

The mysterious case of the disappearing crime

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The Applied Quantitative Methods Network (AQMeN)

- A multi-disciplinary research centre which currently has 4 primary strands of research: Crime, Education, Urban Segregation and Constitutional Change
- Policy focused research using existing secondary data from surveys or administrative sources
- Research feeds into a wider programme of training in quantitative methods for UK social science community and engagement with policy, practice and the public in order to generate impact.
- Funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and Scottish Funding Council (SFC) for 3 years; with further ESRC funding for 4 years.

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AQMeN Crime and Victimization Strand

- **Broad aim:**
 - To address a series of questions about changes in crime over time and explore this at both the individual and geographical level, with a view to informing more effective policy and practice.
- **Four interconnected phases:**
 1. Explaining change in crime over time.
 2. Identifying the participants in crime.
 3. Determining criminal careers.
 4. Evaluating the impact of interventions.

Sources of secondary data

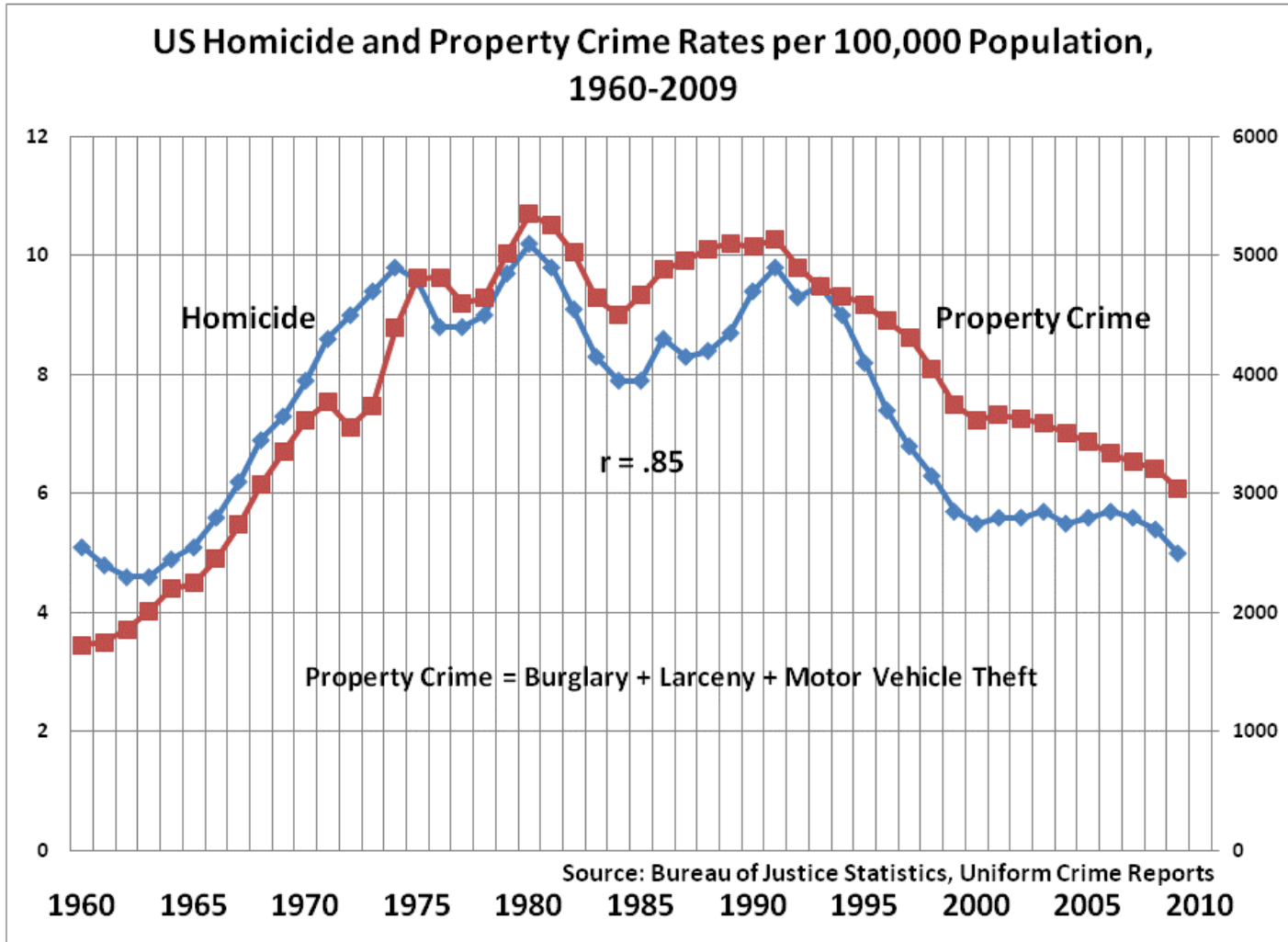
- Administrative data:
 - National statistics (e.g. police recorded crime, courts data, prisons data)
 - Convictions data (e.g. Offenders Index, PNC)
 - Census data (e.g. Scottish Longitudinal Study)
 - Geographical data (e.g. Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics)
 - Local crime data (e.g. Police Scotland data)
- Large-scale national 'victimisation' surveys
 - Scottish Crime and Justice Survey
 - Crime Survey of England and Wales
 - International Crime and Victimization Survey
- National and local 'offender' surveys
 - Offending Crime and Justice Survey
 - Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime

Phase 1:

Explaining change in crime over time

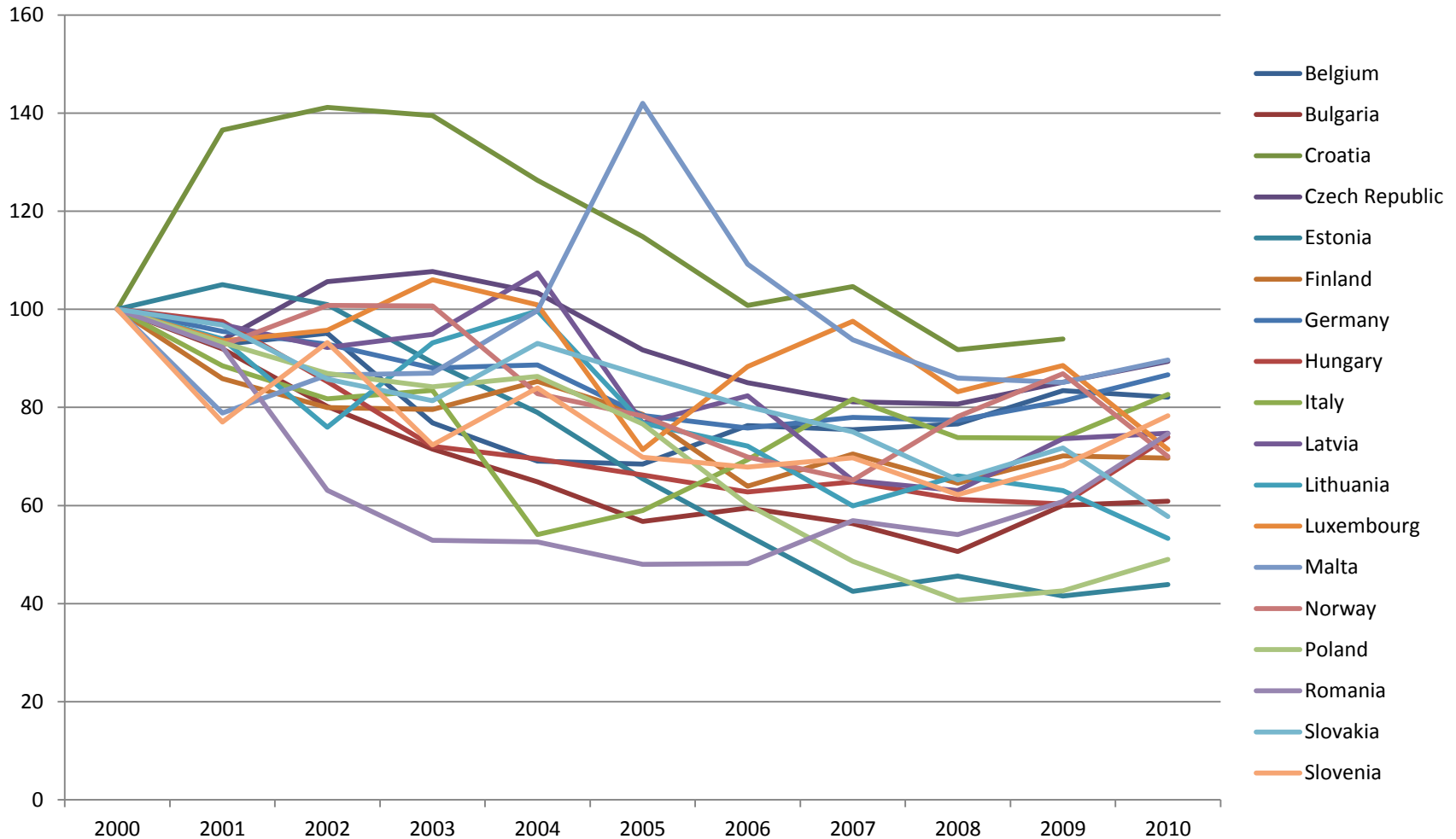
- In the forty years between 1955-1995 (during which many of the criminologists active today learned their craft), the great question was – ‘what explains rising crime?’.
- Since 1995, this has been stood on its head – many countries worldwide have seen an unprecedented drop in crime rates.
- A variety of hypotheses have been put forward for this phenomenon, but few have been tested internationally.
- Some work has been done to explain the crime drop within the UK, but little or none in Scotland.

US crime trends



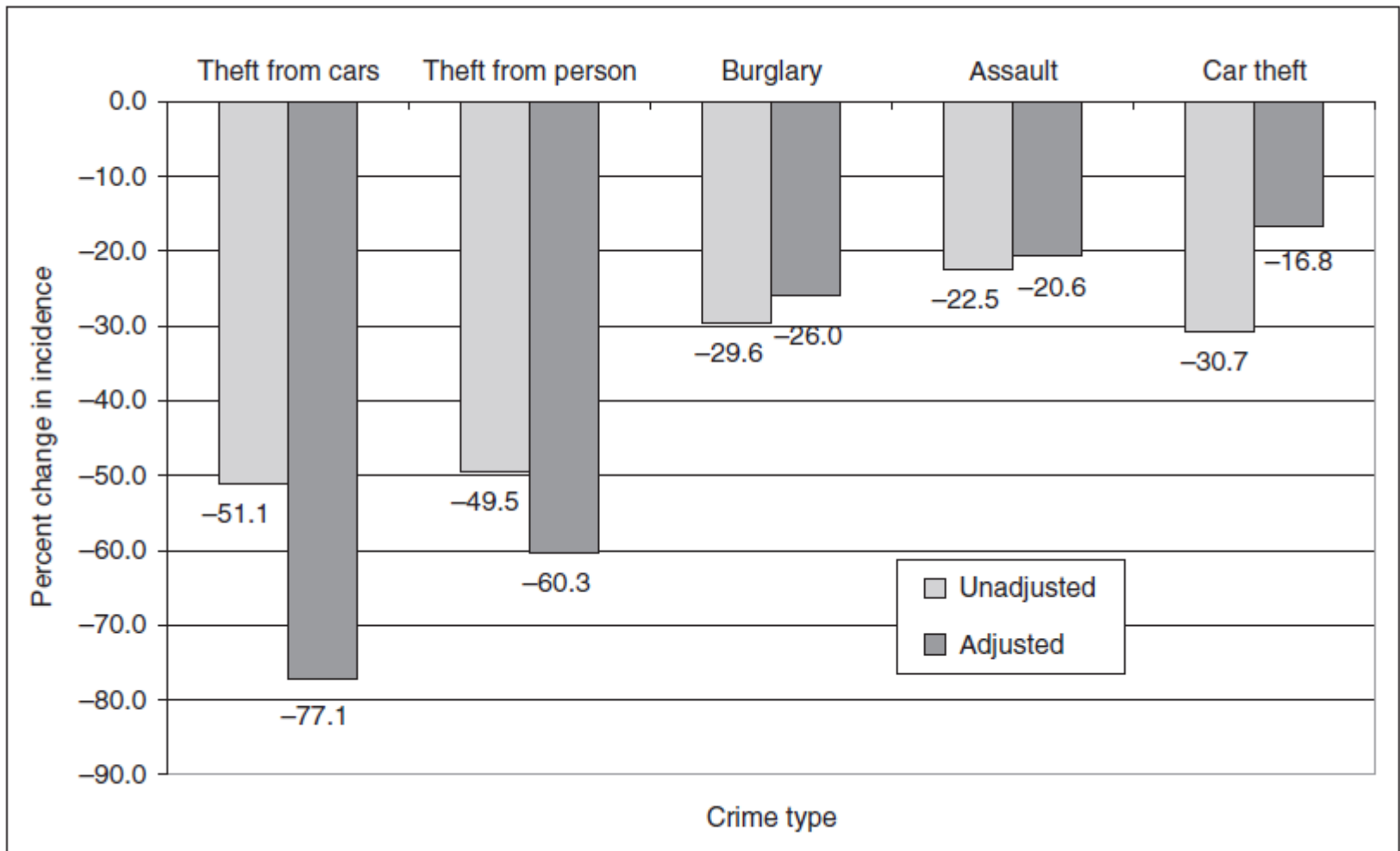
Source: Rosenfeld (2010) Crime Trends Monitor

EU crime trends (indexed at 2000)



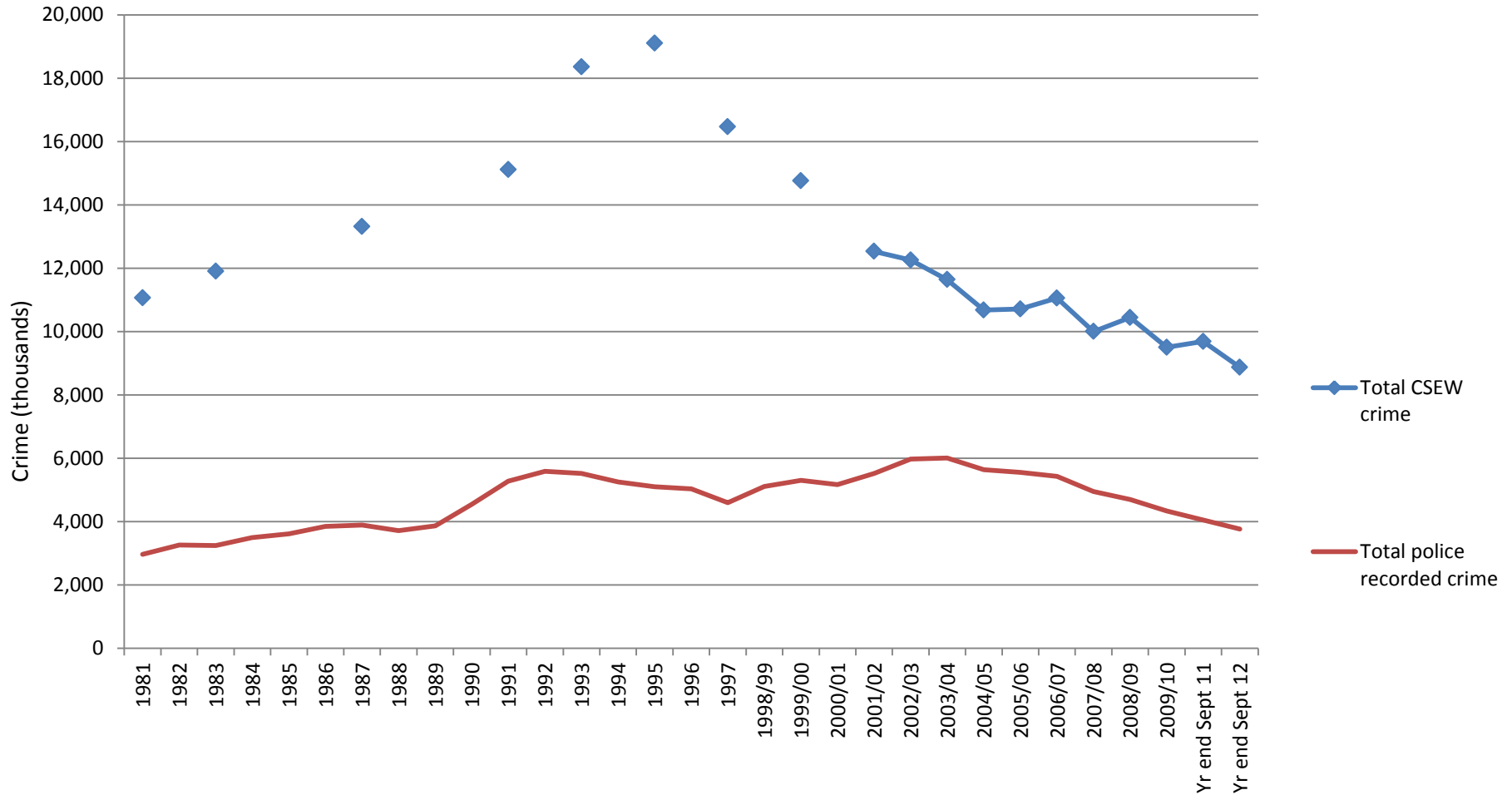
Source: Eurostat - Crimes recorded by the police (accessed February 2013)

Falls in five crime categories



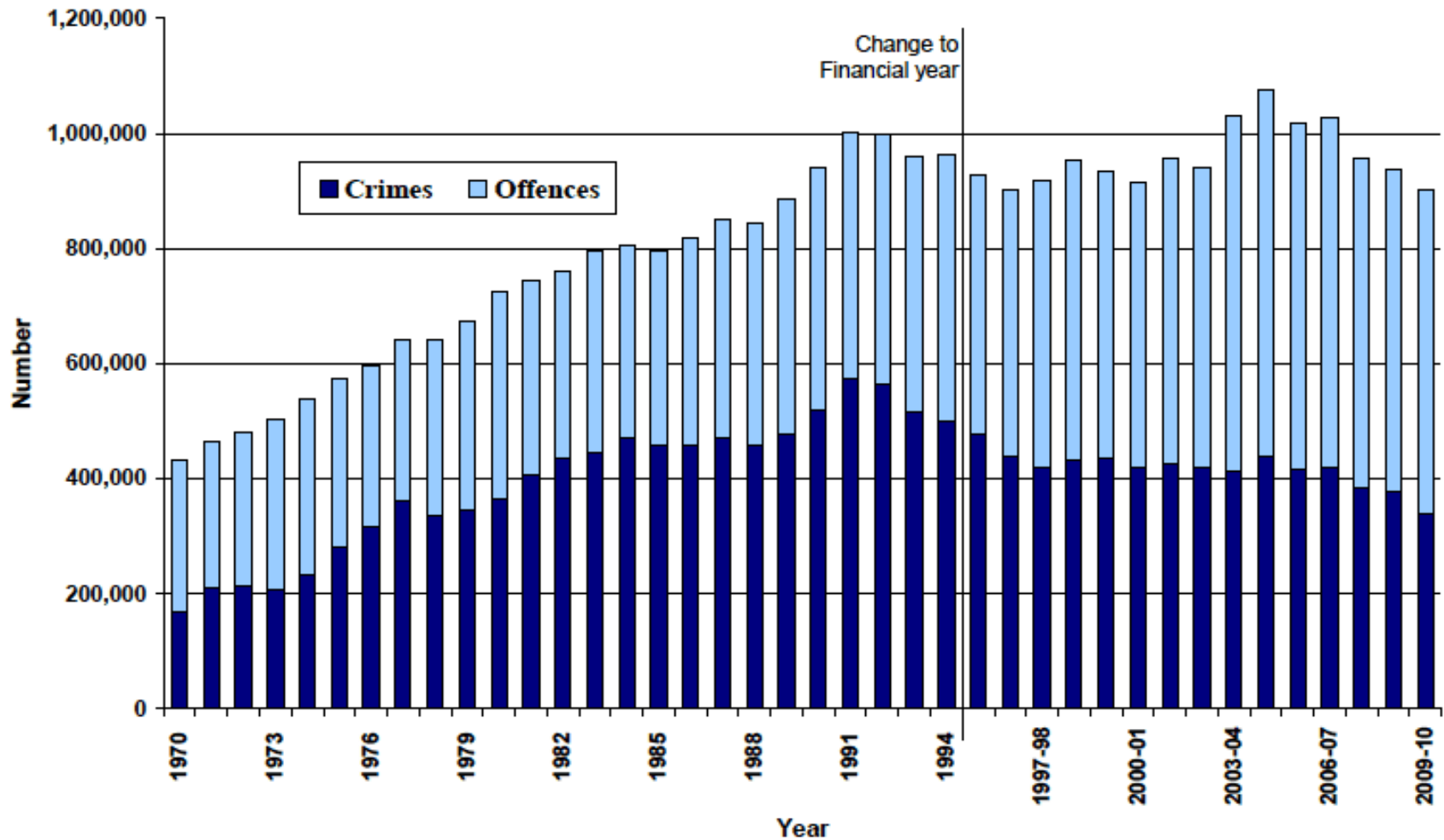
Source: Tseloni et al (2010) Exploring the international decline in crime rates

England & Wales crime trends



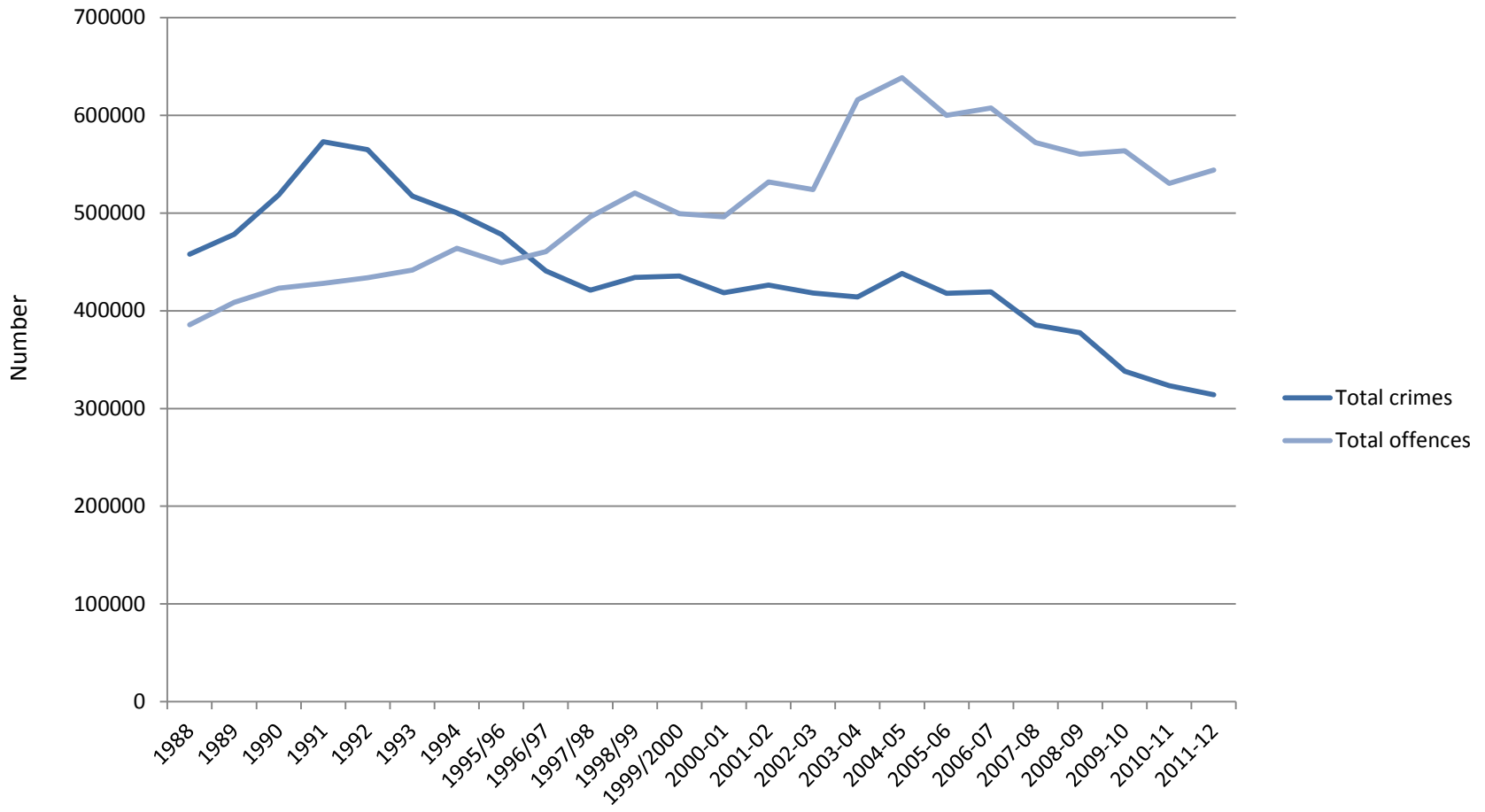
Source: ONS - Trends in recorded crime and CSEW, 1981 to year ending September 2012 (accessed February 2013)

Scotland crime trends: police recorded crime

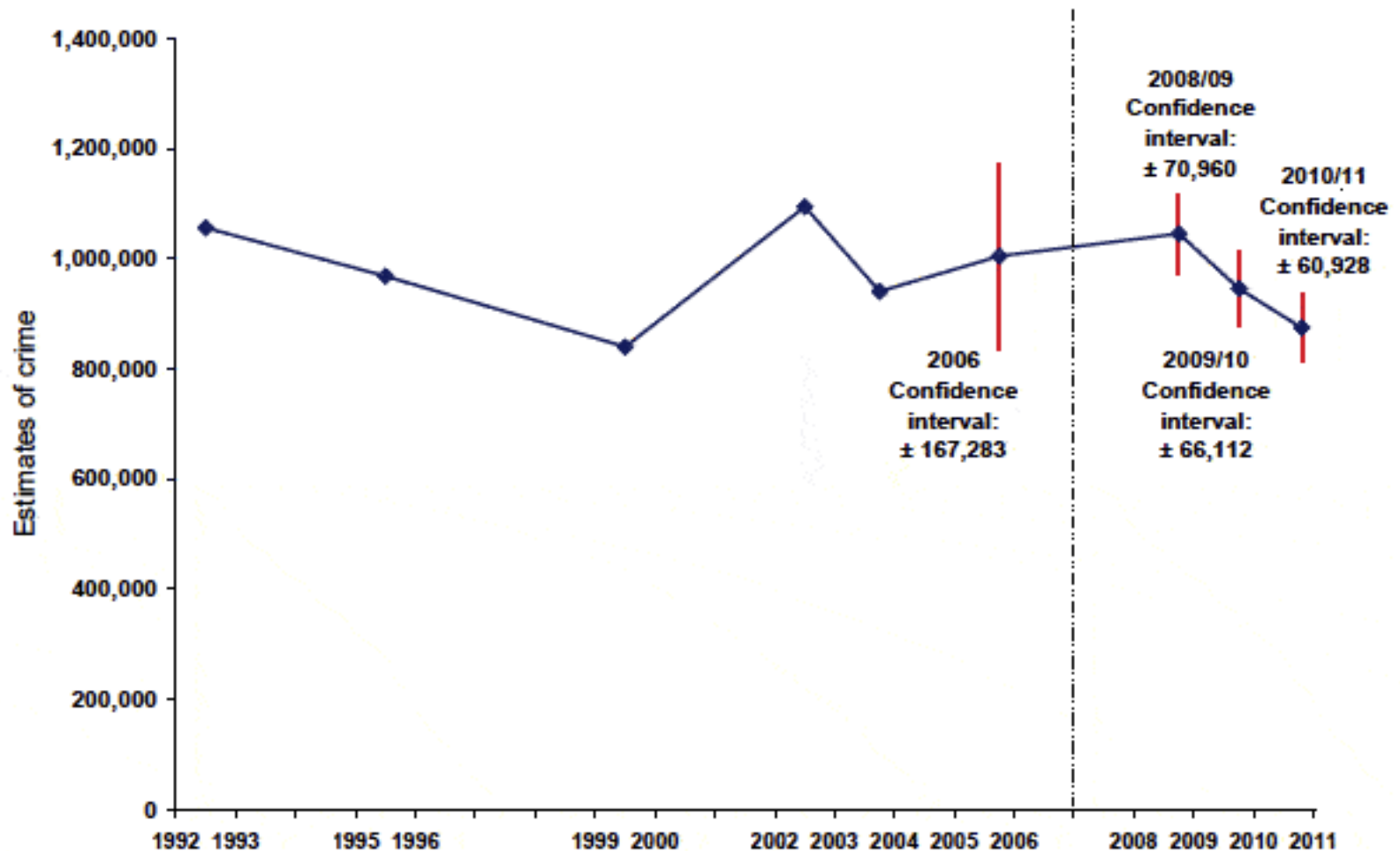


Source: Scottish Government (2012) Recorded Crime in Scotland, 2011-12, Statistical Bulletin, p1

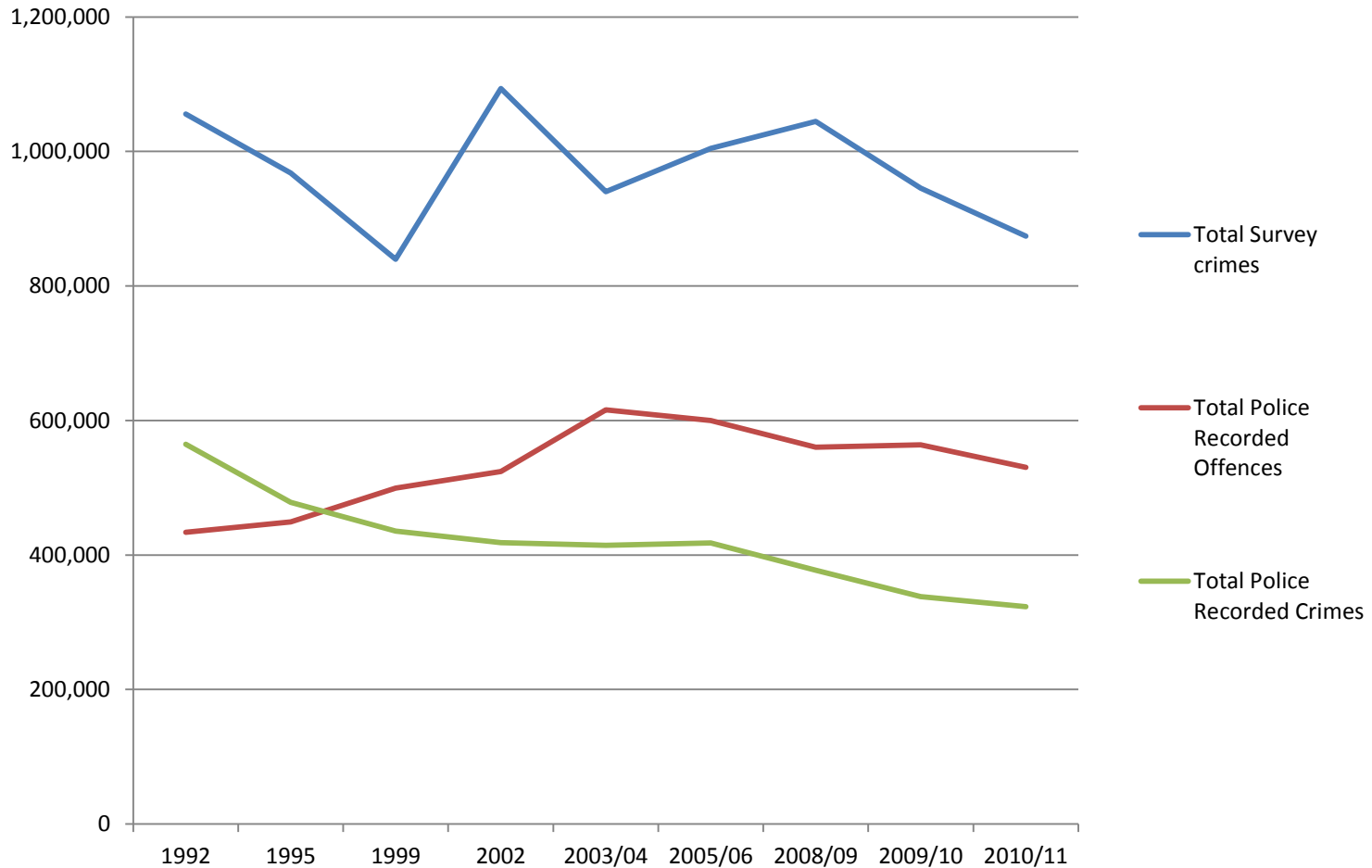
Scottish police recorded crime: A different perspective



Scotland crime trends: Scottish crime surveys



Survey crimes vs Police Recorded Offences/Crimes



Notes:

- 1) These data are not directly comparable due to differences in measurement and definition.
- 2) Gap years are not included in chart.

Scotland's 'criminal record'

- “Scotland has been named the most violent country in the developed world” (BBC coverage of a UN report, 2005)
- “Scotland has the second highest murder rate in Europe” (Guardian report of a WHO study, 2005)
- Police Recorded Crime rates show a substantial increase in minor assault since 2004 (Scottish Government 2007)
- “Murder and Sex Crimes on the Up” (The Scottish Sun, 2011)
- The least peaceful major urban centre in the UK is Glasgow (Institute of Economics and Peace 2013)

Potential explanations?

- International hypotheses:
 - The 'Obama Effect'
 - Falling demand for Crack Cocaine
 - Increased availability of legal abortion
 - Reductions in lead in petrol
 - The baby boomers grew up
- UK hypotheses
 - Improvements in physical security and target hardening
 - Smarter policing practices (e.g. data sharing, crime mapping)
 - Expansion of electronic surveillance (e.g. CCTV, camera phones)
 - A reduction in public alcohol consumption (true in Scotland?)
 - Changes in 'youth culture' (e.g. internet use and video games rather than hanging around the streets).

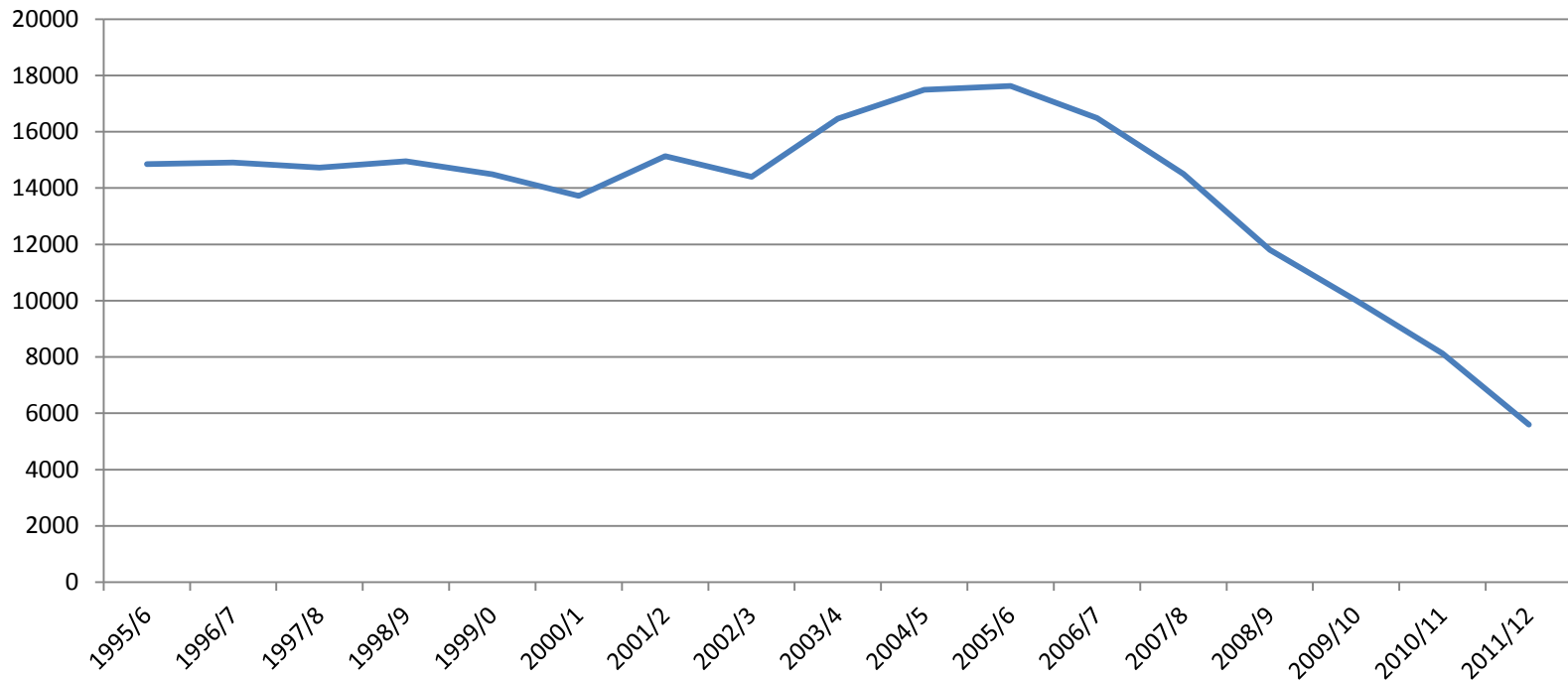
Sources of data on youth crime in Scotland

A report commissioned by Scottish Government (Pieda Consulting, 2005) noted the following:

- Police recorded crime statistics provide only a partial picture of crime and cannot determine the level of youth crime as the perpetrator is usually unknown.
- Court statistics provide data on those proceeded against in court, but few crimes result in court proceedings and most young people are dealt with by the Children's Hearing System.
- The Children's Hearing System has data on young people referred on offence grounds but not all crime committed by young people is dealt with by the Children's Hearing System.
- The Scottish Crime and Justice Survey collects data on victims of some types of crime, but only for those aged 16 or over living in residential households. It doesn't cover all types of crime and details on the offenders are limited.
- Any national survey of young people in Scotland has either had too small numbers to draw any meaningful conclusions or has focused on issues other than offending.
- The only large-scale source of data on youth offending in Scotland is the Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime.

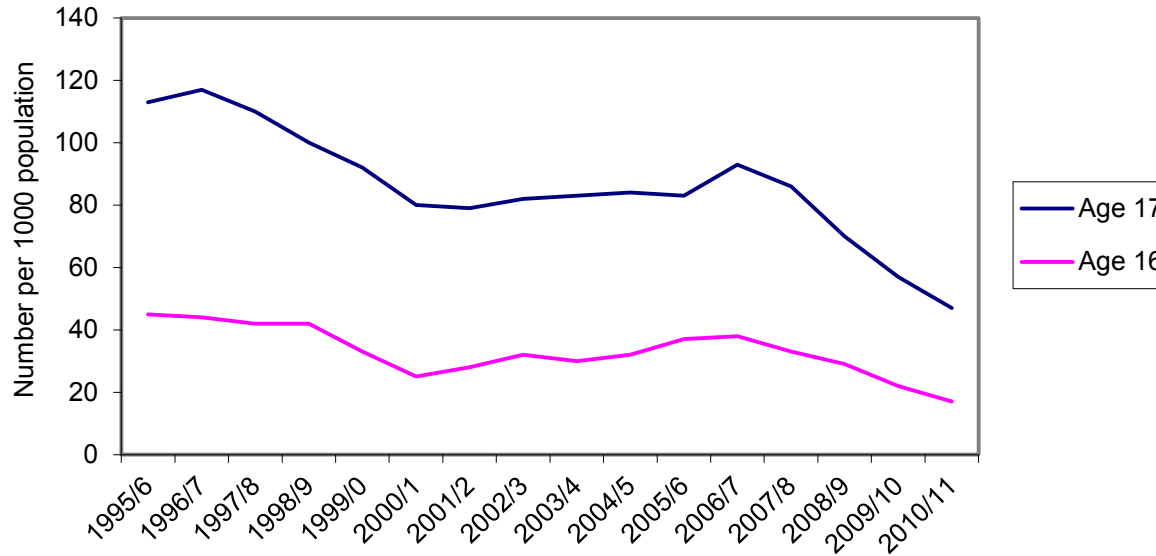
How much youth crime?

Number of children referred on offence grounds

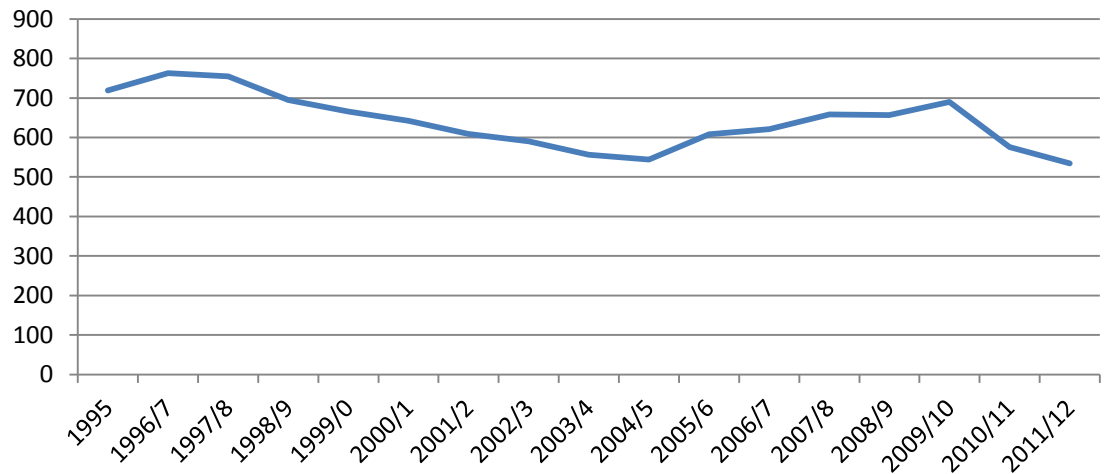


Source: SCRA Online Statistics Dashboard, 2012.

Number of 16 and 17 year olds with charges proved in court



Average daily prison population of prisoners in Scotland Direct sentence (under 21)



Sources: Criminal Proceedings in Scottish Courts Statistical Bulletins & Prison Statistics Bulletins

- “Taken together, information from these two sources - the administrative statistics and the research-base - provide a broad-brush picture of young people and violence in Scotland. This is also a rather limited picture, as much remains unknown about youth violence in Scotland. **There is little doubt that there is a significant lack of available data on youth offending** and the wider experiences of young people in Scotland. The administrative statistical data has a range of limitations, and **there is no large-scale youth offending survey such as those found in other jurisdictions**. The data deficiencies have clear implications for understanding underlying causes of offending amongst young people, trends in offending over time, longer term outcomes for offenders and effectiveness of current intervention policies and practice.” (Fraser et al, 2010, Youth Violence in Scotland: A literature review)

The Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime

About the Edinburgh Study

- Prospective longitudinal study of pathways into and out of offending
- Involving a cohort of around 4,300 young people who started secondary school in Edinburgh in 1998
- Aims to study offending within 3 main contexts:
 - Individual development through the life-course
 - Physical and social structure of neighbourhoods
 - Impact of interaction with agencies of social control & law enforcement
- Broad research programme with multiple forms of data collection
- Key aim is to inform policy development at local and national level

The study design

Census based approach involving all Edinburgh Schools

School participants: All 23 mainstream schools, 8 out of 14 Independent schools and 9 out of 12 special schools (92.2% coverage)

Parental consent (3.1% opt out rate)

Six annual sweeps of data collection (1st-6th year of secondary school) involving self-completion questionnaires administered in schools (high response rates)

Seventh sweep of fieldwork in 2009/10 following up those who were referred to the Children's Hearing System on offence grounds

Multiple methods of data collection

The young people:

- Self-completion questionnaires (6 annual sweeps + 1 follow up)
- Semi-structured interviews (sweeps 2 and 6 + follow-up narratives)

Schools:

- Survey of teachers (sweep 2)
- School records about attendance & exclusion (annual)
- SQA exam results (sweep 4 onwards)

Families:

- Survey of parents (sweep 4)

Communities:

- Community survey (sweep 3)
- Geographical study of Edinburgh neighbourhoods (updated annually)

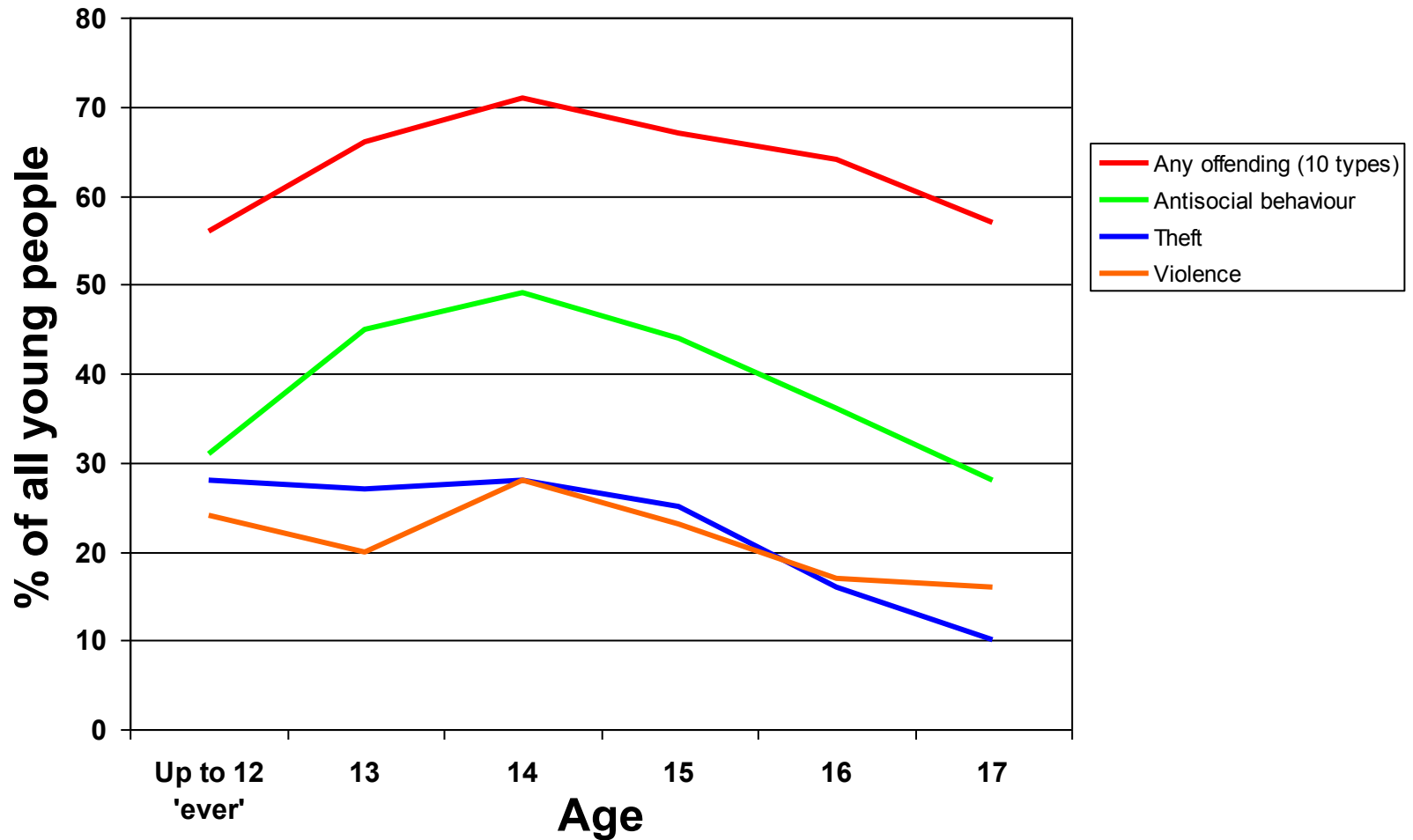
Youth/criminal justice:

- Police Juvenile Liaison Officer records (to age 16)
- Children's hearing and social work records (to age 18)
- Criminal records (to age 22)

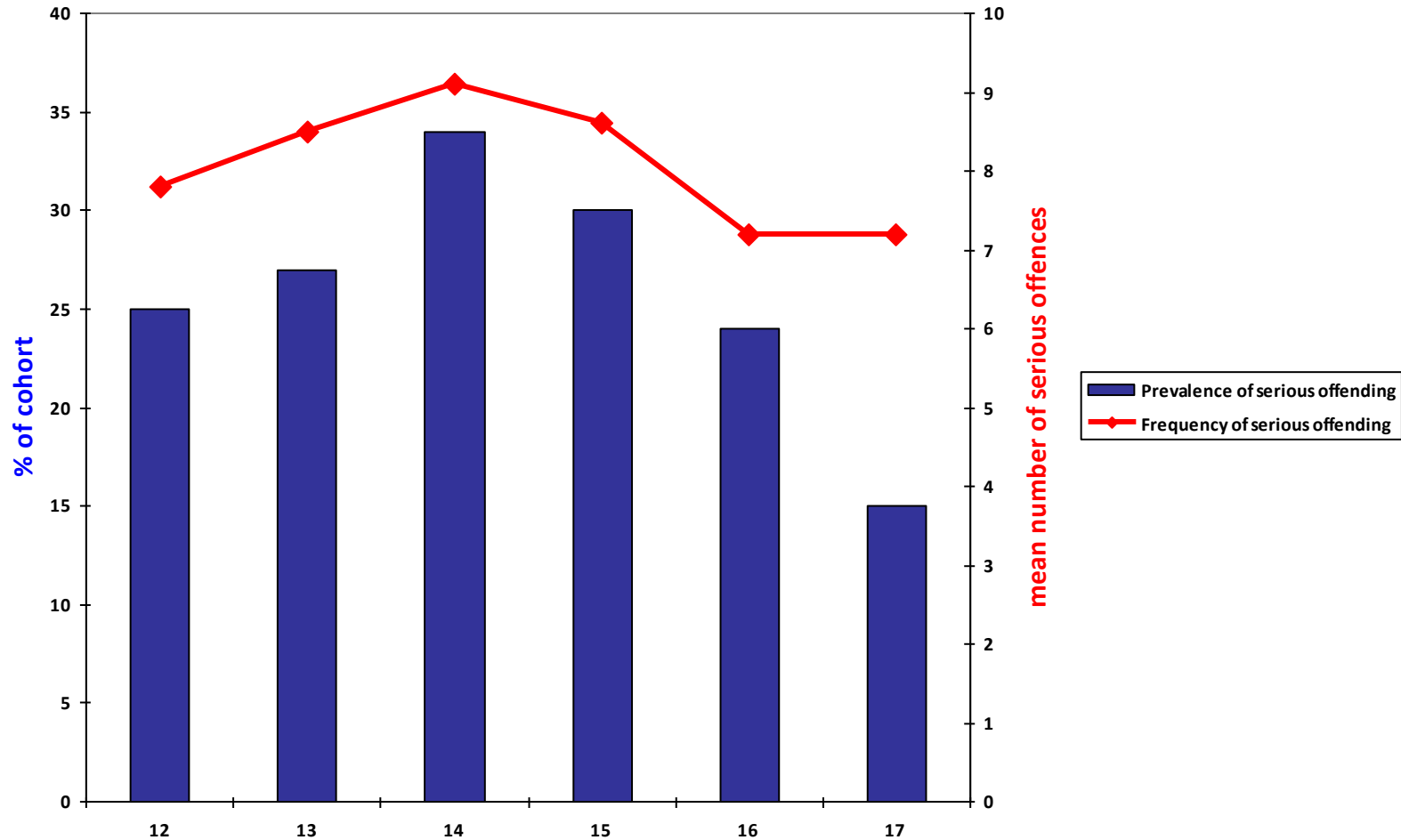
Questions on offending

- A wide range of 'offending' questions were asked (from low level delinquency to serious forms of offending)
- 10 key questions at each sweep
 - Truancy
 - Breach of the peace
 - Vandalism
 - Fire raising
 - Shoplifting
 - Theft from a vehicle
 - Housebreaking
 - Hitting/kicking/punching
 - Carrying a weapon
 - Theft by force (robbery)

Involvement in offending

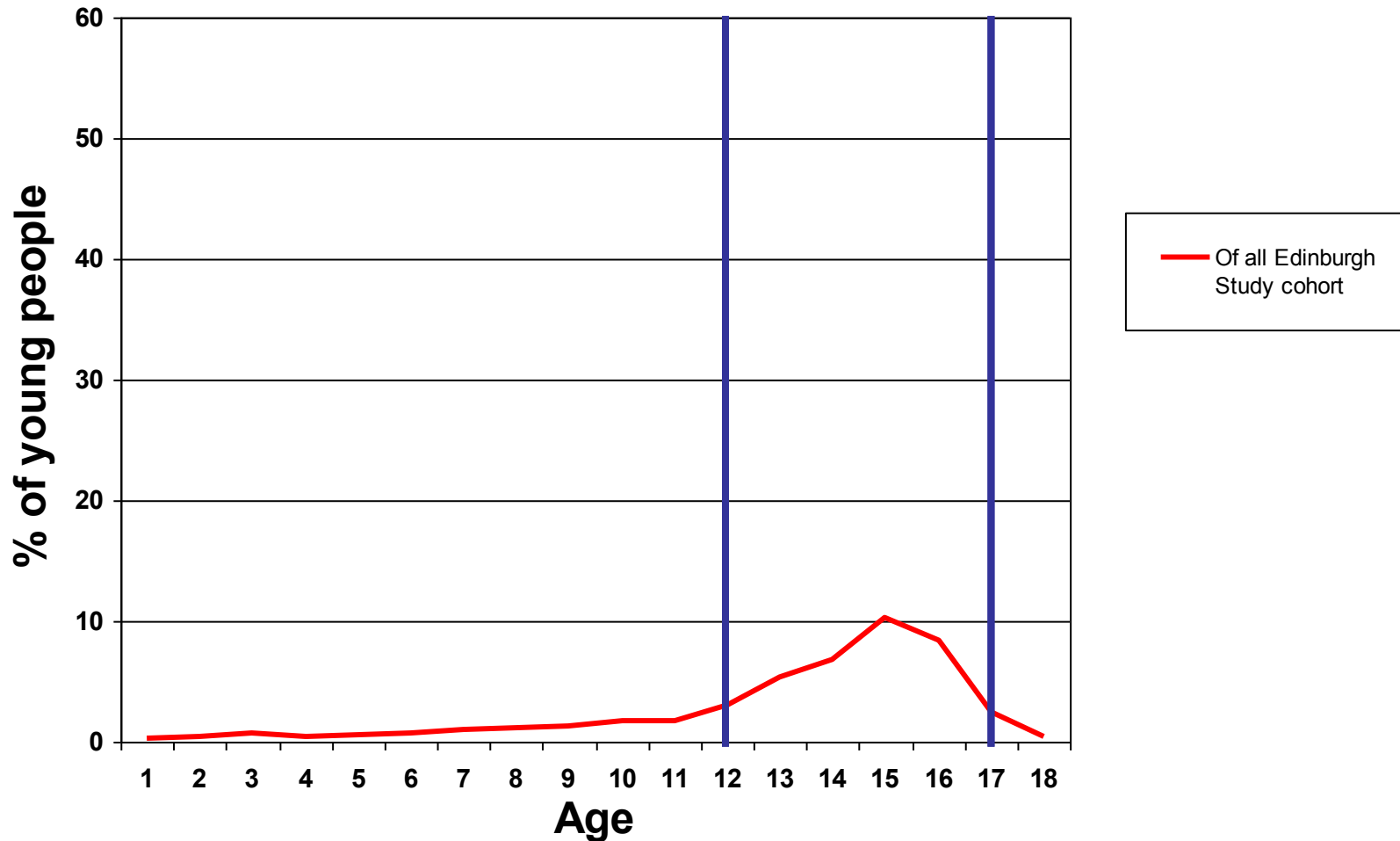


Involvement in serious offending

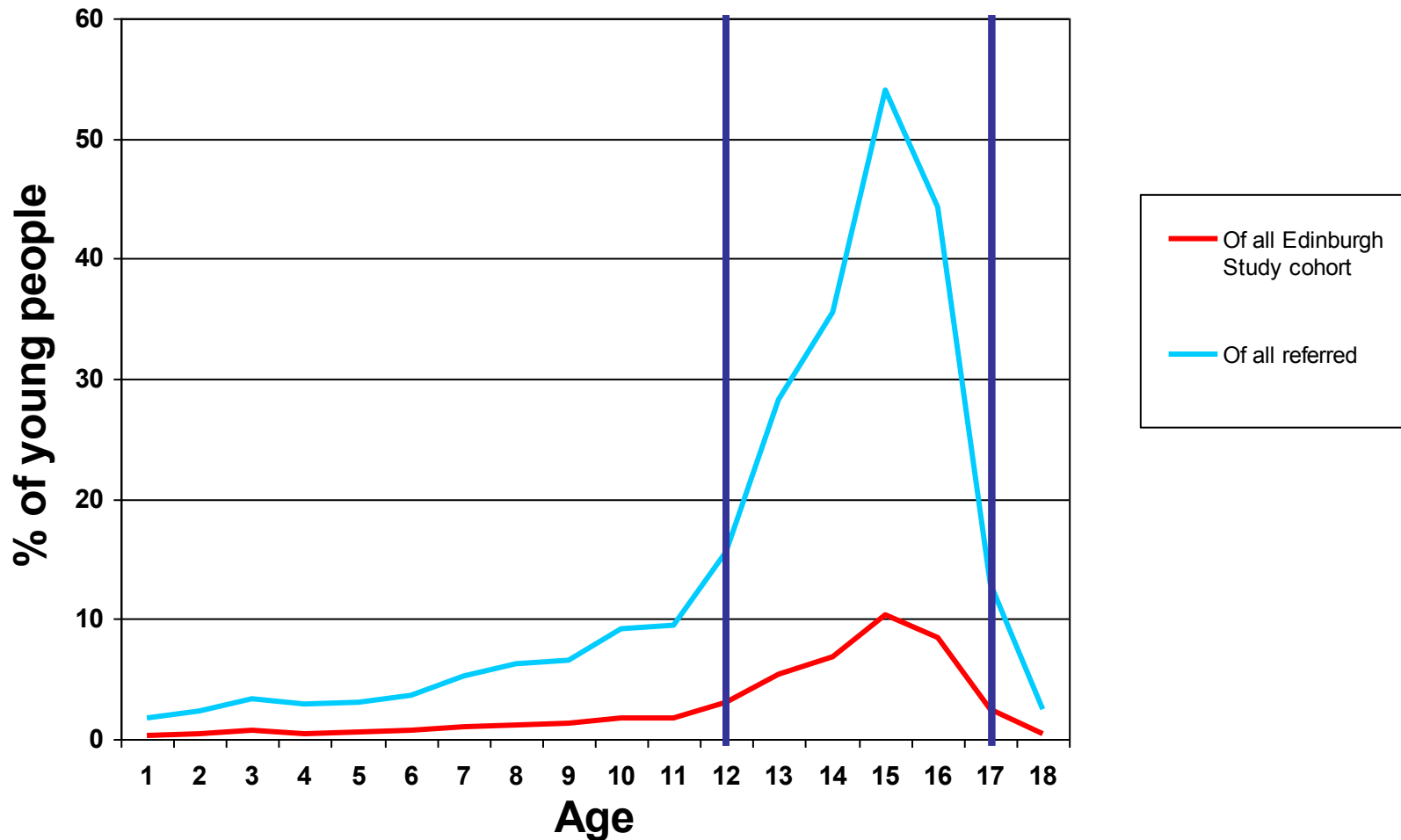


Note: Serious offending = housebreaking, car breaking, joy riding, robbery, weapon carrying, assault (6+), fire-raising.

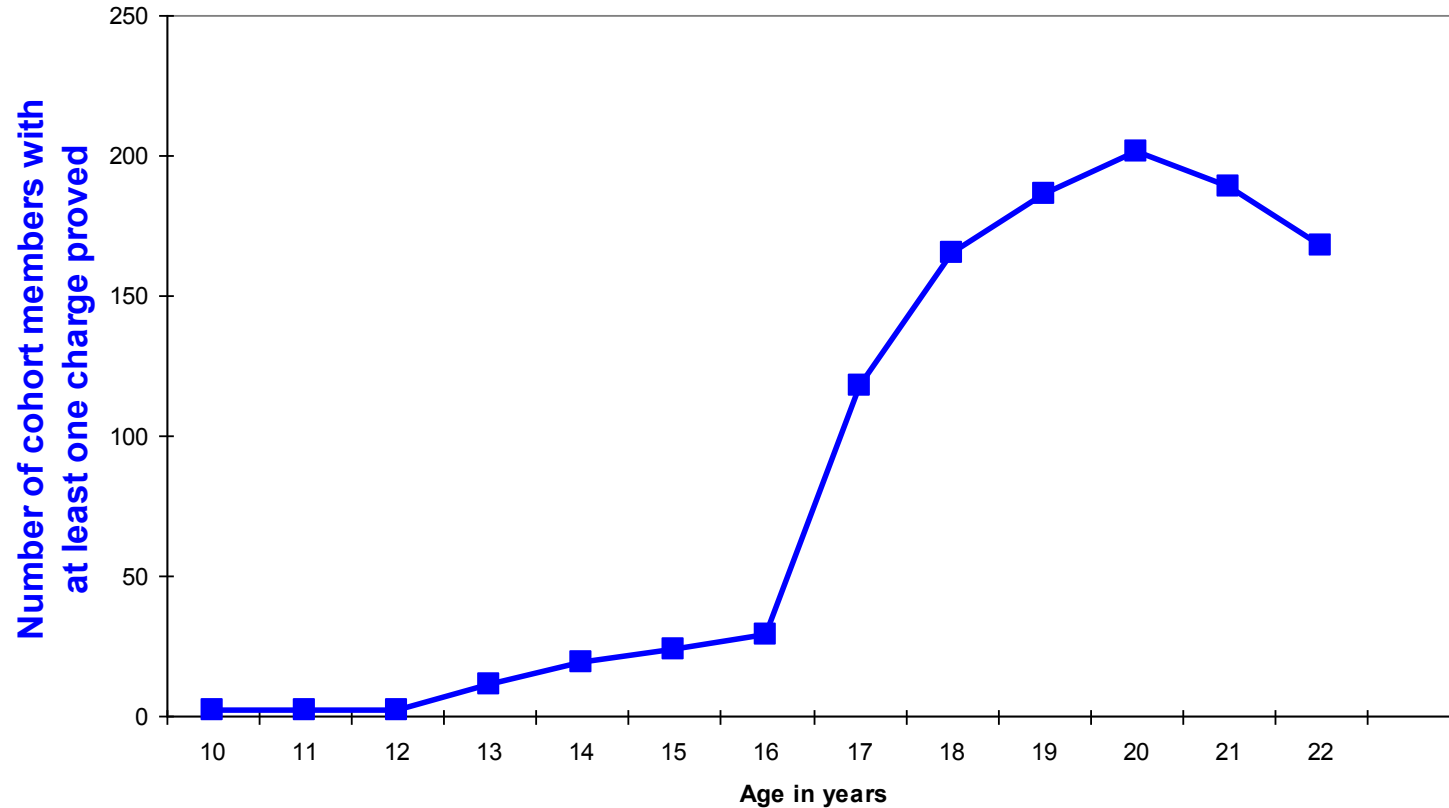
Referral to the Children's Hearing System



Referral to the Children's Hearing System



Conviction in the adult criminal justice system

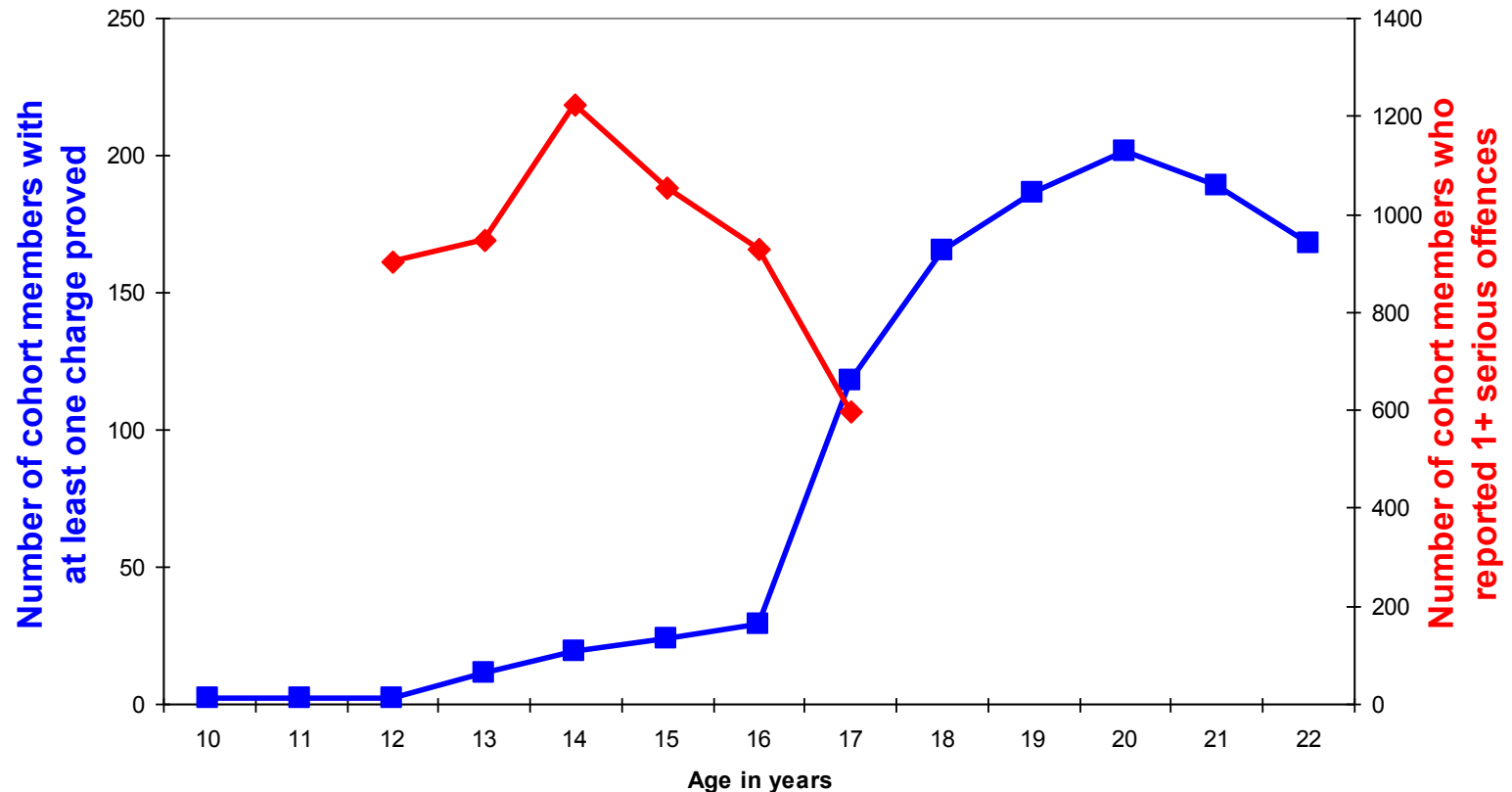


Note: Cohort=3855 whose names were checked against criminal conviction records.

Profile of those convicted

- 15% of all study members were convicted by age 22:
 - Males were more likely (24%) than females (6%)
 - Females accounted for 12% of all convictions (compared to 15% nationally)
 - The peak age of conviction was 18 (same as the national figure)
- Amongst those who were convicted:
 - An average of 5.9 convictions per person
 - The largest number of convictions for any one person was 114
 - Males had a significantly higher number of convictions on average (6.5) compared with females (3.6)

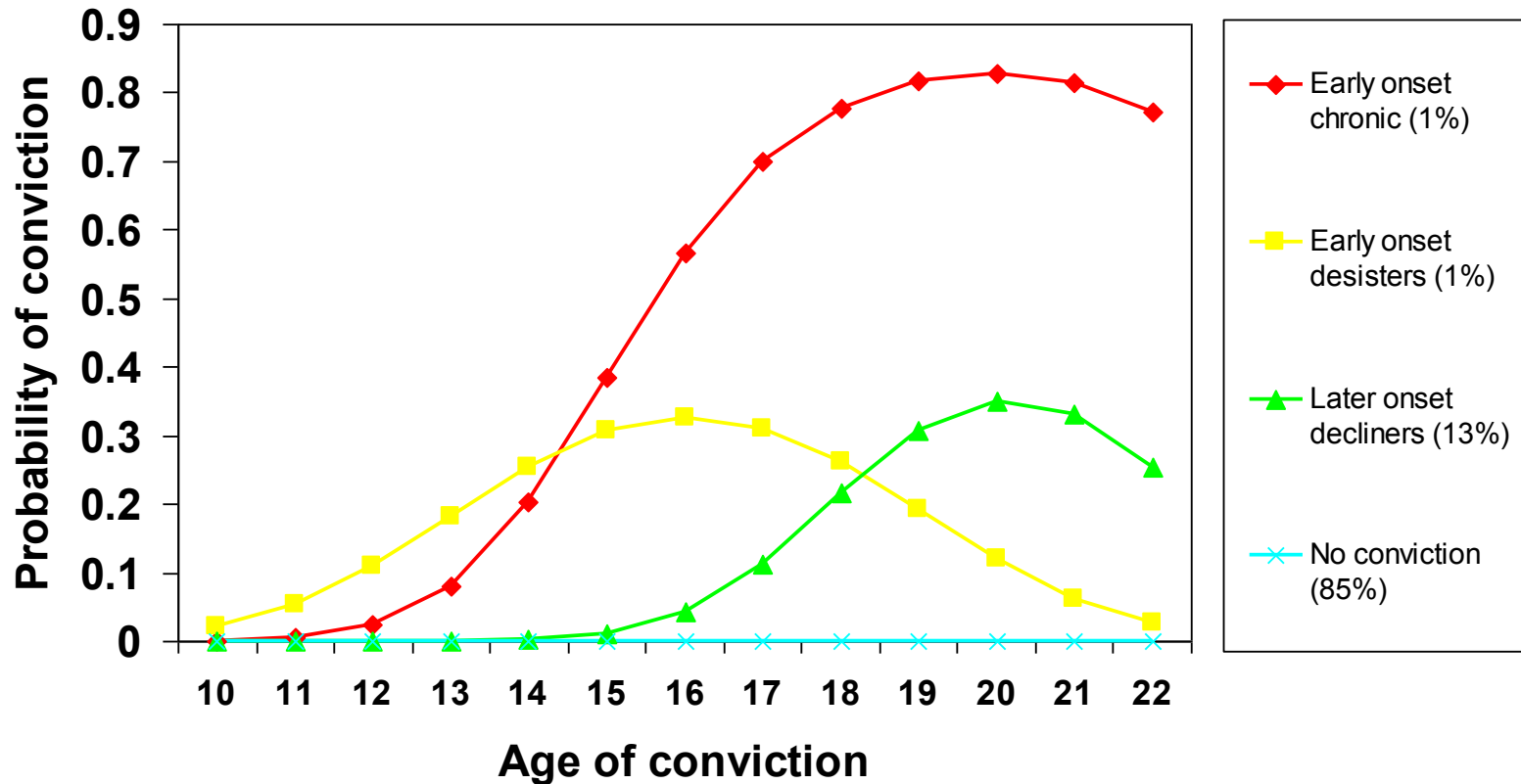
Comparing convictions data with self-reported offending data



Notes: Cohort=3855 whose names were checked against criminal conviction records; self-report data are unweighted.

Probability of criminal convictions: Conviction trajectories

(McAra and McVie, 2010)

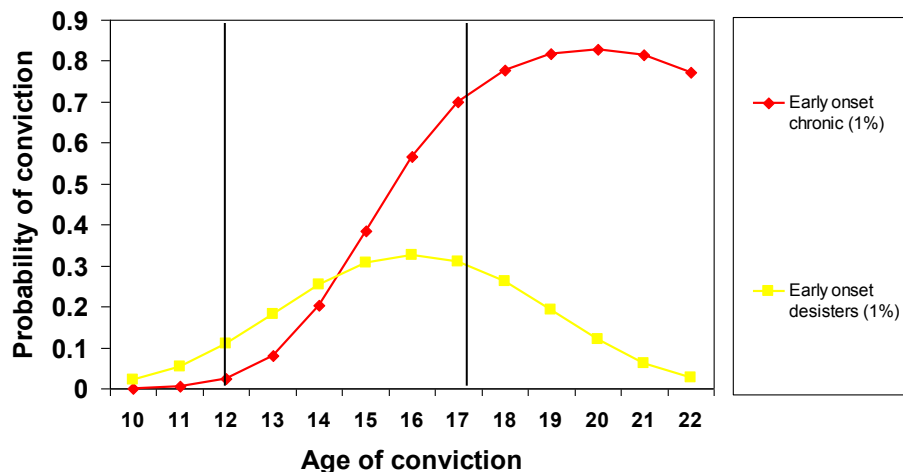


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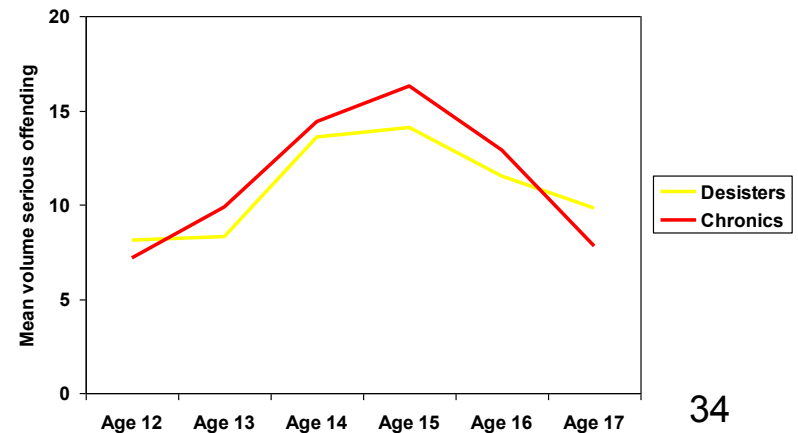
How do the early onset groups differ at age 12?

- No significant differences on measures of deprivation, family problems, delinquent peers, risky leisure activities, school problems (truancy, exclusion and bad behaviour), personality dimensions or moral attitudes to crime.
- No significant difference in frequency of serious offending according to self-reports.

Convictions data



Self-report data



What changes between age 12 and 15?

- The early onset group that went on to have a pattern of 'chronic' convictions were more likely than the desisters to:
 - truant from school
 - be excluded from school
 - get into trouble with the police
 - and receive statutory supervision from CHS during this period

NOTE: the groups did not differ on any of these things at age 12.

Youth to adult criminal justice transitions

(McAra and McVie 2007, 2010)

- Criminal justice outcomes of those referred to hearing system:
 - 55% of those 'ever' referred on offence grounds convicted by age 22 compared with 10% of those with no hearing record (5x higher)
 - 13% of those 'ever' referred on offence grounds imprisoned by age 22 compared with 0.4% of those with no hearing record (33x higher)
 - 71% of those made subject to compulsory measures of care convicted by age 22 (compared with 51% of those referred but not placed on supervision)
- Key factors predicting transition from youth to adult system:
 - Excluded from school by 3rd year of secondary school
 - Early history of police warnings/charges
 - Being male
 - ***Assessed as most 'needy' in reporter files***

Some concluding points

- Research to explain the Scottish crime drop is underway, but it will be significantly weakened by the lack of data on how individual behaviour (especially amongst young people) has changed.
- There are important gaps in our knowledge about patterns, trends and explanations for youth offending in Scotland (we are lagging behind many other countries).
- Studies such as the Edinburgh Study highlight the value of measuring offending independently of (but also connecting it to) administrative data.
- Without repeated/longitudinal national surveys of offending (like we have for victimisation) we cannot gain a clear picture of how much youth (or adult) crime there is in Scotland nor how or why it changes over time.

References

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