

Drug, violent crime up among youths: Statscan

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Canadian youth crime rates rose 3 per cent from 2005 to 2006 but have dropped 6 per cent overall in the last decade and 25 per cent since they peaked in 1991, according to a report released by Statistics Canada Friday.

While overall crime rates have dropped, youth violent crimes have increased 30 per cent since 1991.

Violent crime has risen 12 per cent in the last ten years among youths, while the overall violent crime rate in Canada declined 4 per cent in the same time period. Nearly 80 per cent of youth involved in violent crime were accused of assault. Most of those charges were common assault — the least serious form.

Homicide rates have risen 41 per cent since 1997, one of the largest increases in the last ten years.

Internet Links

- Youth Crime, 2006. Statistics Canada [↗](#)



A trend that Dr. Nick Bala, a youth justice expert at Queens University, calls “worrisome.”

Both the number and rate of youth homicides reached their highest point since data were first collected in 1961, only five years earlier the youth homicide rate was at a record low. Given the relatively low number of youth committing homicides, rates are prone to large fluctuations; homicides represent only about 0.5 per cent of youth crime.

The numbers appear salient but could be attributed to increasingly vigilant reporting, according to Dr. Bala.

“Schools are more likely to report crimes to police now than deal with them internally,” he said.

Drug related youth crimes have nearly doubled in the last decade. While the majority of these charges are cannabis-related, the proportion of cocaine and other drug offences have more than doubled in the same time period.

Property crimes involving youth have dropped to their lowest point in a decade, including a 47 per cent decline in break-ins, and a 33 per cent drop in minor theft — the two most common criminal offences for youth.

Motor vehicle theft was also down 41 per cent from ten years earlier.

All provinces except Quebec, reported an annual increase in youth crime rates in 2006 with Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia reporting the largest increases.

Quebec reported the lowest youth crime rate and Saskatchewan the highest.

Despite the 3 per cent overall increase in total youth crime in 2006, the rate of youth formally charged or recommended for charging dropped 1 per cent from 2005 and 27 per cent from 2002, the year before the enactment of the Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA) The YCJA, which replaced the Young Offenders Act, requires police to consider the use of non-court measures for youths aged 12 to 17 who have committed less serious offences before laying a charge.

According to the report, a primary objective of the YCJA is to divert youth involved in minor crimes away from the formal justice system -- a system experts say has been effective.

“The report shows that you can reduce the use of courts and custody without seeing an increase in crime -- youth crime is down,” said Dr. Bala, “sending people to custody is not an effective way to deter or prevent crime.”

Dr. Bala cites the need for better policing, employment, mental health programs and gun control to curb rising violent crime.

The proportion of youth apprehended by the police but not formally charged has generally been on the rise. But serious crimes still consistently warranted criminal charges while offences involving less serious penalties were less likely to result in criminal charges.

The study, by the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics (CCJS), used police reported data to track youth crime trends.

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