

Juvenile justice: A new national collection

Box 1: Juvenile Justice NMDS Data Dictionary Version 1.0

Data items

| Juvenile justice client | Juvenile justice episode | Juvenile justice institution |
|---|---|---|
| Unique client ID | Entry date | Centre name |
| Letters of name | Reason for intervention | Centre postcode |
| Date of birth | Transferred from | Juvenile justice remand/detention centre capacity |
| Sex | Most serious offence type | Number of juvenile justice detainees |
| Indigenous status | Sentence severity: hours of community service | Escapes |
| Country of birth | Sentence severity: number of days of sentence | |
| Last known home suburb/locality/town name | Juvenile justice agency name | |
| Last known home postcode | Juvenile justice agency postcode | |
| Statistical linkage key | Exit date | |
| | Reason for exit | |

Data concepts

A juvenile justice client was defined as:

A person who has committed an offence or allegedly committed an offence whilst between the ages of at least 10 years and less than 18 years and who, as a consequence, is under the supervision of, or is case-managed by, a juvenile justice department.

A juvenile justice episode was defined as:

A period of time during which a client is under the supervision of, or is case managed by, a state or territory juvenile justice department, under a specific legal order or arrangement.

Field and pilot testing the draft Juvenile Justice National Minimum Data Set v1.0

Prior to testing, decisions were required on how the client collection data would be collated and reported—would the collection be aggregate or unit record data, snapshot (single point in time) or episode based (flow data)?

The recommendation that the collection be episode-based unit record data was accepted by AJJA, the NCSIMG and CSMAC. Field and pilot testing began on the draft NMDS items during 2002 and 2003.

Field testing was conducted in early 2002, with the AIHW visiting each jurisdiction to assess the feasibility of collecting the draft NMDS data items. Several issues were highlighted during this process, and decisions made to alter or eliminate certain data items. The details of this are outlined below in the section on changes to data items.

Generally, it was recognised that most jurisdictions would need to change the way that they collect and record some client information in order to comply with the requirements of the Juvenile Justice NMDS. This would necessitate changes to data

management systems and training for personnel in data collection methods. It was also found that in many jurisdictions, the information required for the NMDS was not held in one data collection, but had to be extracted from a number of sources. Resource and time implications of these difficulties were noted.

Major changes to data items as a result of field and pilot testing

Juvenile justice client

The field testing highlighted the fact that in some jurisdictions, young people aged over 17 years may be subject to juvenile justice supervision. In other jurisdictions, young people who committed a crime when aged 17 years may be supervised in the adult system. It was decided that the aim should be to collect information on all persons in the juvenile justice system. The definition of a client for the purposes of inclusion in the Juvenile Justice NMDS was therefore amended to:

A person who is under the supervision or case management of the juvenile justice department as a result of:

- having committed or allegedly committed an offence between the ages of 10 years and 17 years; OR
- having committed or allegedly committed an offence at age greater than 17 years, and who is treated as a juvenile due to his or her vulnerability or immaturity.

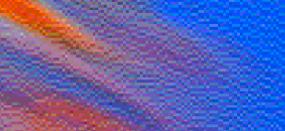
Court variation to conditions

Difficulties in coding the information required for this proposed data item were raised by a number of jurisdictions during pilot testing. It had been included in an attempt to provide additional information to help explain differences in episode length. It was decided, however, that this is a complex area, and that one data item could not sufficiently provide this information. This data item was therefore deleted from the NMDS.

Cultural and linguistic diversity

A number of data items were included in the initial NMDS draft. Jurisdictions noted that the collection of this information in accordance with Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) standards is problematic, since it requires a level of detail rarely captured in administrative data. This was recognised by the ABS as a problem encountered in a number of different sectors. It was decided to field test the following data items:

- Indigenous status
- Main language other than English spoken at home
- Country of birth
- Mother's country of birth



Juvenile justice: A new national collection

Following the field testing, it was decided that Indigenous status and country of birth would be the cultural and linguistic diversity items to remain in the NMDS. Privacy concerns were raised in relation to mother's country of birth, as it is information about a person other than the client (and it was only routinely collected by one jurisdiction). Main language other than English spoken at home, was not collected by the majority of jurisdictions. These items may be included in future developments of the Juvenile Justice NMDS.

The detail required for Indigenous status was seen as problematic, especially given that Indigenous status is often recorded as a result of identification by others, rather than by the clients themselves. However, the importance of this information and the maintenance of national standards around it meant that Indigenous status will be retained in its current form, with jurisdictions making changes to their identification and recording systems as required in order to comply. It was agreed that until the quality of the data could be assured, the categories would be collapsed for reporting purposes to 'Indigenous origin', 'non-Indigenous origin' and 'Unknown'.

Similarly, country of birth is currently not recorded in a consistent way across jurisdictions. Some changes would be required to systems and data recording practices in order to collect this information in a nationally comparable format. The usefulness of this data was questioned, because the aim is to collect information on the ethnic group with which the young person identifies, rather than specifically their place of birth. It was decided to delete the country of birth data item, and draft a replacement—cultural and linguistic background. This data item was left blank for the pilot test, but will be defined for inclusion in the future.

Juvenile justice episodes

The field testing highlighted difficulties in providing information on concurrent juvenile justice episodes, particularly for a national data collection. It was decided that the important concept in capturing this information is to describe what happened to the juvenile, rather than the actual orders handed down from courts. This is considered to be able to provide more meaningful and comparable national data, and to minimise confusion arising from inter-jurisdictional differences.

A number of changes were made following this decision. Firstly, the two data items in version 1.0 relating to sentence severity were deleted. The definition of an episode was changed, to remove reference to legal orders. The definition adopted in version 1.3 is:

A period of time during which a client is under the supervision of, or is case managed by, a state or territory juvenile justice department, as a result of having committed or allegedly committed, an offence, and where there is no change in the type of supervision provided or the specific juvenile justice agency responsible.

In order to facilitate the move away from recording concurrent episodes, a hierarchy of episode types was established, with detention as the highest or most serious. This hierarchy was changed just prior to pilot testing to ensure that periods of remand served while on a community sentence are recorded, since it was seen as important to capture

all periods of time spent in detention. Following some post pilot test amendments to the wording used to describe an episode type, the latest agreed hierarchy is (from most to least serious):

1. sentenced—detention
2. pre-sentence—court referred—remanded in juvenile justice facility
3. pre-sentence—police referred—held in juvenile justice facility
4. sentenced—home detention
5. sentenced—immediate release or suspended detention
6. sentenced—parole or supervised release
7. sentenced—other community based—supervision and other mandated requirements (e.g. work or attendance at a program)
8. sentenced—community based—supervision without additional mandated requirements
9. sentenced—other
10. pre-sentence—court referred—supervised bail
11. pre-sentence—police referred—other
12. other

Reason for intervention—episode type

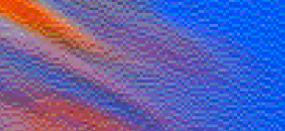
With the move away from describing legal orders to describing the experience of the young people in the system, the reason for intervention data item was refined. The name was changed to episode type, to more accurately reflect that it describes the types of episodes that a juvenile could be experiencing. Its definition was also changed, removing the reference to legal orders, since an episode is not the same as a legal order:

The legal arrangement that has resulted in the juvenile justice client being supervised or case managed by the juvenile justice department.

Offence data

The NMDS Data Dictionary v1.0 which was piloted included data items measuring the most serious offence type. The ABS Australian Standard Offence Classification (ASOC) system was to be used as the basis for the definitions of the offences. The ASOC codes however, were not designed to be used as a hierarchy of seriousness, which led to some debate over their appropriateness for the NMDS. Concerns were also raised that data on the most serious offence may be inappropriately linked with sentence length data and produce misleading conclusions. Most juvenile justice clients have multiple offences or groups of offences, which may not be directly linked to episode types.

It was decided to delete the most serious offence type data item and replace it with several offence type data items. Information on the broad offence types committed by



Juvenile justice: A new national collection

juvenile justice clients was identified as an area of interest nationally. All offences associated with an episode would be recorded using broad ASOC codes. This would remove both the need to establish an agreed hierarchy of offence types, and the representation of a causal relationship between offence information and episode types.

During the pilot testing process, it was found that not all jurisdictions could comply with the ASOC codes for offence type. Concerns about the possibilities of misinterpretation of the data were also raised once again due to the complex relationship between episode type/length and offence data. It was felt that more accurate sources of data on offences and sentences were available elsewhere, such as court data.

A decision was made to delete all items relating to offence data from the Juvenile Justice NMDS pending further investigation. It is expected, however, that offence data in some form will be included in the NMDS at a future time.

Sentence severity

In accordance with the concerns regarding offence data, along with the decision to record only the most serious current episode for each client, it was decided that the data items for sentence severity were no longer meaningful. The complexities involved in determining the sentence to be recorded, consistently across jurisdictions, meant that it would be extremely difficult to provide meaningful results. The NMDS does not allow for the recording of information such as backdating of sentences, remission, suspended detention sentences or parole complexities. Therefore two data items—sentence severity—number of days of sentence and sentence severity—hours of community service—were deleted from the data set.

Supervision period

Following the pilot testing, a new concept of a supervision period was devised for analytical purposes. A supervision period is defined in version 1.3 as:

A period of time during which a juvenile justice client is under the supervision of, or is case managed by, a state or territory juvenile justice department, as a result of having committed or allegedly committed an offence.

A supervision period pertains to continuous contact with the juvenile justice system resulting from offences being committed or allegedly committed. One supervision period may contain several juvenile justice episodes as the client moves through the system, e.g. from remand to sentencing, and may contain more than one sentencing episode where continuous supervision is maintained. The supervision period begins on the entry date of the first juvenile justice episode for which the client is under juvenile justice supervision, and ends on the episode exit date when juvenile justice supervision ceases. A new supervision period begins when the client is next under juvenile justice department supervision. Thus there will be a gap in time between supervision periods, whilst the client is in the community and not subject to any juvenile justice department supervision.

Juvenile justice supervision periods allow the analysis of repeated contacts with the juvenile justice system. This is in contrast to juvenile justice episodes which allow for the analysis of progression through the juvenile justice system within juvenile justice supervision periods.

Escapes

The data item in the centre collection relating to escapes (of at least 7 days in length) was expanded to differentiate between escapes from the actual detention centre and escapes from secure escorts. The options agreed to are:

- Escapes from within a secure perimeter of a juvenile justice remand/detention centre
- Escapes from other legal custody, whilst escorted and under juvenile justice supervision
- Escapes from a juvenile justice remand/detention centre that result in a charge of escape

Issues for future inclusion in the Juvenile Justice NMDS

The NMDS in its current form represents a starting point for the collection of nationally relevant information on young people involved in juvenile justice systems in Australia. There are a number of remaining areas of interest which, for a variety of reasons, have yet to be included in the data set. Development of the data set and performance indicators will continue, and it is hoped that information such as the following will be available in the future:

- Juveniles held in police watch houses
- Juveniles held in adult detention facilities
- Offence data
- Diversion data, e.g. conferencing
- Pre-sentence reports
- Cultural and linguistic background—draft data item to be defined

As of August 2004, the *Juvenile Justice NMDS Data Dictionary v1.3* contains the data items shown in Box 2.

Implementation of the Juvenile Justice NMDS

Management of the national collection

In May 2004 the Australasian Juvenile Justice Administrators (AJJA) endorsed the creation of a permanent committee (Data Sub-committee (DSC)) with the delegation to implement the Juvenile Justice NMDS and manage the performance of the data custodian and all data issues that arise in the course of dealing with and reporting on the Juvenile Justice NMDS. A member of AJJA will chair this committee, and the secretariat will be the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW).