



Youth Justice Data

INTRODUCTION

This document provides an overview of the standard data files used by youth justice's performance and reporting team that may be available to researchers.

The level of detail provided will allow researchers to assess whether datasets available from youth justice are likely to meet their needs. More detailed information is available upon request through the Youth Justice Research and Evaluation team (YJRE).

Youth justice do not have permission to provide data from other departments and agencies (e.g., Police) to third parties. Researchers need to contact other departments directly and seek permission to access their data.

Researchers interested in linking data files across government departments should contact Queensland Government Statisticians Office (QGSO) for availability and costings.

DATA CONTENT

- *Unique identifiers:* youth justice ID (masked), Queensland SPI
- *Demographic characteristics of the young people:* age, sex, sexual orientation and gender identity, geographic location of home address, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identification, ethnicity
- *Offending:* date of offence, QPS offence description, QASOC code, offence seriousness, YJ Offence Group (e.g., Violent, Property, Drug)
- *Restorative Justice (conferencing):* date of referral and completion, conferencing location, offence details (*see above*)
- *Court (including bail and sentencing outcomes):* Initial and final court appearance per offence, bail outcomes, sentencing outcomes, court location, court level and jurisdiction, offence details (*see above*)
- *Youth Justice supervision:* start and end dates, duration, custody, Conditional Bail, sentenced supervised orders, offence details (*see above*)
- *Custody:* custody location, reason young person is held (bail denied, sentenced detention order) start and end dates, incidents, offence details (*see above*)
- *Life experiences and service needs of young people:* mental health, disabilities, behavioural disorders, poverty/homelessness, victimisation of abuse/DFV, family conflict, substance use, engagement in school or work, offending friends and family, parental supervision and parenting practices, young person pregnancy/children, substance use, antisocial attitudes and behaviours, lack of organised recreation or activities, victimisation and enactment of bullying.



DATE RANGES

Start of period: Data is generally available back to 2010; some data is available back to 1 July 2003.

End of period: The Performance and Reporting team typically allows one month for data entry and revisions to occur: this means that there is a one-month lag between the end-of-month snapshot and the reporting period contained in the data available to researchers. Data is therefore available up to two months prior to the date the data is prepared: for example, a dataset prepared in mid-March would reflect the 28 February snapshot; this 28 February snapshot would include transactions up to 31 January.

Researchers typically request date ranges that correspond to calendar years or the standard financial year (1 July to 30 June). However, date ranges for the data files can be for any time span required.

Note that researchers should take into consideration naturally occurring time lags, and the time required for organisational processes to occur. For example, analyses on young person offending should allow time for the young person's offences to be detected and either charged or referred to restorative justice; offences sent to court will require time for the court case to reach completion before any sentencing decisions would occur.

CHANGES IN DATA OVER TIME

Note that noteworthy changes in youth justice's structure, operations, or the broader environment (e.g., pandemics) may constitute "breaks in the series". Researchers should consider these changes when examining patterns over time. Some considerations (presented in approximate chronological order) are:

- There were substantial changes to youth justice legislation which came into effect on 1 July 2003: these affected youth justice practice as well as the orders available for sentencing. For this reason, youth justice typically does not provide data prior to 1 July 2003.
- Risk Assessment (YLS/CMI) data is first available in October 2008; in 2016 there was a staged implementation of the version 2.0 of the YLS/CMI, which added variables and revised the method of calculating risk.
- There are substantial undercounts in Detention data for 2008-09 and 2009-10, and minor undercounts in 2010-11.
- The date of an offence is not robustly available prior to 2011.
- The date of a first appearance for a charged offence is not robustly populated prior to August 2011.
- Incidents data is not robustly available prior to April 2011.
- Court-ordered conferencing (Restorative Justice) data is available for the six months prior to January 2013. Court-ordered conferencing was then suspended from 1 January 2013 to 1 July 2016, and then resumed. (Police-initiated conferencing was still in effect during this period.) This means that a "complete" variable of conferencing activity will typically begin with 1 July 2016.
- "Domestic violence" as an aggravating characteristic in the QPS offence description did not occur prior to 2014-15



- “Finding of Guilt While on Bail” was an offence that was in effect from March 2014 to July 2016: if a young person was found guilty of an offence committed while on bail, the young person would also be guilty of this offence. Some researchers consider this to be “double-counting” of offences, and thus exclude this offence from their calculation of offences.
- Prior to January 2015, all females held at YDCs were held in Brisbane; on 22 January 2015 females began being admitted to Cleveland YDC (Townsville): these changes may impact bail and sentencing decision-making.
- Prior to 2015, Incidents at YDCs were recorded by the single most serious category for the event (e.g., if there was property damage and an assault on staff, the Incident was recorded as “Assault on staff”). Starting in 2015, Incident data began being recorded as “tick all that apply”. This means that Incident types that were not the most serious Incident type would be undercounted prior to 2015.
- The variables contained in the annual Youth Justice Census are available from 2017 to the present: although YJ Census is available prior to 2017, the wording for some items were still being refined, and thus will not be directly compatible with similar items from 2017 and after.
- Prior to 12 February 2018, offences committed by young people who were seventeen years old at the time of the offence were dealt with in the adult system; after 12 February 2018 these offences were dealt with in the Youth Justice system. The inclusion of seventeen-year-old offenders under youth justice resulted in substantial changes in court volumes, caseloads, number of offences, and the age profile within Youth Justice.
- Beginning in March 2018 there have been intermittent periods where some young people that otherwise would have been held at a YDC were instead held at the watchhouses. This means that researchers examining trends in custody levels should consider “Youth Justice Custody” as a system, rather than the Youth Detention Centres in isolation.
- 2019-20 was an anomaly due to the COVID-19 pandemic response. Court processes in Q4 of 2019-20 were delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This appears to have resulted in a displacement of court appearances (and thus charged offences, finalisations, proven offences, and the sentencing of orders) from Q4 of 2019-20 to later quarters. This displacement should be considered when examining patterns over time: as of March 2022, Performance and Reporting (Youth Justice) recommends comparing 2020-21 data to 2018-19, rather than to 2019-20.
 - The courts may have made efforts to limit the number of young people sent to the detention centres during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic response: they may have increased the granting of bail (rather than holding young people in remand) and may have limited the number of Detention Orders sentenced. These possible changes in court practices have not been directly tested but should be considered by researchers when using Youth Justice custody data.
- There have been substantial changes to Youth Detention Centre capacities over the years, including the introduction of the West Moreton YDC in December of 2020: variations in YDC capacity may impact bail and sentencing decision-making.
- The client management system that provides most of youth justice's data begin transitioning from ICMS to Unify in 2021: this means that data from before and after this period of change may differ in their recording practices, and the underlying meaning of variables, and the availability of specific variables.
- There was a graduated transition from PAC to CART techniques in working with young people during Incidents at Youth Detention Centres, which occurred from Sept 2021 to Dec 2022.



This means that the rates of incidents, and manner of resolution, may not be directly comparable before and after this period.

- Legislative changes that came into effect on 22 March 2023 changed Youth Justice bail/remand decision-making, sentencing practices, and age limits for young people transferred for Youth Detention Centres to adult custody. The legislative changes also introduced a “Breach of bail conditions” offence and added “Publishing the details of the offence on social media” as an aggravating characteristic for an Unlawful Use of Motor Vehicle offence. Finally, the legislation changes expanded the use of Electronic Monitoring Devices as a condition of bail.

DATA STRUCTURES

- The data structure varies from dataset to dataset: often youth justice will have datasets with similar content but with different data structures and will use the data structure that best aligns with the task at hand.
- The three basic structures are:
 - One row per young person per day (e.g., "per day in custody")
 - One row per transaction or event (e.g., "per court appearance", "per offence", "per risk assessment form")
 - One row per duration (e.g., "per period of supervision")
- Performance and reporting will work with the researchers to determine the data structure that would best align with their intended analysis.
- An incident is an occurrence that has a moderate to serious impact on people, property, or the good order/security of a youth detention centre.
- Many of these items are only available for young people under Youth Justice supervision and are not available for "court only" young people, with whom the department has much less direct interaction.