

New Generation: Preventing young adults being caught in the revolving door



About us

A summary of evidence
Author: Burcu Borysik
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Acknowledgements:

Thanks to Nathan Dick and Christina Marriott from Revolving Doors Agency, who commented on the earlier drafts.

About Revolving Doors Agency

- Revolving Doors is a national charity that aims to change systems and improve services for people in the revolving door of personal crisis and crime.
- We bring independent research, policy expertise and lived experience together to support effective solutions to end the revolving door.
- We work alongside policy-makers, commissioners, local decision-makers and frontline professionals to share evidence, demonstrate effective solutions and change policy.
- We embed the involvement of people with lived experience in all our work, in a number of ways. These include peer research, interviews, lived experience teams and forums based in London, Birmingham and Manchester.
- Since 2012 we have worked with Police and Crime Commissioners to develop and implement effective solutions for people caught in the revolving door of crime and crisis.
- Working with the Transition to Adulthood Alliance we have campaigned to raise understanding and awareness of the problems young adults in contact with the criminal justice system face.

About the Transition to Adulthood Alliance

- The Transition to Adulthood (T2A) initiative is part of the Barrow Cadbury Trust's criminal justice programme. The Trust is an independent, charitable foundation committed to bringing about socially just change.
- The Trust's criminal justice programme develops and promotes evidence of effective policy and practice for young adults at all stages of the criminal justice system, and supports the voices of those with lived experience to be heard.
- The T2A Alliance makes the case that developmental maturity is a better guide than age when deciding on the best response to offending by young adults. It has developed a robust case for a more effective approach to young adults. This has been achieved through research, pilot projects and supporting practitioners and policy makers. This programme of work is available at T2A website www.T2A.org.uk.

Contents

Introduction	3
People caught in the revolving door: Why it matters	4
Characteristics of young adults entering the revolving door	6
How does the criminal justice system currently deal with young adults entering the revolving door?	8
Conclusion	14
Appendix A: Revolving door pattern offences	15
Further resources	15

Introduction

Young adults entering the revolving door are characterised by repeated low-level, non-violent offences, such as theft and minor drug offences, driven by multiple needs linked to trauma and persistent poverty.



Young adulthood. It's the bridge we all have to cross between 18 and 25. It's a time when we're trying to find our feet as we rely less on parents and develop the knowledge, skills and self-understanding we need for adult life.

Those lucky enough to have had stable and loving families, support from teachers, peers and the wider community, and relative affluence are handed a sturdy bridge that spans the divide. For them, it's an exciting time, involving leaving the family home, finishing education, starting a career, challenging themselves, meeting new friends and falling in and out of love.

Then there are the young adults who have experienced complex trauma. They may have had to cope with household dysfunction, physical, emotional and sexual abuse and neglect, exposure to violence and discrimination, and multiple and often traumatic losses. They have often also experienced severe deprivation – perhaps worrying if they have enough money for food, or somewhere warm to sleep. They lack positive support and opportunities.

These young adults cross incomplete and dangerous bridges into adulthood, experiencing intense instability. They often enter the 'revolving door' of crime and personal crisis. So much human potential is lost because they don't have the opportunities to turn their lives around.

Typical offences for young adults (and adults) in the revolving door are non-violent, including theft, minor drug-related offences and summary non-motoring offences (Full list can be found in Appendix I). The same group commit these offences again and again. The proportion of people with a history of repeat offending is now at its highest ever level, accounting for nearly two-fifths of all offenders.

This briefing brings together the latest evidence on young adults in the revolving door and makes the case for targeting resources to them. It recommends intervening earlier and stabilising the bridge to adulthood, thus cutting crime and reducing demand on police, the courts, probation, prisons and many other local services.

Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) are in a unique position within the criminal justice system to encourage and facilitate a local approach that bridges the divide between childhood and adulthood. We are heartened that two-thirds of PCCs' police and crime plans refer to young adulthood as a critical time of intervention. This represents great progress.

We also know that much more can be done, specifically for young adults entering the revolving door of crisis and crime. If we get it right, then young adults can change and lead better lives. If we get it wrong then the same young adults could be cycling round our criminal justice system for the next 20 years, causing harm to themselves and countless others.

Revolving Doors will be offering support to PCCs and their offices to start working 'upstream' with young adults entering the revolving door of crisis and crime. As part of this work, we will offer bespoke consultancy and intensive on-the-ground support for five areas and offer seed funding to kick-start local initiatives. These sites will benefit from our research, lived experience, policy and service design expertise. Our support, which will be free, can help PCCs and their offices implement new strategies to support better options for young adults, such as deferred prosecutions or diversion schemes to keep young adults out of the criminal justice system.

People caught in the revolving door: Why it matters

People in the revolving door are characterised by repeated low-level, non-violent offences, such as theft and minor drug offences, driven by multiple unmet needs, including mental ill health, problematic substance use, homelessness and domestic abuse. Their health, care and offending-related needs go hand in hand with trauma, persistent poverty, long-term unemployment and social exclusion.

The idea that a significant proportion of all crime is committed by a relatively small number of persistent offenders is not new¹ but in recent years this pattern has become even clearer.

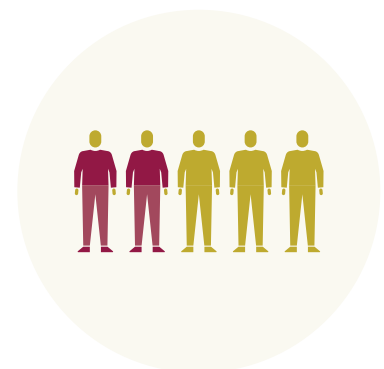
- The total number of people formally dealt with by the criminal justice system in England and Wales is at its lowest since records began, and fell 2% in 2019². At the same time, the proportion of adults convicted for an indictable offence with a history of repeat offending³ is now at its highest ever level, accounting for nearly two-fifths (39%) of the offending population.
- In 2018, 60,000 cautions or convictions for low-level, non-violent offences were given to people who had 11 or more previous convictions^{4 5}. These individuals alone had a total of over 1.8 million previous cautions or convictions for similar low-level, non-violent offences.
- The Ministry of Justice recently analysed the first and last offence committed by 'prolific offenders'⁶. It found that theft and summary non-motoring offences were the most common offences committed by adult prolific offenders. This was the case for both offenders who committed their first offence as a juvenile and those who committed their first offence as an adult (see figure 1).
- Theft and summary non-motoring convictions dominate the entire offending histories of both juvenile and adult prolific offenders

This data shows that we are failing to provide effective interventions for people caught in the revolving door of crime and crisis. As yet there has been no national drive to effectively address the low-level and non-violent crimes people caught in the revolving door commit. Something needs to change if we are going to break the cycle.

01

39%

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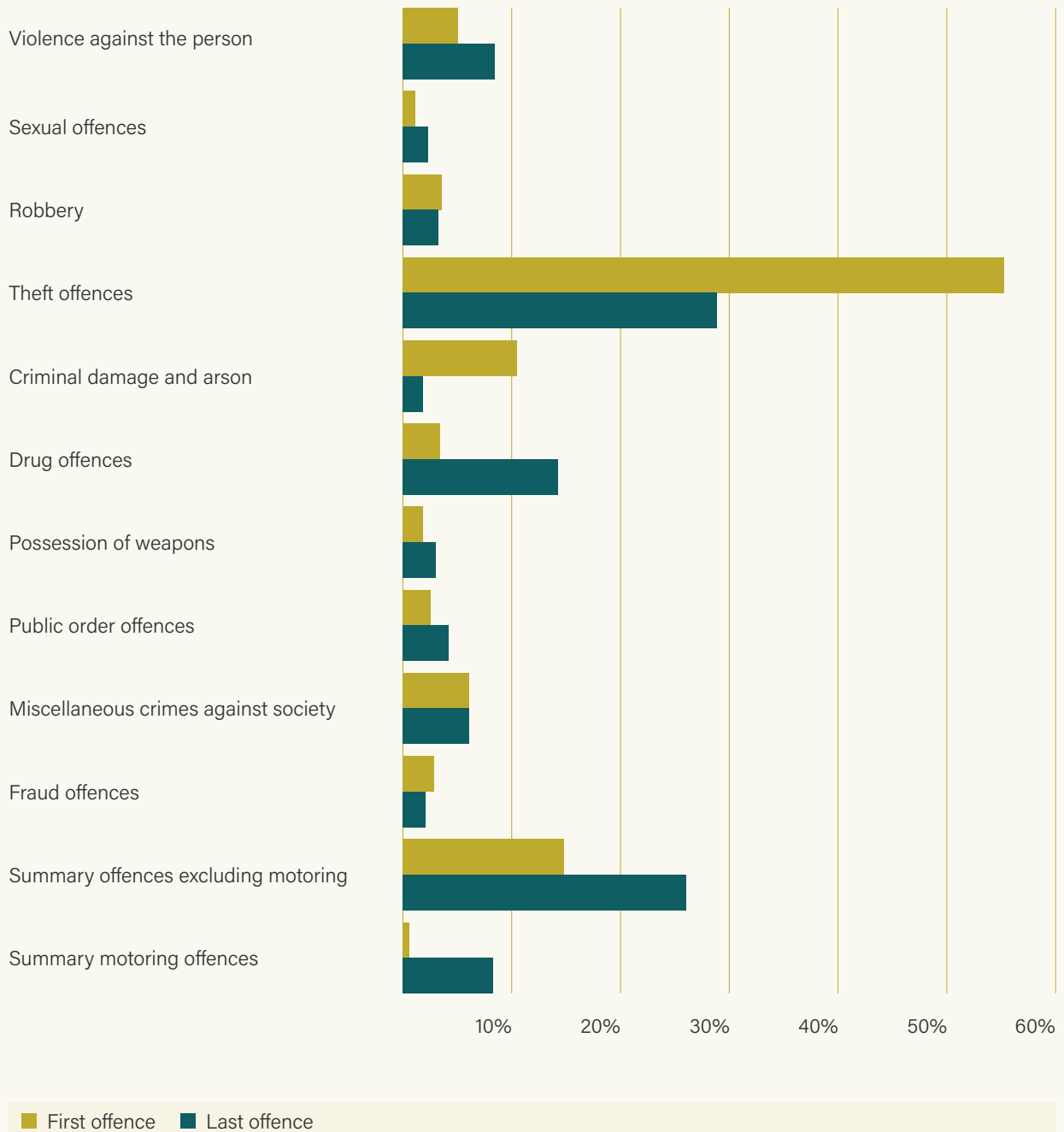


Theft and summary non-motoring convictions dominate the entire offending histories of both children and adults in the revolving door.



Figure. 01

Adult prolific offenders whose first offence was committed as a juvenile



01. See for instance Garside, R. 2014. 'Crime, persistent offenders and the justice gap'. London. Crime and Society Foundation.

02. Ministry of Justice. 2019. 'Offenders convicted for indictable offences by previous criminal history, year ending March 2009 to 2019'. Table Q6.1. London. Ministry of Justice.

03. Johns et al. 2015 say 'prolific' and 'persistent' are frequently conflated or used interchangeably despite having quite discrete connotations: of volume and continuity respectively. Evidence from our lived experience forums suggests the 'revolving door' cohort typically follows from a prolific (young adulthood) to persistent (adulthood) trajectory.

04. Ministry of Justice. 2018. 'Offending History Data Tool: previous offence statistics'. London. Ministry of Justice.

05. This falls below the Ministry of Justice's 'prolific offender' threshold of 16 or more offences and was based on the membership of our lived experience forums. The 'revolving door' cohort, if defined as 11 offences or more, would constitute a little under half of all the offending population (and half of all people being given a custodial sentence every year).

06. Ministry of Justice. 2019. 'Prolific Offender Criminal Pathway: Prison Events & Offender Needs'. Figure 3. London. Ministry of Justice.

Characteristics of young adults entering the revolving door

02

Over the last five years, Revolving Doors Agency has spoken to 2,500 people with lived experience of the revolving door. Their accounts paint a stark picture of the impact trauma and poverty combined has had on their lives.

In 2018 we began an ongoing project to explore the childhood experiences of people in the revolving door⁷. We want to better understand their childhoods, the combined effects of living in unsafe communities, household problems, neglect and abuse, as well as lack of opportunities to access support.

We are finding⁸ that people in the revolving door experience more challenges, more severely and for longer than others. We are discovering a pattern in childhood experiences that lead to an adult becoming stuck in the revolving door of crisis and crime. It involves exceptional levels of abuse, neglect and household disruption – sometimes within the context of community violence that the World Health Organization would normally associate with war zones. These childhoods are blighted by poverty so profound that three meals a day are not guaranteed.

Our preliminary findings are consistent with research⁹ the Ministry of Justice carried out in 2019, looking at the characteristics and needs of 'prolific offenders' (figure 2). It found that:



Over two-fifths (43%) of prolific offenders were eligible for school meals, compared to less than a third (32%) of non-prolific offenders¹⁰ and 15% of all pupils¹¹

A significant majority (91%) of prolific offenders have been excluded from school for a fixed period, compared to over a third (66%) of non-prolific offenders¹² and 7% of all pupils¹³.

Just under a quarter (23%) of prolific offenders have been permanently excluded from school, compared to 7% of non-prolific offenders¹⁴ and 5% of all pupils¹⁵.

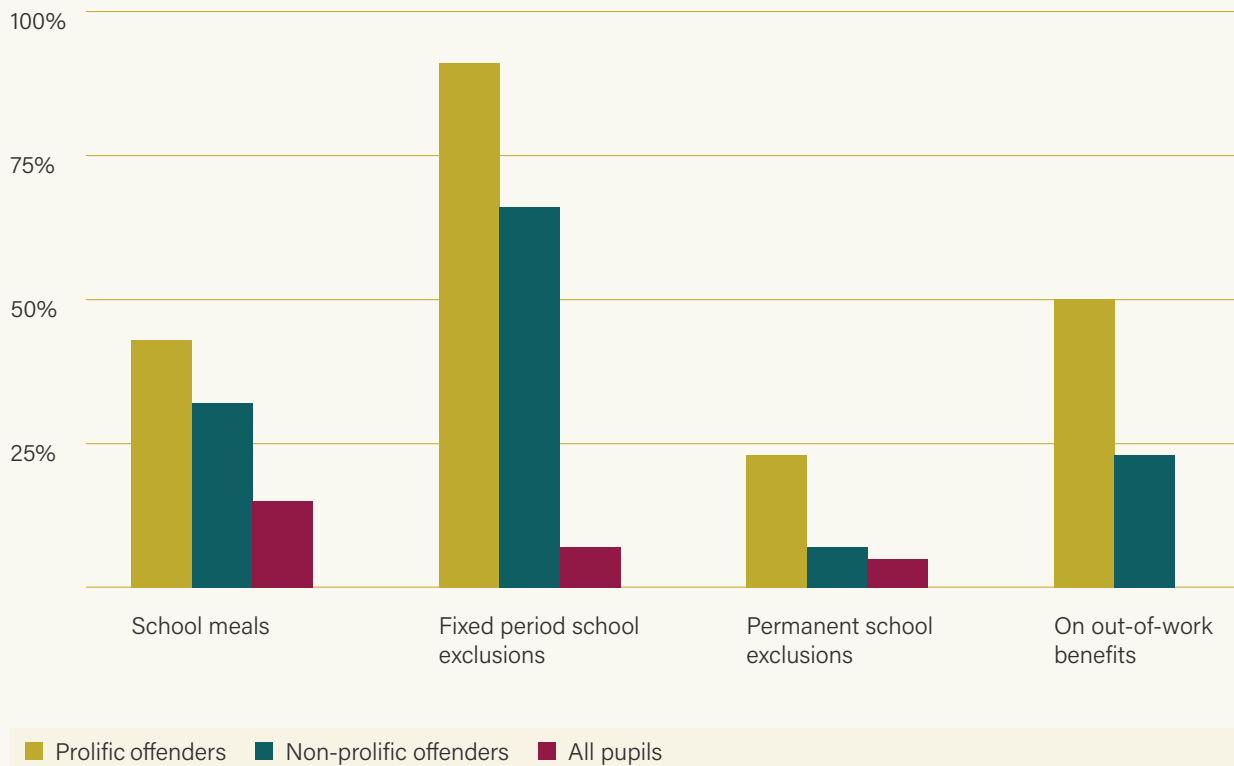
Half (50%) of all adult prolific offenders who predominantly receive short prison sentences have spent their working age period claiming out-of-work benefits, compared to just under a quarter (23%) of non-prolific offenders¹⁶.

Evidence highlights that young adulthood is a critical time of intervention not just to prevent future demand on the criminal justice system, but also to avoid current strain on services. Two police services we interviewed have produced data that suggests young adults who repeatedly commit low-level, non-violent offences make up a quarter of their caseload. We suspect there are similar patterns across England and Wales.

This is hardly surprising – while there has been significant progress in employing diversionary approaches in youth justice, including youth triage schemes and restorative approaches, too often these cut off sharply at the age of 18, regardless of the individual’s maturity or level of need. Other services also cut off, or change radically, when someone turns 18. This leads to many young adults being criminalised by the system, when another disposal may have been more appropriate to address the underlying causes of their behaviour.

Figure. 02

Needs of young adults entering the revolving door compared to non-prolific offenders and general population



07. We combined indicators from a range of standardised surveys, including: Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs); resilience indicators, covering a range of personal, relational and social factors; the English indices of deprivation based on the home in which they spent most of their childhood; housing tenure, type and number of house moves; occupational class, employment and household composition; the Poverty and Social Exclusion (PSE) Survey child deprivation indices and PSE First Findings (e.g. food deprivation); and World Health Organization (WHO) indicators for witnessing or exposure to community violence.

08. Revolving Doors Agency. 2018. '1,800,000 opportunities' pp 8-9. London. Revolving Doors Agency.

09. Ministry of Justice. 2019. 'Prolific offenders: experimental statistics.' London. Ministry of Justice.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. Department of Education. 2019. 'Permanent and Fixed Period Exclusions in England: 2016 to 2017.' London. Department of Education.

14. Ministry of Justice. 2019. 'Prolific offenders: experimental statistics.' London. Ministry of Justice.

15. Department of Education. 2019. 'Permanent and Fixed Period Exclusions in England: 2016 to 2017.' London. Department of Education.

16. Ibid.

How does the criminal justice system currently deal with young adults entering the revolving door?

03

How an individual becomes trapped in the revolving door is complex.

The Ministry of Justice's analysis suggests that a quarter of offenders aged 21 or over were in the revolving door as a juvenile (under 18). They refer to this pattern as 'prolific'¹⁷. That means intervention at the young adulthood stage is critical. Solely targeting children in repeat contact with the criminal justice system is not enough to prevent the revolving door. Currently, a staggering 96% of young men aged under 20 with more than 10 previous (adult) offences are re-imprisoned within two years of release¹⁸.

Our analysis¹⁹ (as illustrated by figures 3 and 4) suggests that the number of young adults who receive a caution or conviction for revolving door pattern offences²⁰ has dropped significantly over the last decade. However, considering that young adults only constitute 10% of the general population, it is notable that they receive 31% of all cautions and 20% of all convictions for revolving door pattern offences.

In contrast, the number of children committing similar offences has reduced significantly. This is often thanks to the success of diversionary approaches emerging in youth justice, including youth triage schemes and restorative approaches. However, these approaches tend to cut off sharply at the age of 18, regardless of the individual's maturity or level of need.

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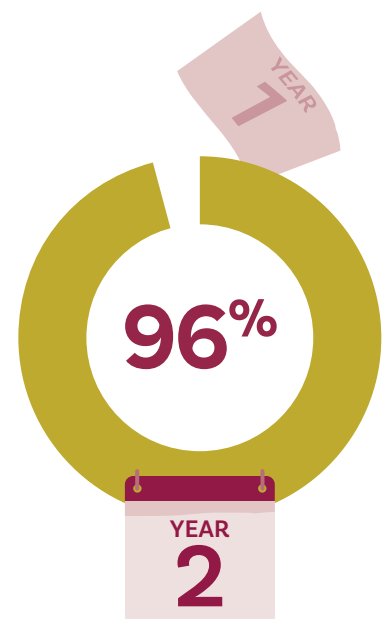


Figure. 03

Cautions issued for ‘revolving door’ type offences in the last decade

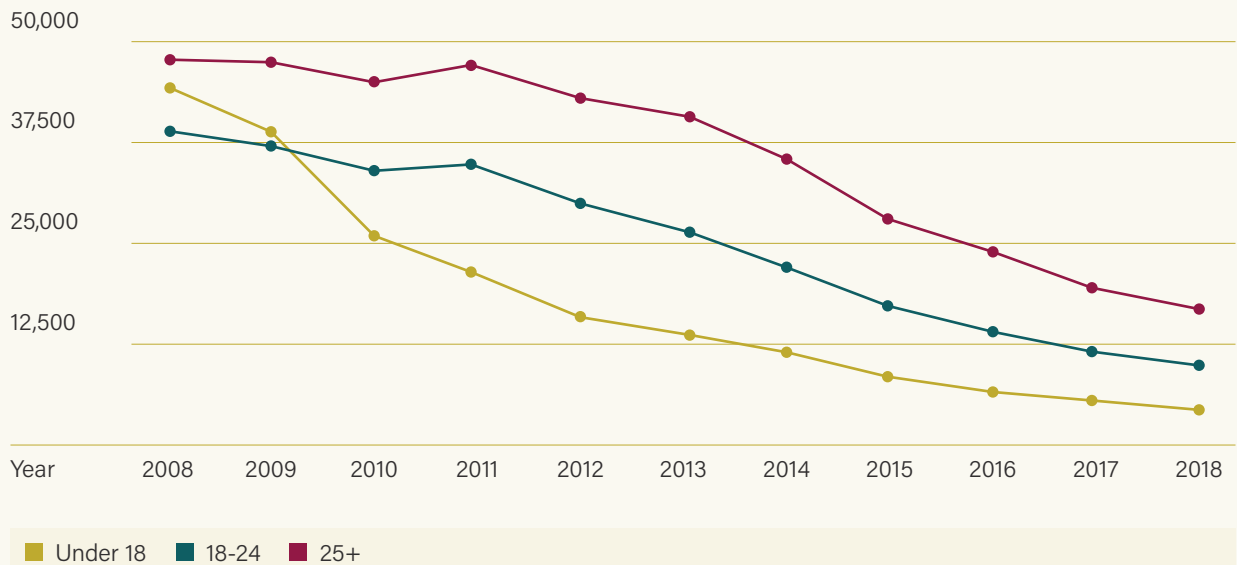
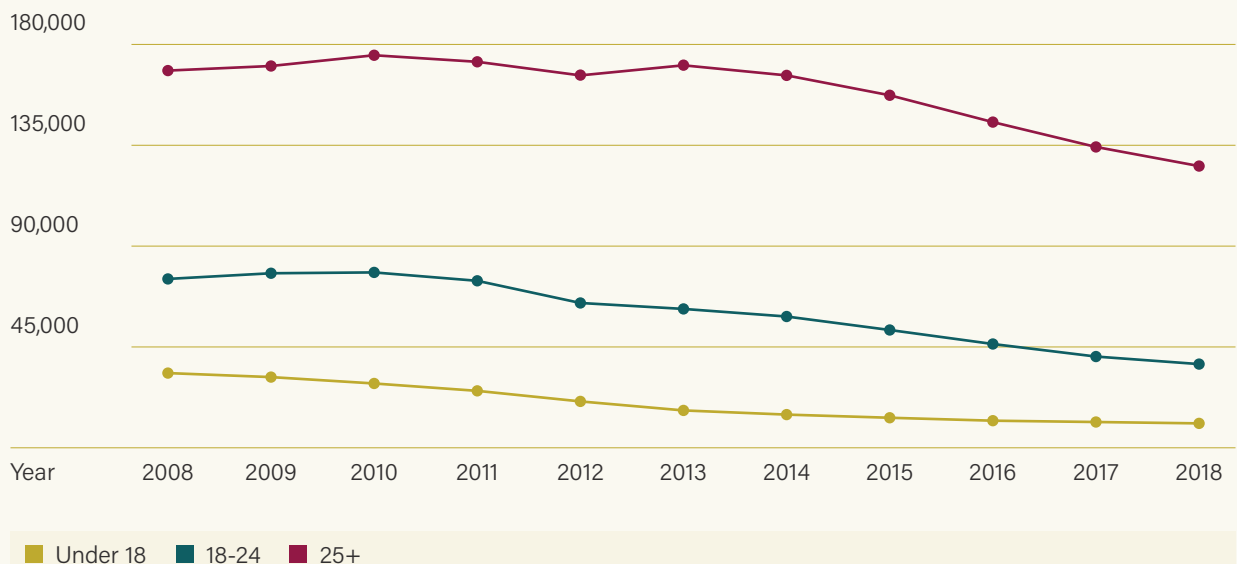


Figure. 04

Convictions for ‘revolving door’ type offences in the last decade



17. Johns et al. 2015 say 'prolific' and 'persistent' are frequently conflated or used interchangeably despite having quite discrete connotations: of volume and continuity respectively. Evidence from our forum suggests the revolving door follows from a prolific (young adulthood) to persistent (adulthood) trajectory. Some people in the revolving door may fall below the 'prolific offender' threshold of 16 offences or more, hence the decision to base our analysis on those with 11 cautions/convictions or more.

18. Home Office. 2004. 'Joint Inspection Report into Persistent and Prolific Offenders'. London. Home Office.

19. Analysis based on Ministry of Justice. 2019. 'Criminal Justice System Statistics publication: Outcomes by Offence 2008 to 2018: Pivot Table Analytical Tool for England and Wales'. London. Ministry of Justice.

20. The analysis focused on low-level crime which is the typical presentation of the revolving door cohort to the criminal justice system. Offence types included in this analysis are non-violent offences, including theft, summary non-motoring and some drug offences (a full list can be found in appendix A).

Sentencing outcomes

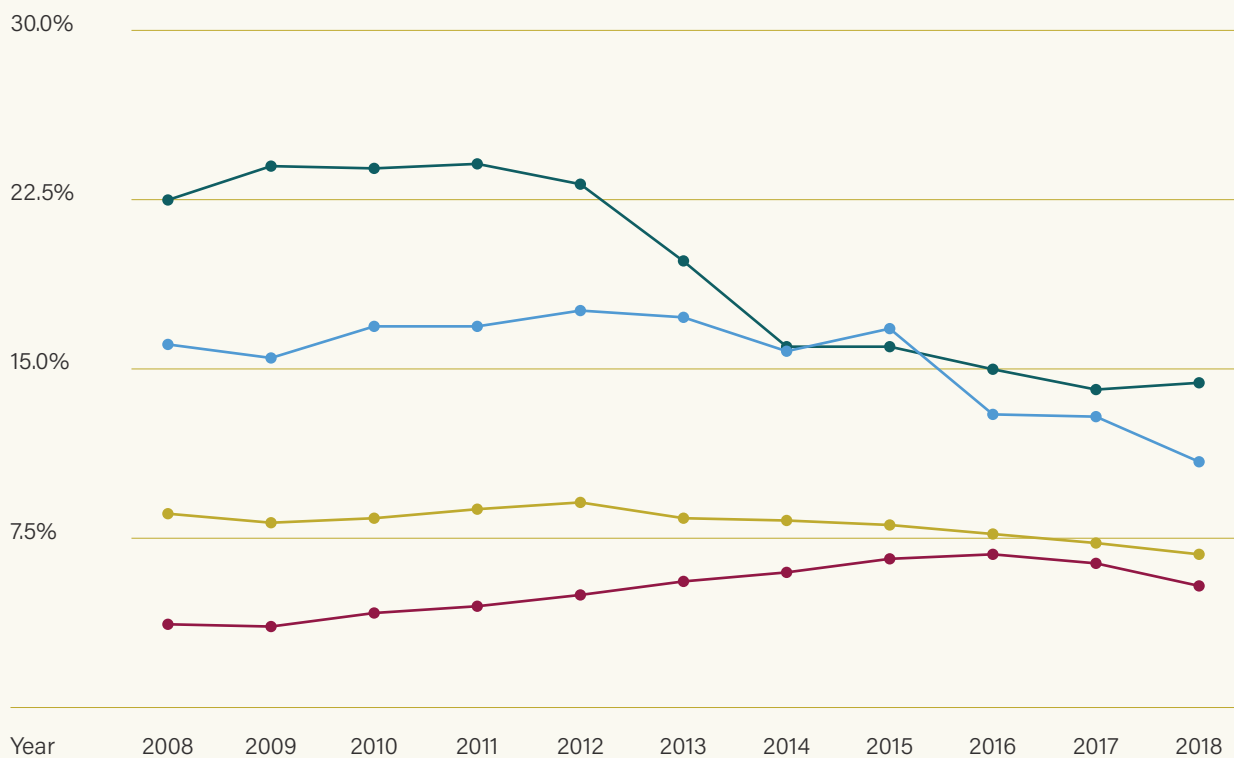
From 2008 to 2018, the criminal justice outcomes²¹ for young adults (18-24) who commit revolving door pattern offences²² has changed significantly. There has been a:

- 36% fall in community sentences
- 32% fall in conditional and unconditional discharges
- 21% fall in the use of immediate custody
- Slight increase in the use of suspended sentences (although they only account for 5% of all sentencing outcomes)
- 25% rise in the use of fines (the most common sentencing outcome, up from 45% to 60%).

Overall our analysis is consistent with the Ministry of Justice's own assessment of the offending histories of 'prolific offenders'²³. The most common disposal for adult prolific offenders who committed their first offence as a child is a community sentence (29%); and for those who committed their first offence as an adult it is a fine (36%). However, both groups mostly received either another fine or a custodial sentence in the last sentencing occasion²⁴.

Figure. 05

Sentencing outcomes for young adults entering the revolving door



- Discharged as a proportion of all sentenced young adults entering the revolving door
- Community sentence as a proportion of all sentences for young adults entering the revolving door
- Suspended sentence as a proportion of all sentences for young adults entering the revolving door
- Immediate custodial sentence as a proportion of all sentences for young adults entering the revolving door

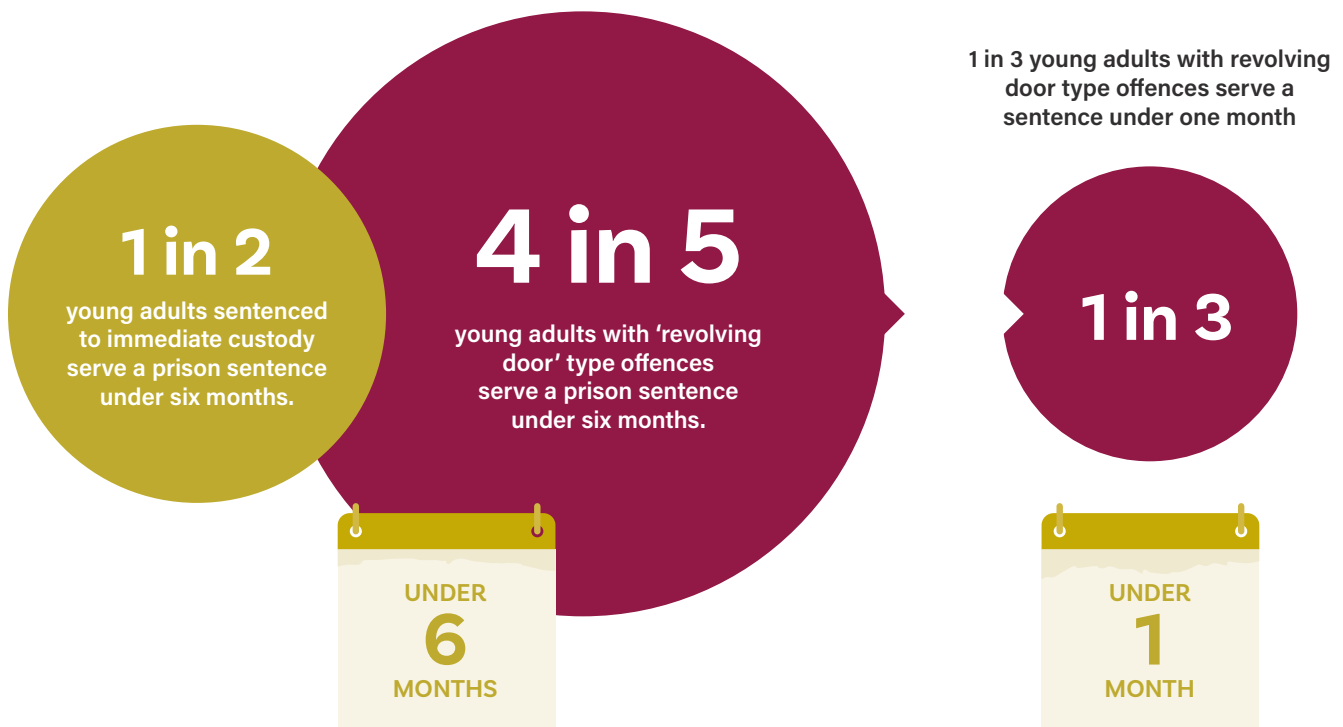
Prison

The steady decrease in immediate custody for young adults over the last decade is welcome. However, the proportion of short sentences remains stubbornly high, particularly for young adults entering the revolving door.

Short prison sentences embed disadvantage, by disturbing family ties, housing, employment and treatment programmes. They fail to address the trauma and poverty this group of young adults experiences and drive increased offending. In fact, the Ministry of Justice's own analysis shows that, like for like, offenders sentenced to custody commit more offences on release²⁵.

Our analysis²⁶ shows that in 2018, nearly half (46%) of all young adults who were sentenced to immediate custody were imprisoned for fewer than six months. In contrast a staggering 80% of young adults entering the revolving door²⁷ who were sent to immediate custody were imprisoned for fewer than six months (down from 87% a decade ago). In fact, a third (33%) of all custodial sentences these young adults served were for less than one month.

The average length of stay in prison for young adults entering the revolving door is very short. In 2018 it was just 4.9 months, while the figure for all young adults was 18.9 months²⁸.



21. Analysis based on Ministry of Justice. 2019. 'Criminal Justice System Statistics publication: Outcomes by Offence 2008 to 2018: Pivot Table Analytical Tool for England and Wales' London. Ministry of Justice.

22. The analysis focused on low-level crime which is the typical presentation of the revolving door cohort to the criminal justice system. Offence types included in this analysis are non-violent offences, including theft, summary non-motoring and some drug offences (a full list can be found in appendix A).

23. Ministry of Justice. 2019. 'Prolific offenders: Experimental statistics' Table 2.3. London. Ministry of Justice.

24. Adult prolific offenders whose first offence was committed as a juvenile are more likely to receive a custodial sentence for their last offence than those whose first offence was committed as an adult (30.7% vs. 27.7%).

25. Ministry of Justice. 2019. 'The impact of short custodial sentences, community orders and suspended sentence orders on reoffending' London. Ministry of Justice.

26. Analysis based on Ministry of Justice. 2019. 'Criminal Justice System Statistics publication: Outcomes by Offence 2008 to 2018: Pivot Table Analytical Tool for England and Wales' London. Ministry of Justice.

27. A full list of offences can be found in appendix A.

28. Analysis based on Ministry of Justice. 2019. 'Criminal Justice System Statistics publication: Offence 2008 to 2018: Pivot Table Analytical Tool for England and Wales' London. Ministry of Justice.

Reoffending

The average rate of reoffending for young adults in the criminal justice system is similar to those of all adults (29%). However, our analysis of the latest reoffending statistics highlights four interesting patterns:

- The reoffending rate for young adults in the revolving door is significantly higher than all other young adults in the criminal justice system. For example, a young adult committing theft offences is 1.4 times more likely to reoffend than any other young adult in the criminal justice system.
- The more entrenched the young adult is in the revolving door, the more likely they are to reoffend. For example, a young adult with 11 or more previous offences is 5.8 times more likely to reoffend than a first time entrant in that age group (figure 6).
- The more entrenched the young adult is in the revolving door, the more frequently they commit offences. For example, a young adult with 11 or more previous offences commits nearly twice (1.8 times) as many offences as a first time entrant in that age group (figure 7).
- Both the average rate of reoffending and the average number of reoffences among young adults correlates to the rates of those with three to six previous offences. Once a young adult exceeds six previous offences the likelihood of reoffending escalates dramatically, indicating that this may be a tipping point at which some young adults start to enter the revolving door.

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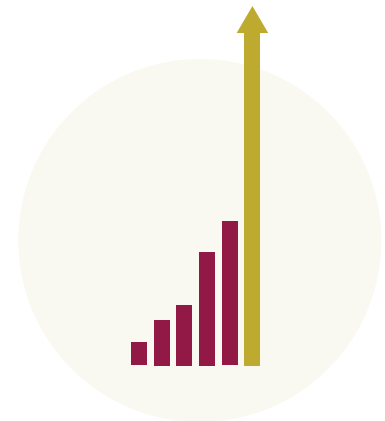
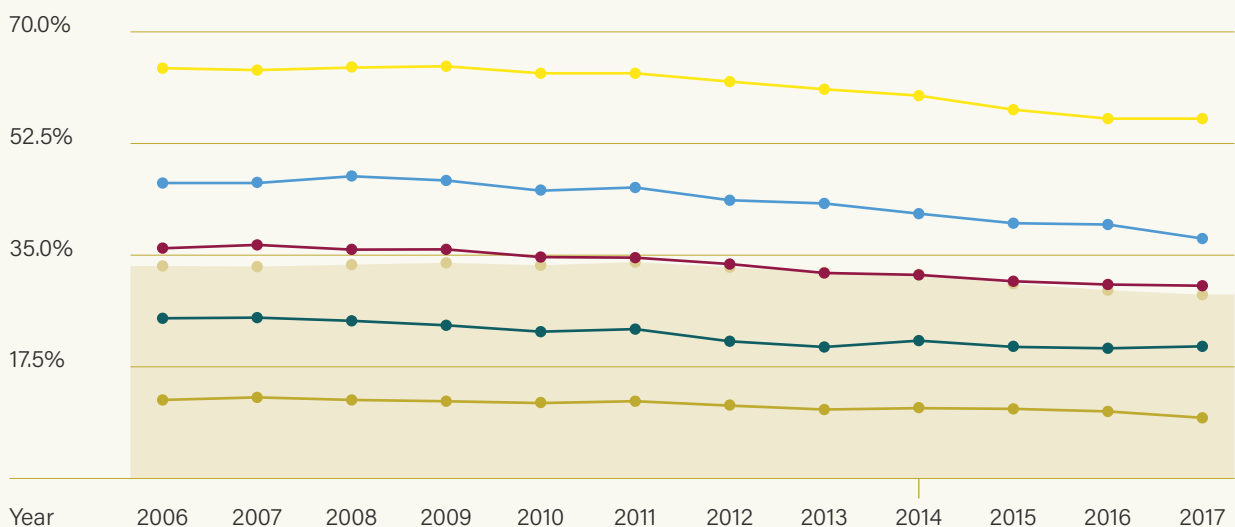


Figure. 06

Reoffending rates among young adults by number of previous offences



Reoffending data methodology changed.

- No previous offences
- 1 to 2 previous offences
- 3 to 6 previous offences
- 7 to 10 previous offences
- 11+ previous offences
- Average

Likelihood of reoffending



First time entrant

Theft offences

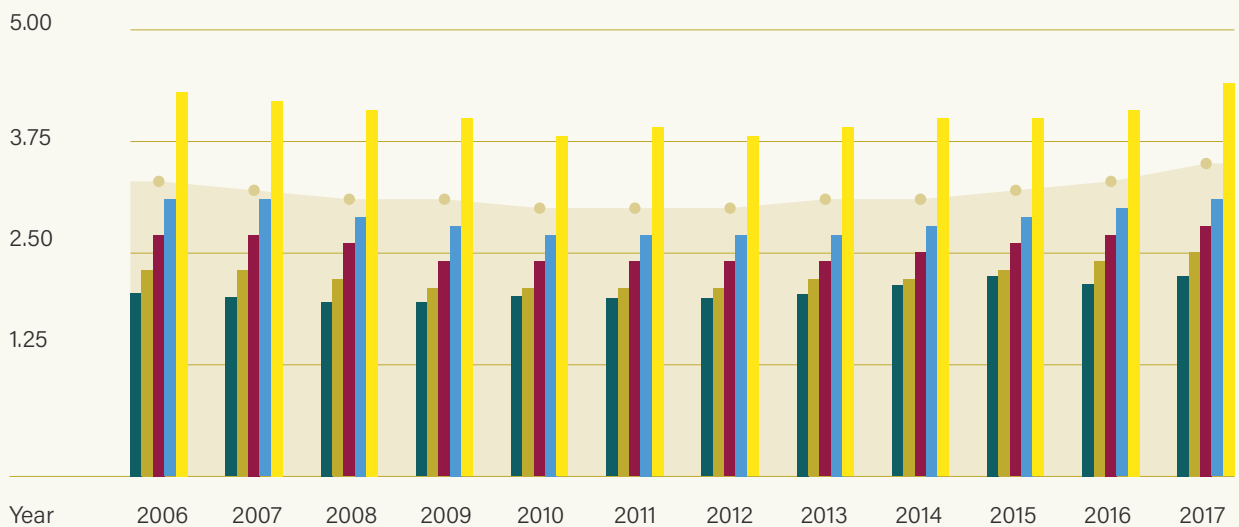
Revolving door

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Figure. 07

Average number of reoffences per young adults who reoffend (2006-2016)



- No previous offences
- 1 to 2 previous offences
- 3 to 6 previous offences
- 7 to 10 previous offences
- 11+ previous offences
- Average

Conclusion

On the whole, the criminal justice system fails to recognise the combined impact of trauma and poverty on the lives of young adults entering the revolving door and therefore break the cycle of crisis and crime. Numerous services withdraw support when young people are transitioning from children's services to adult services. The police are often left to pick up the pieces. The police and others can see that these young adults are not growing out of it, in fact our evidence suggests that a significant number of young adults are on the cusp of entering the revolving door. If we don't intervene we run this risk of people cycling through the system for a decade or more. Young adulthood is the point where we need to intervene more effectively.

There is a plethora of evidence to demonstrate that each contact with the criminal justice system harms future life chances, and that the deeper into the criminal justice system young adults move, the more likely they are to reoffend. A priority for the whole system must be to pro-actively divert young adults in the revolving door away from the criminal justice system and into appropriate support services.

We hope that this evidence about young adults will lead to greater prioritisation of young adults. Revolving Doors Agency will support local areas to deliver change. We are offering support to PCCs and their offices to start the process of working 'up stream' with young adults entering the revolving door of crisis and crime.

Revolving Doors Agency will be offering bespoke consultancy and intensive on the ground support for five areas to kick-start local initiatives. These sites will benefit from our research, lived experience, policy and service design expertise. Our support, which will be free of charge, can help Police and Crime Commissioners and their offices implement new strategies to support better options for young adults, such as deferred prosecutions or diversion schemes to keep young adults out of the criminal justice system.

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Revolving Doors will support local areas to deliver change, we are offering support to PCCs and their offices to start the process of working 'up stream' with young adults entering the revolving door of crisis and crime



Appendix A: Revolving door pattern offences

- Offence type included in this analysis are non-violent offences, including theft, summary non-motoring and some drug offences.
- The analysis focused on low-level crime which is the typical presentation of 'revolving door' cohort to the criminal justice system. These include triable-either-way offences, which can either be tried at the Crown Court or magistrates' court and summary non-motoring offences which are dealt with by the magistrates' court²⁹.

Theft

Included:

- Theft from the person of another
- Theft in dwelling not automatic or meter
- Theft by an employee
- Theft or unauthorised taking from mail
- Theft of pedal cycle
- Theft from vehicle
- Theft from shops, theft from automatic machine or meter, other theft or unauthorised taking
- Theft of a motor vehicle (excluding aggravated vehicle taking)

Excluded:

- Unauthorised taking of motor vehicle, which is a summary motoring offence. In this offence, there is no intention to permanently deprive the owner of their property, unlike with theft offences.

Drug-related offences

Included:

- Possession of a controlled drug (including Class A, B, C, cannabis and unknown class)
- Production, supply and possession with intent to supply a controlled drug including Class A, B, C, cannabis and unknown class)
- Other summary offences under the Drugs Act 2005
- Other offences under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, which may include offences such as knowingly or recklessly giving any information regarding possession, cultivation or supply of any drugs including in shared premises.

Excluded:

- Incite another to supply a controlled drug (class A, B, C, unknown class)
- Forgery etc. of drug prescription
- Motoring offences such as driving a motor vehicle under the influence of drink or drugs; pedal cycle whilst unfit to ride through drink or drugs; causing death by driving without due care or consideration while over prescribed limit; or when under the influence of drinks or drugs; and all other offences related to drink or drug-driving.

Summary non-motoring offences:

Included:

- Offences under Dangerous Dogs Acts – summary
- Protection from Harassment Act 1997 – Summary offence of harassment
- Causing intentional harassment, alarm or distress – summary
- Causing fear or provocation of violence – summary
- Benefit fraud offences – summary
- Housing Act 2005 – Summary S.71(1), (2) & 6 and 95(1) and 5
- Housing Acts- Summary – Other offences
- Town and Country Planning Act 1990 – Summary offences
- Other summary non-motoring offences

Excluded:

- Encouraging or assisting in the commission of one or more, summary, either-way or indictable offences (other than murder)
- Firearms Acts – summary offences
- Racially or religiously aggravated harassment, alarm or distress – summary.

Further resources

Further information and resources are also available at www.t2a.org.uk.

Revolving Doors Agency. 2018. 1,800,000 opportunities http://www.revolving-doors.org.uk/file/2317/download?token=cS_ocem7

Revolving Doors Agency. 2018. Spotlight on Young Adults. <http://www.revolving-doors.org.uk/file/2230/download?token=6OH6Xo32>

Revolving Doors Agency. 2017. 'Under the Spotlight: reviewing police and crime plans for multiple and complex needs, and transition to adulthood.' <http://www.revolvingdoors.org.uk/why-were-here/our-publications>

Revolving Doors Agency and Transition to Adulthood Alliance. 2016. 'Improving responses to young adults: a 'checklist' for police and crime commissioners.' <http://www.revolving-doors.org.uk/documents/improving-responses-to-young-adults/>

Transition to Adulthood Alliance. 2012. 'Pathways from crime: 10 steps to a more effective approach to young adults in the criminal justice process.' <http://www.t2a.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/T2A-Pathways-from-Crime.pdf>


29. If a defendant has a summary offence in addition to the triable-either-way offence, the magistrates' court may also send the summary offence to be tried at the crown court along with the more serious offence.

Revolving Doors Agency

South Bank Technopark
90 London Road
London SE1 6LN

T 020 7407 0747

E admin@revolving-doors.org.uk

 [@RevDoors](https://twitter.com/RevDoors)

