

Annual statistics: a system failing Black children

Our [annual youth justice statistics](#), published today, are the first time we've been able to show the impact of COVID-19.

The statistics show a youth justice system succeeding in fewer children coming into the system, fewer children in custody and lower reoffending rates, but categorically failing on every count to halt the overrepresentation of Black children throughout the system.

A system failing Black children

As a Black child in England and Wales you are more likely to be stopped and searched, arrested, held on remand, sentenced to custody and to go on to commit another offence within a year. Figures show that Black children account for 4% of the 10-17 year old population (Census data, 2011) but:

- 18% of stop and searches (where ethnicity was known)
- 15% of arrests
- 12% of children cautioned or sentenced
- 34% of children in custody on remand
- 29% of the youth custody population (increased from 18% ten years ago)

The statistics are shocking, and the disparity continues when we look at reoffending rates, which for Black children is 42.4% compared to a rate of 35.3% for White children. So, once they are in the justice system, we are still disproportionately failing to give Black children the support they need to live crime-free lives. Sadly, the statistics also show that children with a Mixed ethnicity are over-represented in most stages of the system. This includes stop and search, arrests, cautions and sentences and custody.

Address the use of custodial remand

Another area which concerns me, and is highlighted by these figures, is the unacceptable proportion of children who are in custody on remand. On average, 40% of children in custody have not been sentenced and are there on remand. This is the largest proportion in the last ten years.

Shockingly, almost three quarters (74%) of children remanded to custody did not subsequently receive a custodial sentence. This is the highest level seen on record and means many children in custody today are there unnecessarily and experiencing the trauma and stigma that brings. This is damaging to children, their relationships, their opportunities and identity, which does not improve public safety.

We must prioritise addressing the use of remand, and its disproportionate use with Black children. Our research found that after taking into account the

influences of offending, demographics and practitioner factors, Black children remain less likely to receive community remand (8 percentage points) than their White counterparts. We are working with various partners to address this with haste but there must be a collective effort to find and use less damaging, more effective ways to safeguard children and communities.

Long term trends or pandemic impact?

We must approach the analysis of this 2020/21 data with some caution because of the impact of COVID-19 on the courts and policing. However, it is clear that many of the long-term trends we hoped to see continue through the pandemic, have continued. We continued to see falls in the number of children entering the justice system, the number of children who received a caution or sentence, reoffending rates have decreased again, and the youth custody population is at an all time low.

There is much here to commend, and my challenge to all is to maintain this and to dare to go further. Let's continue to find ways to support children safely in the community, let's invest in the important prevention and diversion work of police, youth justice partners and others, let's invest upstream and enjoy the safer communities that thrive when we meet the needs of vulnerable children early on in their lives.

We must act

It was clear before, but these figures are a sobering reminder of the work we collectively need to do to address disproportionality, find and use alternatives to remand and to keep children out of the justice system.

We must not rely on others to fix 'their part' of the system. We must all make a change, and we must all stand up and do something about it. At the YJB we will continue to champion the important work of early intervention programmes, particularly for Black children, like [Levelling the Playing Field](#). We will continue to work with the Magistrates Association on a disparity protocol. We will look deeper into the reasons behind disproportionality in the justice system. You can find more information about our work in this area through our [understanding racial disparity](#) report and our research into [ethnic disproportionality in remand and sentencing](#).

We will continue to invest in reducing the use of remand. And we will continue to work with partners across the system and further afield to level up the opportunities open to children in and at risk of entering the justice system.

Behind the data

Statistics will only ever give us some of the picture of what is happening. Our position as the only organisation with oversight of the whole youth justice system means that we gather much more than data. We know that behind the data, there are thousands of people working in youth justice who have gone above and beyond throughout the most testing times in the pandemic. My

thanks to them cannot be overstated.

Behind the data, there are also concerns that the pandemic has had a huge affect on children, particularly those who were already vulnerable. Professionals [assessing children in the justice system](#) identify multiple needs – from issues with mental health to family to accommodation to substance misuse. Reduced access to support services, increased trauma and mental illness, fewer opportunities for safeguarding and more opportunities for online exploitation all form a worrying reality for those across the sector.

We must continue to prioritise and invest in children at the earliest possible moment to ensure that children can emerge from the pandemic with a host of opportunities and support.

Above all, we must always remember that youth justice statistics are about children, their lives, their trauma and their needs which we, collectively, must meet. We must also acknowledge that it is us as adults, who have the power to create the opportunities and environment for these children to succeed, and with that, to create safer communities for all.