Youth Justice Conferences versus Children's Court:
A comparison of time to finalisation

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Aim: *To compare police-referred youth justice conferences (YJCs), court referred YJCs and Children's Court matters on the time to finalisation (i.e., the number of days from referral/charge date to conference/court finalisation date), and assess the contribution of index offence- and/or offender-related characteristics as potential confounders.*

Method: *The study utilised data from the NSW Re-Offending Database (ROD) for three cohorts of young people: those with a court-referred YJC held in 2010 (C-YJC), those with a police-referred YJC held in 2010 (P-YJC), and those with a proven Children's Court (CC) appearance finalised in 2010. Negative binomial regression models were fitted to determine index offence- and offender-related characteristics associated with time to finalisation.*

Results: *The C-YJC cohort had a significantly longer time to finalisation compared to the CC cohort and the P-YJC cohort, even after controlling for confounders. In addition, the CC cohort had a significantly longer time to finalisation compared to the P-YJC cohort. Older age, being Indigenous, having a case dealt with in a Metropolitan region, and having more concurrent index offences remained significant predictors of an increase in number of days to finalisation in the adjusted model.*

Conclusion: *The findings suggest that police should be encouraged to refer eligible matters to a YJC given the time-related efficiency identified via this pathway. The findings suggest it may be appropriate to consider further revising the legislated time-frames as there may be legitimate reasons for why delays occur.*

Keywords: *time-related efficiency, juvenile, Youth Justice Conference, Young Offenders Act 1997, Children's Court*

Introduction

The NSW *Young Offenders Act 1997* (YOA) formalised procedures and guidelines for interventions designed to divert young offenders from the court system using a hierarchy of sanctions. If a young person is deemed ineligible for a warning or police caution, the investigating officer must refer the matter to a Specialist Youth Officer (SYO) who can either refer the matter to a Youth Justice Conference (YJC) or commence criminal proceedings. A magistrate can, however, refer a matter to a YJC if they believe a less severe sanction should have been imposed (Bargen, Clancey and Chan, 2005). Conferencing was designed to bring the young person face-to-face with the victim/s of the offence, as well as any family and/or support persons (for the victim or the young person). The purpose of a YJC is to encourage the young person to accept responsibility for the offence, and attempt to repair the harm caused by agreeing

to some form of restitution to the victim. The process strives to re-integrate the offender into his/her family and community network and enhances the rights of victims in the criminal justice process (Clancey, Doran and Maloney, 2005; Trimboli, 2000). A trained convenor, employed by Juvenile Justice NSW, is responsible for setting up the conference, preparing participants for the conference, and facilitating the conference.

Given the court process is often criticised for being fraught with lengthy delays in finalising criminal proceedings (Callinan, 2002), one key element in evaluating the YJC process is to determine its time-related efficiency as a method of processing criminal matters. The legislation originally prescribed that a YJC must be held within 21 days of the conference administrator receiving a referral and not less than 10 days after the child receives written notification of the conference. An evaluation of 1,885 YJCs held in NSW during 1998-1999 found that

the majority (92%) did not meet the statutory time-frames (Trimboli, 2000). The data showed that while conferences were held anywhere from four to 241 days after referral, on average, 40 days elapsed between the referral date and the date of the conference (Trimboli, 2000). Additionally, just over a quarter (28%) of conferences were held before the stipulated ten-day period after the offender has obtained written notification of the conference (Trimboli, 2000). It has, however, been recognised that it is more appropriate to preserve the quality of the pre-conference preparation than strictly adhere to the statutory time-frames. In a statutory evaluation of the YOA it was recommended that the Act be amended to extend the time limit for conferences to 28 days (NSW Attorney General's Department, 2002). This recommendation was later implemented in the legislation, with a condition also allowing the conference administrator discretion if they feel the stipulated time-frame is not practicable.

When the numerous administrative tasks required to organise a conference are considered (such as locating and preparing participants, negotiating a conference time/location/venue, and identifying possible/feasible/effective outcome plan tasks), it is not surprising that very few conferences adhere to the statutory time-frames (Trimboli, 2000). The need to travel long distances in regional and rural areas of NSW are likely to further impact on adherence to time-frames. On the other hand, while time-related efficiency in the criminal justice system is important, there are additional benefits in holding a YJC as soon after the offence as is possible. It is likely that participant recall about the nature of the offence and its impact on their lives will reduce as the delay between the offence date and conference date increases (NSW Law Reform Commission, 2005).

While it is evident that there is some delay in conducting YJCs, it is unclear if this delay is significantly greater than having the matter dealt with through Children's Court proceedings. In addition, little is known about differences in time-related efficiency between court-referred and police-referred YJCs.

The aim of this brief is to compare police-referred YJCs, court referred YJCs and Children's Court matters on the time to finalisation (i.e., the number of days from referral/charge date to conference/court finalisation date), and assess the contribution of index offence- and/or offender-related characteristics as potential confounders.

Method

Study Sample

The study utilised data from the NSW Re-Offending Database (ROD) which contains information on each person who has been dealt with by way of a police caution, a YJC, or a proven court appearance for criminal offences in NSW (since 1994 for court and since 1998 for cautions and YJCs; Hua & Fitzgerald, 2006). The two cohorts of young people were: those with a YJC held in 2010 (regardless of whether their outcome plan was completed or not), and those with a proven Children's Court (CC) appearance finalised in 2010. Each matter (defined as a group of "charges" processed together) is represented by one record, and it is possible for each individual to have several matters (hence the number of records is not equal to the number of unique individuals). A small number of matters were counted in both cohorts and these records were excluded (see Table 1).

Table 1. Sample exclusion criteria

Exclusion criteria	CHILDREN'S COURT ORIGINAL COHORT n=7884	YOUTH JUSTICE CONFERENCE ORIGINAL COHORT n=1894	
Exclude those aged >=19 years old	n=7547 (337 records lost)	n=1879 (15 records lost)	
Exclude those with YJC ineligible offences (homicide, sexual, robbery, drugs or traffic; traffic only applies if aged >=16 years at time of the offence)	n=5854 (1693 additional records lost)	n=1798 (81 additional records lost)	
Exclude those who didn't plead guilty to all offences[a]	n=1800 (4054 additional records lost)	n=1798 (0 additional records lost)	
Exclude those with a prior custodial sentence	n=1642 (158 additional records lost)	n=1779 (19 additional records lost)	
Excluded records where matters were counted in both cohorts	n=1608 (34 additional records lost)	n=1777 (2 additional records lost)	
Exclude outliers, incorrect/ missing values[b]	n=1599 (9 additional records lost)	n=1762 (15 additional records lost)	
Number in final sample for each cohort	CHILDREN'S COURT n=1599 records (1482 individuals)	COURT-REFERRED YJC n=951 records (795 individuals)	POLICE-REFERRED YJC n=811 records (734 individuals)

[a] Whether the young person plead guilty to all offences is not well recorded in the Children's Court data; it is likely that a proportion of those excluded at this stage in the sample selection did actually plead guilty.

[b] 21 records were excluded for missing/incorrect values; 3 records excluded as outliers.

A number of other exclusion criteria were used to ensure the two cohorts were as similar as possible in terms of their likelihood of either being processed through court or through a YJC. The exclusion criteria were selected to closely align with the exclusion criteria for a YJC under the YOA (see Table 1 for full listing of exclusion criteria). While having a prior custodial sentence is not a stipulated exclusion criteria for a YJC under the YOA, the finding that having a prior custodial sentence was more common among those in CC cohort (9.6% vs. 1.1%, after some exclusion criteria were applied) suggested it should be added as an exclusion criteria to keep the cohorts as similar as possible. By ensuring the two cohorts were as similar as possible we were able to minimise any selection bias resulting from unobserved factors related to why an individual was processed through the court system as opposed to through a YJC. The YJC cohort was split into two cohorts by referral source, either police-referred YJC (P-YJC) or court-referred YJC (C-YJC). The final dataset contained records for 1599 matters (1482 individuals) in the CC cohort; 951 matters (795 individuals) in C-YJC; and 811 matters (734 individuals) in P-YJC[1].

Variables

Time to finalisation: A time to finalisation variable was derived for each cohort. For the CC cohort, time to finalisation was calculated as the number of days from the first charge date (which was defined as the date when legal proceedings commenced; not necessarily the actual offence date) to the court finalisation date. For the C-YJC cohort, time to finalisation was calculated as the number of days from the first charge date to the conference date. For the P-YJC cohort, time to finalisation was calculated as the number of days from the conference referral date to the conference date. The first charge date was not available for the P-YJC group because, by definition, young offenders are not issued with a court attendance notice (i.e., a charge) when they are referred to a YJC. The legislation allows 14 days for the investigating officer to determine how the young person should be dealt with under YOA. The conference referral date should, in most cases, be comparable to the date at which they would have been charged if the decision was taken not to refer to a YJC.

Number of proven concurrent offences at index contact: Number of proven concurrent offences at the offender's index contact.

Index offence types: Whether any offence at the index contact was of a type defined by the two-digit codes from the Australian and New Zealand Standard Offence Classification (ANZSOC) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011). After the exclusion criteria were applied, 12 offence type categories were examined. Five of these offence categories, with a small number of records, were combined into "other" (i.e., offences involving dangerous or negligent acts, abduction, deception, weapons/

explosives, miscellaneous, see ANZSOC codes 04; 05; 09; 11; 16). See Table 4 for further details.

JJ region: Police Local Area Commands were mapped to one of the three Juvenile Justice NSW regions, either Metropolitan, Northern or Western.

Number of prior contacts: For each young person, the number of prior police cautions since 1998 was calculated, as was the number of completed YJCs since 1998 and the number of court appearances where one or more offences were proven since 1994.

Age: Age, in years, of the individual at the time of the index contact. The sample was restricted to those aged 18 years or younger at the finalisation date (either court finalisation date for CC cohort or conference date for either the P-YJC or C-YJC cohort). A small proportion of records (n=352; 3.6%) were excluded as the young person was aged 19 or older at the finalisation date.

Sex: Sex of the young person.

Indigenous status: Whether, the young person had ever been identified as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent in ROD. Indigenous status was unknown in 4.7 per cent of cases (n=158; after exclusion criteria was applied) and these cases were combined with the non-Indigenous group as their outcomes tended to more closely resemble non-Indigenous offenders.

Analysis

Descriptive analyses were carried out to determine the characteristics of the sample in terms of socio-demographics, prior contacts with criminal justice system, and index offence characteristics. Chi-square tests of association (for dichotomous variables) and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests of mean differences[2] (for continuous variables, with Tukey post-hoc tests) were carried out to identify significant group differences. The median and inter-quartile range (25th to 75th percentile) was reported for time to finalisation as the distribution of this variable was skewed. Negative binomial regression models (over dispersion suggested an inadequate fit for a Poisson model) were fitted to determine index offence- and offender-related characteristics[3] associated with time to finalisation.

Results

Characteristics of the sample

Table 2 presents the offender and prior offence history of the sample by cohort. The P-YJC cohort was more likely to be male, compared to the other two cohorts (80.4% vs. 75.2% CC and 73.2% C-YJC). The P-YJC cohort was significantly younger (mean=15.4), than both the CC cohort (mean=15.7) and

the C-YJC (mean=15.7). The CC cohort was more likely to be Indigenous compared to the other two cohorts (40.3% vs. 33.8% C-YJC and 24.0% P-YJC). No significant group differences were observed for the mean number of prior cautions, but the C-YJC cohort were significantly more likely to have had a prior YJC, and the CC cohort were significantly more likely to have had a prior proven court appearance, compared to the other two cohorts. In addition, the C-YJC cohort were significantly more likely to have had a prior YJC or a prior proven court appearance, compared to the P-YJC cohort.

Table 2. Offender and prior offence characteristics by cohort (n=3,361)

		Cohort					
		CC (n=1599)		C-YJC (n=951)		P-YJC (n=811)	
Offender characteristics		n	%	n	%	n	%
Sex	Male	1,203	75.2	696	73.2	652	80.4
	Female	396	24.8	255	26.8	159	19.6
							$p<.001$[a]
Indigenous status	Indigenous	645	40.3	321	33.8	195	24.0
	Non-indigenous or unknown	954	59.7	630	66.2	616	76.0
							$p<.001$[a]
Age at reference date[b]	11-13	142	8.9	77	8.1	86	10.7
	14	218	13.6	122	12.8	126	15.5
	15	312	19.5	199	20.9	189	23.3
	16	391	24.5	244	25.7	179	22.1
	17	387	24.2	214	22.5	179	22.1
	18	148	9.3	95	10.0	52	6.4
	Mean (SD)		15.66 (1.52)		15.70 (1.45)		15.43 (1.55)
							CC vs. C-YJC $p=.769$[c]
							CC vs. P-YJC $p=.001$[c]
							C-YJC vs. P-YJC $p<.001$[c]
Number of police cautions prior to index date	0	517	32.3	316	33.2	321	39.6
	1	443	27.7	251	26.4	166	20.5
	2	380	23.8	227	23.9	169	20.8
	3+	259	16.2	157	16.6	155	19.2
	Mean (SD)		1.26 (1.11)		1.27 (1.17)		1.21 (1.18)
							$p=.489$[d]
Number of YJCs held prior to index date	0	1,266	79.2	705	74.1	674	83.1
	1	235	14.7	155	16.3	104	12.8
	2	70	4.4	59	6.2	27	3.3
	3+	28	1.8	32	3.3	6	0.7
	Mean (SD)		0.29 (0.67)		0.40 (0.82)		0.22 (0.53)
							CC vs. C-YJC $p<.001$[c]
							CC vs. P-YJC $p<0.05$[c]
							C-YJC vs. P-YJC $p<.001$[c]
Number of court appearances with conviction prior to index date	0	900	56.3	580	61.0	630	77.7
	1	324	20.3	208	21.9	123	15.2
	2	192	12.0	87	9.1	39	4.8
	3+	183	11.4	76	8.0	19	2.3
	Mean (SD)		0.88 (1.33)		0.69 (1.12)		0.34 (0.79)
							CC vs. C-YJC $p<.001$[c]
							CC vs. P-YJC $p<.001$[c]
							C-YJC vs. P-YJC $p<.001$[c]

[a] *p*-value for chi-square test of association between offender characteristic and cohort. A *p*-value less than 0.05 indicates a significant association.
[b] Age was missing for 1 record in the CC cohort.
[c] *p*-value for one-way ANOVA test of mean difference between offender characteristic and cohort.
[d] *p*-value for one-way ANOVA test of mean difference between offender characteristic and cohort. No post-hoc tests were run as the *p*<0.05 level of significance was not met.

Table 3. Index offence characteristics by cohort (n=3,361)

| | | Cohort | | | | | |
| | | CC (n=1599) | | C-YJC (n=951) | | P-YJC (811) | |
Index offence characteristics		N	%	N	%	N	%
Number of proven concurrent offence at index matter	0	798	49.9	493	51.8	487	60
	1	395	24.7	222	23.3	166	20.5
	2	194	12.1	110	11.6	67	8.3
	3	97	6.1	63	6.6	36	4.4
	4+	115	7.2	63	6.6	55	6.8
	Mean (SD)		2.11 (1.9)		2.08 (1.8)		2.05 (3.1)
							$p=.813$[a]
Any acts intended to cause injury at index matter (ANZSOC 02)	Yes	567	35.5	280	29.4	209	25.8
	No	1032	64.5	671	70.6	602	74.2
							$p<.001$[b]
Any unlawful entry with intent/burglary, break and enter at index matter (ANZSOC 07)	Yes	259	16.2	75	7.9	139	17.1
	No	1340	83.8	876	92.1	672	82.9
							$p<.001$[b]
Any theft and related offences at index matter (ANZSOC 08)	Yes	384	24.0	302	31.8	203	25
	No	1215	76.0	649	68.2	608	75
							$p<.001$[b]
Any property damage or environmental pollution at index matter (ANZSOC 12)	Yes	381	23.8	258	27.1	263	32.4
	No	1218	76.2	693	72.9	548	67.6
							$p<.001$[b]
Any public order offences at index matter (ANZSOC 13)	Yes	408	25.5	257	27.0	121	14.9
	No	1191	74.5	694	73.0	690	85.1
							$p<.001$[b]
Any road traffic or motor vehicle offences at index matter (ANZSOC 14)[c]	Yes	60	3.8	16	1.7	16	2.0
	No	1539	96.2	935	98.3	795	98.0
							$p<.01$[b]
Any offences against justice procedures at index matter (ANZSOC 15)	Yes	292	18.3	112	11.8	15	1.8
	No	1307	81.7	839	88.2	796	98.2
							$p<.001$[b]
Any other offences at index matter[c]	Yes	96	6.0	61	6.4	57	7.0
	No	1503	94.0	890	93.6	754	93.0
							$p=.621$[b]

[a] *p*-value for one-way ANOVA test of mean difference between offender characteristic and cohort. No post-hoc tests were run as the *p*<0.05 level of significance was not met.
[b] *p*-value for chi-square test of association between offender characteristic and cohort. A *p*-value less than 0.05 indicates a significant association.
[c] Includes offences involving dangerous or negligent acts, abduction, deception, weapons/explosives, miscellaneous (ANZSOC codes 04; 05; 09; 11; 16).

Table 3 presents the index offence characteristics of the sample by cohort. No significant group differences were identified for number of proven concurrent offences at the index matter. Significant group differences were identified for each of the offence categories present at the index matter, except for the combined "other" category. Offenders in the CC cohort were more likely to have an offence defined as an "act intended to cause injury", "offences against justice procedures", or a "traffic or motor vehicle offence", compared to the other two cohorts. The C-YJC cohort were least likely to have an offence defined as "unlawful entry or break and enter", and were most likely to have a "theft related offence", compared to the other two cohorts. The P-YJC cohort were most likely to have a "property damage related offence", and least likely to have a "public order offence", or an "offence against justice procedures", compared to the other two cohorts.

Time to finalisation

Table 4 highlights the unadjusted relationship between offender- and index offence-related characteristics and median (and inter-quartile range) number of days to finalisation for each matter.

The most noteworthy results are:

- The CC cohort (median=64 days) and the C-YJC (median=128 days) had a significantly longer time to finalisation than the P-YJC (median=55 days). In addition, the C-YJC cohort had a significantly longer time to finalisation than the CC cohort. No gender differences were identified.

- Older age (median=87 days for 17-18 yrs old vs. 77 days for 14-16 yrs old and 63.5 days for 11-13 yrs old) and being Indigenous (median=81 days vs. median=78 days for non-Indigenous/unknown) were both associated with an increase in the number of days to finalisation.

Table 4. Time to finalisation by offender and offence characteristics

Offender and offence characteristics		Time to finalisation Median (25th-75th percentile)	Comparison[a]
Group	Court cohort vs. court-referred YJC cohort	64 (32-115)	*p*<.001[b]
	Court-referred YJC cohort vs. police referred YJC cohort	128 (91-186)	*p*<.001[b]
	Police-referred YJC cohort vs. court cohort	55 (39-87)	*p*<.001[b]
Sex	Male	80 (44-135)	*p*=.649
	Female	78 (42-135)	reference group
Age	11-13	63.5 (40-111)	*p*<.001
	14-16	77 (42-126)	*p*<.001
	17-18	87 (48-161)	reference group
Indigenous status	Indigenous	81 (44-142)	*p*<.05
	Non-indigenous or unknown	78 (44-132)	reference group
JJ Region	Metropolitan	93 (51-156)	*p*<.001
	Northern	66 (40-115)	*p*=.925
	Western	69 (40-115)	reference group
Number of proven concurrent offences at index matter	0	70.5 (42-124)	*p*<.001
	1	82 (46-133)	*p*<.001
	2	76 (44-133)	*p*<.001
	3+	112 (67-177.5)	reference group
Any acts intended to cause injury at index matter (ANZSOC 02)	Yes	84 (44-147)	*p*<.05
	No	77 (44-129)	reference group
Any unlawful entry with intent/burglary, break and enter at index matter (ANZSOC 07)	Yes	77 (45.5-127)	*p*=.287
	No	79 (43-137)	reference group
Any theft and related offences at index matter (ANZSOC 08)	Yes	84 (47-134)	*p*=.711
	No	77 (43-135)	reference group
Any property damage or environmental pollution at index matter (ANZSOC 12)	Yes	85 (47-135)	*p*=.261
	No	77 (43-135)	reference group
Any public order offences at index matter (ANZSOC 13)	Yes	88 (44-152)	*p*<.01
	No	77 (44-129)	reference group
Any road traffic or motor vehicle offences at index matter (ANZSOC 14)	Yes	70 (41-128)	*p*=.327
	No	80 (44-135)	reference group
Any offences against justice procedures at index matter (ANZSOC 15)	Yes	84 (38.5-156.5)	*p*<.01
	No	78 (44-132.5)	reference group
Any other offences at index matter[c]	Yes	83 (48-147)	*p*=.814
	No	79 (44-134)	reference group

[a] A *p*-value less than 0.05 indicates a significant difference in the time to finalisation based on negative binomial regression.
[b] Three pair-wise comparisons were conducted to enable comparisons between all nominal groups.
[c] Includes offences involving dangerous or negligent acts, abduction, deception, weapons/explosives, miscellaneous (ANZSOC codes 04; 05; 09; 11; 16).

Table 5. Predictors of number of days to finalisation based on negative binomial regression

Offender and offence characteristics[a]		Incident rate (95% CI)	p value[b]
Group	Court cohort vs. court-referred YJC cohort	0.63 (0.58-0.66)	p<.001[c]
	Court-referred YJC cohort vs. police referred YJC cohort	2.01 (1.86-2.16)	p<.001[c]
	Police-referred YJC cohort vs. court cohort	0.80 (0.75-0.85)	p<.001[c]
Age	11-13 vs. 17-18	0.74 (0.67-0.82)	p<.001
	14-16 vs. 17-18	0.82 (0.77-0.87)	p<.001
Indigenous status	Indigenous vs. Non-indigenous or unknown	1.15 (1.08-1.22)	p<.001
JJ Region	Metropolitan vs. Northern	1.22 (1.14-1.30)	p<.001[c]
	Metropolitan vs. Western	1.17 (1.08-1.26)	p<.001[c]
	Northern vs. Western	0.96 (0.89-1.03)	p=.274[c]
Number of proven charges at index matter	0 vs. 3+	0.67 (0.61-0.72)	p<.001
	1 vs. 3+	0.73 (0.66-0.80)	p<.001
	2 vs. 3+	0.69 (0.62-0.77)	p<.001

[a] The following "offence type" variables were not included in the final model as p>.05: any acts intended to cause injury at index matter (ANZSOC 02); Any public order offences at index matter (ANZSOC 13); Any offences against justice procedures at index matter (ANZSOC 15).
[b] p-value for negative binomial regression. A p-value less than 0.05 indicates a significant difference in the time to finalisation after adjusting for other variables in the model.
[c] Three pair-wise comparisons were conducted to enable comparisons between all nominal groups.

- While no regional differences were identified between the Northern (median=66 days) and Western regions of NSW (median=69 days), a longer time to finalisation for the Metropolitan region (median=93 days) was noted, compared to the Western region.

- An increase in the number of proven concurrent offences at the index matter was also found to be associated with an increase in number of days to finalisation (median=112 days for 3+ charges vs. median=70.5 days for 0 concurrent charges). Additionally, a number of offence categories (according to ANZSOC classifications) were also found to be associated with a longer time to finalisation, namely "acts intended to cause injury" (median=84 days vs. 77 days for those without such charges), "public order offences" (median=88 days vs. 77 days), and "offences against justice procedures" (median=84 days vs. 78 days).

The results from the adjusted analysis are described in Table 5, where all unadjusted factors significant at p<0.20 level were considered. The C-YJC cohort had a significantly longer time to finalisation compared to the CC cohort and the P-YJC cohort, even after controlling for offender- and offence-related characteristics. In addition, the CC cohort had a significantly longer time to finalisation compared to the P-YJC cohort. Older age and being Indigenous remained significant predictors of an increase in number of days to finalisation in the adjusted model. Additionally, the Metropolitan region of NSW had a significantly longer time to finalisation than the Northern and Western regions. While offence type was no longer significant in the adjusted model, an increase in the number of proven concurrent offences at the index matter remained a significant predictor of an increase in the number of days to finalisation.

Conclusion

The aim of this brief was to compare police-referred YJCs, court-referred YJCs and Children's Court matters on the time to finalisation, and assess the contribution of index offence- and/or offender-related characteristics as potential confounders. The results suggest that even after controlling for index offence- and offender-related characteristics relevant to court delay, court-referred YJCs are associated with significantly greater delay in processing time relative to police-referred YJCs and court convictions. This is not surprising given that court-referred YJCs are only referred once a matter has been heard in the Children's Court.

Among this cohort, YJC appears to be more time efficient than processing in the Children's Court but only for police-referred rather than a court-referred YJC. The findings suggest that police should be encouraged to refer eligible matters to a YJC given the time-related efficiency identified via this pathway. Identifying methods of reducing the volume of court-referred conferences and increasing the number of police-referred conferences should be a priority for Police and Juvenile Justice.

While there are benefits to holding a YJC as soon as possible after an offence has occurred, there are certainly many legitimate reasons for why delays may occur. It is likely that YJC convenors are more concerned with the quality of the pre-conference process than strictly adhering to the time-frames stipulated in the YOA. The findings suggest it may be appropriate to consider further revising the legislated time-frames.

It is not surprising that an increase in the number of concurrent offences at the index matter is associated with an increase in

the number of days to finalisation, but it is unclear why older offender age, Indigenous status or Metropolitan region is associated with a delay to finalisation. While the results can not be generalised to all YJCs or Children's Court proceedings, they do provide new knowledge on the factors associated with time-related efficiency in terms of the number of days a matter takes to be finalised.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. No adjustments were made for multiple persons as the incident rate ratios and p values computed using generalised estimating equations (adjusting for repeated measures) were consistent with the results reported herein.

2. Non-parametric tests were also computed for variables with skewed distributions. The results were consistent with those identified using one-way ANOVAs. As such we have chosen to present means, standard deviations and associated significance tests for each cohort.

3. Prior offence history was not examined in the regression models as it was not considered to be associated with time to finalisation.

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