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LESSON 4: Youth Criminal Justice Act Introduction

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LESSON 4:

Youth Criminal Justice Act Introduction

Topic 1: Youth Crime in Canada

Youth who commit offences in Canada are dealt with under the *Youth Criminal Justice YCJA* (YCJA) passed in 2003 and the *Criminal Code of Canada*. The information that follows provides some insight into youth crime, based on statistics in Canada^[1].

Youth Crime is Decreasing in Canada

Between 1991 and 2006 British Columbia's youth crime rate declined by 49%, Alberta 41%, Ontario 34% and Quebec 25%. In 2006, around 180,000 youth were implicated in some violation of the Criminal Code (excluding traffic offences). Therefore, 6,885 youth were accused for every 100,000 young people in this age group.

What Kinds of Crimes do Youth Commit?

Violent Crime

- In 2006, violent crimes made up a large share of youth crime, estimating around 39,472 youth. Weapons were present in 20% of violent crimes.
- In the 10 years between 1997 and 2006, the overall violent crime rate in Canada declined 4%. However, the violent crime rate among youth has risen 12% in the last 10 years and has climbed 30% since 1991.
- By 2006, youth accused of violent offences accounted for nearly a quarter of youth crime; up from one in five 10 years earlier. Increase in youth assaults.
- Youth accused of assault represented nearly 80% of those apprehended for a violent crime in 2006.
- Violent crime rates among youth including homicides, and crime rates for "other" Criminal Code offences such as mischief and disturbing the peace, were up in 2006.
- In 2006, both the number and rate of youth aged 12 to 17 years accused of homicide reached their highest point, rising 41% since 1997.
- The homicide rate is only 0.05%. 44% of those homicides involved a knife and 17% involved a firearm. Overall, 84% young people (72 boys and 12 girls), were implicated in 54 homicides in 2006.

Property Crime

- Property crimes are at their lowest rate compared to the last 10 years. These types of offences accounted for about 4 in 10 youth accused of crimes in Canada in 2006. This turned out to be 75,461 youth involved in property crime.

Drug Crime

- Between 1991 and 2006, drug related crime committed by young people doubled, with close to 18,000 youth accused.

School Crime

- In 2006, 1 in 10 youth crimes were committed on school property
- Crimes at school include bullying and violence
- Assaults are particularly common representing about 30% of all violations committed by youth on school property. Uttering threats constituted another 8%
- Nearly 20% of crimes committed at school were drug offences, whereas 5% of youth crimes committed elsewhere were drug-related. Youth drug offences taking place on school grounds usually involved the possession (78%) or trafficking of cannabis (10%)

Where and When do Youth Commit Crimes?

- In 2008, police reported nearly one-third (32%) of young people aged 12-17 committed crime in private residences, such as homes and surrounding properties
- 13% of those offences occurred on school property and 23% occurred in stores, office buildings and outdoor public spaces
- Crime was relatively spread out evenly between spring, summer and fall but occurred least during the winter months. Youth crime was distributed evenly across the week (except for Sundays) and peaked on Fridays
- Crime rose through the early morning and peaked late afternoon between the end of school days and suppertime (3 pm and 6 pm). Crimes gradually decreased in the evenings
- Early afternoons, between noon and 3pm, showed the highest frequency of drug related offences for youth
- Youth committed the most traffic violations, from 9pm to midnight

At What Age do Youth Commit Crime?

In 2009/2010, the age break down was as follows:

- 32% of crimes were committed by those 17 years of age
- 26% of crimes were committed by those 16 years of age
- 20% of crimes were committed by those 15 years of age
- 12% of crimes were committed by those 14 years of age
- 6% of crimes were committed by those 13 years of age
- 2% of crimes were committed by those 12 years of age

Over one half of youth crime is committed by youth who are 16 or 17 years of age. The other half involves youth under the age of 16.

Which Youth Gender is More Likely to Commit Violent Crimes?

- Young men are still more than twice as likely to be involved in violent crime than are young women.
- In 2009/2010, 71% of males committed crimes compared to only 22% of females. 7% of crimes were committed where sex is unknown.
- Females account for 1 out of every 5 youth accused of committing a violation against the Criminal Code.
- When females did offend, they tended to commit crimes of theft, common assault, bail violations and fraud (2005).

Youth Crime by the Numbers

Although youth crime has decreased generally, violent crime and drug related crime has increased. These figures indicate that the law dealing with youth crime needs to look at different options for different age groups and categories of offences. This is what the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* does.

[1] Statistics Canada 2006, 2008 and 2011

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