POLICING AND PATHWAYS TO DIVERSION AND CARE AMONG VULNERABLE YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAVE SUBSTANCE USE ISSUES
RACHAEL GREEN, JOANNE BRYANT, REBECCA GRAY, REBECCA BROWN, DAVID BEST, JAKE RANCE, SARAH MACLEAN

Presenter: Dr Rachael Green
rachael.green@acu.edu.au

Juvenile offending in Australia
- Rate of juvenile offending is usually twice that of adults (AIC 2009)
- One in every 420 young people aged between 10 and 17 years was under supervision on an average day in 2012-13 (AIHW 2014)
- The majority (83%) were male (ABS 2014)
- 78% aged between 14-17 years. (ABS 2014)
- Aboriginal young people over-represented

"Life-course persistent" vs "adolescent limited" offending
(Moffit 1993)

Two trajectories (Patterson and colleagues (2002):
"Transient and peer-related offending beginning in late adolescence and usually desisting in adulthood"
"Persistent anti-social behaviour beginning in preschool years that progresses from early arrest, and chronic and violent offending in juvenile years, to career adult criminality"

Young offenders and complexity
Issues experienced among a cohort of 75 young Victorian offenders (aged 16-30 years):
- intellectual disability,
- mental health issues,
- substance use,
- financial, relational, and housing instability;
- few pro-social extracurricular activities;
- major barriers in the areas of education and employment.

Past involvement in the child protection system common (CSR and Department of Corrections, 2010)

Project aims
- Identify characteristics of young AOD users who offend
- Determine diversion and treatment needs of this group
- Document the challenges for police when encountering young offenders
- Investigate the effectiveness of current diversion and referral processes
- Identify barriers and facilitators to accessing diversion and treatment
- Explore how these might be addressed

Funded by the National Drug Law Enforcement Research Fund
Melbourne Team (Turning Point, Eastern Health)
- Dr Rachael Green
- Dr Sarah MacLean
- Prof. David Best
Sydney Team (Centre for Social Research in Health, University of New South Wales)
- Dr Joanne Bryant
- Dr Rebecca Gray
- Rebecca Brown
- Jake Rance

Other acknowledgements:
- Project Reference Group
- NSW Police
- Victoria Police
Method

1) Background review
   - Relevant literature
   - Policy documents, and legislation NSW and Victoria

2) Analysis of secondary data
   Victoria: The Youth Cohort Study (YoCo): longitudinal cohort design (3 time points) and non-probability convenience sampling (n=150 baseline)
   - NSW: The Exposure and Transition Study (ET Study): cross-sectional design, non-probability convenience sampling (one time point only) (n=219).

3) Semi-structured interviews (N = 64):
   - Clients of youth specialist alcohol and other drug services (n = 23)
   - Police employees, NSW Police Force and Victoria Police (n = 25);
   - Staff of youth specialist drug and alcohol services (n = 16)

AOD clients – interview sample

Young clients (n = 23)
- Majority (n = 17) 18 years or younger
- Majority male (n = 18)
- Vast majority (n = 20) grew up in Australia
- n = 10 no fixed address
- Five had spent time in juvenile detention (all male)
- Drug use typically began at around age 12 years

Some factors that inform and shape individual pathways:
- Age
- Seriousness of the offence
- Decisions made by apprehending officer (especially re eligibility)
- Number of times apprehended
- Whether parental consent can be obtained
- Whether and when they are engaged by therapeutic services
- Availability of services and programs
  - varies according to postcode of residence
  - many programs are pilots

The system...
- Is complex, there are some inconsistencies, it changes, there are gaps...
  E.g. young people can be involved in the juvenile and adult systems simultaneously
- Delays have an impact on young people
  E.g. delay between offending and court date

Small window between first drug use and incarceration

Analysis of secondary data...
- Average age first drug use: 13 years
- Average age first incarceration: 15.9 years
- Engagement in treatment: 16.3 years
Challenges discussed by police making referrals and ‘diversion’

- Recidivism, rapid escalation of offending
- Police are time poor, heavy workloads
- No e-system in NSW
- Perception that young people “don’t want help” from police (however, cooperation and consent is necessary)

Engagement of this client group in treatment is difficult but worthwhile

- Interviewees reported that engagement in therapeutic programs is difficult among young justice clients.
- However, secondary data analysis indicates that if young people do stay in treatment they display some marked positive outcomes in relation to their drug use, risk and social functioning.

Collaboration

... between police and other professionals who work with vulnerable young people

Finding viable ways for both professional groups to work together more closely without being too onerous remains an obvious challenge.

In conclusion...

- Strong support for early intervention approaches.
- The ongoing issue of funding e.g. crisis accommodation
- Funding so that there can be collaborative efforts between the system – ensure that the system does give young people the support they need to effectively divert them away from a pathway of adult offending.

References