

Report summary: The age distribution of crime by offence type in Queensland

Background

Age-crime curves plot the age-specific rates of offending and have been used to establish changes in the age distribution of crime both nationally and internationally. Previous work undertaken by the Queensland Government Statistician's Office (QGSO) (QGSO 2021a) aligns with other research findings and showed a decline in offender rates among younger people and increases in offender rates among people in their 30s and 40s when comparing 2008–09 with 2017–18. These changes in the age-crime curve were apparent for male and female offenders, as well as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous offenders. QGSO's prior research also indicated that the average number of times offenders had contact with police increased over time for both younger and older offenders.

The project described in this report aimed to better understand the differential changes evident in Queensland-based age-crime curves by investigating if decreases in offending among younger people and increases among older people were related to the types of offences being committed. The project also involved examining if changing patterns of recidivism differed by age as found elsewhere (Howard and Corben 2018).

Research approach

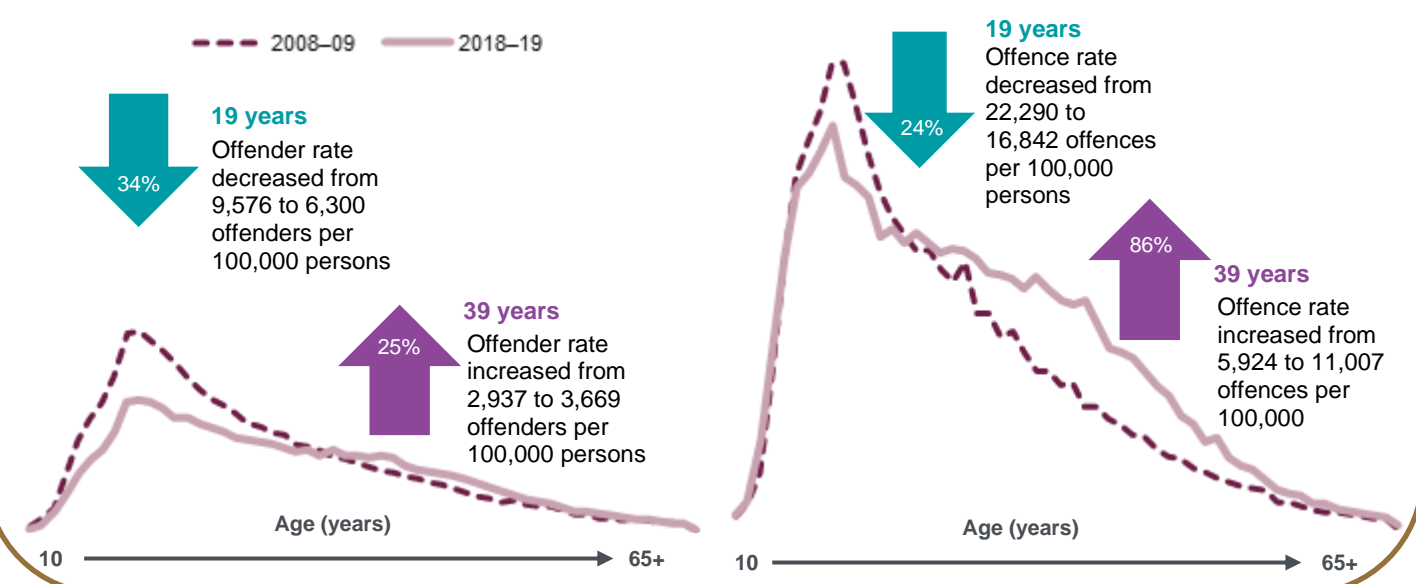
Age-crime curves for 2008–09 and 2018–19 were constructed to update previous QGSO findings and examine changes in the age-specific rates of offending and offences using police administrative data in relation to personal, property and 'other' offences. These established that changes were mostly attributable to those aged 14–49 years, and that offending patterns for younger and older offenders were different. From this, changes in the types and frequency of offenders and offences for those aged 14–29 years (younger offenders) and 30–49 years (older offenders) were compared in more detail. Changes in the frequency of prior offending were also explored by comparing the four-year retrospective offence counts of offenders.

The specific research questions addressed by the project were:

1. How has the age distribution of offending changed over time?
2. Is the change in the age distribution of offenders related to changes in types of offences being committed and the frequency of offending?
3. Is the change in the age distribution of offenders related to changes in prior offending?

Key findings

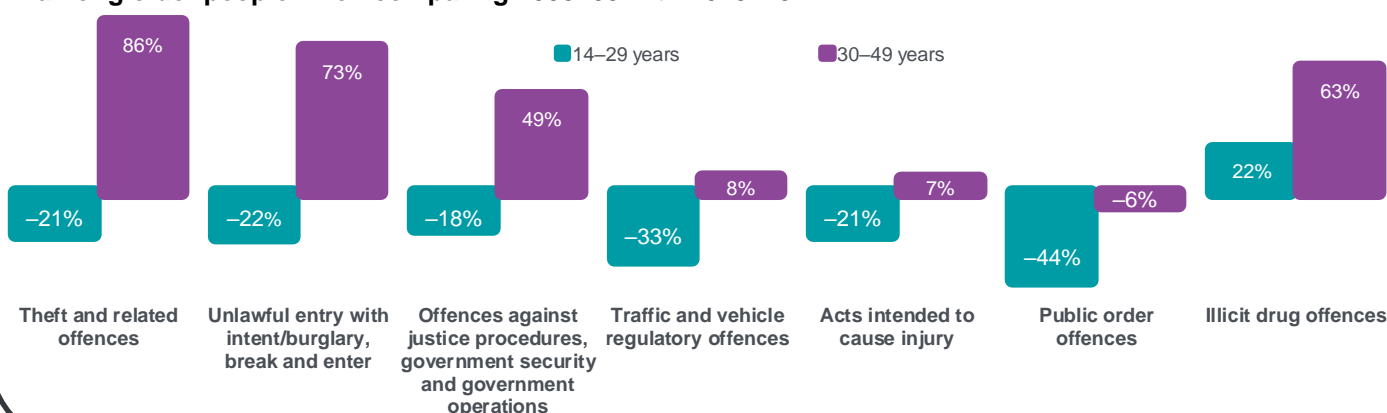
There has been a change in the age distribution of offenders, with a decrease in offender and offence rates among younger people and an increase among older people when comparing 2008–09 with 2018–19.



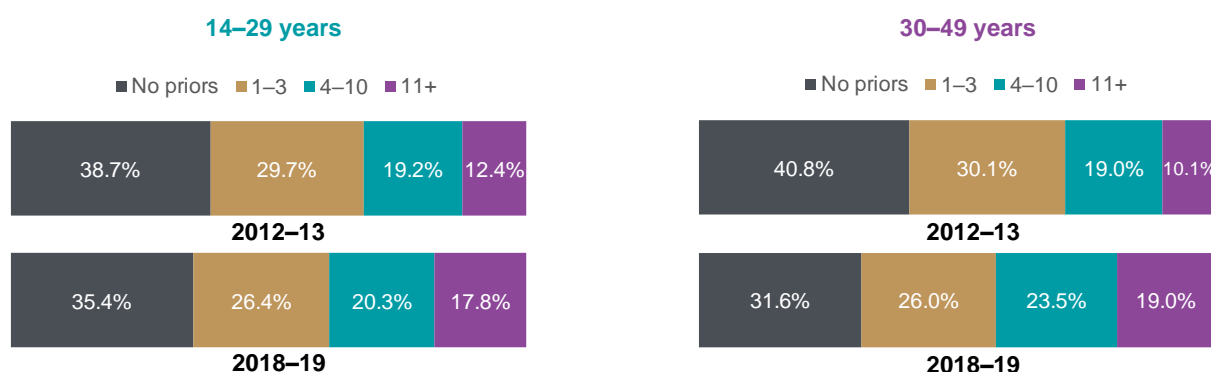
The average number of offences per offender increased for both younger and older offenders when comparing 2008–09 with 2018–19.



There were substantial decreases in offender rates for *traffic and vehicle regulatory offences* and *public order offences* among younger people, and substantial increases in *theft and related offences*, *unlawful entry with intent/burglary, break and enter*, *illicit drug offences*, and *offences against justice procedures* among older people when comparing 2008–09 with 2018–19.



The prevalence of no prior offending within the previous four years has become less prevalent among both younger and older offenders.



Conclusion

This project has shown that changes in the age-distribution of crime vary across different types of crime, which has implications for the development of targeted criminal justice interventions. In particular, the research showed increases in the prevalence of offenders among older people; and unlike younger offenders, older offenders were characterised by rising theft and illicit drug offending. The results also indicate more frequent and persistent offending by both younger and older offenders. These results highlight the relevance of interventions designed to address factors possibly contributing to people's entrenched involvement in crime.