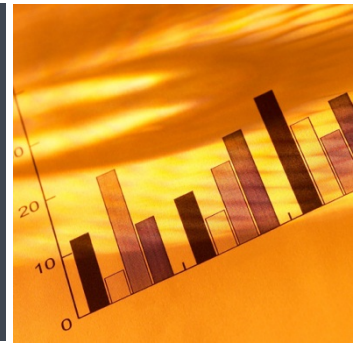


# Transitions From Juvenile Delinquency to Young Adult Offending: A Review of Canadian and International Evidence



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This review examines Canadian and international longitudinal studies concerning the transition from juvenile delinquency to young adult offending.

## Background

Police-reported data shows that young adults aged 18-24 have the highest rates of criminal offending of any age group in Canada. In 2014, there were over 183,000 young adults accused of crimes by the police, representing a rate of 5,428 persons accused per 100,000 young adults. In comparison, the rates for youth aged 12-17 (4,322) and 25-29 (4,712) were lower. Therefore, reducing offending in the young adult years should be a priority and could have a big impact on the total crime rate.

It is critical to understand why juvenile delinquents continue to offend in the young adult years and to make recommendations about how this transition to young adult offending can be most effectively prevented.

## Method

This report reviews the most relevant Canadian longitudinal studies in detail and briefly mentions some of the most pertinent findings from longitudinal studies that were carried out in other countries. Longitudinal research beginning in the juvenile years and continuing at least up to age 24 was used since under Canadian law youth criminal records are purged after a certain time period. Thus, beginning with an adult sample would miss many juvenile offences. Longitudinal studies based on community samples were preferable to studies based on samples of offenders because representative samples of offenders emerge naturally from an initially non-delinquent sample, allowing the prevalence of juvenile offending to be determined more accurately. This literature review was used to answer key questions concerning transitions from juvenile delinquency to young adult offending.

The key questions are as follows:

- What proportion of juvenile offenders up to age 17 become young adult offenders at age 18-24?
- To what extent is there specific continuity in types of crimes, as opposed to versatility in offending?
- To what extent can the probability of persistence into young adult offending be predicted, based on features of the previous criminal career?
- To what extent can different features of young adult criminal careers, such as the frequency and duration of offending, and the monetary cost of offences, be predicted from earlier features of juvenile careers?
- To what extent can the probability of persistence into young adult offending be predicted, based on earlier risk and protective factors?
- To what extent do all findings vary with gender, ethnic/national origin, and different community or provincial contexts?

## Findings

Canadian and international longitudinal research shows that: (1) convicted juvenile offenders are much more likely than are those who are not convicted as juveniles to be convicted as young adults; and (2) the majority of convicted juvenile offenders are reconvicted as young adults. Early impulsiveness, poor child-rearing, family stressors, separations from parents, antisocial associates, and antisocial attitudes predict persistence in offending. Indigenous offenders are somewhat more likely to persist into young adult offending than non-Indigenous offenders, and risk factors for persistence are somewhat different for Indigenous and non-Indigenous offenders. Financial problems and



antisocial associates are important risk factors for young Indigenous offenders.

Whereas international longitudinal research shows that the probability of persisting in the young adult years increases with the number of juvenile offences committed, Canadian longitudinal studies have mixed findings about whether an early age of onset in the juvenile years predicts persistence in the young adult years. More research is needed on the predictive utility of an early compared to a later age of juvenile onset.

Canadian and international longitudinal research demonstrates that the monetary cost of juvenile offending predicts the cost of correctional dispositions related to adult offending. However, the costs of juvenile offending have not been shown to be predictive of the victim costs linked with adult offending.

### Implications

More Canadian research is needed on how the onset of offending predicts persistence in offending in the young adult years, and on the particular types of juvenile crimes that predict particular types of adult crimes. More Canadian research is also needed on risk factors and risk/needs assessment instruments that predict the persistence of offending, especially on protective factors that prevent the continuation of offending into the adult years. Research gaps also exist regarding self-reported offending, female offending, Indigenous offending, and on predicting the monetary cost of young adult offending careers.

There would be value in reanalyzing existing Canadian longitudinal studies to advance knowledge about the transition from juvenile delinquency to young adult offending. Ideally, a new longitudinal study on the development of offending in Canada, preferably based in a large city, should be mounted. Another possibility would be to collect information about offending in an existing Canadian longitudinal study of children and youth.

### Recommendations

Effective programs should be implemented to prevent the transition from juvenile delinquency to young adult offending. Also, new methods of dealing with young adult offenders could be piloted in Canada.

Possibilities include: (1) increasing the minimum age for adult court; (2) applying a “maturity discount” to young adult offenders, which involves giving less severe dispositions if their judgment is immature; (3) establishing special courts for young adult offenders; (4) establishing special correctional facilities for young adult offenders; and (5) using risk/needs assessment and screening of young adult offenders to assess risk and protective factors and the maturity of brain functioning.

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### Source

Farrington, D.P. (2017). *Transitions From Juvenile Delinquency to Young Adult Offending: A Review of Canadian and International Evidence*. Ottawa: Public Safety Canada.

### Additional Sources

Farrington, D. P. (2017). *Transitions From Juvenile Delinquency to Young Adult Offending: A Review of Canadian and International Evidence- Research Highlights*. Ottawa: Public Safety Canada.

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