

5 Regular Multiple Offenders

Regular multiple offenders consist of those who self-reported having ever been a regular offender of one or more violent offences and one or more property offences (n=311). This sample does not include regular offenders of any fraud offence.

Regular multiple offenders represented 15 per cent of the total inmate population interviewed in this study. The majority (57 per cent) were aged between 21 and 30 years of age, with relatively few offenders (15 per cent) aged 36 years or older (table 5.1). In terms of the general age profile, regular multiple offenders were not dissimilar to regular property offenders, but younger on average than regular violent offenders.

One in three regular multiple offenders identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and very few (two per cent) reported never having been to school. A large proportion (42 per cent) had completed TAFE or technical college, and 16 per cent had completed year 10. More than half (57 per cent) of all regular multiple offenders had a history of juvenile detention. Compared with the total DUCO male sample, regular multiple offenders were more likely to have been incarcerated as a juvenile.

Offending Histories

Regular multiple offenders have extensive offending careers spanning all offence categories including violent, property and drug offences. All reported to have offended across a number of different offences at least once in their lifetime and almost 100 per cent self-reported having ever committed three or more of the offences as asked by the DUCO male survey. When broken down among specific offence types, 90 per cent self-reported having committed a break and enter offence while just over 80 per cent had stolen a motor vehicle. This group of offenders typified the more serious, frequent and chronic offenders within the incarcerated population. They are particularly problematic for criminal justice organisations and are important for correctional and community policy initiatives because of their prolific offending.

Table 5.1 Demographic characteristics for regular multiple offenders

	n	%
Age distribution		
18–20	42	14
21–25	91	29
26–30	86	28
31–35	45	15
36+	47	15
<i>(Total)</i>	<i>(311)</i>	<i>(100)</i>
Indigenous status		
Indigenous	94	32
Non-Indigenous	204	69
<i>(Total)</i>	<i>(298)</i>	<i>(100)</i>
Educational attainment		
Never went to school	7	2
Completed some primary school	1	0
Primary school	89	29
Year 10	51	16
Apprenticeship	19	6
Year 12	7	2
TAFE/technical college	130	42
Tertiary	7	2
<i>(Total)</i>	<i>(311)</i>	<i>(100)</i>
Prior juvenile detention	176	57

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO Male Survey, 2001 [Computer File]

The violent offences most likely to be ever committed were physical assault (91 per cent) and robbery without a weapon (63 per cent). Few offenders (12 per cent) within this sample reported having ever committed a sex offence. In terms of regular offending, the most common offences were physical assault (54 per cent), break and enter (71 per cent), and trading stolen goods (59 per cent). Ninety-five per cent reported having regularly committed more than three offence types in their criminal careers.

Drug offending was common. Ninety-two per cent reported having bought illegal drugs while 65 per cent reported having sold them. This decreases to 85 per cent reporting regularly purchasing illegal drugs and 49 per cent reporting regularly selling illegal drugs. A larger proportion of regular multiple offenders self reported buying illegal drugs than regular property offenders or regular violent offenders.

Table 5.2 Prevalence of offending for regular multiple offenders

	Ever		Regular		Escalation
	n	%	n	%	%
Property offences					
Break and enter	280	90	221	71	79
Stealing without break in	254	82	159	52	63
Motor vehicle theft	260	84	159	51	61
Traded in stolen goods	248	80	182	59	73
Vandalism	179	58	70	23	39
Violent offences					
Physical assault	284	91	168	54	59
Armed robbery	189	61	130	42	69
Robbery without a weapon	196	63	118	38	60
Sexual offence	36	12	19	6	53
Killed someone	29	10	3	0	0
Drug offences					
Bought illegal drugs	286	92	264	85	92
Sell illegal drugs	201	65	151	49	75
Fraud offences					
Fraud	88	28	–	–	–
Multiple offences					
Three or more offences	310	100	295	95	95
Three or more property offences	270	87	156	50	58
Three or more violent offences	140	45	0	0	0

Escalation = 'regular' divided by 'ever'.

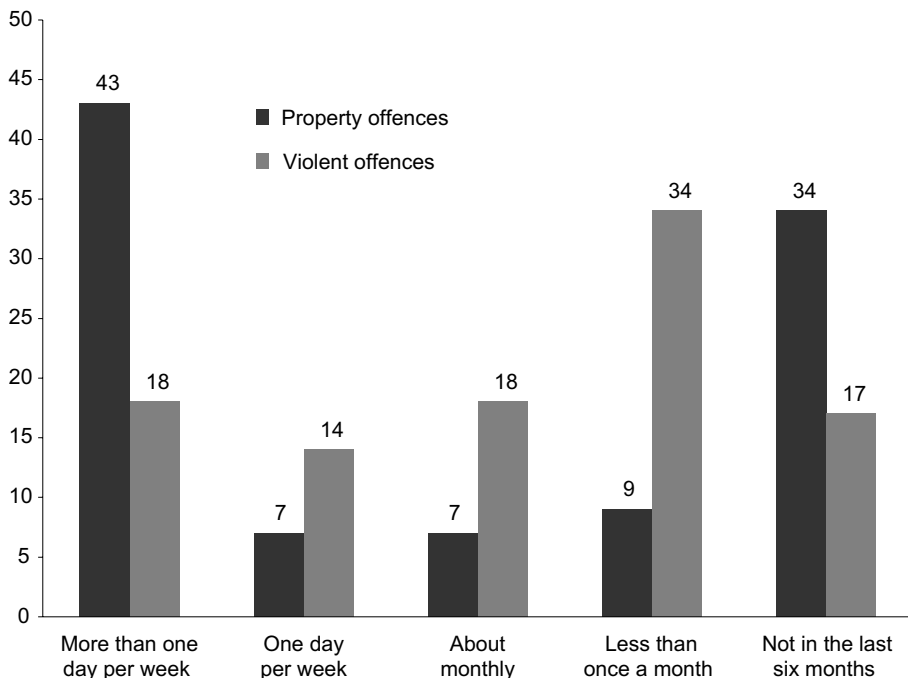
Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO Male Survey, 2001 [Computer File]

More than 80 per cent of regular multiple offenders reported committing at least one violent offence during the six months prior to the arrest for which they are now in prison, while 66 per cent reported having committed a property offence (see figure 5.1). The trend in these data suggest that fewer regular multiple offenders reported property offending than violent offending in the six months prior to the most recent arrest. However of those that did, the frequency of offending was much greater. Forty-three per cent of regular multiple offenders reported committing property offences on more than one day per week. This compares to only 18 per cent of offenders reporting violent offending at the same frequency. The frequency of violent offences are skewed to the lower end with 34 per cent reporting that they had committed a violent offence less than once a month in this time.

It is possible that individual perceptions of regular offending are influenced by the seriousness of some violent crimes. That is, one violent offence per week might be defined as regular offending while five property offences per week may need to be committed before offenders would self-define themselves as a 'regular'. Furthermore, the classification of offenders into a particular crime type is based on ever having been a regular offender, which may or may not have occurred in the six months prior to the arrest for which they are now in prison. This may have implications to the offending frequencies presented for regular property and regular violent offenders in earlier chapters.

On average these offenders reported a total of 56 charges within their lifetime, and of these charges, an average of 45 resulted in a conviction (see table 5.3). The conversion between charge and conviction suggests that approximately eight in every ten charges imposed on a regular multiple offender resulted in a criminal conviction. Furthermore, of all convictions received by regular multiple offenders, it was reported that 47 per cent resulted in a prison sentence. The mean number of convictions resulting in a prison sentence was 21.

Figure 5.1 Volume of offending in the six months prior to arrest for regular multiple offenders (per cent)



Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO Male Survey, 2001 [Computer File]

Similar results were found for specific offence types. For property offences, the conversion from charge to conviction was 80 per cent and conviction to prison was 43 per cent. Regular multiple offenders reported fewer charges for violent offences, fraud offences and drug offences.

Table 5.3 Offending outcomes for regular multiple offenders

	Any	Property	Violent	Drugs	Fraud
Mean (median) number of:					
Charges	56 (25)	44 (12)	10 (6)	1 (0)	1 (0)
Convictions	45 (20)	35 (10)	8 (5)	1 (0)	1 (0)
Prison sentences	21 (7)	15 (3)	5 (2)	0 (0)	0 (0)

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO Male Survey, 2001 [Computer File]

Table 5.4 reports the prison histories of regular multiple offenders. On average, these offenders had served time in an adult corrective institution a total of four times. Fifty-seven per cent of regular multiple offenders had served time in a juvenile detention centre. These offenders spent an average of five times in a juvenile facility and a total of nine times in both an adult and juvenile correctional centre. These numbers are higher than for regular violent offenders but similar to regular property offenders. A further discussion of juvenile detention is provided in chapter 12.

Table 5.4 Prison experience of regular multiple offenders

	Mean (median) number of times
Prison experience	
Adult institutions	4 (3)
Juvenile detention centres	3 (1)
Of those having been in a juvenile detention centre (n=172)	
Juvenile detention centres	5 (3)
Both adult and juvenile centres	9 (7)

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO Male Survey, 2001 [Computer File]

Drug Use Histories

As with other criminal offending, drug use is prolific. Table 5.5 illustrates the extent of drug use among regular multiple offenders. It shows that:

- ninety-eight per cent reported having used any of the four main drug types—cannabis, amphetamines, cocaine and heroin;
- ninety per cent of the sample reported having used at least one of these drugs in the six months prior to arrest;
- eighty-seven per cent were classified as a current regular user of at least one of these drugs during this time;
- eighty-three per cent reported lifetime prevalence of more than one of the four main drug types; and
- more than half of all regular multiple offenders were current regular users of more than one of the four main drug types during the six months prior to the arrest for which they are now in prison.

Like with most other offender types, cannabis was the drug most likely to have been used. Ninety-seven per cent of regular multiple offenders had used cannabis, while 78 per cent were current regular users prior to arrest. The next most common drug was amphetamines. Eighty per cent had ever used it, while just less than half (49 per cent) reported being a current regular user in the six months prior to arrest. As for heroin, 38 per cent of all regular multiple offenders were current regular users during the six months prior to the arrest for which they were now in prison.

Frequency of use is high. Sixty-six per cent of current regular heroin users reported at least daily use in the six months prior to arrest. This compares to 45 per cent of current regular amphetamine users and 59 per cent of current regular cannabis users. Cocaine users reported infrequent use with 50 per cent reporting monthly or less use of cocaine. The definition of regular use of each specific drug type is defined differently by its regular users. Offenders reporting to be current regular users of cocaine reported less frequent use than did current regular users of heroin, cannabis or amphetamines.

Sixty-one per cent of regular multiple offenders progressed from onset to persistence for amphetamines. Persistence occurred for 54 per cent of heroin users and for 80 per cent of cannabis users. Compared with regular violent offenders, regular multiple offenders reported much higher rates of escalation for amphetamines, heroin and cannabis. However the patterns of drug use and persistence among this sample follow similar patterns to the regular property offenders.

Table 5.5 Prevalence of illegal drugs use amongst regular multiple offenders (per cent)

	Cannabis	Amphetamines	Heroin	Cocaine	Any	More than 1
Prevalence						
Ever used	97	80	71	50	98	83
Used in six months prior to arrest	82	60	48	29	90	67
Current regular user	78	49	38	12	87	57
Escalation	80	61	54	24	89	69
<i>(n)</i>	<i>(241)</i>	<i>(152)</i>	<i>(119)</i>	<i>(36)</i>	<i>(271)</i>	<i>(177)</i>
Current regular users—frequency of use						
Less than monthly	4	8	6	22		
One to several times a month	5	10	8	28		
One to several times a week	18	24	14	31		
Once a day	14	13	6	6		
Several times a day	59	45	66	14		
<i>(Total)</i>	<i>(100)</i>	<i>(100)</i>	<i>(100)</i>	<i>(100)</i>		

Escalation = 'current regular' divided by 'ever used'

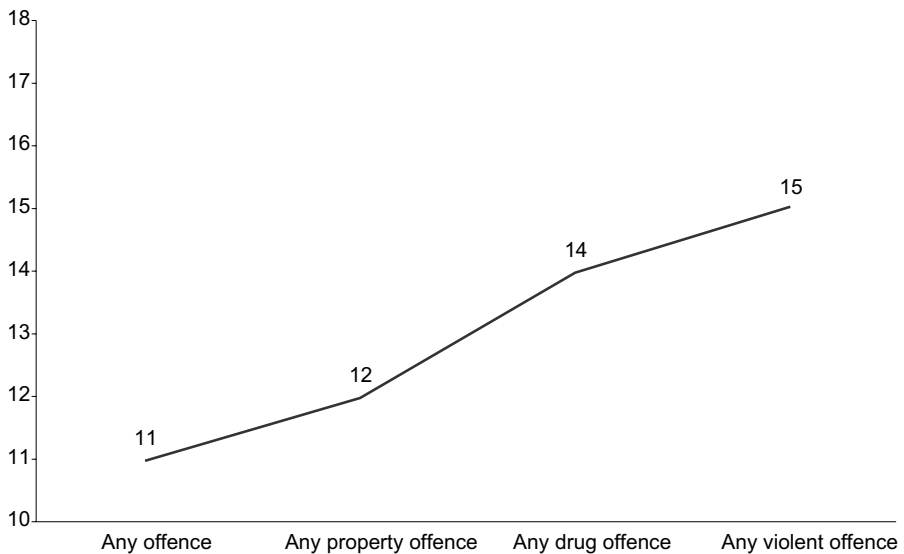
Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO Male Survey, 2001 [Computer File]

Linking Drugs and Multiple Offenders

Age of Onset

As mentioned in earlier chapters, the age of onset into both offending and drug taking behaviours can provide important information for early intervention policy and programs. For regular multiple offenders the age of onset into criminal careers was markedly lower than many of the other offender types analysed in this report. This indicates that the more chronic and serious adult offenders began their offending careers at much earlier ages. This is confirmed by the proportions of regular multiple offenders reporting juvenile detention (57 per cent), which is also significantly higher than most other offender types. The average age of first offence across violent, property and drug offences was 11 years. Broken down and averaged across offence type, regular multiple offenders typically began their offending careers with property offences. Drug offences that included buying and selling illegal drugs began approximately two years after the first property offence at the age of 14 years. The mean age of first violent offence was 15 years.

Figure 5.2 Mean age of offending for regular multiple offenders



Estimates are for offenders having committed that offence

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO Male Survey, 2001 [Computer File]

Further analyses by individual offence types are shown in table 5.6. The first offence was most likely to be stealing without a weapon or shoplifting. The mean age for this offence was 12 years, and was followed by break and enter at 13 years. The first occurrence of physical assault was an average of two years after the onset of break and enter. Sex offending, where it did occur, onset at a much later age than most of the other offence types (21 years). Even for regular multiple offenders it seems that the offending pathway was one of minor property offending followed by regular property offending, violent offending, and finally regular violent offending. In any case, violent offending almost invariably occurred after the establishment of a significant and regular property offending career.

Table 5.6 Mean age of first and regular offending for regular multiple offenders

	Stealing without break in	Break and enter	Motor vehicle theft	Vandalism	Assault	Traded stolen goods	Robbery without a weapon	Armed robbery	Sex offence
First offence									
Mean age	12	13	14	14	15	16	17	19	21
(n)	(250)	(279)	(260)	(178)	(284)	(247)	(194)	(189)	(36)
Of regular offenders¹									
First offence	12	13	14	14	15	16	16	18	21
Regular offending	13	15	15	14	16	17	17	19	23
Interval (regular–first)	1	2	1	0	1	1	1	1	2
(n)	(159)	(221)	(159)	(70)	(168)	(182)	(117)	(130)	(19)

¹ Estimates are for regular offenders of each offence type

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO Male Survey, 2001 [Computer File]

There was very little variation in the time delay between first and regular offending among each offence type, averaging between zero and two years. This interval is interpreted as the average time taken for an offender to progress to regular offending for each individual offence type. These data are important from a policy perspective, as this interval between first and regular offending represents the maximum timeframe for intervention prior to the establishment of a more chronic and regular offending pattern. It is clear from these data that the window of opportunity for early intervention or diversion is somewhat limited. The age of onset for each individual offence type did not significantly differ between regular and non-regular offenders across all offence types.

The drug most likely to be used was cannabis, with first use of the other three drug types occurring much later. The average interval between first use and regular use of amphetamines and cocaine was one year, while for cannabis and heroin the mean age interval was two years. The interval between onset and persistence of cocaine and amphetamines was much shorter than for either the regular property or regular violent offenders.

Table 5.7 Mean age of illegal drug use for regular multiple offenders

	Cannabis	Amphetamines	Heroin	Cocaine	Any
First use					
Mean age	14	18	18	19	14
(n)	(299)	(245)	(220)	(153)	(301)
Of current regular users					
First use	13	17	17	18	
Regular use	15	18	19	19	
Interval (regular–first)	2	1	2	1	
(n)	(241)	(151)	(119)	(36)	

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO Male Survey, 2001 [Computer File]

As noted, 30 per cent of regular multiple offenders reported having committed two or more of the violent offences as asked by the DUCO male survey. This group of multiple offenders also reported violent and property offending at a higher frequency during the six months prior to the arrest for which they are now in prison. Table 5.8 illustrates that these offenders began both their offending and drug use careers earlier than offenders who reported committing only one violent offence regularly.

Despite the obvious disparity in age of onset and persistence, the order of progression remained relatively the same for both offender groups. Where the age of first use of cannabis is included in the analysis, the order of progression typically began with a property offence. This was followed by regular property offending and first drug use, both of which commenced approximately two years after the first property offence. The first violent offence typically followed one year later, at which time regular drug use also commenced. The progression followed with the commencement of regular violent offending. Among both groups, first and regular property offending began prior to the commencement

of any violent offending. The interval between regular drug use and regular violent offending among those who reported only one regular violent offence was three years. This compares to a two-year interval among the more serious violent offenders.

Cannabis was used by a significant portion of the total offender population. Its use in almost all cases preceded other illegal drug use by up to four years. If cannabis is excluded from the analysis of the pathways, first use of drugs occurred later in the criminal career. Regardless of the volume of regular violent offending, the first violent offence occurred prior to the first use of illegal drugs, with regular drug use occurring at around the same time as regular violent offending.

Table 5.8 Pathways model for ages of onset by offence combinations for regular multiple offenders¹

	First property offence	Regular property offending	Any drug use	First violent offence	Regular drug use	Regular violent offending	(n)
Including cannabis							
Two violent offences	11	13	13	14	14	16	(92)
One violent offence only	12	14	14	15	15	18	(188)
Excluding cannabis							
Two violent offences	11	13	16	14	17	16	(70)
One violent offence only	12	14	17	15	18	18	(143)

¹Estimates are for current regular drug users of any drug.

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO Male Survey, 2001 [Computer File]

Lifetime Offending Attributions

These offenders were undoubtedly the more serious and chronic offenders within the total offender population. They reported the commencement of offending and drug use earlier than most other offender types, and committed crimes across a broader range of offences. So to what extent did regular multiple offenders attribute drugs or alcohol to their lifetime offending? Of those regular multiple offenders who provided an answer (64 per cent) that could be defined as a numerical representation of the possible effect, 20 per cent self-reported that all (100 per cent) of their criminal activities could be attributed to their personal alcohol or drug use histories. A further 41 per cent reported that their drug use histories affected

most (75 per cent) of their criminal activities, while more than one in four stated that there was no effect. Compared with regular property offenders and regular violent offenders, a greater number of regular multiple offenders attributed all or most of their lifetime offending to drugs or alcohol.

Forty per cent stated that the effect of alcohol and drugs on their lifetime offending behaviour was primarily psychopharmacological. Twenty-one per cent reported the economic/compulsive effects of drugs and alcohol, while a further 30 per cent stated that drugs and alcohol lead to crime. Compared with regular property offenders, regular multiple offenders were more likely to report the psychopharmacological effects, and less likely to report the economic/compulsive effects.

Table 5.9 Lifetime offending attributions for regular multiple offenders

	n	%
Of those who quantified the effect		
0 per cent	53	27
25 per cent	18	9
50 per cent	6	3
75 per cent	81	41
100 per cent	40	20
<i>(Total)</i>	<i>(198)</i>	<i>(100)</i>
Of those who qualified the effect		
Psychopharmacological	64	40
Economic/compulsive	34	21
Drugs/alcohol lead to crime	48	30
Other	16	9
<i>(Total)</i>	<i>(162)</i>	<i>(100)</i>

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO Male Survey, 2001 [Computer File]

In terms of explaining the extent of the association between drugs and criminal offending across the lifecycle, between 24 and 40 percent of regular illegal drug users attributed their offending to psychopharmacological factors. However, this was less likely to be the case for regular heroin users. These offenders were more likely to attribute their criminal offending to economic/compulsive factors of drug use. Again a sizeable proportion reported that drugs and alcohol were a factor in lifetime criminal offending.

Table 5.10 Lifetime offending attributions by the current regular drug use of regular multiple offenders (per cent)

	Cannabis	Amphetamines	Heroin	Cocaine
Psychopharmacological	36	39	24	40
Economic/ compulsive	24	22	31	25
Systemic	1	0	1	0
Drugs and alcohol lead to crime	30	32	34	30
Other	9	7	10	5
(n)	(132)	(82)	(71)	(20)

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO Male Survey, 2001 [Computer File]

Exploring attributions of behaviour by the age of onset and persistence shows that, on average, regular multiple offenders (who have attributed their offending career to drugs) were most likely to onset with property offending prior to the experimentation with illegal drugs. Violent offending and regular violent offending invariably commenced after the onset of illegal drug use. The greatest variability between offenders of different attributions exists around the age of regular property offending and regular drug use. Offenders reporting the psychopharmacological effects of drug and alcohol use reported regular property offending prior to regular use of illegal drugs. However, for offenders reporting economic/compulsive effects, both regular drug use and regular offending occurred concurrently; and those reporting that drugs led them to crime reported on average the onset of regular drug use one year prior to regular property offending.

When cannabis is excluded from the pathways analysis, it becomes more evident that both the onset of drug use and regular drug use did not commence until the property offending career was well established. The age of onset for any of the three main drugs—amphetamines, heroin and cocaine—typically occurred after the commencement of first and persistent property offending. Furthermore, when cannabis use is excluded from the analysis, the first violent offence preceded any drug use.

As seen earlier, the inclusion of cannabis use most often placed regular drug use two or three years prior to regular violent offending. By excluding the age of regular cannabis use, regular violent offending and regular use of illegal drugs occurred on or around the same time in the temporal order of the offending and drug use career. When compared with the reasons given for lifetime attribution, offenders reporting a primarily psychopharmacological effect of alcohol and drug use reported that, on average, regular drug use occurred after the commencement of regular violent offending. Conversely, regular multiple offenders who stated that drug use led them to crime most often reported regular drug use prior to regular violent offending. In any case, regular property offending preceded the regular use of harder drugs such as heroin, amphetamines and cocaine.

Table 5.11 Pathways model by the lifetime offending attributions of regular multiple offenders¹

	First property offence	Any drug use	Regular property offending	Regular drug use	First violent offence	Regular violent offending	(n)
Including cannabis							
Psychopharmacological	11	13	14	15	15	17	(55)
Economic/ compulsive	11	13	14	14	15	17	(34)
Drugs and alcohol lead to crime	12	13	15	14	15	17	(45)
Excluding cannabis							
Psycho pharmacological	11	16	14	18	15	17	(39)
Economic/ compulsive	11	16	14	17	15	17	(30)
Drugs and alcohol lead to crime	12	16	15	17	15	18	(36)

¹Estimates are for regular drug users of any drug.

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO Male Survey, 2001 [Computer File]

Conclusion

The data presented in this chapter show that regular offenders of both property and violent offences display a broad range of offending histories. They have offended across a number of violent, drug and property offences in their lifetime, and have regularly committed more than one violent and property offence. This group contained more frequent violent and property offenders than either regular property and regular violent offenders alone. They were more likely to have escalated to regular illegal drug use than regular violent offenders and they reported more frequent use across all four main drug types.

For these reasons, the regular multiple offender presents a number of significant implications for criminal justice policy. They are the most frequent and chronic offenders within the criminal justice system and both their offending patterns and motivations help to illuminate to complex web of interactions between offending and drug use.

Unlike regular property offenders alone or regular violent offenders, the time from onset to persistent drug use was shorter, indicating a narrower window of opportunity for intervention prior to behaviours becoming regular occurrences. Importantly, the age of onset for offending behaviour was younger. This suggests that offenders who begin at an earlier age are more likely to have more chronic and serious offending and drug-using careers.