

Young state care leavers a crime risk

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For the majority of young people in state care, offending behaviour started at the age of 12 to 13, with assault, theft, substance use and property damage the main offences.

A Victorian study has found that young people transitioning out of state care are at greater risk of entering the youth justice system than other young people.

Associate Professor Philip Mendes, Director of the Social Inclusion and Social Policy Research Unit in the Department of Social Work, with Monash University colleagues Associate Professor Pamela Snow and

Susan Baidawi, collected data from interviews with 15 Victorian care-leavers aged from 18 to 26, who had also entered the youth [justice system](#).

They found the most vulnerable [young people](#) appeared to be those who were in residential rather than [foster care](#), had little positive adult support networks, had difficulties at school, were involved in [substance abuse](#), had other family members in prison, and did not have access to formal post-care support.

For the majority of young people, offending behaviour started at the age of 12 to 13, with assault, theft, substance use and property damage the main offences. By the age of 16, all of the young people had entered out-of-home care, engaged in offending, become involved with Youth Justice and become disengaged from education.

These young people reported entering out-of-home care in adolescence as a result of substance use, violence and other offending, family conflict or running away, abuse and neglect. In most cases, care-leavers entering the youth justice system often had specific experiences of abuse or trauma.

"One of the most noteworthy themes was the general lack of knowledge and recall of many young people concerning the precise reasons they were involved with Youth Justice, or the orders which they had been placed under," Dr Mendes said.

"It appears that the chaotic nature of young people's lives and offending made it very difficult for them to make connections between their own behaviour and the various judicial consequences which they experienced as a result."

When asked what could be done to reduce offending among young

people leaving care, the respondents outlined the three areas of care, containment and treatment, including more one-to-one attention from workers and carers, curfews and strict consequences for breaking rules and greater support for mental health and substance abuse.

The report made a number of recommendations for addressing offending behaviour in young people leaving out of home care, such as that trauma-informed post-care models, including housing and educational supports, be developed as a priority to prevent care-leavers from entering adult prisons.

This report presents the results of the second phase of the Leaving Care and Youth Justice project, which aimed to generate a more in depth understanding of the involvement of care leavers in the Youth Justice system.

More information: Read the complete report:
[www.academia.edu/5218450/Young ... ow and Susan Baidawi](http://www.academia.edu/5218450/Young_state_care_leavers_a_crime_risk)

Provided by Monash University

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