.

This notion is supported by the fact that girls committing the more serious offences against persons, and house or commercial burglary did have high contact ratios which, while not as high as those of their male counterparts do indicate some probability of coming again to the attention of the police, or more broadly, adopting a lifestyle of continuing offending.

But if girls have a lower likelihood of being dealt with again by the police the converse should apply - that is that girls will be less likely to have past contacts with the police. This is indeed the case. Just under ten percent of the girls had had prior contact with the police - 4.6 percent had been previously cautioned, 2.7 percent had previously appeared before the

Children's Court and 2.4 percent had been both cautioned and before the Court. The comparable and significantly different statistics for the boys are 13.8 percent, 3.6 percent and 12.0 percent respectively.

#### BIRTHPLACE OF THE OFFENDERS

Only those countries in which more than 60 offenders were born have been individually noted in Table 16, where it will be seen that 88 percent of all offenders were Australian born. No distribution of Victorian children aged 8-17 by country of birth is readily available but estimates based on 1981 Census data indicate that 90.7 percent of Victorian children in that age group were Australian born. (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1983a:3). This discrepancy indicates that non-Australian born youngsters were significantly over-represented amongst offenders. In fact the estimate from the Census for British born youngsters is 2.6 percent, and Table 15 indicates 3.6 percent British born offenders, and the comparable Census and offender percentages for Greece are 0.4 and 0.8, for Yugoslavia 1.6 and 0.6, for Lebanon 0.2 and 0.5, and for New Zealand 0.5 and 0.8. The number of Turkish born children is less than 0.1 percent, but they account for 0.9 percent of offenders.

Just why these overseas countries are disproportionately represented in the offender group cannot be answered without consideration of the particular individuals concerned. Re-adjusting to a new environment if they have been in Australia only a brief time, or not being accepted by their Australian peers might be possibilities. But more information is needed than is provided in this data collection.

The contact ratio is a useful measure with which to compare those offenders born in different countries. The Table shows that those young offenders born in Yugoslavia and Lebanon have notably higher contact ratios, suggesting that those young people tend to be repeat offenders. And that in turn raises again the spectre of some cultural conflict helping to explain

their offending. However children born in Greece who might also suffer considerable cultural conflict and difficulty in adjusting to Australian society actually have a contact ratio that is average, while Italian and Turkish born children have a substantially lower contact ratio than the average.

TABLE 16  
OFFENDERS' BIRTHPLACES

Offenders'Country of Birth	Number of Persons	Contact Ratio	Percentage
Australia	11508	1.17	88.1
Britain <sup>1</sup>	468	1.16	3.6
Yugoslavia	212	1.26	1.6
Turkey	118	1.12	0.9
Greece	109	1.17	0.8
New Zealand	100	1.18	0.8
Italy	80	1.11	0.6
Lebanon	64	1.23	0.5
Asia and the Pacific	134	1.08	1.0
Other Non-English Speaking Countries	175	1.15	1.4
Other English Speaking Countries	94	1.09	0.7
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>13062<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>1.17</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Notes

1. Includes England 365 contacts (1.14), Wales 12 (1.08), Scotland 68 (1.26) and Northern Ireland 23 (1.30).
2. Birthplace not known for 16 offenders with 24 contacts, and one offender with one contact was born at sea.



The differences between those born in different countries are not then immediately explainable by reference to possible inability to speak English or geographical considerations. Indeed, within the British group, offenders born in England and Wales have low contact ratios while those from Scotland and Northern Ireland appear more likely to continue coming into contact with the police. Obviously those from different cultures or ethnic backgrounds face different problems and may have varying levels of difficulty acclimatising themselves to Australian life. But, intuitively children born in Australia of migrant parents may have an equally difficult time and in order to examine this phenomenon Table 17 which takes into account the birthplaces of parents and the young offender was calculated.

Details about both parents' birthplaces were missing for just over 20 percent of offenders, so Australian born offenders comprise only 85 percent of those in Table 17 (compared with 88 percent in Table 16). Notwithstanding this, 58 percent of offenders in Table 17 were all-Australian. The next largest group were Australian born children of overseas born parents and they accounted for 15 percent. Somewhat surprisingly the only group that has a higher contact ratio than the average is the all Australian family, with aboriginal offenders having the highest contact ratio. In this study an aboriginal offender is defined as an offender about whom a comment such as "has aboriginal father" or reference to the offender having used the Aboriginal Legal Service appeared on the Form 276.

In total 145 of the 13,079 individual offenders were aboriginal. This is 1.11 percent of the sample, an increase on the 0.87 percent in the 1975 study. (Challinger 1977) even though census statistics show aboriginals still comprising about the same small percentage of the total Victorian population. The broad definition of aboriginal in this study actually makes it impossible to find a comparable population estimate, but notwithstanding that it appears that aboriginals are not only frequently represented amongst young offenders but likely to come to the continued attention of the police.

TABLE 17  
ETHNICITY OF OFFENDERS

Ethnicity	Number of Persons	Contact Ratio	Percentage
Aboriginal	145	1.48	1.3
Australian child with Australian parents	6314	1.16	57.2
Australian child, with only one Australian parent	1208	1.12	10.9
Child and parents from same overseas country	1141	1.15	10.3
Child, mother and father each born in a different country other than Australia	504	1.14	4.6
Australian child with overseas born parents	1683 <sup>1</sup>	1.12	15.3
Overseas born child of Australian parents	46	1.11	0.4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>11041<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>1.15</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Notes

1. Details of these persons appear on the next table.
2. Details of birthplace of one or both parents were not known for 2038 persons who accounted for 2582 contacts, (contact ratio 1.27).

At the other end of the spectrum offenders with at least one parent born in another country have low contact ratios. Those 1683 Australian born offenders whose parents were both born in the same overseas country comprise a particularly interesting group and they are elaborated in Table 18. It shows that the contact ratio is highest in the case of parents from English speaking countries. There were a couple of non-English speaking countries with high contact ratios - Holland at 1.24 and the Lebanon at 1.45 for instance - but those countries had small numbers of young offenders involved.

TABLE 18COMMON BIRTHPLACE OF NON-AUSTRALIAN PARENTS OF AUSTRALIAN BORN OFFENDERS

Parents' Place of Birth	Number of Persons	Contact Ratio	Percentage
Italy	410	1.07	24.4
Greece	404	1.11	24.0
England	190	1.15	11.3
Yugoslavia	156	1.13	9.3
Malta	107	1.11	6.3
Holland	95	1.24	5.6
Other English Speaking Countries	101	1.18	6.0
Other Non-English Speaking Countries	220	1.14	13.1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1683</b>	<b>1.12</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The two countries best represented in Table 18 are Italy and Greece and they account for almost half the Australian born offenders with parents both born in the same overseas country. As those born in these two countries constitute 3.0 percent and 1.9 percent of the Victorian population, this is scarcely surprising.

The offenders with cultural backgrounds in these two countries have noticeably lower contact ratios, 1.07 for Italy and 1.11 for Greece. And this suggests that Italian and Greek families may well react in such a way to their offspring's original contact with the police as to reduce further contacts. The presence of such a reaction is further supported by the contact ratios from Table 16 with Italian born offenders having a contact ratio of 1.11 and Greek born a contact ratio of 1.17 compared with 1.17 for Australians.

Those statistics show some congruence with local research which suggested that "culture conflict may be an influential factor in the adjustment of

(adolescent) Italian-Australians, but not Greek-Australians" (Rosenthal et al 1983). But here the contact ratio of 1.11 for Greek-Australians is itself well below the contact ratio of 1.16 for Australian-Australians suggesting that a positive cultural consideration may well exist for them too. Indeed, the fact that Australian born offenders of overseas born parents seem less likely to come into further contact with the police suggests that perhaps such parents act more vigorously to ensure their offspring do not re-offend. Many reasons may exist to explain that vigour - family shame, great respect (or fear) of the police, or a basic cultural reaction are all possibilities.

#### EDUCATIONAL FACTORS

The centrality of schooling in the lives of young people makes its relationship with offending an important area of study. There is no shortage of research in this area which ranges from the seminal work of Polk and Schafer (1972) to the recent publication of Pink (1984) in which he suggests that the development of "effective schools" would be a most fruitful way to prevent juvenile offending.

Table 19 provides an overview of the educational experience of the 13,079 individual offenders, some 2,925 (or 22.4 percent) of whom had actually left school at the time of their police contacts. What is most apparent from Table 19 is that Government schools were, or had been, attended by 86 percent of the offenders, whereas only 72 percent of all Victorian school children attended such schools in 1982. (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1983b). This last statistic is, of course, not directly comparable as Table 19 summarises the past school history of those who have left as well as the current school experience of those offenders still students. From the 10,154 offenders who were students at the time of their police contact, details of 10,019 in mainstream education were known: 1372 were undertaking primary education at Government schools, 7235 were undertaking secondary education at Government schools, 191 primary education at non-Government schools and 1221 secondary education at non-government schools. These give a percentage distribution for

current student offenders of 13.7: 72.2: 1.9: 12.2. And the Victorian student population at that time was distributed 43.1: 28.8: 14.9: 13.2. (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1983b).

**TABLE 19**  
**EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF OFFENDERS**

(showing numbers in, and contact ratio for, groups)

School Type	School Level Reached				Total
	Primary	Lower Secondary	Upper Secondary	Not Known	
<u>Government School</u>					
Primary	1349 (1.08)	-	-	-	1349 (1.08)
Special <sup>1</sup>	40 (1.43)	64 (1.61)	9 (1.78)	1 (1.00)	114 (1.59)
High	-	3743 (1.18)	1520 (1.10)	10 (1.10)	5273 (1.15)
Technical	-	2972 (1.26)	1456 (1.15)	13 (1.00)	4441 (1.23)
<u>Private Schools</u>					
Roman Catholic	177 (1.08)	607 (1.07)	369 (1.05)	3 (1.00)	1156 (1.06)
Other Private	14 (1.00)	205 (1.03)	155 (1.06)	2 (1.50)	376 (1.05)
<u>Not Known</u>	-	38 (1.34)	18 (1.00)	290 (1.21)	346 (1.21)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1580</b> <b>(1.12)</b>	<b>7629</b> <b>(1.20)</b>	<b>3527</b> <b>(1.12)</b>	<b>319</b> <b>(1.20)</b>	<b>13055<sup>2</sup></b> <b>(1.17)</b>

Notes

1. Special schools comprise all schools outside the educational mainstream and include those for the physically disabled or mentally retarded, (some) alternative schools and schools within institutions.
2. Twenty four individuals accounting for 27 contacts were attending various colleges for hairdressing, ballet etc. tuition.

As expected, primary school children represent only a small portion of the

official offending population despite comprising well over half of the student population. Secondary students at non-government schools are fairly well represented in offending statistics but it is the secondary Government school system that provides the bulk of offenders. And within the 7242 current secondary Government school students, Technical Schools are over-represented as indeed they were in the 1972 and 1975 studies. Of those students, 43.9 percent were attending Technical Schools compared with 28.5 percent of all Victorian Government secondary school students attending Technical Schools at that time. (The comparable figures for High Schools were 55.4 percent and 70.5 percent.) This over-representation is not easily explained but is consistent with other research showing quite different rates of offending between different schools and documented by Rutter and Giller (1983).

They draw attention to the importance of selective intake to schools in explaining some of the differences. In Victoria, the view that less academically promising primary school students are "streamed" into Technical Schools still appears to exist. Believing that, may well have a negative impact on Technical School students but it may also cause a Technical School to have a student population who are less well behaved anyway due to disenchantment with schooling. These are not the only possibilities, and the current data are not sufficient to indicate whether one is a more likely explanation than the other.

What the data does show is that offenders with Technical School experience have a high contact ratio of 1.23 compared with High School offenders' 1.15. (The comparable figures only for those still at school are 1.17 and 1.11). This suggests that something about High Schools or their pupils causes them to be much less likely to continue coming into formal contact with the police. And that may relate entirely to the general ethos of the school which "is by no means entirely shaped by the intake of pupils" (Rutter and Giller, 1983: 201). As it is certain that some High Schools have worse offending rates than some Technical Schools, this concept is worthy of closer examination. More

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than that, working towards a positive school ethos is a distinctly desirable aim, which seems to be just what Pink (1984) is also supporting.

TABLE 20  
OFFENDERS WITH SECONDARY SCHOOL EXPERIENCE  
(showing numbers in, and contact ratio for, groups)

	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Years 11 & 12	Total
<u>Government Schools</u>						
Special	14 (1.57)	25 (1.36)	25 (1.88)	8 (1.63)	1 (3.00)	73 (1.63)
High	779 (1.13)	1298 (1.16)	1666 (1.22)	1164 (1.11)	356 (1.04)	5263 (1.15)
Technical	591 (1.19)	961 (1.27)	1420 (1.29)	1114 (1.18)	342 (1.07)	4428 (1.23)
<u>Private Schools</u>						
Roman Catholic	118 (1.06)	223 (1.06)	266 (1.09)	240 (1.07)	129 (1.02)	976 (1.06)
Other Private	40 (1.00)	82 (1.01)	83 (1.07)	89 (1.03)	66 (1.09)	360 (1.04)
<u>Not Known</u>	4 (1.25)	11 (1.55)	23 (1.26)	15 (1.00)	3 (1.00)	56 (1.23)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1546</b> <b>(1.15)</b>	<b>2600</b> <b>(1.19)</b>	<b>3483</b> <b>(1.24)</b>	<b>2630</b> <b>(1.14)</b>	<b>897</b> <b>(1.05)</b>	<b>11156</b> <b>(1.18)</b>

Table 20 provides more detail concerning only those with secondary school experience and shows that the higher contact ratio for Technical Schools holds at each level of schooling. It also suggests that Year 9 is the peak year for youthful offenders and this is supported by data relating only to those offenders who were actually attending school at the time of their contact with the police. That data, which is not tabulated here, shows 22.8 percent of students studying at Year 9 having a contact ratio of 1.15, the highest for all secondary levels with 1.12 being the contact ratio for all current students. It should be noted however that current Year 8 students are only

marginally less in number than those currently in Year 9. Indeed the single largest group of current students are the 1,122 in Year 8 at High School followed by the 1098 High School students in Year 9. Any contemplated in-school programmes to prevent offending thus therefore seem best directed at Year 7 and Year 8 students.

TABLE 21

OFFENDERS WHO HAVE LEFT SCHOOL ACCORDING TO MODE  
OF LEAVING AND CURRENT OCCUPATION

(showing numbers in, and contact ratio for, groups)

Mode of Leaving School	Current Occupation				Total <sup>1</sup>
	Apprenticeship	Un/Semi Skilled	Clerical, Sales	Not Working	
Left School Voluntarily	399 (1.15)	761 (1.25)	181 (1.13)	1216 (1.38)	2634 (1.29)
Expelled	15 (1.13)	33 (1.88)	9 (1.22)	152 (1.78)	211 (1.72)
Exemption Granted	3 (1.33)	26 (1.50)	2 (1.00)	48 (1.38)	80 (1.40)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>417</b> <b>(1.15)</b>	<b>820</b> <b>(1.28)</b>	<b>192</b> <b>(1.13)</b>	<b>1476</b> <b>(1.42)</b>	<b>2925</b> <b>(1.32)</b>

Notes

1. Totals include those whose current occupations were not known, comprising 17 voluntary leavers, 2 expulsions and 1 exemption.
2. 10,154 persons with 11,430 contacts were still at school. (Contact ratio 1.13).

Those offenders who had left school are the subject of Table 21 which shows the three modes of leaving school; being expelled, being formally exempted, or simply leaving after attaining the age of 15. The numbers of offenders in the first named groups may well be understated as this information is extracted from the Form 276, and a, say, sixteen year old expelled youth might well not admit his expulsion, while happily admitting that he no longer attends school. Notwithstanding that, it is notable that



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those offenders admitting expulsion have a very high contact ratio - a not unexpected result since severe behaviour problems seem to precipitate most expulsions. And to expect those problems to be isolated to the school environment would be unrealistic. Exemptions from school can also result from behavioural difficulties at school as well as from legitimate requests from youngsters in dire circumstances, and the offenders in this subgroup show a high contact ratio, too. Indeed it should be noted that the contact ratio for the whole group of offenders who have left school is high at 1.32.

Within the possible situations in which the non-student offenders find themselves, being unemployed with a contact ratio of 1.42 is that state most associated with further offending. Roughly half (50.5 percent) of all of the group fall into the unemployed category compared with 49.1 percent in 1972, and 43.0 percent in 1975. (Challinger 1977). A further 28.0 percent were working in low status jobs although their contact ratio was less than that for the group overall, suggesting that simply having a job may well be associated with a lesser likelihood of continued offending. Once again, the data here do not allow a definitive statement to be made. However it does appear that unemployment is associated with a distinct chance of coming into further formal contact with the police. But whether such further contact occurs because the unemployed young do actually offend more than others, because of their public exposure, their disillusionment or anger with life in general, or because of additional police oversight, cannot be said.

In addition to these quite factual details about school, it will be remembered that the Form 276 has space for police officers to tick boxes labelled "truancy" or "inability to cope (at school)" and this occurred for 1094 and 700 individuals respectively, with a further 397 having both boxes ticked (see Table 22). Additional negative comments could also be made by police officers by elaborating under the heading "additional comments". In this way a further 74 individuals were described as (for instance) "unhappy at

school", having no "interest" or being "illiterate". That section of the form also allowed police to make positive comments, which included some such as "good student", "regular", and "bright", and these were made for 1236 individuals with a contact ratio of 1.06.

In total then, there were 2265 individuals for whom negative comments were made, but only 1236 individuals with positive comments. That negative comments out-numbered positive comments by almost two to one is probably a reflection of the ease with which negative educational comments could be included by simple box ticking on the Form 276. In the 1975 study, educational comments were made in only 11.9 percent of all contacts whereas the statistic here is 28.6 percent (4369 of 15294 contacts). These figures support the notion that the design of the Form 276 itself has increased the number of comments.

TABLE 22

EDUCATIONAL COMMENTS MADE ABOUT OFFENDERS BY POLICE

Educational Comments	Number of Persons	Contact Ratio	Percentage
No comment	9578	1.14	73.2
Negative comments comprising	2265	1.35	17.3
"truant"	1094	1.35	8.4
"can't cope"	700	1.28	5.3
both above	397	1.51	3.0
other	74	1.16	0.6
Positive comments	1236	1.06	9.5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>13079</b>	<b>1.17</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Overall, no comments about schooling were made for over 73 percent of the offenders, and this is a cause for some concern. The lack of positive comments means that some number of student offenders who are making steady, satisfactory academic progress at school simply do not appear in Table 22.

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Hopefully their sound and happy progress at school will become known to either the police Inspector administering a caution, or the Magistrate during the Children's Court hearing, since it is plainly to the offender's credit. Indeed it seems an excellent idea that those dealing with offenders should always know about offenders' school conduct and require them to bring their recent school reports with them to either of the above venues.

The value of input from an offender's school has been indicated by Ball (1981). She found for a small sample of property offenders, that English children's court magistrates were strongly influenced by (educational) reports made by the offender's headmaster. The Magistrates appeared to favour the headmaster's report over a social worker's report because "the school sees the child every day whereas the social worker who wrote the report may only have visited the family once or twice". (p.481). Moreover, while the social work report was invariably shown to the offender and family, and may therefore possibly be incomplete or less than frank, headmasters "full" reports were often confidential to the Court and therefore, it seems, perhaps be more comprehensive.

Most Victorian offenders appearing before the Court have not acquired, or had provided for them, reports from their headmasters. But all would have their normal school reports which could be tendered to, or even strongly requested by, the Magistrate. Teachers well know that school reports are often used, for instance, in employment seeking and the comments they make are therefore intended to be helpful to persons outside the school. By requesting school reports as a matter of course, the Court or the cautioning police officer would be ensuring that highly relevant information about the offender's behaviour and character was used.

What Table 22 also clearly shows is that the contact ratio for offenders about whom negative comments have been made is a very high 1.35; while those with positive comments have a contact ratio of only 1.06. Clearly then those with less interest in school are more likely to come into further contact with

the police. The majority of those negative comments relate to truancy but that very concept is one which needs to be considered carefully.

Recently local research by Coventry et al (1984) indicates a variety of ways in which a youngster could be defined as a truant, but police officers completing the Form 276 may well have differing ideas about what is needed to tick the "truancy" box. This fact, taken with the probability that many non-attending students may have been missed, makes it impossible to enter the debate about whether truancy causes offending or vice versa. Coventry et al after quite meticulous research are unable to do better than say it is "questionable" whether truancy is a causal factor, or whether many truants commit offences in school hours. The current data cannot add to that.

#### OFFENDER'S LIVING SITUATION

The value of the contact ratio is well illustrated in Table 23 which presents the situation in which the Form 276 indicates the offender was living at the time of being dealt with. Those offenders living with both natural parents have a low contact ratio of 1.12, suggesting that something about those families contributes to ensuring that offenders from them are less likely to re-appear in another police contact (at least in a twelve month period). Alternatively those offenders coming from families where natural parents have parted company show a higher contact ratio. Offenders living with no adult supervision are higher again (at 1.33) and those resident in institutions have an extremely high contact ratio of 1.69. This last group of offenders comprises 2.5 percent of the offenders just as it did in 1975. While the contact ratio of this group has decreased a little these 334 individuals were responsible for a disproportionate 564 contacts, which seems to indicate that institutions are having little impact in dissuading their residents from further offending.

Plainly the distribution of offenders' living situations in Table 23 does not reflect that of the young Victorian population because of the 2.5 percent

in institutions, the 2.1 percent living away from home without adult supervision and the 2.9 percent in foster homes etc. Excluding those individuals for the moment leaves 12,080 individuals living in family settings however they still do not appear to reflect those of the Victorian community.

TABLE 23  
OFFENDERS' LIVING SITUATION AT TIME OF CONTACT

Offender Living -	Number of Persons	Contact Ratio	Percentage
With Both Natural Parents	8515	1.12	65.2
With Natural Mother Alone	2349	1.21	18.0
With Natural Mother and Others	644	1.22	4.9
With Natural Father Alone	456	1.24	3.5
With Natural Father and Others	116	1.16	0.9
Under Some Sort of Adult Supervision <sup>1</sup>	382	1.26	2.9
Independently With No Adult Supervision <sup>2</sup>	273	1.33	2.1
In Institution <sup>3</sup>	334	1.69	2.5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>13069<sup>4</sup></b>	<b>1.17</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Notes

1. Comprises those living with relatives, substitute or foster parents, guardians or in boarding schools.
2. Comprises those living alone with friends or defactos in flats, houses, or boarding houses, or no fixed place of abode.
3. Comprises those living in Children's Homes, Youth Training Centres or hostels.
4. Living situation not known for ten persons with 10 contacts.

This comment is based on re-working some statistics about families from the 1981 Australian Census. There are difficulties with respect to definitions here so the following figures for Victorian families should be

seen as good guides rather than accurate statements about the situation. Families comprising a "(family) head, spouse and dependants" accounted for 68.7 percent of the 547,826 Victorian "families with dependants" identified in the Census. Families comprising a "non married head, spouse, other adults and dependants" accounted for 17.6 percent, a "male head with dependants" 9.1 percent, a "male head other adults and dependants" 0.7 percent and a "female head other adults and dependants", 2.4 percent. (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1983: 94).

These phrases are not strictly comparable with the definitions on Table 14. But, using the Census figures with caution, living "with natural mother alone" from Table 14 can be roughly compared with "female head with dependants", and the respective population percentages for these are 19.5 percent (2349 of 12080) and 9.1 (50,127 of 547,826). They suggest quite dramatically that single mother families are overrepresented amongst the offender sample. So too are single father families where the figures are respectively 3.7 percent and 1.5 percent.

It is the size of the differences between the total Victorian sample and the offender sample that cause the over-representation of single parent families amongst offenders to be made with confidence. Even if allowance is made for definitional differences between census data and Table 14, the size of the difference, that is more than twice as many single parent offenders' families, is such that, adjusting each by say 20 percent still leaves over-representation.

But why should single-parent families be so over-represented? Lack of supervision, emotional upheaval of children and deliberate attention-getting behaviour might all be suggested. But single parents, especially those on government pensions, can face real everyday strains in survival in addition to emotional difficulties that must affect their children. But the ways in which children are affected cannot be generalised, in some cases children may be far better off socially and emotionally if their incompatible parents have parted.

78.

Belson (1975), for instance, found that "a broken home did not emerge as an appreciable causal factor (for stealing) in its own right - though a miserable or uninteresting home did" (original emphasis) (p.xiv). The current data while identifying an important area cannot suggest which explanation is best.

What is also interesting and worthy of examination is the intensity of offending as indicated by the contact ratio; offenders living with both natural parents have a contact ratio of 1.12 compared with 1.21 for those with another alone and 1.24 for those with father alone. Is the reaction of the apparently stable family to a police contact so different from that within a dislocated family where further contacts seem more likely? Or is youthful offending in a dislocated or one parent family a continuing reaction of a youth to that dislocation? Plainly these are but two of a host of possible explanations for the statistics in Table 23.

#### FAMILY SIZE

In this study the average number of children in the offenders' families is 3.6, which is higher than the average 2.2 children for married couple families with offspring, or the average total family size of 3.3 for all Victorian families. (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1985: 58). High as it is, this figure is lower than previously documented family sizes for young Victorian offenders of 4.6 (1966), 4.5 (1972), 4.3 (1975), 4.3 (1978), and 5.8 for a group of institutionalised offenders in 1973. (Biles and Challenger, 1981). Table 24 provides a distribution of family size and shows that as size increases so too do contact ratios indicating that within smaller families the likelihood of a youngster coming to further official notice of the police is much lower. That Victorian offenders come from larger families is quite unexceptional. In a review of research on family size and delinquency Fischer (1984) summarises the various possible explanations for this phenomenon. One of these comes from West and Farrington's (1973) important prospective research into young offenders in England. After noting that youngsters from

larger families seemed more likely to come to formal police notice they conclude "more likely it was the inability of the overburdened mother to give adequate attention to each child that was the root cause of the delinquency" (1973: 91). This may perhaps be stating the situation a bit too strongly for the Victorian situation but it is certainly intuitively acceptable subsuming as it does the associated social problems that can follow simply from being a large family.

TABLE 24

OFFENDERS' FAMILY SIZE AND RANK  
(showing numbers of, and contact ratio for, groups)

Number of Children In Family	Offenders Rank in Family			Total
	Youngest	Middle	Oldest	
One.	-	-	762 (1.16)	762 (1.16)
Two	1546 (1.12)	-	1450 (1.13)	2996 (1.13)
Three	1197 (1.12)	1267 (1.16)	1095 (1.14)	3559 (1.14)
Four	680 (1.14)	1311 (1.18)	444 (1.20)	2435 (1.17)
Five	351 (1.22)	797 (1.22)	157 (1.25)	1305 (1.23)
Six	179 (1.21)	554 (1.25)	42 (1.23)	775 (1.24)
Seven	107 (1.26)	296 (1.31)	18 (1.17)	421 (1.29)
Eight	57 (1.26)	161 (1.23)	4 (1.00)	222 (1.23)
Nine	32 (1.22)	83 (1.27)	2 (1.50)	117 (1.26)
Ten or More	52 (1.17)	123 (1.27)	1 (1.00)	176 (1.24)
<b>TOTAL<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>4201 (1.14)</b>	<b>4592 (1.20)</b>	<b>3975 (1.15)</b>	<b>12768 (1.17)</b>

**Note**

1. Details of family size or rank missing for 311 offenders, contact ratio 1.23.



The Table also shows an abbreviated form of family rank which reveals no consistent pattern although it does provide more support for the proposition that youthful offenders are more likely to be middle children rather than the oldest or youngest in a family, as was previously found to be true for Victorian offenders by Biles and Challinger (1981). This is true notwithstanding the low probability of a child being the oldest child in a large family but still being under the age of seventeen. However birth order is a fairly blunt sort of measure and recent research has attempted to examine it more closely by reference to the sex and position of the children in the family. Wilkinson et al's (1982) exploratory study finds variation in self reported offending and sibling structure. Younger children's behaviour was explained as being either in contrast with, or imitative of, that of siblings, and some patterns did emerge. The Form 276 did long ago include details of the numbers of brothers and sisters of the offender but that data does not appear to have ever been analysed. It would seem now to be a useful area for future research.

#### CO-OFFENDERS

The phenomenon of group offending by youngsters is well documented, especially in America where youngsters are more likely to form quite organised gangs. Zimring (1981) puts it simply: "adolescents commit crimes, as they live their lives, in groups" (p.867) but he then indicates how that fact has not had the impact on the criminal justice process that it should have had. Organized gangs are less likely in Victoria although there are loose bands of youngsters who frequent venues like the City Square, are known to the police, and are represented by contacts in this study. Hindelang (1976) has suggested groups of young offenders are more likely to be dealt with formally because the police can dispose informally of single offenders quite expeditiously and Morash (1984) notes that youths "in gang like peer groups were more often

investigated and arrested than other youths" (p.108).

This should be borne in mind when reading Table 25 which sets out details of the numbers of co-offenders involved with individual offenders classified also according to the sex of the offender. It indicates that girls were more likely to offend in the company of others; only 32.3 percent of girls offending alone compared with 38.2 percent of the boys, giving an overall rate of 36.7 percent solo offenders. This continues an increase in the numbers of lone offenders over the last few years, 32.8 percent in 1969, 33.9 percent in 1972 and 35.0 percent in 1975. (Challinger, 1977). This increase parallels increased use of the police cautioning program and suggests that that program may well be seen as useful for solo offenders who in the past may, as Hindelang suggested, have not otherwise been dealt with formally by the police.

TABLE 25

CO-OFFENDERS INVOLVED IN OFFENCES  
(showing numbers of, and contact ratio for, groups)

Number of Co-offenders	Sex of Offender		Total
	Male	Female	
None	3745 (1.23)	1058 (1.04)	4803 (1.19)
One	3210 (1.21)	1471 (1.04)	4681 (1.16)
Two	1671 (1.20)	449 (1.05)	2120 (1.17)
Three	748 (1.18)	193 (1.05)	941 (1.16)
Four or More	433 (1.20)	101 (1.05)	534 (1.17)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>9807</b> <b>(1.21)</b>	<b>3272</b> <b>(1.04)</b>	<b>13079</b> <b>(1.17)</b>

The other notable feature of Table 25 is that there is a very slight tendency for boys who offend alone to be more likely to be dealt with again by the police. But some offences are much more likely to be committed by solo

offenders, 55 percent of assaults for instance are solo offences, while public building burglary has a solo rate of only 10 percent, and commercial burglary has a rate of 17 percent. It then seems that group participation in offending itself, is not a major issue in Victoria.

#### PRIOR OFFENDING

The majority of individual offenders in this study, in fact 75.5 percent, had not previously come to formal police notice, compared with 73.4 percent in 1975 and 69.9 percent in 1972. The distribution of the 3198 offenders who had prior formal dealings with the police are analysed in Table 26 according to the type of prior contact.

TABLE 26  
PRIOR POLICE CONTACT WITH OFFENDERS

Type of prior contact	Number of prior contacts					
	1	2	3	4+	N.K.	
Caution only	1168	128	8	2	200	1506 (47.1%)
Court appearance only	182	69	30	32	125	438 (13.7%)
Both caution and court appearance	-	277	151	137	689	1254 (39.2%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1350</b> <b>(42.2%)</b>	<b>474</b> <b>(14.8%)</b>	<b>189</b> <b>(5.9%)</b>	<b>171</b> <b>(5.4%)</b>	<b>1014</b> <b>(31.7%)</b>	<b>3198</b> <b>(100.0%)</b>

It can be seen that precise details of prior contacts were not provided on the Form 276 for almost a third of the sample. This occurred because of the design of the Form 276 in use in 1982 which only required officers to tick boxes bearing the titles listed in Table 26. Notwithstanding this, it is plain that most offenders had only been formally dealt with once before. (Putting aside the 1014 individuals for whom data was missing, 1350 of 2184,

or 61.8 percent had only one prior contact.)

TABLE 27  
PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION BY CURRENT OFFENCE GROUP  
FOR INDIVIDUALS ACCORDING TO THEIR PRIOR POLICE CONTACT<sup>1</sup>

Offence Group	Type of Prior Police Contact			
	None	Caution	Court	Court and Caution
Against Persons	3	6	8	7
Burglary	16	23	23	25
Theft <sup>2</sup>	54	33	23	21
Car Theft	5	12	17	18
Property Damage	4	5	5	4
Minor Property	5	5	4	4
Street Offences	2	3	5	5
Driving Offences	8	10	10	8
Miscellaneous	3	3	5	8
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Notes

1. Percentages slightly adjusted to ensure a total of 100.
2. The figures for shop theft alone are 42, 17, 11, 7.

This does however leave 834 individuals who have been previously formally dealt with by the police on more than one occasion. And that suggests that whatever resulted from those formal police contacts has not been sufficient to sway those offenders from a course of continued offending. In some cases it appears that members of the Victoria Police have been quite generous in dealing with young offenders. Details were available for one of the two offenders who had been cautioned four times. They show that the offender was cautioned for theft from shops in July 1978, November 1979, March 1980 and February 1981. While there were instances where multiple cautions were given

84.

to individual offenders only months apart in different police stations suggesting that delays in creating central records had occurred, the above case seems not to be one of these. This conclusion follows from the fact that the same Inspector imposed the first, third and fourth cautions on the offender, and it seems unlikely (though of course not impossible) that that Inspector would not have local records or have remembered the offender.

The ways in which offending patterns are different for offenders according to their prior records is indicated on Table 27. Burglaries and car thefts are far more likely amongst those with prior records suggesting that those are the sorts of offences to which youngsters may well gravitate if they do not cease offending.

#### THE FORM 276 CHECKLIST FOR OFFENDERS

As indicated earlier the Form 276 used for most of the offenders in the 1982 sample included a checklist of "historical factors". Table 28 lists those that related to the offender and also indicates the frequency with which those factors were "checked off" by the police officer completing the Form 276.

The first point to note from Table 28 is that all listed factors are negatively oriented, and this is supported by the fact that contact ratios are high. But it is not true that a listed factor is necessarily negative for a particular young offender. For instance being "forced to leave home" could actually be a positive move for some people. Certainly more detail of the offenders' actual circumstances than is provided by a tick on the Form 276 should be acquired by those dealing with them. The appearance of such a factor may be completely irrelevant to a youngster's offending, and not a contributing factor as is assumed by the designer of the Form 276.

The second point is that, in any event, the factors appear to either be quite uncommon, or so often referred to as to be of minimal use. Being "forced to leave home" was noted for 3 in every 200 offenders, whereas the

very broad "influence of companions" was noted for more than 1 in 3. This last phrase and the no less broad "lack of leisure facilities" which occurred for almost 1 in 5 individuals appear to be factors ticked either in response to police members' own beliefs about offending, or because they felt they should tick something on the checklist. Both are subjective and neither really seems to help address the real reasons for an individual's offending.

TABLE 28

PRESENCE OF 'HISTORICAL FACTORS' RELATING TO THE OFFENDER  
AND COMMUNITY AS LISTED ON THE FORM 276

Historical Factor	Number of Persons for Which Noted	Percentage of Total Persons	Contact Ratio
<u>Community</u>			
Lack of leisure facilities	2539	19.4	1.21
Influence of companions	4974	38.0	1.18
<u>Subject child</u>			
Medical problems	417	3.2	1.28
Chronic behavioural problems	639	4.9	1.51
Alcohol Abuse	504	3.9	1.36
Drug abuse	68	0.5	1.28
Left home voluntarily	332	2.5	1.40
Forced to leave home	201	1.5	1.30
Sexual promiscuity	155	1.2	1.25

FURTHER POLICE COMMENTARY

The Form 276 in use in the early 1980's prompted police officers to provide more information about the offender under the heading

ADDITIONAL DETAILS which might assist (Home conditions, associates,

places frequented, attitude, personal details of any step-parent or guardian). Favourable features of the child or his environment should also be included. Has any person or agency offered to assist the child? Has any reparation been made or promised?

TABLE 29  
POLICE PERCEPTIONS OF OFFENDER'S CHARACTER

Police Comment on Form 276	Number of Persons	Contact Ratio	Percentage
Truthful in interview	2973	1.06	34.3
Other favourable comments	115	1.10	1.3
Easily led	3885	1.20	44.8
Stubborn	165	1.31	1.9
Ringleader	381	1.24	4.4
Liar, sulky, weak	462	1.21	5.3
Troublemaker	261	1.60	3.0
Smart, arrogant	185	1.32	2.2
Other negative comments	240	1.57	2.8
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8667<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>1.18</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Notes

1. No comments about character were made for 4412 persons with 5071 contacts.

Plainly this allows an enthusiastic member of the Victoria Police a good chance to elaborate upon the offender, and comments under this heading tended to fall into three general groups. The first comprised comments about the offender's character, 35.6 percent of which could be described as favourable, 19.6 percent of which were negative, and the remaining 44.8 percent of which utilised the epithet "easily led". These are presented in Table 29 and in a condensed form in Table 30 which also shows the sex of the offender. Little

trouble is faced in condensing comments into negative and positive. Police informants tend to be firm in their attitudes, and in some instances quite flamboyant. One, for instance describes a youth as having "a sneaking sly lying attitude".

TABLE 30  
CONDENSED POLICE PERCEPTIONS OF OFFENDER'S  
CHARACTER BY SEX OF OFFENDER

Character	Sex of Offender		Total
	Male	Female	
Positive	2065 (32.2%)	1023 (45.3%)	3088 (35.6%)
Easily led	3007 (46.9%)	878 (38.8%)	3885 (44.8%)
Negative	1335 (20.9%)	359 (15.9%)	1694 (19.6%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6407</b> <b>(100.0%)</b>	<b>2260</b> <b>(100.0%)</b>	<b>8667</b> <b>(100.0%)</b>

Not at all surprisingly those offenders about whom the police made negative comments had higher contact ratios. And this is true for both boys and girls even though police were far more likely to make positive comments about the girls, as can be seen from Table 30. This arises more because of the nature of the offences committed by the girls rather than because the offenders were girls.

The second group of comments relates to the police perception of the likelihood of re-offending by the subject of the Form 276. Predictions were made for 35.6 percent of the sample and are presented in Table 31. That also shows that female offenders are usually predicted as unlikely re-offenders. Indeed, overall the predictions are predominantly favourable predictions for the future.



TABLE 31  
POLICE PREDICTION OF OFFENDER'S RE-OFFENDING  
BY SEX OF OFFENDER

Police Prediction	Sex of Offender		Total
	Male	Female	
Will not reoffend	221 (6.8%)	9 (0.6%)	230 (4.9%)
Unlikely to reoffend	1964 (60.4%)	1156 (82.0%)	3120 (66.9%)
Likely to reoffend	691 (21.3%)	205 (14.6%)	896 (19.2%)
Will certainly reoffend	375 (11.5%)	40 (2.8%)	415 (9.0%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3251</b> <b>(100.0%)</b>	<b>1410</b> <b>(100.0%)</b>	<b>4661</b> <b>(100.0%)</b>

Interestingly those offenders classified by the police as "easily led" in Tables 29 and 30 are less likely to receive a favourable prediction. Only 58.9 percent of them were considered not or unlikely to be reoffenders compared with 66.9 percent overall. If police believe that an easily led offender stands less chance of ceasing offending, this is actually an important statement that peer contamination is a particularly serious problem. This seems a more likely interpretation than the police seeing the offender as basically without the strength of character to ignore or avoid previous acquaintances.

These police predictions are also related to offenders' prior offending and their attitude to the police. Eighty percent of those with no prior record for whom predictions were made, were deemed unlikely to reoffend, while only 7 percent of those who had previously received cautions and been to court, were similarly assessed. The statistic for those who were respectful towards the police or co-operative in interview was 83.8 percent compared with 7.3 percent for whom negative comments and a prediction were made.

It is not possible to say how a prediction of re-offending made by front

line police would affect the officer who has to administer the caution or the Magistrate who might hear the case at Court. But it is reasonable to assume that re-offending is of considerable concern to each of them and, for instance, might provoke a rigorous dressing down in the first instance or a longer probation term in the second. Garrett and Short (1975) found that "fewer than half of the (police) predicted repeaters actually turned up in further contacts" after six years (p.378). But Hanson et al's (1984) research found that "socialised-aggressive" behavior which includes involvement with a deviant peer group was the best predictor of a youth's future offending. On the face of it, the police should be able to identify that characteristic accurately. However if those who are predicted to be repeat offenders actually 'suffer' in some way as a result of that prediction, then many offenders who are wrongly predicted would be unfairly treated. Currently however neither the effect of making such a prediction, or its accuracy, is known.

TABLE 32

POLICE ASSESSMENT OF OFFENDER'S ATTITUDE TO AUTHORITY

Police Assessment	Number of Persons	Contact Ratio	Percentage
Respectful or co-operative	3231	1.10	70.5
No respect	722	1.43	15.7
Insolent or Aggressive	246	1.27	5.4
Treats offence as joke	202	1.25	4.4
Contemptuous	185	1.41	4.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4586<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>1.18</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Note

1. No comment made for 8493 individuals with 9898 contacts (contact ratio 1.17).

90.

The third group of comments refer to the offenders' attitude to authority and are presented in Table 32. While these comments were only made for 35.1 percent of individuals, being "co-operative" (in interview) comprised the bulk - 69.3 percent - of them. And those offenders either co-operative or respectful showed a low contact ratio, while negative comments again showed high contact ratios.

It is notable that here too, police were far more likely to make positive comments about offenders than they were to make negative comments. This indicates that the police themselves do not view all those young offenders with whom they are required to deal with formally as young desperadoes about to plunge Victoria into chaotic crime. Rather, the police comments tend to reflect the view that most young offenders are "normal" enough.

CHAPTER 5  
THE OFFENDERS' FAMILIES

In the preceding chapter details relating to the offenders' living situations and their family sizes were given. These gave some insight into their families, but there is more information about them on the Form 276 which is presented in this chapter. This information is quite restricted - it does not allow any comment on, for instance, family bonds which Canter (1982) found to be modestly correlated to self-report delinquency for boys and girls. But it does throw some light on a plainly crucial area.

FATHERS' OCCUPATIONS

The occupation of the father of a family has long been used as a measure of social status or class (see for instance Akers (1964)) and Ouston (1984) for example has found a "clear relationship" between parental occupation and official offending. While Brotherton et al (1979) have argued that both grandfather's occupations are also necessary to measure social status accurately, in most instances, such as here, only father's occupation is available. The occupations noted on the Forms 276 are however often imprecise, and "manager", "business man" and "technician" for instance are somewhat ambiguous. Notwithstanding such difficulties, six broad occupational groups were defined and the offenders' fathers were distributed as shown in Table 33.

As previously indicated, a sizeable percentage of offenders did not live in households with their fathers and this explains the fact that father's occupation was not noted on the Form 276 for 18 percent of offenders. The distribution of fathers occupation where the offender was living with both natural parents was significantly different from that of other offenders. In particular, there were less fathers unemployed or on pensions in the first group, and more fathers classed as "middle management". Despite that, the

Table does have interest, it shows for instance, a steady reduction in the size of the contact ratio as the status of father's occupation increases down the Table.

TABLE 33  
OCCUPATIONS OF FATHERS OF OFFENDERS

Father's Occupation	Number of Persons	Contact Ratio	Percentage
Pensioner, Unemployed	1046	1.21	9.8
Unskilled Semi-skilled	3394	1.19	31.6
Skilled	3168	1.13	29.5
Clerical, sales	799	1.12	7.5
Middle Management	1346	1.11	12.5
Professional	976	1.07	9.1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>10729<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>1.15</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Notes

1. Father's occupation not stated in 2350 cases (2965 contacts).

Those offenders whose fathers were unemployed or unskilled appear more likely to come again to police attention - the unemployment rate for offenders' fathers was 9.8 percent compared with 5.0 percent in the 1981 Census. (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1983a: 30) but here again, the reasons for this are not able to be provided from the current data. While the occupational grouping used here does not relate precisely to Census categories, some comparison is possible. For instance the "professional/technical" group in the Census comprises 12.5 percent of all "employed persons", while the "clerical" and "sales" groups comprise 16.0 percent. The same named groups on Table 33 comprise 10.1 percent and 8.3

percent respectively (excluding the unemployed group from the calculation). Each of these higher status groups is therefore under-represented notwithstanding that those Census figures include the elderly and those without young families. In fact if the "white collar" occupations are added together they comprise 35.3 percent of male employed persons at the last Census but only 32.2 percent of offenders' fathers who are working. The difficulties with respect to accurately comparing father's occupations as defined here with Census figures, do however not prevent suggesting that lower status fathers are over-represented amongst offenders in this sample.

#### WORKING MOTHERS

Rutter and Giller (1983) point out that "it seems implausible that changes in maternal employment have had any substantial effects on rates of delinquency" (p.109). But despite that, the possibility of working mothers being well associated with, if not a direct cause of, youthful offending is one which seems to have continuing appeal. Relevant data from this study appears in Table 34.

It was not possible to categorise mother's working situation for almost a quarter of individual offenders. This was mainly due to police officers leaving empty the response box relating to mother's work being full or part time. Of the remaining sample of 9,830 mothers of individual offenders some 27.5 percent were in some sort of paid employment and their children registered a nett contact ratio of 1.12. That indicates that children of these mothers had a lower chance of being formally dealt with again by the police particularly compared with children of mothers receiving some sort of social security pension whose contact ratio was a high 1.26.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics 1982 Family Survey provides the following statistics regarding the employment of mothers with dependent children: 16.7 percent worked full time for the whole of 1981-82, 40.4 percent did some "other" sort of work, and 42.9 percent did not work at all

94.

during the year. (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1983: 192). This is significantly different from the comparable statistics generated from Table 34 which are 18.9, 8.6 and 71.5 respectively. If pensioners (who may well have worked but are unlikely to broadcast it widely) are withdrawn from the calculation the relevant statistics become 23.1, 10.5 and 66.4.

TABLE 34  
OCCUPATIONS OF MOTHERS OF OFFENDERS

Mother's Occupation	Number of Contacts	Contact Ratio	Percentage
Full time white collar	1592	1.12	16.2
Full time blue collar	267	1.18	2.7
Part time white collar	749	1.08	7.6
Part time blue collar	92	1.12	1.0
Home Duties	5338	1.15	54.3
Pensioners	1792	1.26	18.2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>9830<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>1.16</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Note

1. Mothers whose employment was not noted accounted for 3249 individual offenders and 3849 contacts, a contact ratio of 1.18.

The problem with the information about offenders' mothers seems to be that it does not accurately reflect non-full time or casual work, and many of the full time mothers and housewives included on Table 34 should perhaps be included in the part time work category. However, if the information provided in the Form 276 with respect to mothers' full time employment is not overstated, there is a significant over-representation of full-time working

mothers amongst the offenders' mothers.

The most obvious comment that flows from the over-representation of working mothers taken with the fact that their children are less likely to re-offend is that lack of supervision may well have made it easier for their children to offend, but that once that offending became known to them sufficient action was taken to prevent further offending. But this is not the same as saying that having a working mother has caused the child to offend - and these data simply cannot support that view.

A further feature of Table 34 is the substantial group of mothers who are noted on the Form 276 as pensioner, for which category a box to be ticked is provided. That group accounts for 18.2 percent of all mothers in 1982, but for no more than 4.2 percent in 1975 when no such box was provided on the Form 276. It is not clear what criteria a police officer uses in order to place a tick in the box marked "Pens.", but it appears that the mere change in Form 276 layout has caused the appearance of this previously understated group, whose children are more likely to re-offend.

#### THE FORM 276 CHECKLIST FOR OFFENDERS' FAMILIES

The notion that additional information has been included on the 1982 Form 276's because of the design of that Form is an important point to bear in mind when examining positive responses to the family checklist summarised in Table 35. It is impossible to know whether the responses listed there would have appeared had the checklist not prompted police. Apart from the broad "inadequate supervision", and "marital breakdown in the past" actual positive responses were made fairly infrequently.

The same two points hold for Table 35 as were made for Table 28. The factors are negatively oriented even though they may not constitute negative experiences for individuals, and they are relatively infrequent. This infrequency raises an important question about the utility of requiring members of the Victoria Police to respond to them. In a way this is now a



dead question as the most recently designed Form 276 has no checklist. But the question addresses the broader issue of the extent to which operational police should delve into the affairs of the offender and his family in order to be able to make a sensible recommendation for formally dealing with the offender and briefing that person who would eventually dispose of the offender's case.

TABLE 35  
PRESENCE OF 'HISTORICAL FACTORS' RELATING TO OFFENDERS  
FAMILIES AS LISTED ON THE FORM 276

Historical Factor	Number of Persons for which noted	Percentage of Total Persons	Contact Ratio
Marital breakdown in Process	475	3.6	1.24
Marital breakdown in past	2922	22.3	1.25
Death of Mother	226	1.7	1.27
Death of Father	610	4.7	1.25
Lack of money	1424	10.9	1.27
Inadequate accommodation	388	3.0	1.28
Conflict from adjusting to Australian society	186	1.4	1.16
Mother's Alcoholism	160	1.2	1.41
Father's Alcoholism	417	3.2	1.37
Mother's Ill Health	298	2.3	1.20
Father's Ill Health	259	2.0	1.20
Family conflict generally	891	6.8	1.33
Poor example by, or criminality of mother	203	1.6	1.36
Poor example by, or criminality of father	373	2.9	1.42
Inadequate supervision	5113	39.1	1.25

In practice the extent of the information gathering should depend on the nature and gravity of the offence and the operational police officers professional view or feelings about important relevant factors. It should be no more or less than a statement of facts reflecting those feelings. Such feelings are currently accommodated on the Form 276 under the "Additional Information" heading and because comments under this heading are unprompted they can be interpreted as being more valid than simple ticks on the checklist.

FAMILY INTEREST

TABLE 36  
INTEREST SHOWN BY PARENTS OF OFFENDERS

Police Assessment of Parental Interest	Number of Persons	Contact Ratio	Percentage
Parents very interested	7857	1.10	79.7
Parents show some interest	245	1.29	2.5
Only one parent shows interest	654	1.19	6.6
Parents have little or no control	589	1.39	6.0
Parents "don't care"	370	1.42	3.7
Parents "given up"	110	1.70	1.1
Parents involved in offences	38	1.21	0.4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>9863<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>1.15</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Note

1. No comment made for 3216 persons with 3954 contacts.

Indications of the levels of interest shown in the offender by his parent(s) or guardians are a case in point. Such comments were forthcoming for just over three-quarters of all offenders, and were generally expressed briefly through comments such as "parents very concerned", or "parent doesn't care". Table 36 indicates that in 80 percent of the offenders' families, parents were very interested or concerned about their offspring's coming into official contact with the police. Not surprisingly offenders coming from very interested families had a noticeably low contact ratio of 1.10.

By way of contrast, offenders whose parents have simply "given up" trying to control or advise their offspring have a high contact ratio, and that too is unsurprising. This group surely represents the ultimate collapse of parenting but accounted for just over one percent of all offenders about whom parental interest comments were made. If in fact one in a hundred youthful offenders are virtually out of control that indicates a potential problem of no little concern.

#### FAMILY CHARACTER

Space was also provided on the Form 276 for the police informant to note the "character" of the offender's parents. To make such a comment it would be necessary for a police informant to know or at least meet the offenders' parents. That this did not occur in many instances is shown by the fact that comments were not provided for both the parents of over half the individual offenders. As Table 37 shows, when comments were made for both parents they were mostly both described as good, very good or excellent. And offenders with parents of good character show a high likelihood of not returning to formal police attention.

Predictably offenders with parents of poor (or worse) character have a high contact ratio. But a circular argument holds here. Simply because a youth keeps getting into trouble, the police may be more likely to get to know

that youth's parents and describe them as having no interest and/or being of poor character simply because their child continues to get into trouble. Assuming for the present that the police assessment is based on their certain knowledge of the parents or the parents' behaviour, three percent of Victorian young offenders have parents who the police at least believe are unlikely to be setting a good example for their offspring to follow.

TABLE 37  
CHARACTER OF PARENTS OF OFFENDERS

Police Assessment of Parents' Character	Number of Persons	Contact Ratio	Percentage
Both parents of good character	5745	1.11	43.9
One parent of poor character	269	1.29	2.1
Both parents of poor character	169	1.37	1.3
No comment or not known	6896	1.21	52.7
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>13079</b>	<b>1.17</b>	<b>100.0</b>

But apart from being set a bad example, are such offenders different from others with respect to the behaviour that caused their formal contact with the police? Table 38 shows that they are and that those with parents of poor character are more likely to be involved in burglaries and offences against persons, and less likely to be customer thieves in shops. In addition those with parents of poor character are more likely to be formally dealt with for street offences. And this might indicate a police bias in that offenders from poor (or known) families might be particularly unlikely to have their behaviour informally sanctioned by the police. This is not to suggest that police are going out of their way to formally deal with such youngsters, but

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rather, once aware of the behaviour the police feel it necessary to take formal action.

TABLE 38  
PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION BY CURRENT OFFENCE GROUP FOR  
INDIVIDUALS ACCORDING TO CHARACTER OF BOTH PARENTS

Offence Group	Parents' Character			Total Sample (N = 13079)
	Both Good (N = 5745)	One Poor (N = 269)	Both Poor (N = 169)	
Against Persons	4	5	6	4
Burglary	18	30	22	17
Shopteift	34	24	20	37
Other Theft	13	13	17	12
Car Theft	7	8	8	7
Other property	9	9	9	8
Driving offences	9	6	5	8
Other offences	6	6	13	7
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

#### IMPORTANT FAMILY VARIABLES

In their comprehensive review of research into juvenile offending, Rutter and Giller (1983) indicate that there is "good agreement (that) the most important variables associated with both juvenile delinquency and adult criminality include parental criminality; poor parental supervision; cruel, passive or neglecting attitudes; erratic or harsh discipline; marital conflict; and large family size" (p.180).

While these factors are "most strongly associated with delinquency", Rutter and Giller point out that "less is known about the precise mechanisms by which these family variables have their effects" (1983: 219). The data collected here can certainly not assist with this latter point, but the tables

presented in this chapter do show the expected association with offending. This holds despite the fact that the relevant family factors are incompletely and possibly inconsistently noted by members of the Victoria Police completing Forms 276.

Precise statements about family characteristics are not possible because of the absence of a control (non-offending) group or relevant community statistics (for example the number of youngsters in the Victorian population whose parents have criminal records). The best that can be done is to use the contact ratio as some sort of measure reflecting the strength of association between family factors and offending. Accordingly this research shows that those youngsters formally dealt with by the Victoria Police:

- either of whose parents, siblings or other close relatives had criminal records recorded a contact ratio of 1.36 compared with 1.16 for the remaining offenders,
- whose parents were described as exercising inadequate supervision, record a contact ratio of 1.25 compared with 1.12 for the other offenders for whom a comment about parental supervision was made,
- whose families were described as being in conflict, recorded a contact ratio of 1.33 compared with 1.16 for the remaining offenders
- whose parents had little or no interest in the offender recorded a contact ratio of 1.43 compared with a ratio of 1.11 for offenders whose parents were noted as being interested in them.
- whose families were noted as having suffered "marital breakdown", recorded a contact ratio of 1.25 compared with 1.14 for the other offenders,
- who come from larger families consistently show higher contact ratios.

But while the current data show the above family characteristics to be important, it is necessary to again consider the way in which young offenders come to be in this sample. In particular, a member of the police force can take many factors into account when deciding whether or not to formally deal

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with an offender. And learning that a youth is a "latchkey" child, or that the family has undergone disruption may be the sort of factor that may make an official contact more likely. That in turn would increase the incidence of such factors in this sample. The problem is, of course, that this proposition is not provable but simply plausible, and therefore the above statistics concerning families should be used cautiously.

CHAPTER 6  
DEALING WITH THE OFFENDERS

Just how to deal with young offenders who have been brought to the formal attention of the police, has of course been the subject of a great deal of attention in criminological literature. In Victoria this issue has recently been addressed by the Child Welfare Practice and Legislation Review Committee which has recommended, amongst other things, a screening procedure involving police and welfare personnel to choose between a "no action" letter, a formal police caution or a court appearance for a detected young offender (Report, 1985). The effect of adding another stage to the existing mechanism for dealing with young Victorian offenders remains unknown - whether the "no action" letter will be used in place of informal police action or instead of an official police caution remains a vexed question.

However the Committee does support both the methods of dealing with young offenders that were operational in 1982. It recommends that the police cautioning programme be included in legislation, and that the Children's Court be 'upgraded' by the appointment of a Chief Judge, and recommends that all "decision makers in the Children's Court should have ... training in a social or behavioural science, experience with children and personal qualities" (Report 1985 p.404). These qualities appear to be seen as the essentials to allow an appropriate disposition to be determined for a young offender at Court.

But in other places more imaginative mechanisms have been developed. In some American states for instance procedures exist whereby serious and persistent young offenders are dealt with in public adult courts, although the success of these procedures in practice seems arguable (Osburn and Rode 1984). And, at the other end of the spectrum in the American state of Georgia, peer juries have been developed to decide appropriate action for young offenders who admit their guilt in court (Reichel and Seyfrit, 1984).



These youthful jurors are all trained and the benefit of their involvement "lies in the ability of age peers to understand the problems and behaviors of other youths and to make recommendations that can positively influence the misbehaving youngster" (p.429). While there are problems with the representativeness of these jurors (who volunteer to so serve), most offenders believed their treatment by peer jury was fair. Whether Victorian offenders believe they receive fair treatment at the hands of local Children's Court magistrates is simply not known.

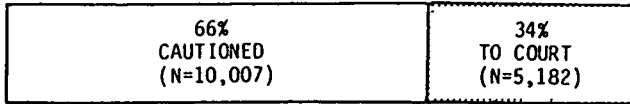
#### THE ACTUAL DISPOSITIONS

A total of 5,283 contacts from the 1982 sample were dealt with by the Children's Court. Of the remainder of the sample, 10,007 contacts concluded with an official caution, and a further four contacts; two for arson and two for armed robbery resulted in Higher Court hearings. Either those four offenders exercised their right to a trial by Judge and jury or else the Children's Court had determined there was "special reason" under Section 15(3) of the Children's court Act for the offences to be heard at a higher level.

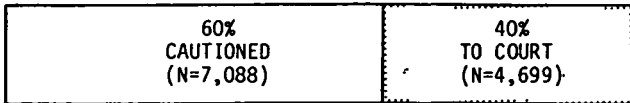
A total of 89 Forms 276 for which there appeared to have been a Court hearing had no result of that hearing marked on them, another 6 forms were marked "withdrawn", and a further 6 were marked "struck out". Exclusion of these leaves a total of 5,182 contacts for which a court appearance occurred and for which the disposition of the Court was known. This left a sample of 15,189 contacts with known dispositions and these are summarised on Figure 4, which also shows the different disposal patterns for male and female contacts. It should be noted that all percentages in this Chapter are calculated on this revised sample size of 15,189 rather than the original sample size of 15,294.

**FIGURE 4**  
**DISPOSITIONS BY SEX OF OFFENDER**

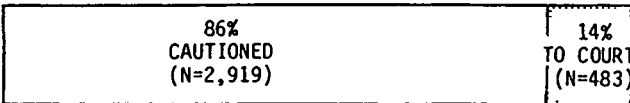
TOTAL CONTACTS (N=15,189)



MALE CONTACTS (N=11,787)

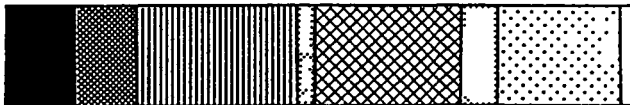


FEMALE CONTACTS (N=3,402)

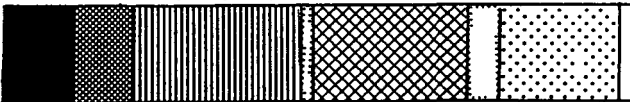


CONTACTS RESULTING IN COURT APPEARANCES

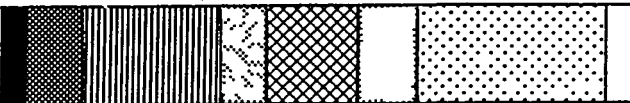
TOTAL CONTACTS (N=5,182)



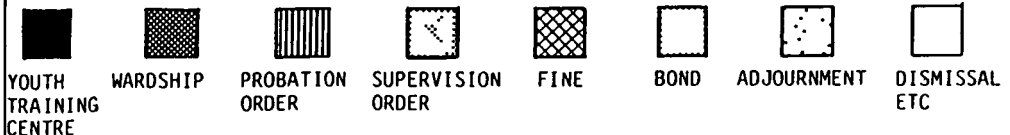
MALE CONTACTS (N=4,699)



FEMALE CONTACTS (N=483)



KEY



After establishing that a child has committed the offence the Court before determining an appropriate disposition, has, according to Section 25(1), of the Children's Court Act to

"give consideration to any report tendered which sets out an account of the results of investigation into the antecedents, home environment (including parental control), companions, education, school attendance, employment habits, recreation, character, reputation, disposition, medical history and physical or mental defects (if any) of the child and any other relevant matters".

In the majority of cases (at least in 1982) it seems the report tendered to the Court was the Form 276 alone, although invariably a Magistrate will try to evince any other relevant factors verbally from those in the Court.

Under Section 26 of the Children's Court Act when the Court has heard and determined that an offence has been proved to its satisfaction, eight particular orders are available for dealing with the offenders. These are set down in Section 26(1) and are summarised below with details of numbers of contacts from this sample, resulting in each.

S26(1)(a) "without convicting him, dismiss the information".

A total of 114 or 2.2% of the court subsample had their offences dismissed under this paragraph.

S.26(1)(b) "without convicting him, adjourn the proceedings for a specified period not exceeding two years ... on condition that he will during that period be of good behaviour".

A large group of 1,063 (being 20.5 percent of the court subsample) had their cases adjourned for an average of 11.6 months. The most frequent sanction under this paragraph was 12 months adjournment imposed in 980 contacts.

S.26(1)(c) "without convicting him release him on probation for a specified term not exceeding three years ..."

The single most frequent disposition used by the Court for this sample was a twelve month probation order. That was used for 1,123 contacts (in 124 cases in conjunction with a fine for other offences). Overall 1,307 probation

orders with an average term of 12.9 months were ordered. (145 of them with an added fine). Constituting 25.2 percent of the subsample, a probation order was the most favoured court disposition.

S.26(1)(d) "whether convicting him or not order him to pay a penalty not exceeding 5 penalty units".

In 1982 a penalty unit was legislatively set at \$100 so a maximum fine of \$500 could be ordered for any offence. Some 1,189 contacts (23.0 percent of the court subsample) concluded with fines averaging \$100:16. This figure includes 60 contacts where a fine was ordered with a bond for another offence, and 149 fines with adjournments for other offences.

Fines are a unique disposition in that the offender does not need to fulfil the court's order himself. In the case of young offenders it seems often the case that a fine will be paid by the parents of an offender, in which case the impact of the fine upon the offender is plainly questionable. In 1984 a paragraph (Section 26(5)) was inserted into the Children's Court Act requiring the court to "have regard to the capacity of the child to pay the fine" when setting it. But this does not mean that the Courts at the time of fixing the fines described above were not doing that.

S.26(1)(e) "whether convicting him or not, discharge him conditionally on his entering into a recognizance ... to be of good behaviour".

Only 292 contacts (that is 5.6 percent) resulted in good behaviour bonds with an average length of 12.3 months.

S.26(1)(f) "upon convicting him for an offence for which ... a sentence of imprisonment may be imposed (in an adult court)

(i) if he is under the age of fifteen years ... - admit him to the care of the (Community Welfare Services) Department; or

(ii) if he is over the age of fifteen years ... - sentence him to be detained in a youth training centre for a specified period not exceeding two years ... or ... an aggregate period which ... shall not exceed three years".

These orders constitute the harshest dispositions available to the Court in that they involve the young offender being sent to an institution. For

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this sample 186 contacts (or 3.6 percent of the court subsample) concluded with the offender being made a Ward of the State under the guardianship of the Community Welfare Services Department. (But see S.26(1)(g) below).

A further 546 contacts concluded with an average sentence of 6.35 months detention in a Youth Training Centre. This comprises 10.5 percent of the court subsample and of that number two contacts also involved a period of probation, 15 also involved fines and 4 received adjournments for other offences.

While this seems a hefty number of young offenders to be incarcerated, 22 percent of them were sentenced to one month or less, suggesting that perhaps the Courts were aiming to simply give those offenders a 'taste' of institutional life. In total, 38 percent of the sentenced offenders were given terms of 3 months or less, and 66 percent for 6 months or less.

S.26(1)(g) "where the court is satisfied by the evidence before it that the child answers to any of the descriptions set out in Section 31 of the Community Welfare Services Act (the care and protection provisions), without convicting him, order that he be admitted to the care of the Department ... or make a supervision order in respect of the child ..."

The practical difference between the first part of this provision and S.26(1)(f)(i) above, is that while the offence is still found proven by the Court, this provision allows no conviction to be recorded, although the child is still made a Ward of the State. What this means is that some of the 186 above contacts resulting in wardship should probably be included under the heading currently under discussion. It is entirely possible that a Magistrate finding the offence proven and strains or difficulties present in an offender's family of sufficient gravity to have sustained a care and protection application might choose to use this Section instead of 26(1)(f)(i), simply in the future interests of the child to avoid a record of conviction.

In many ways it may well be that the choice between these sections is decided on the basis of whether the sentencer believes the label "ward" to be

less potentially damaging in later life than the label "been convicted of an offence". Unfortunately the information on the Form 276 does not allow a distinction to be drawn between admissions to wardship under each of these Sections. Only 89 of the admissions to wardship involved offenders aged 15 years and over, and they must have been admitted under Section 26(1)(g). The remaining 264 admissions could have been made under either section.

The second part of 26(1)(g) allows for supervision orders to be ordered by the Court, and this occurred for 132 contacts (or 2.6 percent of the Court subsample). Supervision orders involve supervision of offenders and their families rather than involving oversight of the offender alone.

A further disposition is available to the Children's Court for offenders. It appears as Section 28 of the Act and relates to those already admitted to wardship who later offend.

S.28 "when a child who is a ward ... is charged before a Children's Court with an offence ... if (the Court) finds the child guilty ... (it) may instead of dealing with the child in any other way order that the child be returned to the care of the Department".

In this sample 6.8 percent, that is 353 contacts resulted in wards being returned to the care of the Department. In practical terms this usually involves re-admission to an institution and it is precisely because of that that a return to care appears to be seen by some offenders as a fairly innocuous sort of disposal. To the extent that the actual life of a ward who offends suffers little disruption if he is returned to care, it could be argued that there is little deterrent to an offender already a ward to refrain from future offending.

#### CHANGES IN DISPOSAL PATTERNS

Over the last few years there has been a substantial shift in the formal patterns for disposing of young offenders in Victoria. Not only has the use of the official police caution replaced the Children's Court appearance as the major result of formal contacts between police and young offenders, as

discussed earlier. But within the Children's Court itself there have been changes which are summarised in Table 39.

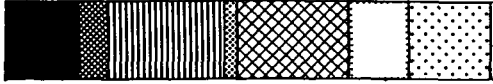
The most striking feature of that Table is the decrease in the Court's use of the adjournment over the period 1972-82 in favour of the use of the fine and to a lesser extent, the bond. Most broadly there is definite indication that whereas in the 1970's offenders stood a good chance of having their case adjourned with their promising to be of future good behaviour, in the 1980's the Courts were adopting a view that offenders should be more rigorously dealt with. Tutt and Giller (1983) are particularly concerned with increasing rigour in Children's Courts dispositions. They state that the "expansion of the use of (police) cautions (in England) has, in effect, eroded the lower levels of the juvenile court tariff" (p.595) through the Magistrates being told or assuming, that an offender before them has previously been dealt with through a police caution.

TABLE 39  
VICTORIAN CHILDREN'S COURT DISPOSITIONS, 1972-1982

Court Disposition	Percentage Distribution in -		
	1972 (N=7667)	1975 (N=7847)	1982 (N=5182)
Youth Training Centre Sentence	6.0	5.5	10.5
Admission or Return to Wardship	11.4	14.8	10.4
Probation or Supervision Order	36.6	27.4	27.8
Fine	10.9	13.3	23.0
Bond	0.6	2.0	5.6
Adjournment	30.8	33.6	20.5
Dismissal	3.7	3.4	2.2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

FIGURE 5  
COURT DISPOSITIONS FOR OFFENCE GROUPS

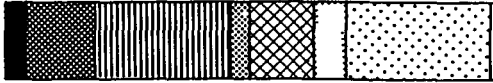
OFFENCES AGAINST PERSONS (N=392)



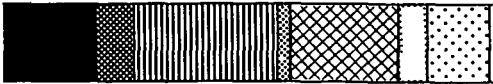
BURGLARIES (N=1,259)



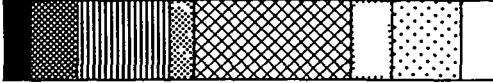
THEFTS (N=1,257)



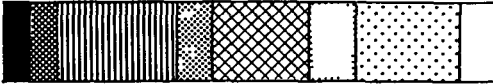
MOTOR VEHICLE THEFTS (N=793)



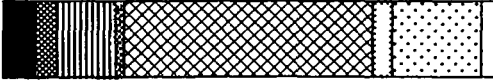
PROPERTY DAMAGE OFFENCES (N=224)



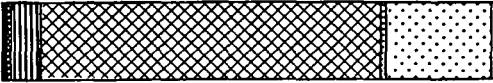
MINOR PROPERTY OFFENCES (N=200)



STREET OFFENCES (N=217)



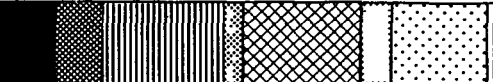
DRIVING OFFENCES (N=580)



MISCELLANEOUS OFFENCES (N=260)



TOTAL OFFENCES (N=5,182)





But the major change reflected in Table 39 constitutes a shift within the lesser penalties rather than a move from them. And further, a Magistrate in Victoria has to assume nothing, since after a youth's guilt is established the police will explicitly reveal whether a caution has previously been used. And if it has, Victorian Magistrates as fully qualified lawyers, will not attach the same importance to that as they would to a prior finding of guilt in Court.

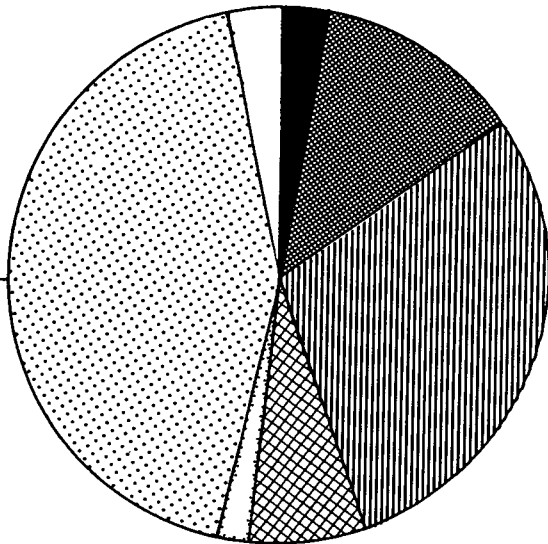
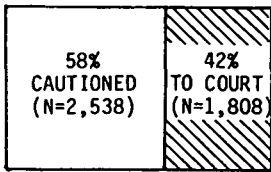
The very fact that first offenders are now less likely to appear in Court should result in a more rigorous court disposal pattern and in 1982 there is an increased use of Youth Training Centre sentences. Overall, the data in this study suggest that while those young offenders detected for the first time will be liberally dealt with; those re-offending can expect to be held more accountable for their misbehaviour.

But Court disposal patterns obviously change according to the sorts of offences with which the Court has to deal. This is apparent from Figure 5 which shows the relative use of court dispositions according to offence groups as previously defined. But that Figure does not, indeed cannot, reflect the actual event which has resulted in a particular disposition. For instance, on the face of it, having any driving offenders sentenced to a Youth Training Centre seems extraordinary. But examination of the seven relevant contacts reveals that all of them involved youths well known to the police who were driving cars in reckless fashion while being unlicensed. In the worst case a police chase developed with a "hit-run" accident along the way and charges of dangerous driving were imposed. The extraordinarily high Youth Training Centre rate for the miscellaneous offence group is caused by the fact that charges of escaping from Youth Training Centres are included in that group, and they obviously were disposed of by the imposition of another Youth Training Centre sentence.

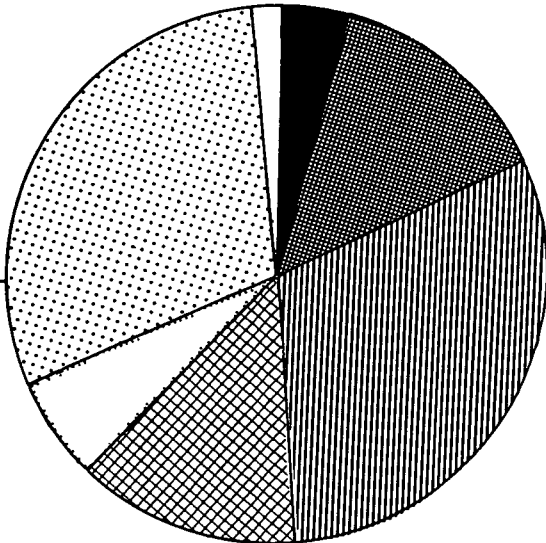
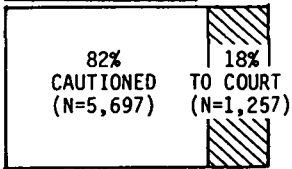
FIGURE 6

VICTORIAN CHILDREN'S COURT DISPOSAL OF THEFT CASES 1975 AND 1982

1975  
THEFTS (N=4,346)



1982  
THEFTS (N=6,954)



KEY

- |  |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| YOUTH TRAINING CENTRE  | WARDSHIP  | PROBATION/SUPERVISION ORDER   | FINE  | BOND  | ADJOURMENT  | DISMISSAL ETC   |

Changes in sentencing patterns can then be best reflected by consideration of a particular sort of offence. Figure 6 presents the dispositions handed down by the Victorian Children's Court for thefts committed in 1975 and 1982. It more accurately reflects changing disposition patterns and, in fact, confirms Table 39 by showing that the major change is a move away from adjournments to the use of fines and bonds, both of which require more than a simple promise of future good behaviour.

CHAPTER 7ARE 1982 OFFENDERS TYPICAL?

The preceding descriptions of Victoria's young offenders have been compiled from analysis of youngsters formally dealt with by the police in a twelve month period ending September 1982. This is now almost three years ago and the pressing question is whether a similar situation pertains today. In order to provide at least a partial answer to this a sample was drawn from young offenders dealt with by the police in May and June 1984 and it is compared with reduced samples for the same two months in 1982, and in the years 1966, 1972 and 1975 by re-working the data from Young Offenders (Challinger 1977). It is important to note that the 1966 data relates only to Court Appearances which at that time constituted the major way in which young offenders were handled (see Table 1).

In 1966, those offenders dealt with in May and June comprised 16.1 percent of all offenders for the year. They comprised 16.1 percent of all offenders for the year. They comprised 17.6 percent in 1972, 18.4 percent in 1975, 15.9 percent in 1982 and 16.9 percent in 1984. Overall this is a variation which is quite acceptable. It has to be assumed that there were not startling variations with respect to the way, or speed with which, members of the Victoria Police processed young offenders in May and June over the years in question. Although it is possible that variations could have occurred. For instance, rapid processing of offenders detected during the May school holidays may have occurred in, say, one police district in one year. But that does not seem likely to cause major corruption of the statistics.

The following tables then allow some comment to be made first about the similarity of the 1982 and 1984 situation, and thus, on the appropriateness of considering the foregoing material as reflective of today's young offenders. And secondly the tables allow some appreciation of the ways in which the offending population has changed since 1966.

However it is important to note that this two month period cannot be seen to be typical of the whole of the years in question. Indeed comparison of 1982 data in this chapter with 1982 data in preceding chapters indicates that there are certainly differences between those dealt with in the winter months - see for example, Table 43 (May/June) showing 62 percent of offenders living with both parents compared with 65 percent for the 12 month period (Table 23). But it is comparison between time periods up to 1984 that is the focus of this chapter and that requires using the same two month period for each year in question.

The sample sizes for each year were 1966 - 604, 1972 - 1918, 1975 - 2410, 1982 - 2428, and 1984 - 2063 (excluding protection applications). The inclusion of protection applications in the earlier years makes accurate comparison of offence distributions for the five years impossible. Suffice it to say that the percentages of contacts for theft were 36, 37, 33, 48 and 44 over the five years, and those for burglary were 20, 28, 19, 18 and 15. For comparative purposes, data relating to these 9,423 contacts over this 17 year period are presented only for six objective characteristics associated with the contacts. The relevant tables follow.

TABLE 40  
PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF SEX OF YOUNGSTERS INVOLVED  
IN OFFICIAL CONTACTS DURING TWO MONTH PERIOD 1966 - 1984

Sex	1966	1972	1975	1982	1984
Male	82	79	78	77	79
Female	18	21	22	23	21

TABLE 41

PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF AGES OF YOUNGSTERS INVOLVED  
IN OFFICIAL CONTACTS DURING TWO MONTH PERIOD 1966 - 1984

Age	1966	1972	1975	1982	1984
12 and under	16	18	21	19	18
13	10	15	15	16	13
14	17	21	18	18	18
15	23	21	21	19	21
16	29	21	20	23	23
17	5	5	5	5	7

TABLE 42

PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF OCCUPATION OF YOUNGSTERS INVOLVED  
IN OFFICIAL CONTACTS DURING TWO MONTH PERIOD 1966 - 1984

Occupation	1966	1972	1975	1982	1984
Student	56	75	72	78	80
Unemployed	9	8	13	13	12
Other	35	17	15	9	8

TABLE 43

PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF LIVING SITUATION OF YOUNGSTERS INVOLVED  
IN OFFICIAL CONTACTS DURING TWO MONTH PERIOD 1966 - 1984

Living situation	1966	1972	1975	1982	1984
Both natural parents	68	67	66	62	59
One parent and others	4	6	6	7	6
One parent alone	21	20	17	24	27
Other	7	7	11	7	8

TABLE 44  
PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF PRIOR OFFENDING HISTORY OF  
YOUNGSTERS INVOLVED IN OFFICIAL CONTACTS DURING TWO MONTH  
PERIOD 1966-1984

Prior History	1966	1972	1975	1982	1984
None	67	70	67	77	80
Some	23	30	23	23	20

TABLE 45  
PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF DISPOSITION OF  
OFFICIAL CONTACTS DURING TWO MONTH PERIOD 1966-1984

Disposition	1966	1972	1975	1982	1984
Official Caution	-	23	33	74	72
<u>Percentage Distribution of Court Dispositions</u>					
YTC	4	4	3	9	9
Wardship	12	14	20	11	5
Probation	35	35	26	31	23
Fine	16	9	11	23	16
Bond	1	1	2	6	16
Adjournment	29	33	33	18	26
Dismissed etc.	3	4	5	2	5

The preceding six tables do show that both for the 1982-84 period and the longer period, changes in these objective measures do reflect the increased use of police cautions. Thus it is that girls, students and those with no prior formal dealings with the police have increased their representation in the young offender population. But in addition, those living with single parents have increased in representation at the expense of those living with both parents. Undoubtedly some of this reflects the increased levels of family breakdown in the community at large, however it will for instance

increase the level of association between youthful offending and family disruption beyond that indicated by the 1982 data.

It was the purpose of this chapter to indicate whether the statements about Victoria's young offenders in 1982 could be said to be a reasonable representation of offenders today. The short answer is that they can. Indeed with the more problematic aspects such as broken homes, working mothers and unemployed fathers, the preceding statements might now be seen as a conservative statement, especially if those aspects are becoming more common in the community.

But those aspects can in no way be used to describe a 'typical young Victorian offender' for indeed there is no typical offender, and it makes no sense to try and define one. Some characteristics of children and their families are associated with offending, but each young offender must be considered as an individual.



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