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Offending in the ACT, 2015-2024: Analysis of administrative data

Prepared by POLIS@ANU: The Centre for Social Policy Research, for the ACT Government

Hayley Boxall

Olivia Halls

Lorana Bartels

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The Australian National University

Canberra ACT 2600 Australia

www.anu.edu.au

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1. Introduction

The Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Justice and Community Safety Directorate (JACS) has partnered with POLIS@ANU: The Centre for Social Policy Research at the Australian National University to undertake a program of research supporting the Reducing Recidivism Plan, which aims to reduce recidivism in the ACT by 25% by 2025 (RR25by25; ACT Government, 2020). This report presents findings from the statistical component of that program, based on analysis of administrative data from ACT Policing, the ACT court system, and ACT Corrective Services, accessed via the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) DataLab.

The report has three primary aims. First, it provides a snapshot of people in contact with the ACT criminal legal system during the period 2015–2024, including the nature of the offences and charges they were accused of and the outcomes of their interactions with police, courts, and custodial services. Second, it describes changes over the observation period in the characteristics of persons accused of a crime, appearing as a defendant in court, or entering custody (ie, the Alexander Maconochie Centre), as well as changes in outcomes and reoffending patterns. Third, and more implicitly, it seeks to assess the useability of administrative data holdings currently managed by the ABS for the purposes of criminal justice monitoring and research in the ACT, an issue that forms part of a broader ongoing conversation about data infrastructure and governance within the Territory.

It should be noted that the research program was originally designed around linked unit record data across the three datasets, which would have enabled analysis of individual pathways through the criminal legal system. However, as described in the limitations section of this report, linkage at the individual level was not achievable, given the absence of unique event identifiers in the data provided. As a result, each dataset is analysed independently, and the findings should be interpreted with this constraint in mind.

This report is one of several produced under the RR25by25 research program. It is intended to be read alongside the Pathways Out of the Criminal Justice System (POCS) report (Boxall & Bartels, 2025), which presents survey and interview data from people with lived experience of the ACT justice system, to examine the factors that support or hinder desistance from offending. Together, the two reports offer complementary perspectives: where this report describes patterns and trends at the population level, the POCS report provides depth and texture, through the experiences of individuals navigating pathways out of the system.

1.1 Structure of this report

This report is structured as follows:

- The **Methodology** chapter describes the data sources, data items available for analysis, key definitions and counting rules adopted throughout the report, the analytic approach, relevant ethical considerations, and the limitations of the data and analysis.
- **Chapter 3: Police proceedings** presents a descriptive overview of the characteristics of persons proceeded against by ACT Policing, the nature of offending, policing outcomes, and patterns of reoffending and change over time.
- **Chapter 4: Courts** presents a descriptive overview of the characteristics of defendants appearing before the ACT courts, the nature of matters finalised, court outcomes, sentencing, and patterns of change over time.

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- **Chapter 5: Prisons** presents a descriptive overview of the characteristics of persons entering the Alexander Maconochie Centre, the nature of sentences served, reasons for exit, and patterns of change over time.
- **Discussion and conclusion** draws together key findings across the three datasets and considers their implications for policy and practice, future research and data development.

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2. Methodology

The current report involved the analysis of administrative data obtained from the ABS, which sourced the data from the relevant ACT agencies. The datasets comprised:

- all offences reported to ACT Policing for the period 1 July 2015 to 30 June 2024
- all criminal matters finalised in the ACT courts (ie, Supreme Court, Magistrates Court and Children's Court) for the period 1 July 2019 to 30 June 2024 and
- all prison episodes recorded at the Alexander Maconochie Centre by ACT Corrective Services for the period 1 July 2015 to 30 June 2024.

2.1 Data items

For each dataset, the data items available for analysis were limited. Across all three datasets, information was available on the sex and Indigenous status of individuals, as well as their age at the time of each recorded event. For policing data, additional items included the nature of each offence (using the Australian and New Zealand Standard Offence Classification (ANZSOC: see ABS, 2023 and further discussion below), the outcome of each police episode, and the date of each offence. For courts data, additional items included the court in which matters were heard, the outcome of each charge, and the sentence imposed where applicable. For prison data, additional items included the length of each sentence and the reason for exit from custody.

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Table 1: Data items included in the three datasets

Data item	Categories	Police	Courts	Prisons
Person ID	Unique identifier	✓	✓	✓
Age	Single years (police/courts: 10+; prisons: 18+)	✓	✓	✓
Sex	Male; Female; Not stated	✓	✓	✓
Indigenous status	Indigenous; Non-Indigenous; Unknown	✓	✓	✓
Offence type	ANZSOC 2023, coded to subdivision level (3 digits)	✓	✓	
Date of proceeding/finalisation/entry	dd/mm/yyyy	✓	✓	✓
Method of proceeding	Court action; Non-court action	✓		
Court level	Supreme Court; Magistrates Court; Children's Court		✓	
Method of finalisation	Charges proven; Charge not proven; Transfer; Non-adjudicated		✓	
Sentence type	Custodial orders; Non-custodial orders (various subcategories)		✓	
Sentence quantum	Value and unit of sentence or monetary order		✓	
Date of prison exit	dd/mm/yyyy			✓
Country of birth	Born in Australia; Not born in Australia; Unknown			✓
Reason for exit	Completed; Parole/supervised release; Transfer; Death; Other			✓

2.2 Analytic approach

The analyses presented in this report were primarily limited to descriptive statistics, encompassing frequency distributions, cross-tabulations and summary statistics, to characterise the populations and events captured in each dataset. Where temporal patterns were of interest, trends across financial years were examined. For the sub-sample of individuals with complete offending histories, survival analysis was used to examine time to first reoffence.

The descriptive approach reflects both the nature of the data available and the characteristics of the datasets themselves. All offences reported to ACT Policing between 2015 and 2024 form the complete population of recorded offending for that period. The courts and prisons datasets likewise constitute complete populations of recorded events within their respective observation periods. Because all datasets constitute populations rather than samples, inferential statistical tests are not employed in this report. Such tests are designed to estimate the probability that patterns observed in a sample reflect those in an underlying population; where the population itself is observed, this estimation is unnecessary and p-values would be

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misleading. Observed differences and patterns reported here therefore represent actual variations in the data, rather than estimates subject to sampling error. In place of significance testing, the analysis focuses on the magnitude and practical importance of observed differences, which is of greater relevance to policy and practice than statistical significance thresholds.

2.2.1 Counting rules

Throughout this report, the primary unit of analysis is 'episodes' rather than individual offences or charges. A single episode may encompass multiple offences or charges arising from the same interaction with the ACT criminal legal system — for example, a person proceeded against by police on one occasion for three separate offences or a defendant with multiple charges whose matter is finalised at court on a single date. Counting at the episode level avoids the inflation of figures that would result from treating each individual offence or charge as an independent event. This better reflects the reality of how people move through the criminal legal system.

Where offence type is reported at the episode level, the most serious offence within the episode is used. Seriousness is determined according to the ANZSOC code, with offences ranked from most to least serious, based on their classification category. This approach is consistent with ABS reporting conventions.

Where counts of unique individuals are reported, figures are deduplicated, so that each person is counted only once, regardless of the number of episodes they were involved in during the observation period. Readers should note that the same individual may therefore appear in counts of both episodes and persons and the total number of episodes will always equal or exceed the total number of unique individuals.

2.3 Ethics

The above data extraction and analysis process was approved by the Australian National University Human Research Ethics Committee (H/2022/821).

2.4 Limitations

There are several limitations associated with the current analysis which need to be acknowledged from the outset. These are described in detail below.

2.4.1 Data linkage across datasets

Linkage of records across the three datasets was not possible. While it was possible to identify individuals across datasets at the person level, the absence of unique event identifiers meant that, for individuals with more than one police, court, or prison episode, it was not possible to reliably differentiate between those events for the purpose of linking a specific police episode to a specific court matter or prison sentence. As such, cross-dataset linkage was not undertaken, and each dataset is analysed independently throughout this report.

2.4.2 Limited availability of individual-level data

The datasets contain limited information about the individuals who came into contact with the ACT criminal legal system, with data available only on age, sex, and Indigenous status. This restricted the analytical approaches available for this report. In particular, the absence of

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broader individual-level data — such as housing status, employment, prior trauma, or substance use — meant it was not meaningful to develop multivariate models to examine predictors of outcomes of interest, such as charges being proven, the imposition of a custodial sentence or reoffending. The breadth of factors shown in the research literature to contribute to offending, reoffending, and criminal legal system responses means that models based on age, sex, and Indigenous status alone would be expected to account for only a small proportion of variation in these outcomes. Accordingly, the analyses presented in this report are primarily descriptive in nature.

2.4.3 Absence of information about New South Wales-based offending

The datasets are limited to offending and criminal legal system contact recorded within the ACT. Given the porous nature of the ACT's borders with New South Wales (NSW), a significant proportion of people who offend in the ACT may also have had contact with the NSW criminal legal system and that is not captured in these data. The inability to account for NSW-based offending is a material limitation of this report, particularly for analyses of reoffending and criminal histories, where the true extent of an individual's offending may be underestimated.

2.4.4 Collection of information about sex rather than gender

The ABS datasets we used report data on the basis of 'sex', rather than 'gender' (see e.g., Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2025)). It should be acknowledged, however, that there are differences between 'sex' and 'gender'. Significantly, there may be differences between someone's gender expression and how they are formally recorded in administrative data. It is beyond the scope of this report to explore this issue further, but future analysis should recognise the specific issues that may arise for trans- and gender-diverse people involved in the criminal legal system. For further discussion, see Genovese (2023) and Winter (2024).

2.4.5 Absence of detailed outcome data

The datasets capture only those outcomes recorded consistently by the ABS across all Australian jurisdictions, which has the effect of rendering invisible a number of outcomes that are distinctive to the ACT context. For example, restorative justice conferencing is enshrined in ACT legislation and constitutes a common outcome of both police and court processes in the Territory (Broadhurst et al., 2018; Lawler et al., 2025). Similarly, the ACT hosts specialist courts — including the Drug and Alcohol Sentencing List (Rossner et al., 2022) and Circle Sentencing— whose outcomes and processes differ meaningfully from those of mainstream courts. For the purpose of ABS data collection, the outcomes for these courts are subsumed within the Supreme Court and Magistrate's Court respectively. The analyses presented in this report do not reflect the full range of criminal justice responses available to, and used with, individuals in the ACT. This is a notable limitation, particularly for interpreting the findings on policing and court outcomes, where the apparent distribution of results may underrepresent the extent to which diversionary and therapeutic approaches are being utilised.

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3. Police

This chapter draws on data provided by ACT Policing covering the period 1 July 2015 to 30 June 2024. Over this period, ACT Policing recorded a total of 74,400 offences involving 14,300 unique offenders across 29,333 unique police episodes. This section presents a descriptive overview of these data, examining the characteristics of persons proceeded against, the nature of offences detected, and patterns of subsequent reoffending.

3.1 Characteristics of offenders

During the observation period, a total of 74,400 offences were recorded by ACT Policing, involving 14,300 unique 'offenders'. We note here that the ABS uses the term 'offenders' and, to ensure consistency, we also adopt this terminology, but we recognise that this term is not technically accurate at this stage in the criminal justice process, as people who have been proceeded against by the police but not yet found guilty by a court are entitled to the presumption of innocence and should not be referred to as 'offenders'. Furthermore, we note that some consider this term to be stigmatising.[1]

The majority of offenders were male (77.2%, *n* = 11,033), with women and girls only comprising 22.9 per cent of the population (*n* = 3,267).

Most offenders identified as non-Indigenous; however, Indigenous peoples were significantly overrepresented. Although only 2.0% of the ACT population identified as Indigenous at the most recent Census, 13.0% of offenders who had contact with ACT Policing during the observation period identified as Indigenous.

At the intersection of sex and Indigenous status:

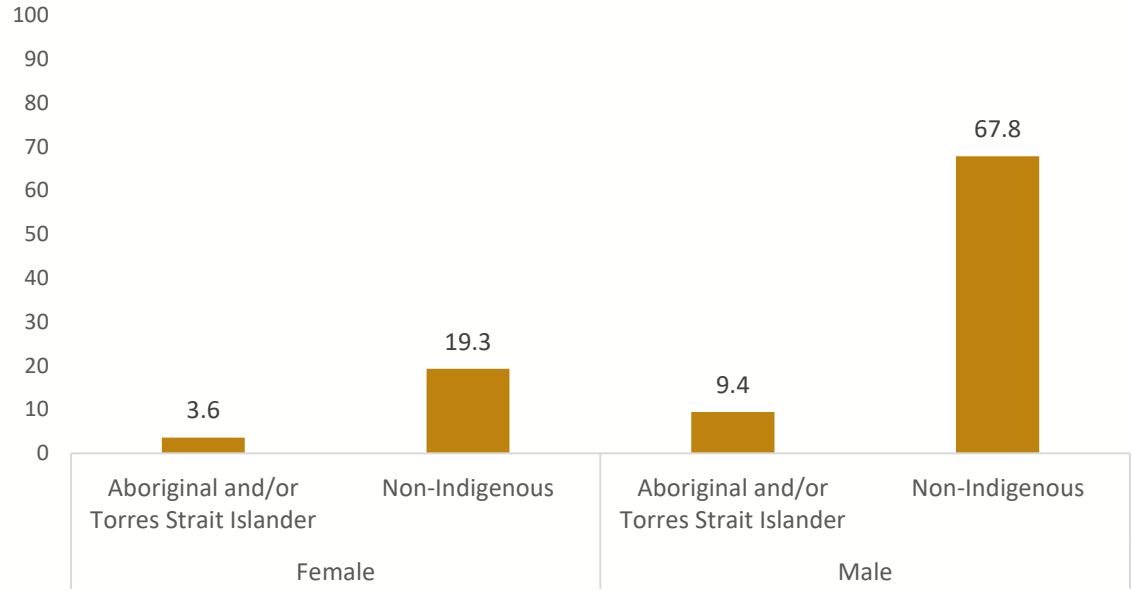
- 67.8% (*n* = 9,689) were non-Indigenous males,
- 19.3% (*n* = 2,758) were non-Indigenous females,
- 9.4% (*n* = 1,344) were Indigenous males, and
- 3.6% (*n* = 509) were Indigenous females (see Figure 1).

Indigenous women and girls made up a relatively larger proportion of the female offender population (15.6%) than their male counterparts (12.2%). Although the number of Indigenous females involved in the ACT criminal legal system may be relatively small, the intersection of their gender- and culture-specific needs reinforces the importance of targeted approaches that respond to the four cohorts set out above, as well as other specific needs not identified in this dataset (eg, members of the LGBTIQ community, people with disability).

[1] See eg Tran, N et al. 2018). Words matter: A call for humanizing and respectful language to describe people who experience incarceration. *BMC International Health and Human Rights* https://doi.org/10.1186/s12914-018-0180-4; Community Restorative Centre (2025). *Language guide*. Version 2. https://www.crcnsw.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/CRC-language-guide-v2-2025-PDF-version.pdf.

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Figure 1: Sex and Indigenous status of persons accused of a crime (%) (*n* = 14,300)



Note: Sample limited to unique offenders to limit double-counting. Percentage totals may not equal 100 due to rounding.

Source: ABS, Police 2015-2024

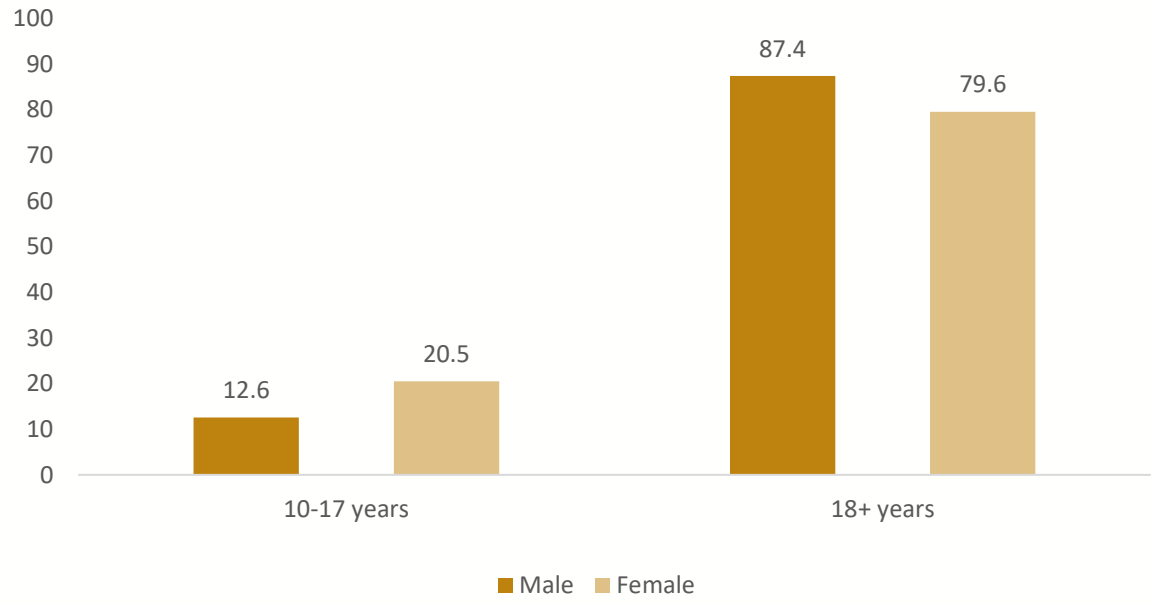
3.1.1 Age at time of index offence

Unfortunately, as noted in the methods section of this report, we do not have the complete offending histories for all offenders identified during the observation period (noting the sub-sample analysis below). Nevertheless, we were able to identify each person's age at their first offence within the observation period. This is hereafter referred to as the individual's "index offence".

Almost one in four offenders were aged 18–24 years at time of their index offence, (24.6%, *n* = 3,513) and a further 26.4% (*n* = 3,778) were aged 25–34 years. In addition, 18.9% (*n* = 2702) were 35–44, 10.2% (*n* = 1,454) were 45–54, and 5.6% (*n* = 799) were 55 years or older. Only 14.4% (*n* = 2,054) were juveniles (10–17 years) at time of their index offence.

When age at first offence was examined alongside other offender characteristics, several differences emerged. For example, as shown in Figure 2, a larger proportion of females were juveniles at time of their first contact with ACT Policing during the observation period (20.5%, *n* = 668), compared with males (12.6%, *n* = 1,386). This highlights the need for targeted interventions designed for girls involved or at risk of becoming involved in the criminal legal system.

Figure 2: Age at index offence, by sex (%) (*n* = 14,300)



Note: Note: Sample limited to unique offenders to limit double-counting. Percentage totals may not equal 100 due to rounding.

Source: ABS, Police 2015-2024

A similar trend emerged when the sample was disaggregated by Indigenous status: a larger proportion of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander young people coming into contact with ACT Policing as juveniles, during the observation period, compared to non-Indigenous people (19.1% vs 13.7%).

Figure 3: Age at index offence, by Indigenous status (%) (*n* = 14,300)



Note: Sample limited to unique offenders to limit double-counting. Percentage totals may not equal 100 due to rounding.

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Source: ABS, Police 2015-2024

3.2 Characteristics of offending

During episodes of contact with ACT Policing, it was common for offenders to be proceeded against for multiple offences at one time. This could be because the multiple charges arose from the same instance of (alleged) offending or the police chose to combine multiple (alleged) offences into one episode.

On average, the number of offences per police episode was 2.5 (SD: 5.93). Approximately 47.9% of episodes involved two or more offences (*n* = 14,037).

As demonstrated in Table 2, the most common offence category was acts intended to cause injury (19.4% of all recorded offences [*n* = 14,446]), followed by:

- theft (17.6%, n = 13,069),
- offences against justice procedures (10.9%, n = 8,108), and
- fraud, deception and related offences (9.1%, n = 6,750).

The least common offences were homicide and related offences (0.1%, *n* = 104), followed by dangerous or negligent acts endangering life (0.5%, *n* = 379). Assault was also the most frequently identified most serious offence recorded within an episode.

Table 2 Offences recorded by ACT Policing

	Overall (*n* = 74,400)		**Recorded as most serious offence within a police episode (*n* = 29,333)**
Offence type	**n**	**%**	**%**
Acts intended to cause injury	14,446	19.4	27.4
Theft and related offences	13,069	17.6	17.0
Offences against justice procedures	8,108	10.9	
Fraud, deception and related offences	6,750	9.1	2.1
Property damage and environmental pollution	6,011	8.1	5.8
Illicit drug offences	5,694	7.7	11.4
Public order offences	5,341	7.2	10.7
Prohibited and regulated weapons	3,901	5.2	3.9
Sexual assault and related offences	3,708	5.0	2.3
Unlawful entry with intent	2,719	3.7	4.6
Abduction, harassment and other offences	1,976	2.7	1.5
Robbery, extortion and related offences	1,201	1.6	1.6
Dangerous or negligent acts endangering life	379	0.5	0.4
Homicide and related offences	104	0.1	0.3
Other miscellaneous offences	993	1.3	0.7

Note: Percentage totals may not equal 100 due to rounding.

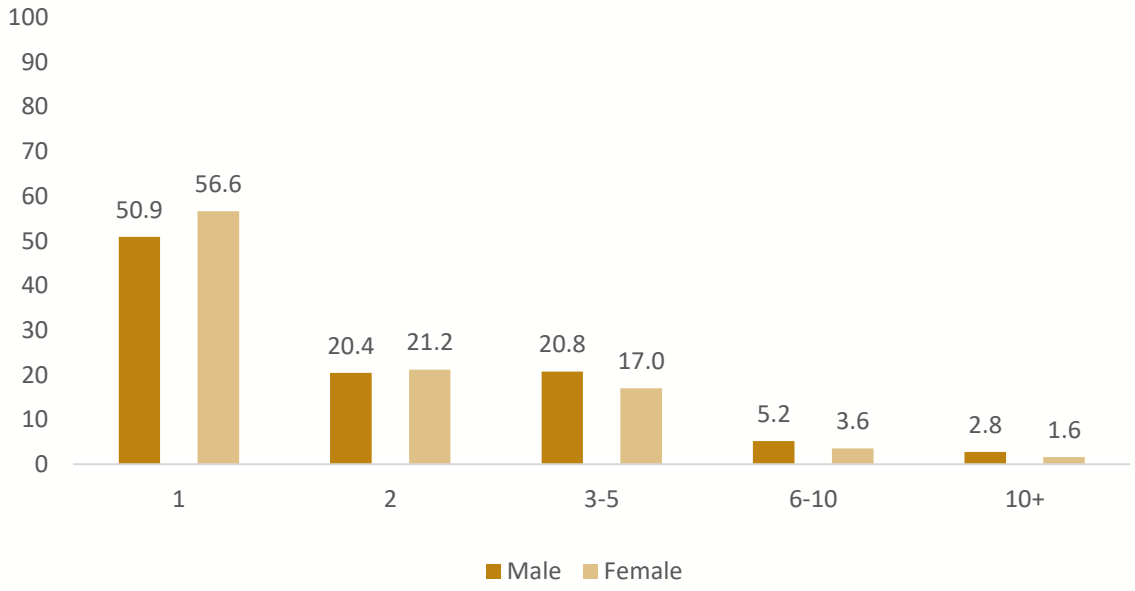
Source: ABS, Police 2015-2024

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3.2.1 Offending patterns by sex

On average, the number of offences per police episode was 2.6 (SD: 5.3) for males, while females were accused of 2.3 offences per episode (SD: 7.8). Further, as shown in Figure 4, a larger proportion of females were only accused of one offence per episode compared to males (56.6%, *n* = 3,667 vs 50.9%, *n* = 11,629). Meanwhile a larger proportion of males were accused of three or more offences per police episode, compared to females (28.7%, *n* = 6,557 vs 22.2%, *n* = 1,436).

Figure 4: Number of offences per police episode, by sex (%)



Note: Percentage totals may not equal 100 due to rounding.
Source: ABS, Police 2015-2024

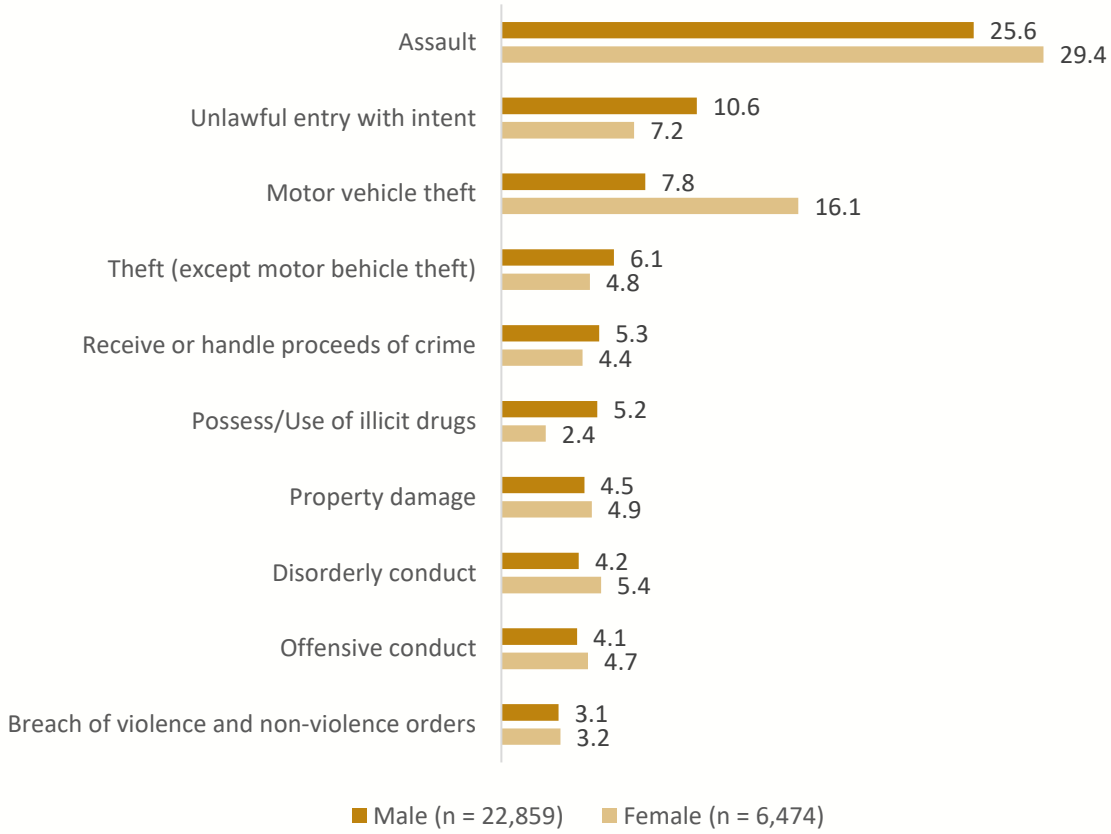
There were some important differences in the offending profiles of males and females in the ACT (see Figure 4):

- more females than males were accused of assault (29.4%, *n* = 1,903 vs 25.6%, *n* = 5,848),
- more females than males were accused of motor vehicle theft (16.1%, *n* = 1,039 vs 7.8%, *n* = 1,792),
- fewer females than males were accused of:
    - unlawful entry with intent (5.2%, *n* = 1,186 vs 2.4%, *n* = 154),
    - drug possession or use (10.6%, *n* = 2,414 vs 7.2%, *n* = 467).

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Figure 5: Most common offences recorded by ACT Policing, by sex (%)



Note: Percentage totals do not equal 100 because the denominator is all episodes of offending reported to ACT Policing.

Source: ABS, Police 2015-2024

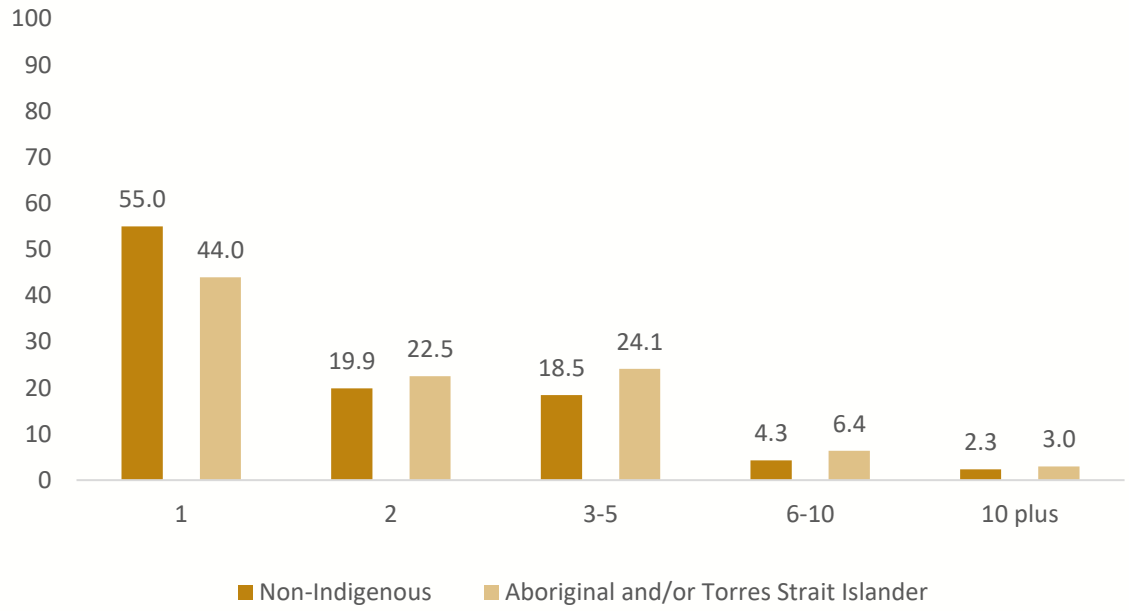
3.2.2 Offending patterns by Indigenous status

Overall, although Indigenous offenders only comprised 13.0% of the overall offender population, they accounted for 25.8% (*n* = 7,563) of all episodes of offending.

On average, the number of offences per police episode was 2.5 (SD: 6.6) for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in contact with ACT Policing, while non-Indigenous people were accused of 2.7 offences per episode (SD: 3.3). Further, as shown in Figure 6, a larger proportion of non-Indigenous offenders were only accused of one offence per episode compared to Indigenous offenders (55.0%%, *n* = 11,972 vs 44%, *n* = 3,324). Meanwhile, a larger proportion of Indigenous offenders were accused of 3 or more offences per police episode compared to non-Indigenous offenders (33.5%, *n* = 2,534 vs 25.1%, *n* = 5,459).

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Figure 6: Number of offences per police episode, by Indigenous status (%)



Note: Percentage totals may not equal 100 due to rounding.

Source: ABS, Police 2015-2024

There were also some key differences observed, when the sample was disaggregated by Indigenous status. Relative to non-Indigenous persons, a larger proportion of Indigenous peoples were accused of:

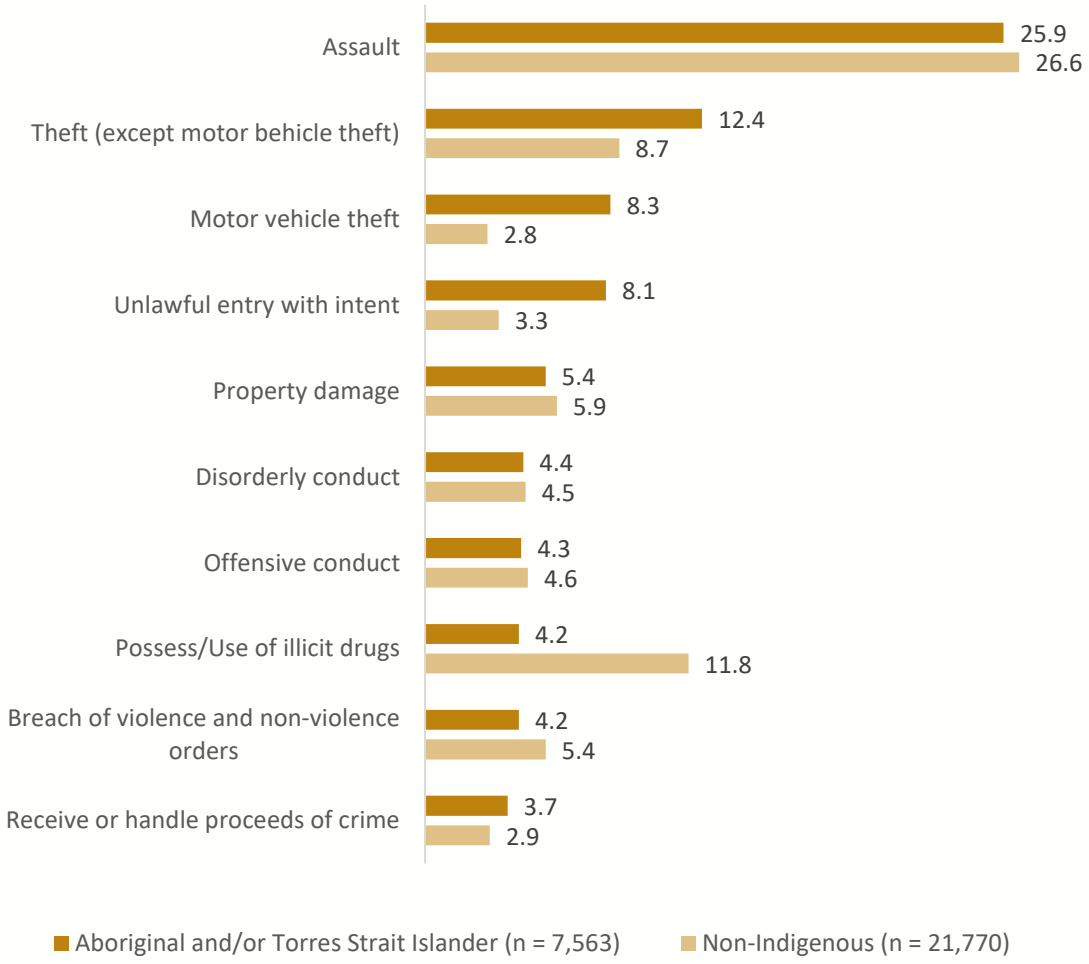
- unlawful entry with intent (8.1%, *n* = 615 vs 3.3%, *n* = 725),
- motor vehicle theft (8.3%, *n* = 629 vs 2.8%, *n* = 610), and
- theft (excluding motor vehicle; 12.4%, *n* = 940 vs 8.7%, *n* = 1,891).

However, a larger proportion of non-Indigenous offenders were accused of drug use and possession (11.8%, *n* = 2,566 vs 4.2%, *n* = 315; see Figure 7).

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Figure 7: Most common offences recorded by ACT Policing, by Indigenous status (%)



Note: Percentage totals do not equal 100 because the denominator is all episodes of offending reported to ACT Policing.

Source: ABS, Police 2015-2024

3.3 Outcomes of police episodes

The vast majority of offences reported to ACT Policing resulted in a court action (91.0%, *n* = 67,737). Consistent with this, most episodes of offending also involved at least one court action (80.6%, *n* = 23,640).

There were notable differences across demographic groups. A higher percentage of episodes involving an Indigenous person resulted in a court action (91.6%, *n* = 6,926), compared with episodes involving a non-Indigenous person (76.8%, *n* = 16,714). This is consistent with interstate research demonstrating lower diversion rates for Indigenous people (see eg (Teperski & Rahman, 2023)). A slightly larger percentage of episodes involving males led to a court action than those involving females (81.6%, *n* = 18,645 vs 77.2%, *n* = 4,995).

When disaggregated by both sex and Indigenous status, the same pattern remained: a much larger proportion of episodes involving Indigenous males (92.0%, *n* = 5,215) and Indigenous females (90.3%, *n* = 1,711) resulted in court action, compared to episodes involving non-Indigenous males (78.1%, *n* = 13,430) and females (71.7%, *n* = 3,284; Table 3).

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Age was also an important factor. A larger percentage of episodes involving young people (10–17 years) were resolved without a court action (41.0%, *n* = 1,790), compared with adult defendants, whose episodes resulted in a non-court action in 15.6% of cases (*n* = 2,903). Similar proportions of episodes involving young males (59.5%, *n* = 1,774) and females (58.2%, *n* = 806) were finalised by way of non-court outcomes.

Table 3: Police episode outcomes, by accused person characteristics (%) (n = 29,333)

	Court		Non-court	
	n	**%**	**n**	**%**
Sex				
Male	18,645	81.6	4,214	18.4
Female	4,995	77.2	1,479	22.9
Indigenous status				
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	6,926	91.6	637	8.4
Non-Indigenous	16,714	76.8	5,056	23.2
Indigenous status x sex				
Indigenous female	1,711	90.3	183	9.7
Indigenous male	5,215	92.0	454	8.0
Non-Indigenous male	13,430	78.1	3,760	21.9
Non-Indigenous female	3,284	71.7	1,296	28.3
Age				
<18 years	2,580	59.0	1,790	41.0
18+ years	21,060	84.4	3,903	15.6
Age x sex				
Male <18 years	1,774	59.5	1,210	40.6
Female <18 years	806	58.2	580	41.9
Male 18+	16,871	84.9	3,004	15.1
Female 18+	4,189	82.3	899	17.7

Note: Percentage totals may not equal 100 due to rounding.

Source: ABS, Police 2015-2024

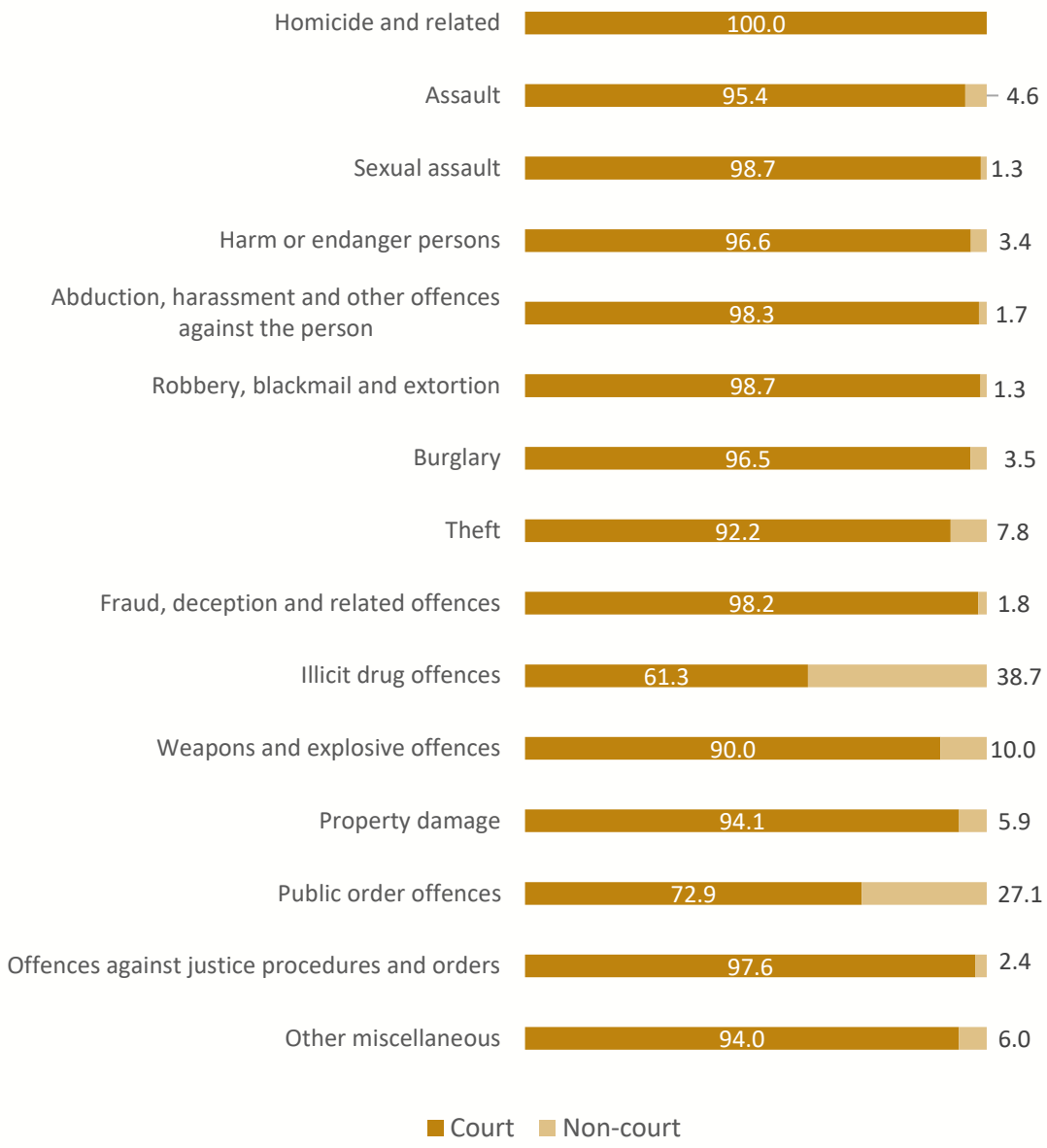
As shown in Figure 8, at the offence level, the prevalence of matters being dealt with by way of a court outcome was overall very low across most offence types (typically less than 10%). The only notable difference to this general trend related to illicit drug related offences and public order offences. A third of illicit drug offences were dealt with by way of a non-court action (38.7%, n = 2,204), and a quarter of public order offences (27.1%, n = 1,446).

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Figure 8: Policing outcome, by offence type (%) (*n* = 74,400)



Note: Percentage totals may not equal 100 due to rounding.
Source: ABS, Police 2015-2024

Examining the intersection of sex and offence category revealed few meaningful differences in proceeding outcomes (see Table 4), with males and females accused of similar offences being referred to court at comparable rates. This said, a larger proportion of males than females received a court outcome for the following offence categories:

- assault (93.2%, n = 4,025 vs 86.1%, n = 1,297),
- sexual assault (95.4%, n = 642 vs 75.0%, n = 18),
- theft (86.8%, n = 2,941 vs 75.2%, n = 1,111), and
- fraud (92.2%, n = 570 vs 84.6%, n = 208).

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Table 4: Prevalence of court actions, by sex and offence type (n = 29,333)

	Male		Female	
	n	%	n	%
Assault	4,025	93.2	1,297	86.1
Sexual assault	642	95.4	18	75.0
Harm or endanger persons	118	95.9	27	90.0
Abduction, harassment and other offences against the person	438	96.1	87	92.6
Robbery, blackmail and extortion	329	96.8	87	95.6
Burglary	539	91.1	67	85.9
Theft	2,941	86.8	1,111	75.2
Fraud, deception and related offences	570	92.2	208	84.6
Illicit drug offences	1,128	39.8	236	42.1
Weapons and explosive offences	1,046	79.5	156	76.9
Property damage	1,749	89.1	401	89.3
Public order offences	1,748	64.5	541	60.1
Offences against justice procedures and orders	3,090	96.3	688	93.2
Other miscellaneous	229	83.9	66	90.4
Total	18,592		4,990	

Note: Calculated based on the maximum outcome for episodes where the defendant was accused of a specific offence type. Excludes episodes where an outcome was not recorded.

Source: ABS, Police 2015-2024

In comparison, across almost all offence types, a higher proportion of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander individuals received a court outcome. The only exceptions to this trend was robbery (98.4%, n = 179 vs 95.2%, n = 237), and acts that harm or endanger persons (100.0%, n = 30 vs 93.5%, n = 115), with higher proportions of non-Indigenous individuals receiving a court outcome for these offence types (see Table 5).

The current data do not enable analysis of why these variations in policing outcomes exist on the basis of gender and Indigenous status. In particular, the absence of complete criminal histories for individuals identified during the observation period limits our ability to explore the role of prior offending in shaping these outcomes. To examine these findings in greater depth, subsequent sections of this report present additional analyses, drawing on the subsample of individuals for whom complete offending histories are available (see Section 3.8).

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Table 5: Prevalence of court actions, by Indigenous status and offence type (%) (n = 29,333)

	Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander		Non-Indigenous	
	n	%	n	%
Assault	4,013	89.9	1,309	96.0
Sexual assault	600	94.2	60	100.0
Harm or endanger persons	115	93.5	30	100.0
Abduction, harassment and other offences against the person	390	94.2	135	99.3
Robbery, blackmail and extortion	237	95.2	179	98.4
Burglary	334	86.8	272	95.4
Theft	2,308	76.9	1,744	93.7
Fraud, deception and related offences	567	87.9	211	96.4
Illicit drug offences	1,080	35.9	284	73.0
Weapons and explosive offences	811	74.5	391	91.1
Property damage	1,573	87.3	577	94.3
Public order offences	1,622	60.2	667	73.0
Offences against justice procedures and orders	2,770	94.7	1,008	98.5
Other miscellaneous	242	83.2	53	96.4
Total	16,662		6,920	

Note: Calculated based on the maximum outcome for episodes where the defendant was accused of a specific offence type. Excludes episodes where an outcome was not recorded.

Source: ABS, Police 2015-2024

3.4 Reoffending

3.5.1 Overall patterns

To examine the prevalence and nature of reoffending among individuals accused of a crime in the ACT, we limited the sample to those who could be followed up for a minimum period of 12 months following their index offence. This was to ensure that we were only including individuals in the analysis who had an opportunity to reoffend.

Of the individuals included in the sample who could be followed for a minimum of 12 months (n = 12,945), 34.5% (*n* = 4,462) went on to be accused of a subsequent offence within the observation period. As shown in Table 6, 10.0% (*n* = 848) were accused of two subsequent episodes, and 39.7% (n = 1,772) were accused of 3 or more subsequent episodes.

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Table 6: Number of reoffences (n = 12,945)

	n	%
1	1,842	41.3
2	848	19.0
3	487	10.9
4	315	7.1
5-9	676	15.2
10-14	196	4.4
15-20	60	1.3
Over 20	38	0.9
Total	*4,462*	*100.0*
Mean	4.32	
SD	3.78	

Note: Percentage totals may not equal 100 due to rounding. Sample limited to offenders who could be followed for at least 12 months, and were accused of at least one offence after their index offence.

Source: ABS, Police 2015-2024

3.5 Youth to adult offending

For this stage of the analysis, we were interested in understanding the progression of offending for young people accused of an offence in the ACT, particularly whether they were subsequently accused of an offence as an adult (18 years or older). For this stage of the analysis, we limited the sample to those individuals who were accused of an offence as a juvenile, and were at least 18 years of age by the end of the observation period (i.e., had the opportunity to be accused of an offence as an adult). This left a sample of 1,443 individuals.

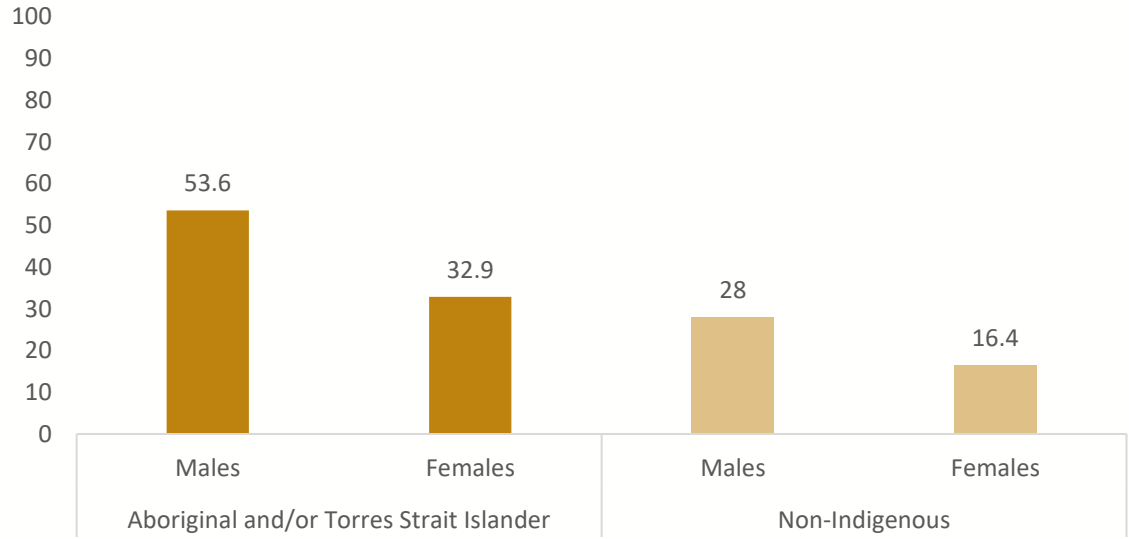
Overall, of those accused persons who were accused of an offence when they were a juvenile and were 18 at the end of the observation period, 27.9% (*n* = 402) went on to be accused of an offence as an adult. A larger proportion of males went on to be accused of offence as an adult compared to females (32.0%, *n* = 315 vs 19.0%, *n* = 87). Further, a larger proportion of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander individuals were accused of an offence as an adult, compared to non-Indigenous people (46.9%, *n* = 106 vs 24.3%, *n* = 296).

As shown in Figure 9, youth to adult offending was most common among Indigenous males (53.6%, n = 82) and females (32.9%, n = 24), followed by non-Indigenous males (28.0%, n = 233) and then non-Indigenous females (16.4%, n = 63). Addressing the needs of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait men (eg, culturally-responsive programs delivered Indigenous organisations, resolving education and housing issues) is therefore likely to yield the greatest reductions in reoffending among young people in contact with the juvenile justice system.

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Figure 9: Prevalence of youth to adult reoffending, by sex and Indigenous status (%) (*n* = 1,443)



Note: Sample is limited to individuals who were reported for an offence prior to 18 years old and turned 18 by the end of the observation period.

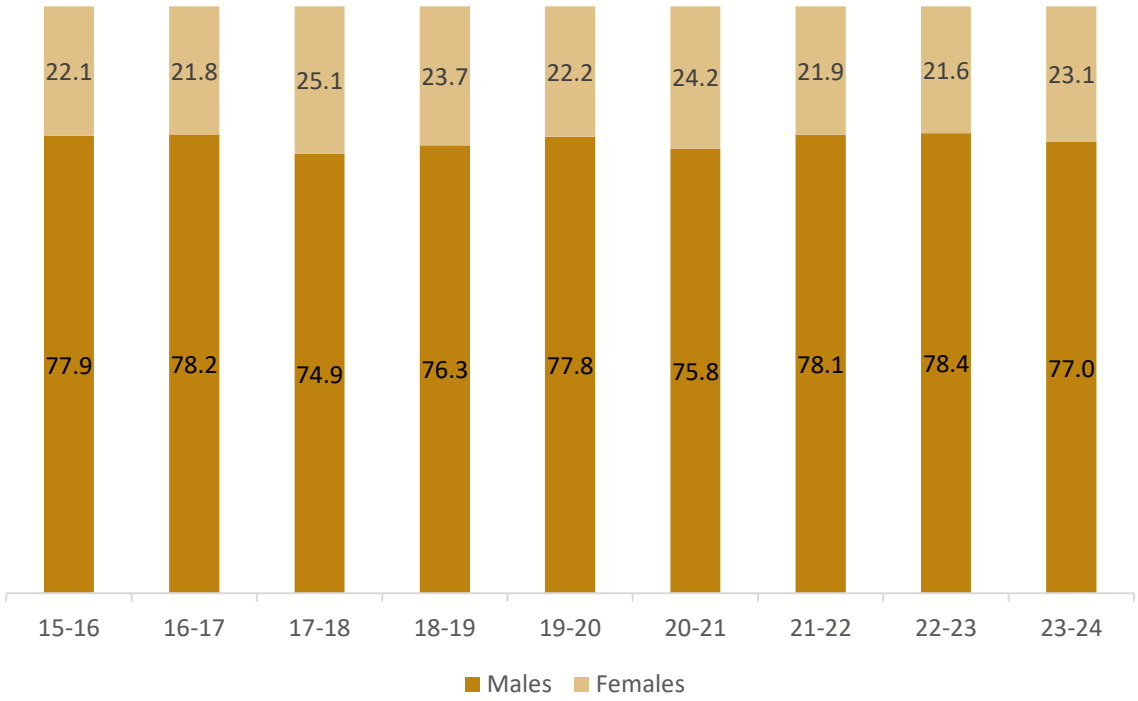
Source: ABS, Police 2015-2024

3.6 Changes over time

Across the observation period, very few changes were observed in offender characteristics or offending patterns. For example, the proportion of defendants who were female remained relatively stable, at around one in four, with the remainder being male (see Figure 10).

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Figure 10: Sex of persons accused of a crime, by financial year (%)

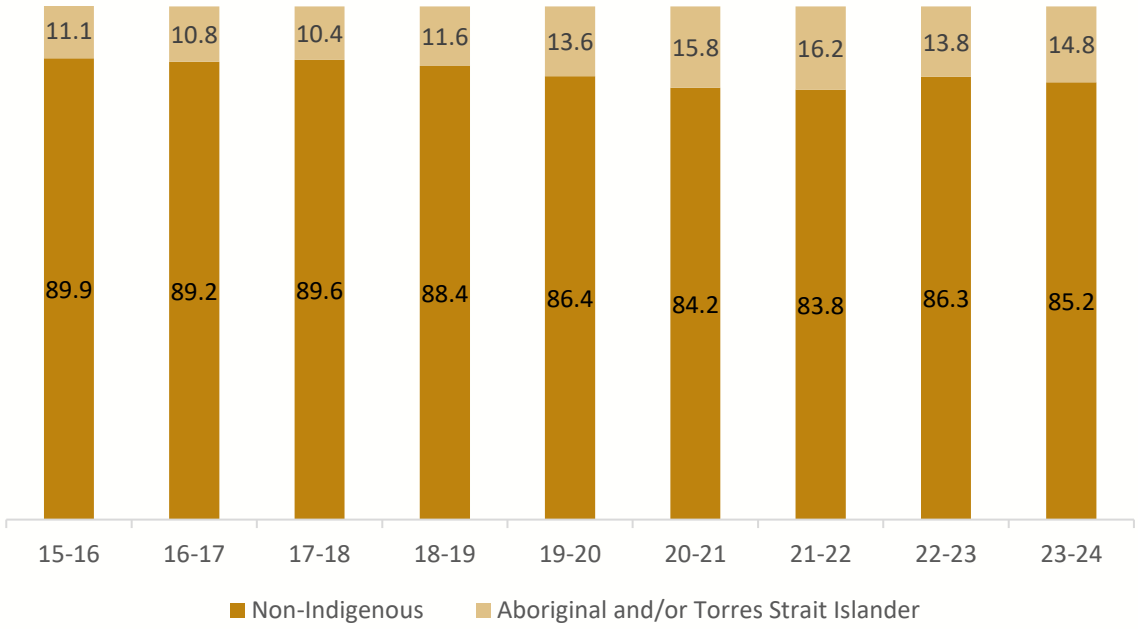


Note: Percentage totals may not equal 100 due to rounding.

Source: ABS, Police 2015-2024

However, the proportion of defendants who identified as Indigenous increased over time, rising by 3.7 percentage points between 2015-16 and 2023- 24. This reinforces the importance of working with the ACT's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to address relevant underlying factors contributing to (re)offending, especially in relation to young people and males (Figure 11).

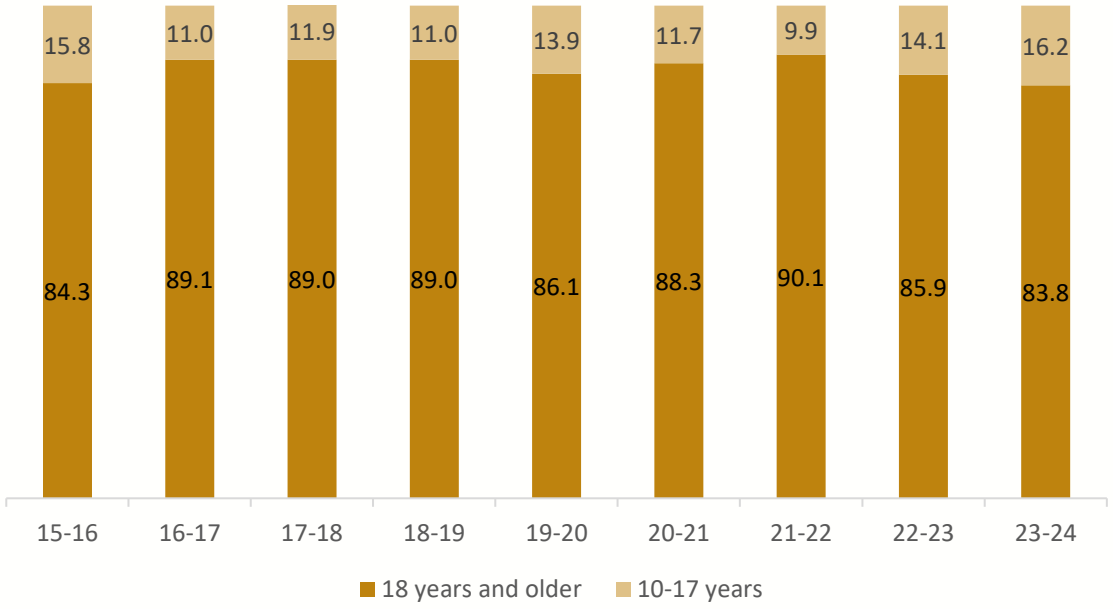
Figure 11: Indigenous status of persons accused of a crime, by financial year (%)



Note: Percentage totals may not equal 100 due to rounding.
Source: ABS, Police 2015-2024

A similar trend was observed for young people: the proportion of defendants who were juveniles increased by 0.4 percentage points over the same period (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Age of persons accused of a crime, by financial year (%)



Note: Percentage totals may not equal 100 due to rounding.
Source: ABS, Police 2015-2024

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3.7 Sub-sample analysis - entire criminal histories

Within the current dataset, it was possible to examine the offending careers of a individuals who turned 10 during the observation period. This provides the most accurate information about the offending trajectories of people who come into contact with ACT Policing, as their entire histories of contact with the legal system were able to be examined.

However, this sub-sample only accounted for 5.8% (*n* = 834) of all individuals included in the ACT Policing dataset, meaning that the findings should be viewed with caution.

3.8.1 Age of first offence

The majority of young people in the sub-sample were first accused of an offence in the ACT at 13–15 years (62.0%, *n* = 517), with smaller proportions being 10–12 years (8.9%, *n* = 74) or 16–18 years (29.1%, *n* = 243).

As demonstrated in Figure 13, some differences emerged when we disaggregated the sample by gender. Although a similar proportion of males and females were 10-12 years old at time of first coming to the attention of ACT Policing, a larger proportion of females were 13-15 at time of first offence (68.2%, *n* = 195) compared to males (58.8%, *n* = 322). Meanwhile, a larger proportion of males were 16-18 years old at time of first coming to the attention of the police (32.3%, *n* = 177) compared to females (23.1%, *n* = 66).

Further, a larger proportion of Indigenous young people first came to the attention of ACT Policing when they were 10-12 years old (15.9%, *n* = 27), compared to non-Indigenous young people (7.1%, *n* = 47). Meanwhile, a larger proportion of non-Indigenous young people were older (16-18 years) at time of their first contact with ACT Policing (31.5%, *n* = 209) compared to Indigenous young people (*n* = 20.0%, *n* = 34). This finding confirms that the recent move by the ACT to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility is likely to have greater impacts for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and contribute towards closing the gap (see CTG Target 11).

The sample size was too small to disaggregate the sample by both gender and Indigenous status simultaneously.

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Figure 13: Age of first contact with ACT Policing, by gender and Indigenous status (%) (*n* = 834)



Note: *$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$. Sample is limited to individuals who turned 10 during the observation period. Percentage totals may not equal 100 due to rounding.

Source: ABS, Police 2015-2024

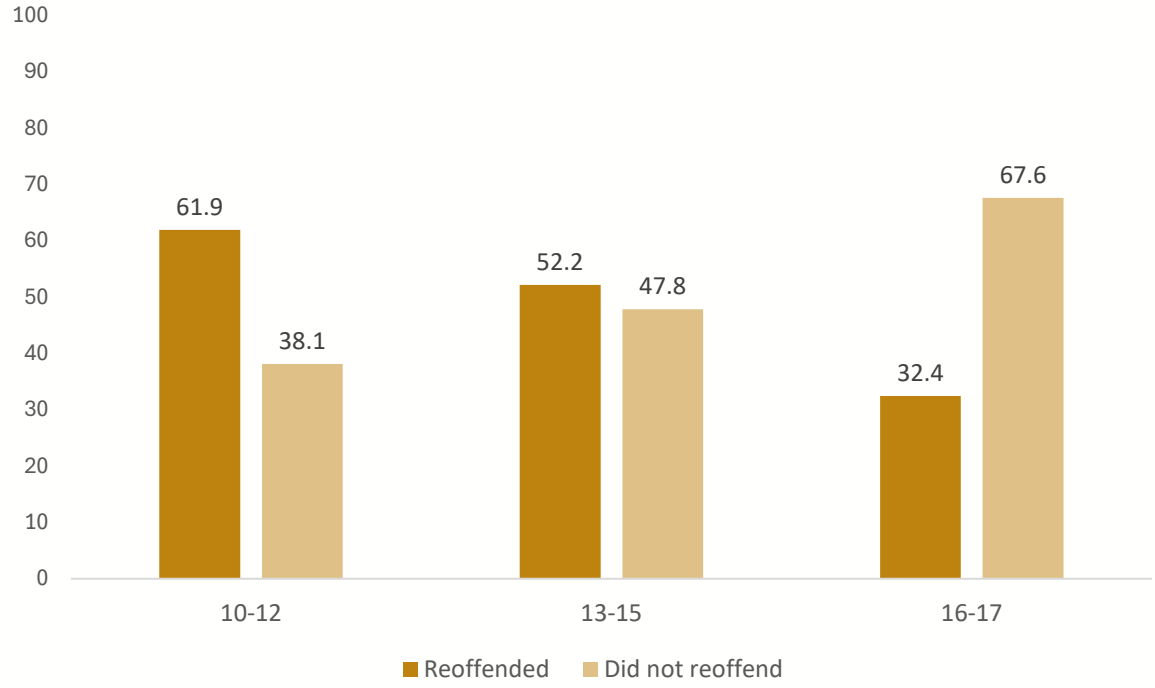
3.8.2 Reoffending

Overall, 50.5% (n = 284) of young people in the sub-sample, who could be followed for a minimum of 12 months, reoffended at least once during the observation period.

As shown in Figure 14, there was a clear linear relationship between age at first contact with ACT Policing and prevalence of reoffending. Young people whose first contact occurred at 10–12 years were more likely to reoffend (61.9%, *n* = 39), than those first contacted at 13–15 years (52.2%, *n* = 204) or 16–18 years (32.4%, *n* = 35). The sample size was too small to disaggregate these age patterns by sex and/or Indigenous status.

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Figure 14: Reoffending, by age of first contact (%) (n = 834)



Note: Sample is limited to individuals who turned 10 during the observation period and could be followed for a period of 12 months.

Source: ABS, Police 2015-2024

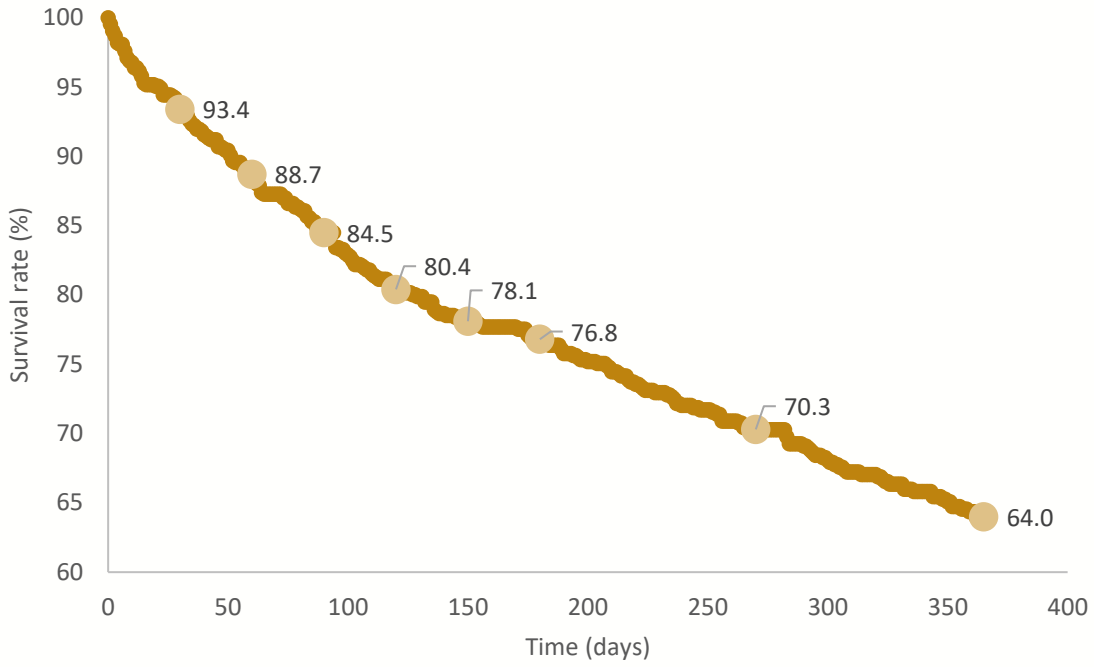
3.8.3 Timing of reoffending

Beyond examining which individuals reoffended, we also sought to understand when reoffending was most likely to occur. To do this, we used *survival analysis*, a method that examines the timing of a first event, while accounting for the fact that individuals are followed for different lengths of time; this meant we could include all young people where we had their entire criminal histories, not just those who could be followed for a minimum of 12 months.

Survival analysis provides a clearer picture of the high-risk periods for reoffending, highlighting when people are most likely to return to the justice system after their index offence. Understanding these temporal patterns supports more targeted and timely intervention planning, allowing services to focus resources on the periods when support is most needed.

The survival analysis identified that, within 12 months of their first offence, 36.0% of people had gone on to reoffend again. However, risk of reoffending was not constant over time: at six months, 24.2% of people had reoffended, with the rate of reoffending declining significantly after this point (see Figure 15). This demonstrates that the first six-month period following contact with ACT Policing is of highest risk for young people to have a subsequent reoffence.

Figure 15: Time to first reoffence (%) (n = 834)



Note: Sample is limited to individuals who turned 10 during the observation period
Source: ABS, Police 2015-2024

The survival curves for male and female young people were very similar (see Figure 16), with comparable proportions reoffending at:

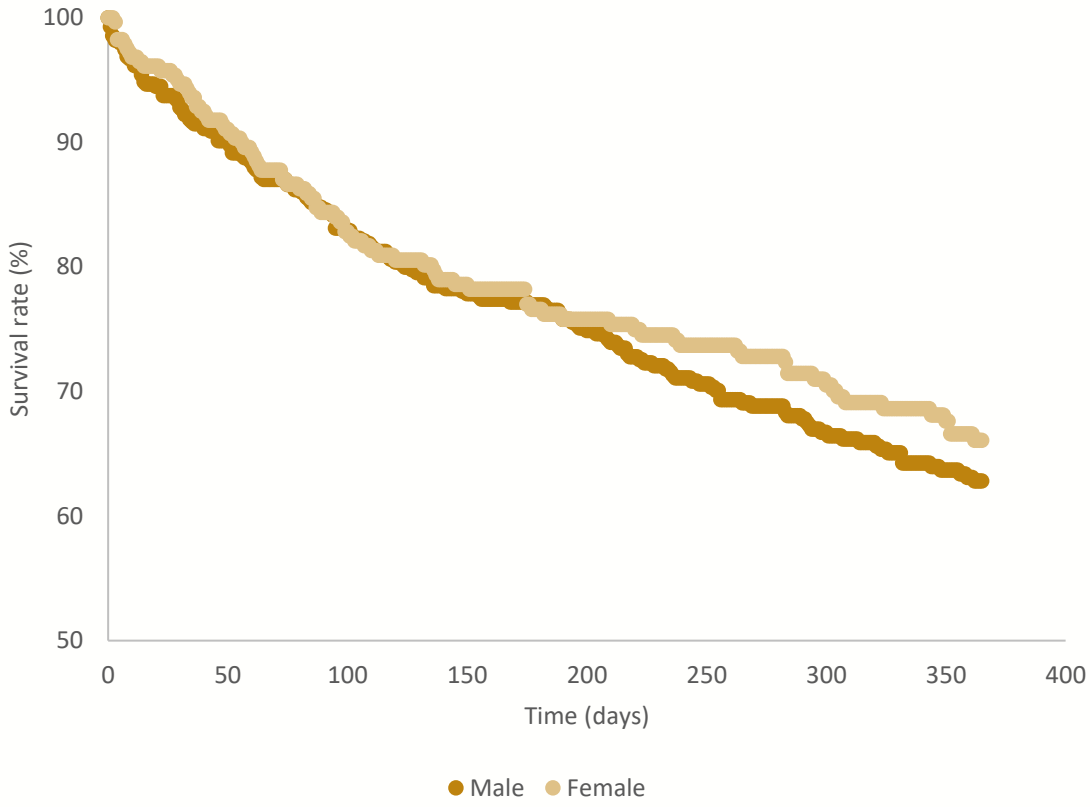
- 30 days (92.8% vs 94.7%),
- 90 days (84.6 vs 84.4%),
- 6 months (77.0% vs 76.7%), and
- 12 months (62.8% vs 66.1%).

Log-rank tests revealed no difference in reoffending survival between male and female young people ($\chi^2(1) = 0.69$, $p = 0.407$).

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Figure 16: Time to first reoffence, by sex (%) (n = 834)



Note: Sample is limited to individuals who turned 10 during the observation period
Source: ABS, Police 2015-2024

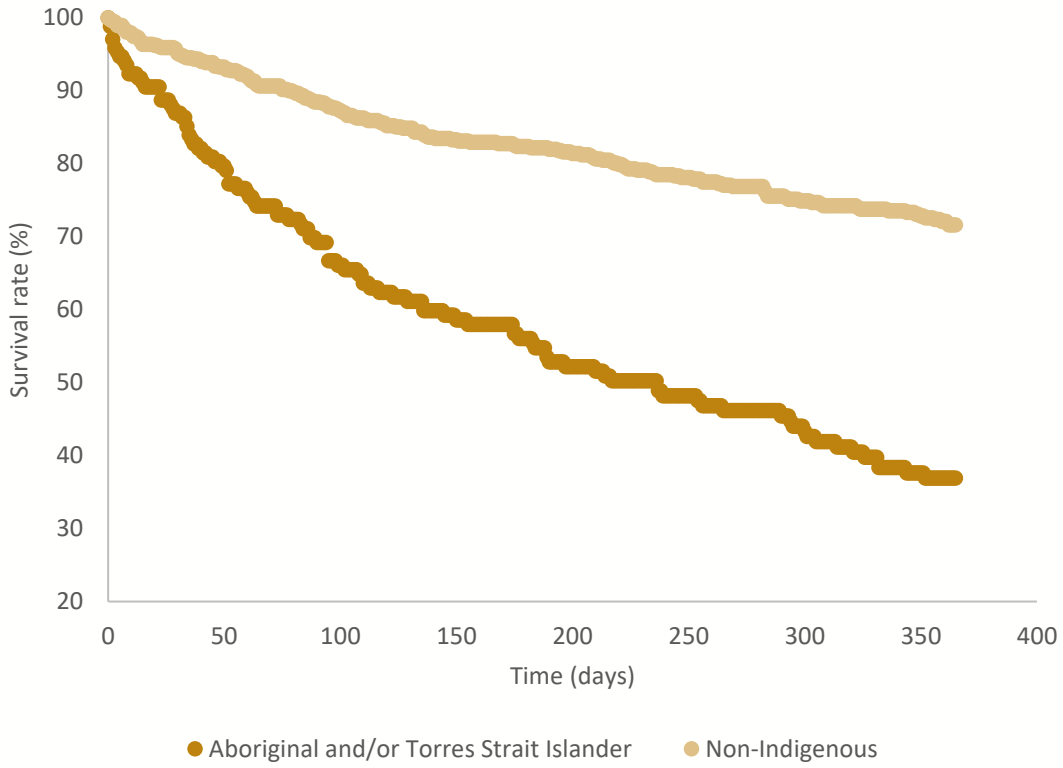
In contrast, there were significant differences in the time to first reoffence between Indigenous and non-Indigenous young people. As shown in Figure 17, at:

- 30 days, 13.1% of Indigenous young people had reoffended, compared to 4.9% of non-Indigenous young people,
- 60 days, 24.0% of Indigenous young people had reoffended, compared to 8.1% of non-Indigenous young people,
- 90 days, 30.8% of Indigenous young people had reoffended, compared to 11.5% of non-Indigenous young people,
- 6 months, 43.9% of Indigenous young people had reoffended, compared to 16.7% of non-Indigenous young people, and
- 12 months, 63.1% of Indigenous young people had reoffended, compared to 28.4% of non-Indigenous young people.

Log-rank tests revealed a statistically significant difference in reoffending survival between Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals ($\chi^2(1) = 80.99$, $p < 0.000$).

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Figure 17: Time to first reoffence, by Indigenous status (%) (n = 834)



Note: Sample is limited to individuals who turned 10 during the observation period
Source: ABS, Police 2015-2024

While the current data do not permit identification of the mechanisms underlying this finding, it is consistent with a broader body of research demonstrating that risk of re-contact with criminal legal systems is not evenly distributed over time but is instead concentrated in the period immediately following an initial contact (Boxall & Morgan, 2020; Morgan et al., 2018).

Several explanations may account for this pattern. First, contact with the criminal legal system may itself have criminogenic effects, exacerbating existing risk factors (Baidawi & Sheehan, 2019; McCausland & Baldry, 2023; Vieraitis et al., 2002). For example, because of their offending, a young person may be kicked out of home, with housing insecurity increasing their risk of both reoffending, as well as being detected by the police. Second, such contact may undermine protective factors that were previously present in a young person's life — for example, by jeopardising employment, precipitating school exclusion, or damaging relationships with pro-social peers and family members (Weaver, 2013). Third, following an initial police contact, young people may come under greater surveillance, increasing the likelihood that subsequent offending is detected rather than reflecting a genuine increase in offending behaviour. This has been particularly documented for Indigenous young people and adults (Cuneen et al., 2025; Porter, 2015).

Regardless of the mechanism, this finding underscores the importance of providing intensive, targeted supports to young people in the period immediately following contact with the ACT justice system. As shown in Figures 15, 16 and 17, risk of re-contact is highest in the first six months after an offence, and this is therefore the critical window during which intervention is most likely to be effective.

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4. Courts

This chapter draws on courts data covering matters finalised between 1 July 2019 and 30 June 2024. Over this period, a total of 81,440 court matters — individual charges brought before the court — were finalised, comprising 26,904 unique court episodes across 18,395 unique individuals. This section presents a descriptive overview of these data, examining the characteristics of persons appearing before the courts, the nature of matters finalised, and sentencing outcomes.

4.1 Characteristics of defendants

4.1.1 Sex

During the observation period (1 July 2019 - 30 June 2024), 26,904 court episodes involved 18,395 unique individuals. In total, 81,440 charges were brought before ACT Courts across all court episodes. The majority of defendants were male (74.5%, *n* = 10274), while females accounted for 25.5% (*n* = 3,523), reflecting similar patterns to those observed in police proceedings. However, it is important to note that sex was missing for a significant proportion of individuals included in the dataset (*n* = 4,598, 25.0%).[2]

4.1.2 Indigenous status

Indigenous people were significantly overrepresented among people involved in the criminal courts. As noted above, this cohort comprised approximately 2.0% of the ACT population, but accounted for 17.7% (*n* = 1,211) of all finalised defendants, with non-Indigenous defendants comprising the remaining 82.3% (*n* = 5,643). However, it should be noted that Indigenous status was missing for a significant proportion of individuals included in the dataset (62.7%, *n* = 11,541).[3]

4.1.3 Age at time of finalisation

The majority of defendants were aged 25–34 (31.7%, *n* = 8,516), while 17.1% (*n* = 4,603) were 18–24 years old 24.5% (*n* = 6,602) were 35–44. Smaller proportions were aged 45–54 or 55 and older and only 3.9% (*n* = 1,038) of court finalisations involved juveniles (10–17 years).

4.2 Characteristics of episodes

Overall, the majority of episodes that appeared before the ACT Court system only involved one charge (59.3%, n = 15,958). Meanwhile, 20.9% (n = 5,634) of episodes involved two charges, and 7.7% involved three charges (n = 2,066). Only a small number of episodes involved 10 or more charges (1.6%, n = 434).

The number of charges per episode varied significantly across the Court system. While half of episodes that were finalised in the Magistrates (61.4%, n = 15,141) or Children's Court (53.5%, n = 656) only involved one charge, this decreased to 16.1% (n = 161) of episodes finalised in the Supreme Court. Meanwhile, 40.8% of episodes finalised in the Supreme Court involved five

[2] The majority of matters for which sex of the defendant was missing were low-level traffic offences (e.g., speeding). It is unclear why this information was missing in these matters.
[3] The majority of matters for which Indigenous status of the defendant was missing were low-level traffic offences (e.g., speeding). It is unclear why Indigenous status was missing in these matters.

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or more charges (n = 408), compared to 5.8% in the Magistrates Court (n = 1,429), and 8.1% in the Children's Court (n = 90; Table 7).

Table 7: Number of charges per court episode, by court level (n = 26,904)

	Children's Court		Magistrate's Court		Supreme Court	
	n	**%**	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**
1	656	53.5	15,141	61.4	161	16.1
2	298	24.3	5,163	20.9	173	17.3
3	112	9.1	1,813	7.4	141	14.1
4	60	4.9	1,132	4.6	117	11.7
5-9	79	6.4	1,181	4.8	243	24.3
10 or more	21	1.7	248	1.0	165	16.5
Total	*1226*	*100*	*24,678*	*100*	*1,000*	*100*
Mean (SD)	2.20 (3.21)		1.91 (2.72)		9.85 (57.63)	

Source: ABS, Courts 2019-2024

4.2.1 Finalisation by court type

Most matters were finalised in the Magistrates Court (83.3%, *n* = 67,851), with smaller proportions finalised in the Children's Court (6.0%, *n* = 4,883) and Supreme Court (10.7%, *n* = 8,687).

4.2.2 Charge type

The most common charges dealt with by the courts were:

- traffic offences (e.g. parking offence, exceeding legal speed limit; 38.7%, *n* = 31,550),
- theft (12.4%, *n* = 10,086),
- assault (11.2%, *n* = 9,126), and
- offences against justice procedures and orders (9.1%, *n* = 7,433).

Less common categories, such as sexual assault, dangerous or negligent acts, and homicide, accounted for a very small proportion of all finalisations (see Table 8).

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Table 8: Charge type (n = 81,346)

	n	%
Traffic offences	31,550	38.7
Theft	10,086	12.4
Assault	9,126	11.2
Offences against justice procedures and orders	7,433	9.1
Fraud, deception and related offences	5,055	6.2
Property damage	3,532	4.3
Sexual assault	2,880	3.5
Weapons and explosive offences	2,100	2.6
Harm or endanger persons	1,922	2.4
Burglary	1,871	2.3
Illicit drug offences	1,715	2.1
Public order offences	1,722	2.1
Robbery, blackmail and extortion	944	1.2
Other miscellaneous	934	1.2
Abduction, harassment and other offences against the person	440	0.5
Homicide	126	0.2

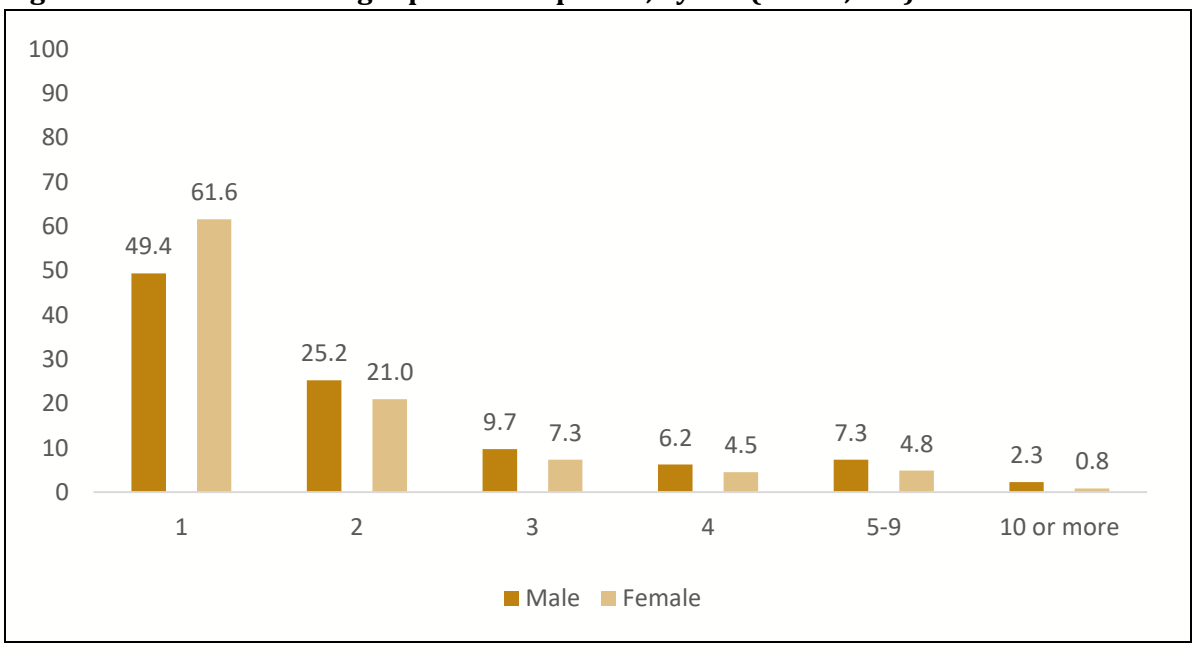
Note: Excludes <10 charges where the type of offence was not provided

Source: ABS, Courts 2019-2024

4.2.3 Court episodes by sex

On average, the number of charges per court episode for males was 2.6 (SD = 12.7) compared to 2.1 (SD = 12.9) for females. However, as demonstrated in Figure 18, a much larger proportion of males were the subject of five or more charges per court episode (9.6%, *n* = 1,605), compared to females (5.7%, *n* = 291).

Figure 18: Number of charges per court episode, by sex (n = 21,922)



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Note: Excludes 4,982 episodes for which the sex of the defendant was not recorded. Percentage totals may not equal 100 due to rounding.

Source: ABS, Courts 2019-2024

As demonstrated in Table 9, the types of offences that males and females were charged with did not differ significantly. The only exception to this general rule was offences against justice procedures: 25.6% (n = 1,313) of episodes involving a female included a charge for offences against justice procedures, which decreased to 18.7% among males (n = 3,130).

Table 9: Type of charge per episode, by sex (%) (n = 21,922)

	Males		Females	
	n	**%**	**n**	**%**
Traffic offences	7,068	42.1	2,170	42.2
Offences against justice procedures and orders	3,130	18.7	1,313	25.6
Assault	3,097	18.5	761	14.8
Theft	1,740	10.4	511	10.0
Property damage	1,301	7.8	308	6.0
Weapons and explosive offences	775	4.6	107	2.1
Public order offences	772	4.6	204	4.0
Burglary	644	3.8	101	2.0
Harm or endanger persons	599	3.6	127	2.5
Illicit drug offences	574	3.4	112	2.2
Sexual assault	565	3.4	22	0.4
Robbery, blackmail and extortion	419	2.5	115	2.2
Other miscellaneous	340	2.0	69	1.3
Abduction, harassment and other offences against the person	262	1.6	29	0.6
Fraud, deception and related offences	153	0.9	58	1.1
Total	*21,439*		*6,007*	

Note: Excludes 4,982 episodes for which the sex of the defendant was not recorded. Percentage totals may not equal 100 due to rounding.

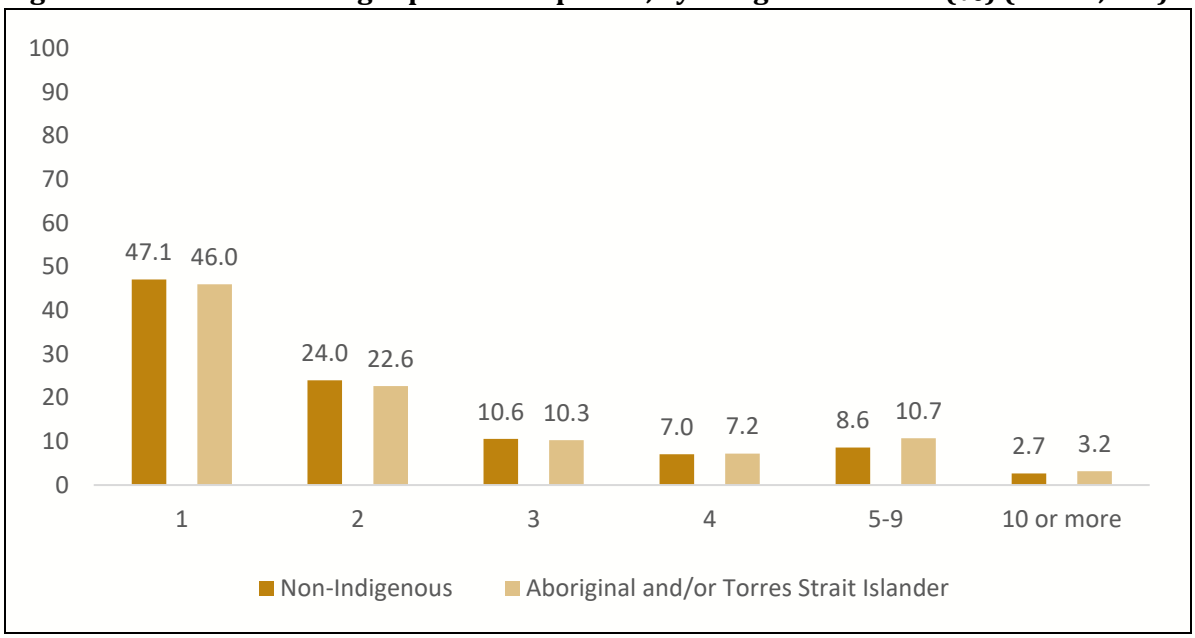
Source: ABS, Courts 2019-2024

4.2.4 Court episodes by Indigenous status

On average, the number of charges per episode for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander defendants was 3.0 (SD = 18.2) compared to 2.7 (SD = 3.7) for non-Indigenous defendants. Further, as demonstrated in Figure 19, a slightly larger proportion of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander defendants were the subject of five or more charges per court episode compared to non-Indigenous defendants (13.9%, n = 522 vs 11.3%, n = 1,191).

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Figure 19: Number of charges per court episode, by Indigenous status (%) (n = 14,318)



Note: Excludes 12,586 episodes for which the Indigenous status of the defendant was not recorded. Percentage totals may not equal 100 due to rounding.

Source: ABS, Courts 2019-2024

As demonstrated in Table 10, the types of charges did not appear to vary by the Indigenous status of defendants. The only exception to this general rule was theft: 25.3% (n = 950) of episodes involving an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander defendants included a charge for theft, which decreased to 11.9% among non-Indigenous defendants (n = 1,263). Further, a larger proportion of episodes involving an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander defendants were charged with burglary (8.9%, n = 333), compared to 3.8% of episodes involving a non-Indigenous defendant (n = 404).

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Table 10: Type of charge per episode, by Indigenous status (n = 14,318)

	Non-Indigenous		Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	
	n	%	n	%
Assault	2,834	26.9	972	25.9
Traffic offences	2,824	26.7	804	21.4
Offences against justice procedures and orders	1,953	18.5	724	19.3
Theft	1,263	11.9	950	25.3
Property damage	1,115	10.5	479	12.8
Public order offences	691	6.5	261	7.0
Weapons and explosive offences	598	5.7	273	7.3
Illicit drug offences	527	5.0	149	4.0
Sexual assault	517	4.9	65	1.7
Burglary	404	3.8	333	8.9
Harm or endanger persons	374	3.5	169	4.5
Other miscellaneous	319	3.0	76	2.0
Robbery, blackmail and extortion	289	2.7	242	6.4
Abduction, harassment and other offences against the person	211	2.0	72	1.9
Fraud, deception and related offences	150	1.4	45	1.2
Total	*14,069*		*5,614*	

Note: Excludes 12,586 episodes for which the Indigenous status of the defendant was not recorded. Percentage totals may not equal 100 due to rounding.

Source: ABS, Courts 2019-2024

4.3 Outcomes

Across all court episodes, the majority resulted in the imposition of a sentence (58.9%, n = 15,850). Among the 41.1% of matters that did not result in a sentence:

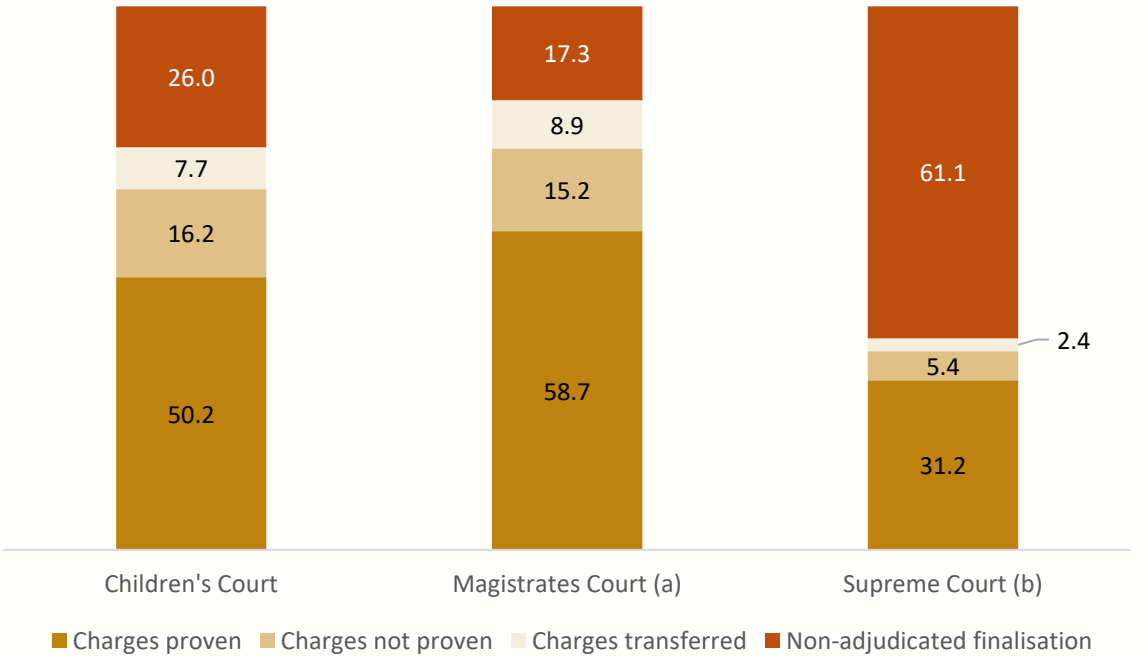
- 44.3% (*n* = 10,968) were recorded as non-proven,
- 40.4% (*n* = 7,529) were transferred to another court, and
- 25.3% (*n* = 6,253) resulted in a non-adjudicated verdict.

As shown in Figure 20, there was variation in the outcome of charges by court level. In particular, while half of charges finalised in the Children's (50.2%, n = 2,451) or Magistrates Court (58.7%, n = 39,800) were proven, this was the outcome in only 31.2% of cases in the Supreme Court. By contrast, the majority of charges there (61.1%) were finalised by way of non-adjudicated verdicts.

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Figure 20: Charge outcome, by court (%) (n = 81,423)



Note: Percentage totals may not equal 100 due to rounding.

a: Excludes 10 offences for which the outcome was not recorded

b: Excludes <10 offences for which the outcome was not recorded

Source: ABS, Courts 2019-2024

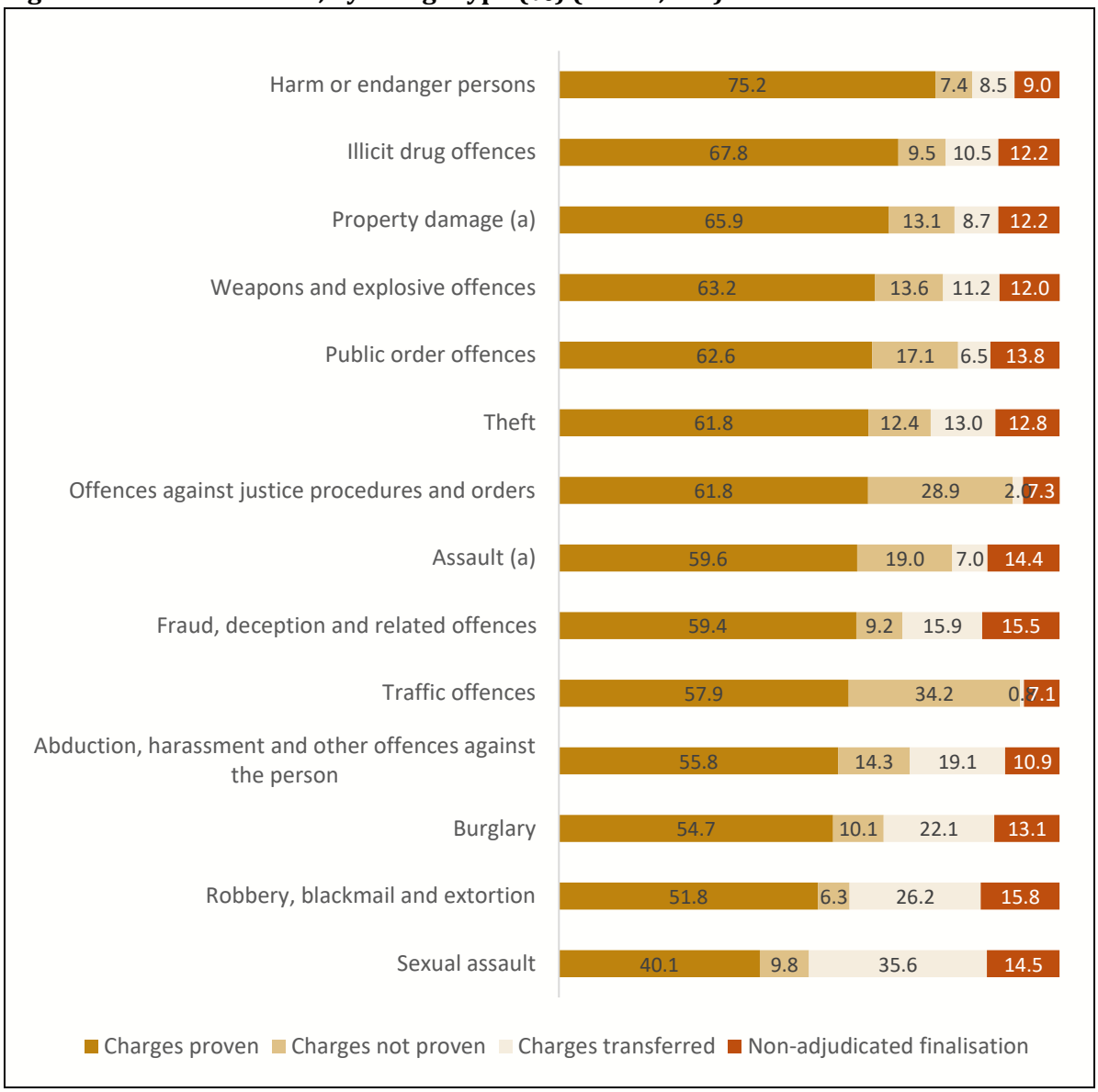
4.3.1 Charge outcomes by charge type

The outcome of charges differed by the nature of the offence. As shown in Figure 21, sexual assault charges were the least likely to result in a finding of charges proven (40.1%, n = 238), followed by robbery (51.8%, n = 279). On the other hand, as shown in Figure 20, harm or endanger person charges were the most likely to result in a finding of charges proven (75.2%, n = 551), followed by drug offences (67.8%, n = 471) and property damage (65.9%, n = 1,078).

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Figure 21: Court outcome, by charge type (%) (n = 81,423)



Note: Calculated based on the maximum court outcome for episodes where the defendant was charged with a specific offence type. Does not include homicide due to small cell sizes. Percentage totals may not equal 100 due to rounding. Excludes <10 episodes where the outcome was not recorded.

Source: ABS, Courts 2019-2024

4.3.1 Charge outcomes by defendant sex

These patterns remained largely consistent when the sample was disaggregated by defendant sex and charge type. As shown in Table 11, across the charge types examined, female defendants were consistently more likely than male defendants to have their charges not proven.

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Table 11: Charge outcome, by defendant sex (%)

	Males				Females			
	PR	NPR	TR	NAF	PR	NPR	TR	NAF
Assault (a)	65.1	12.1	15.1	7.8	56.9	23.6	10.5	9.1
Harm or endanger persons (b)	76.9	3.5	16.5	3.0	84.8	4.1	7.1	4.1
Abduction, harassment and other offences against the person (c)	55.7	8.3	30.1	5.9	39.0	11.0	45.0	5.0
Robbery, blackmail and extortion (d)	57.9	4.0	32.9	5.2	57.2	9.7	17.7	15.5
Burglary (e)	60.0	4.5	30.9	4.6	61.4	14.6	20.6	3.4
Theft (f)	66.8	5.8	21.5	5.9	72.2	8.9	11.3	7.6
Fraud, deception and related offences (g)	66.8	1.2	11.3	20.7	29.2	1.6	1.8	67.3
Illicit drug offences (h)	73.7	6.1	14.7	5.5	73.9	13.3	4.2	8.5
Weapons and explosive offences (I)	68.0	8.5	17.9	5.7	64.7	17.1	5.4	12.9
Property damage (g)	69.6	6.7	18.0	5.7	63.7	20.3	7.0	9.1
Public order offences (j)	64.4	10.0	17.9	7.8	61.7	21.5	6.6	10.2
Traffic offences (k)	86.3	5.4	6.0	2.3	85.5	9.6	1.6	3.3
Offences against justice procedures and orders (l)	71.5	13.8	8.1	6.6	65.3	25.9	1.9	7.0
Other miscellaneous (m)	86.3	3.7	8.0	2.1	67.8	18.4	6.3	7.5

Note: Percentage totals may not equal 100 due to rounding. Homicide, sexual assault, negligent acts not included due to small cell sizes.

a: Excludes <10 episodes where the outcome was not recorded, and 68 episodes where the sex of the defendant was not recorded.

b: Excludes <10 episodes where defendant sex was not recorded

c: Excludes <10 episodes where defendant sex was not recorded

d: Excludes <10 episodes where defendant sex was not recorded

e: Excludes <10 episodes where defendant sex was not recorded

f: Excludes 50 episodes where defendant sex was not recorded

g: Excludes 28 episodes where defendant sex was not recorded

h: Excludes <10 episodes where defendant sex was not recorded

i: Excludes <10 episodes where defendant sex was not recorded

j: Excludes 29 episodes where defendant sex was not recorded

k: Excludes 4,699 episodes where defendant sex was not recorded

l: Excludes 95 episodes where defendant sex was not recorded

m: Excludes 16 episodes where defendant sex was not recorded

Source: ABS, Courts 2019-2024

4.3.2 Court outcomes by defendant Indigenous status

When the sample was disaggregated by Indigenous status and charge type, several notable differences in charge outcomes emerged. As shown in Table 12, a larger proportion of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander defendants had charges proven for the following offence types:

- abduction (57.0%, n = 296 vs 52.3%, n = 646),
- robbery (61.1%, n = 887 vs 54.7%, n = 758), and

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- illicit drug (79.0%, n = 890 vs 72.2%, n = 1942).

Conversely, a larger proportion of non-Indigenous defendants had charges proven for property damage (70.3%, n = 3,775 vs 66.8%, n = 2,177), traffic offences (89.8%, n = 12,323 vs 80.3%, n = 5,082), and other offences (86.7%, n = 2,893 vs 74.8%, n = 367).

Table 12: Charge outcome, by defendant Indigenous status (%)

	Non-Indigenous				Indigenous			
	PR	NPR	TR	NAF	PR	NPR	TR	NAF
Assault (a)	62.3	15.0	14.2	8.6	66.9	11.6	14.6	6.9
Harm or endanger persons (b)	77.1	4.4	14.5	4.0	74.7	2.9	20.4	2.0
Abduction, harassment and other offences against the person (c)	52.3	7.6	34.5	5.7	57.0	10.0	27.0	6.0
Robbery, blackmail and extortion (d)	54.7	5.2	33.5	6.6	61.1	4.1	28.4	6.5
Burglary (e)	60.4	5.5	29.5	4.6	60.3	4.6	30.6	4.5
Theft (f)	66.9	6.6	19.7	6.8	68.8	6.0	19.8	5.5
Fraud, deception and related offences (g)	57.0	0.8	7.9	34.3				
Illicit drug offences (h)	72.2	6.7	14.5	6.7	79.0	7.8	9.2	4.0
Weapons and explosive offences (I)	67.3	9.6	15.8	7.3	68.1	8.6	18.3	5.0
Property damage (j)	70.3	9.3	13.0	7.4	66.8	6.7	22.5	4.1
Public order offences (k)	64.4	11.8	14.3	9.5	63.8	11.0	19.4	5.8
Traffic offences (l)	89.8	3.3	4.7	2.3	80.3	2.8	14.8	2.2
Offences against justice procedures and orders (m)	73.0	12.4	6.6	8.0	74.9	7.8	11.6	5.7
Other miscellaneous (n)	86.7	4.6	7.1	1.6	74.8	6.5	9.4	9.4

Note: PR = Proven, NPR = Not proven, TR = Transferred, NAF = Non-adjudicated finalization. Percentage totals may not equal 100 due to rounding

Source: ABS, Courts 2019-2024

a: Excludes <10 episodes where the outcome was not recorded, and 389 episodes where defendant Indigenous status was not recorded.

b: Excludes 730 episodes where defendant Indigenous status was not recorded

c: Excludes 59 episodes where defendant Indigenous status was not recorded

d: Excludes 50 episodes where defendant Indigenous status was not recorded

e: Excludes 115 episodes where defendant Indigenous status was not recorded

f: Excludes 397 episodes where defendant Indigenous status was not recorded

g: Excludes 307 episodes where defendant Indigenous status was not recorded. Figures for Indigenous defendants not provided due to small cell sizes.

h: Excludes 76 episodes where defendant Indigenous status was not recorded

i: Excludes 104 episodes where defendant Indigenous status was not recorded

j: Excludes <10 episodes where the outcome was not recorded, and 150 episodes where defendant Indigenous status was not recorded.

k: Excludes 156 episodes where defendant Indigenous status was not recorded

l: Excludes 16,701 episodes where defendant Indigenous status was not recorded

m: Excludes 2,221 episodes where defendant Indigenous status was not recorded

n: Excludes 148 episodes where defendant Indigenous status was not recorded

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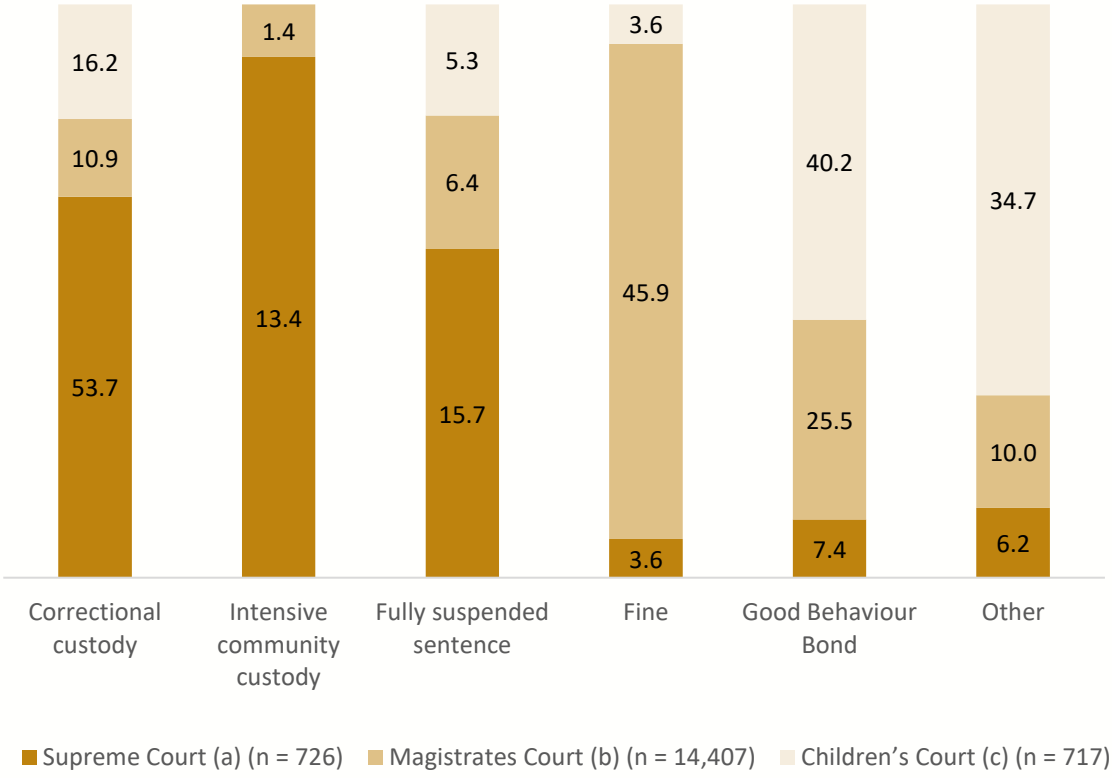
4.4 Sentencing

For sentenced matters finalised in the Magistrates Court, the most common sentencing outcome was a fine—accounting for 45.9% (*n* = 6,609) of all sentenced matters. This was followed by a Good Behaviour Bond (25.5%, *n* = 3,668), and Custody (10.9%, *n* = 1,576). The most common sentence type in the Children's Court was a Good Behaviour Bond (40.2%, n = 288), followed by 'other' (e.g., moderate community custody, community service; 34.7%, n = 249) and then custody (16.2%, n = 116). Fines only accounted for a small proportion of sentences in the Children's Court (3.6%, n = 26).

In the Supreme Court, the most common sentence was custody, imposed in 53.7% (*n* = 390) of sentenced matters. This was followed by fully suspended sentences (15.7%, *n* = 114), and intensive community custody (13.4%, *n* = 97; Figure 22).

Among matters which resulted in a custodial sentence, the mean sentence length was 1.88 years in the Magistrates Court (SD 3.1), 4.53 years (SD: 6.9) in the Supreme Court and 1.78 years (SD = 2.4) in the Children's Court.

Figure 22: Maximum sentence, by court (%)



Note: Sample limited to episodes where at least one charge was proven. Percentage totals may not equal 100 due to rounding.

a: Excludes <10 episodes where sentence type was not recorded

b: Excludes 20 episodes where sentence type was not recorded

b: Excludes 60 episodes where sentence type was not recorded

Source: ABS, Courts 2019-2024

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4.4.1 Sentence type by charge

Custodial sentences were most common for robbery (56.3%, n = 157), burglary (52.1%, n = 214) and sexual assault (50.8%, n = 121). Notably, although most assault and harm or endanger person charges were proven in court (see Figure 20), only a minority led to a custodial sentence (23.7%, n = 553; 25.1%, n = 138 respectively; see Table 13).

Table 13: Sentence outcome, by charge type (%)

	Custody	Intensive community custody	Fully suspended sentence	Other (b)
Assault	23.7	3.9	14.0	8.8
Sexual assault (a)	50.8	7.1	10.9	31.1
Harm or endanger persons	25.1	6.2	11.6	4.9
Abduction, harassment and other offences against the person (a)	48.8	8.5	21.3	21.3
Robbery, blackmail and extortion (a)	56.3	8.2	16.5	19.0
Burglary	52.1	12.2	12.7	4.6
Theft	37.8	6.5	10.8	9.8
Illicit drug offences	24.6	6.8	7.2	6.6
Weapons and explosive offences	32.0	5.7	11.7	9.3
Property damage	23.7	4.6	7.9	9.6
Public order offences	11.9	2.7	5.6	18.4
Traffic offences	4.5	1.1	3.9	13.7
Offences against justice procedures and orders	13.9	1.3	4.6	8.0

Note: Sample limited to finalised episodes. Calculated based on the maximum sentence for episodes where the defendant was charged with a specific offence type. Analysis does not include homicide, fraud, harm or endanger persons, or other charge types, due to small cell sizes.

a: Excludes <10 episode where the outcome was not recorded

b: Other category includes Fines and Good Behaviour Bonds due to small cell sizes

Source: ABS, Courts 2019-2024

4.4.1 Sentence type by defendant sex

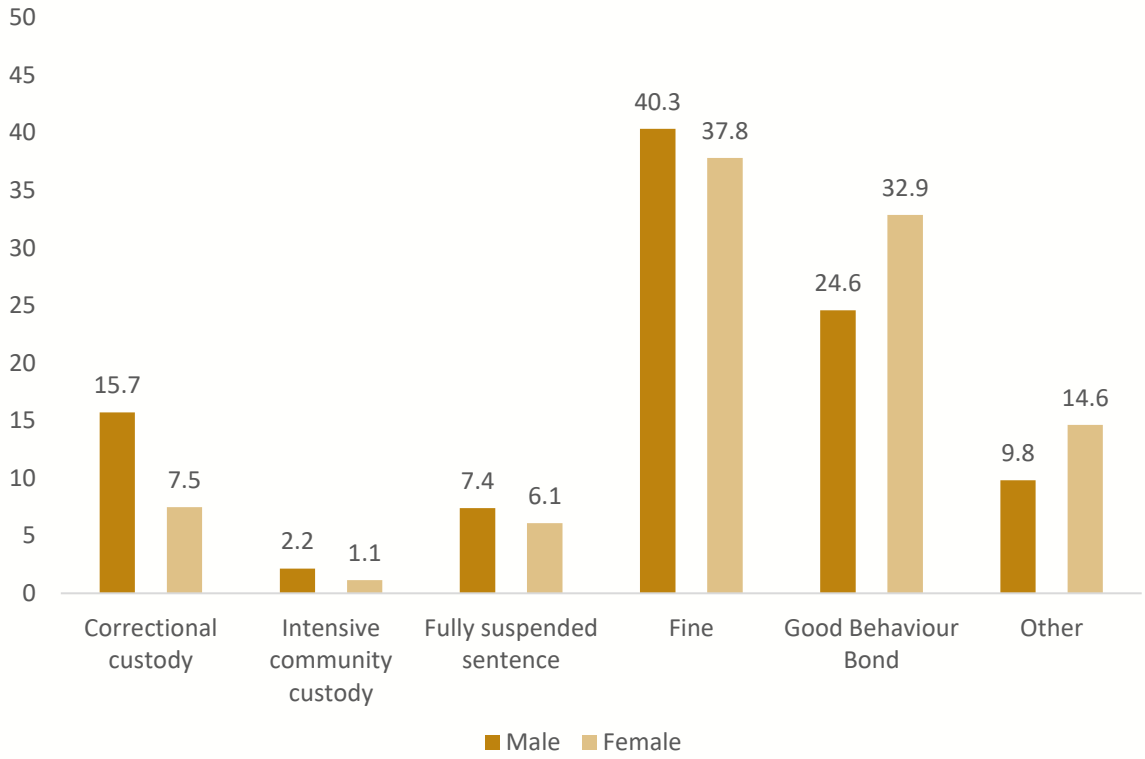
A much larger proportion of court episodes involving male defendants resulted in a custodial sentence, compared with those involving females (15.7%, *n* = 1,825 vs 7.5%, *n* = 245; see Figure 23). In contrast, a larger proportion of female defendants received a Good Behaviour Bond as their maximum sentence (32.9%, n = 1,077 vs 24.6%, n = 2,855), or 'other' sentence types (e.g., fines; 14.6%, n = 479 vs 9.8%, n = 1,142; Figure 21).

The average length of custodial sentence for males was 2.04 years (SD = 3.6), and 2.09 years (SD = 3.4) for females.

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Figure 23: Maximum sentence, by defendant sex (%)



Note: Excludes 952 episodes where sex of defendant was not recorded, and 83 episodes where the sentence type was not recorded. Sample limited to episodes where at least one charge was proven.

Source: ABS, Courts 2019-2024

4.4.1 Sentence type by defendant Indigenous status

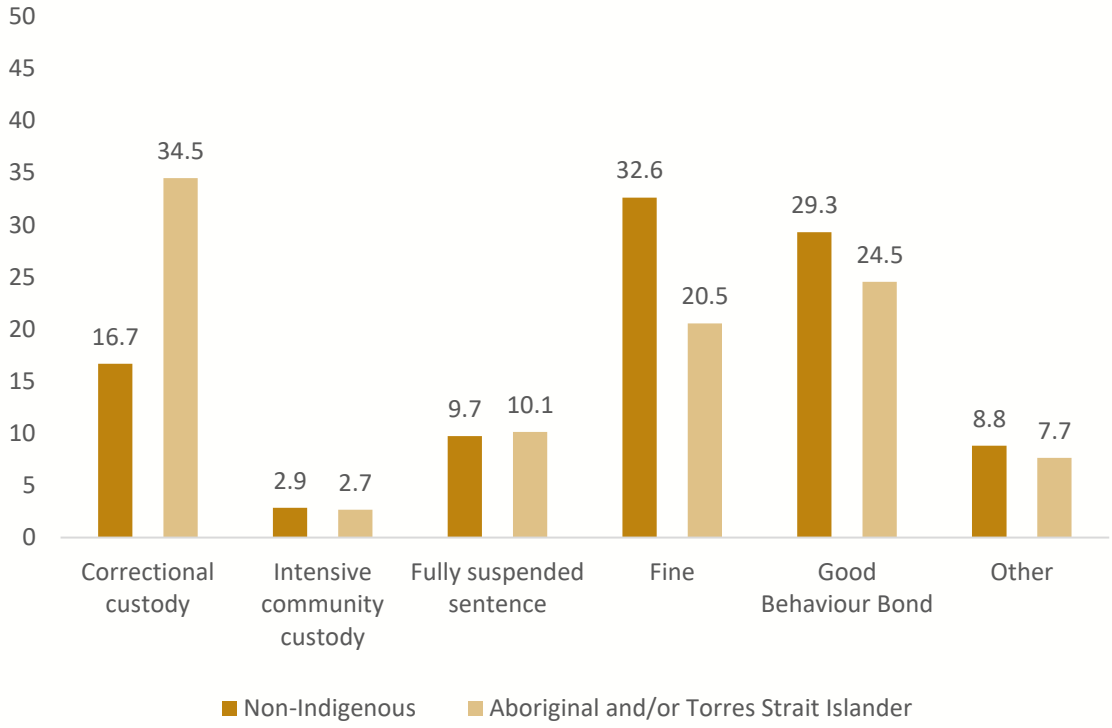
Significant differences also emerged by defendant Indigenous status. A larger proportion of episodes involving an Indigenous defendant resulted in a custodial sentence, compared to episodes involving non-Indigenous defendants (34.5%, *n* = 843 vs 16.7%, *n* = 1,194). Conversely, non-Indigenous defendants were more likely to receive a fine as their maximum sentence, compared to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander defendants (32.6%, *n* = 2,336 vs 20.5%, *n* = 502), or a Good Behaviour Bond (29.3%, n = 2,099 vs 24.5%, n = 600; Figure 24).

The average length of custodial sentence for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander defendants was 3.5 years (SD = 5.9), and 3.5 years (SD = 5.2) for non-Indigenous defendants.

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Figure 24: Maximum sentence per episode, by Indigenous status (%)



Note: Excludes 6,200 episodes where Indigenous status of defendant was not recorded, and 85 episodes where the sentence type was not recorded. Sample limited to episodes where at least one charge was proven.

Source: ABS, Courts 2019-2024

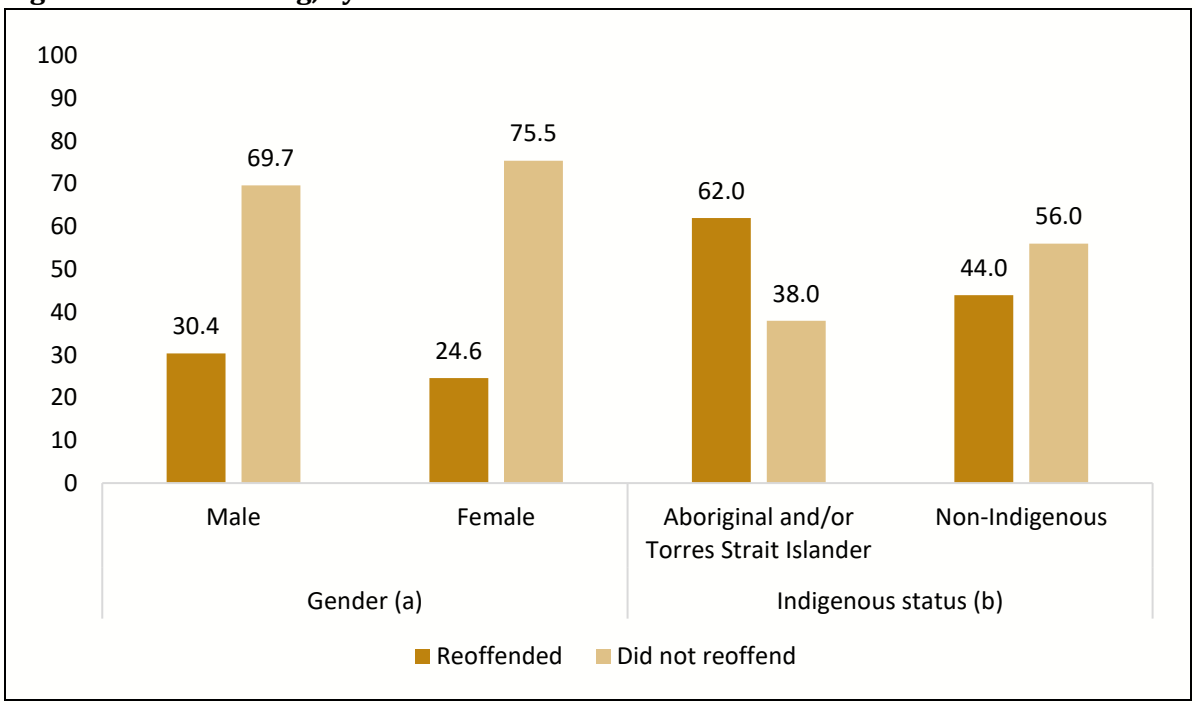
4.5 Reoffending

Reoffending after court finalisation was common. Overall, 23.9% (***n*** = 3,967) of defendants who could be followed for a minimum of 12 months appeared in court again as a defendant for a new charge during the observation period. As demonstrated in Figure 25, these figures were higher for both males (compared to females; 30.4%, *n* = 2,881 vs 24.6%, *n* = 808) and Indigenous defendants (compared to non-Indigenous defendants; 62.0%, *n* = 781 vs 44.0%, *n* = 2,305).

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Figure 25: Reoffending, by defendant characteristics



Note: Sample limited to defendants who could be followed for a minimum of 12 months following their index offence

a) Excludes 3,804 defendants whose sex was not provided

b) Excludes 10,087 defendants whose Indigenous status was not provided

Source: ABS, Courts 2019-2024

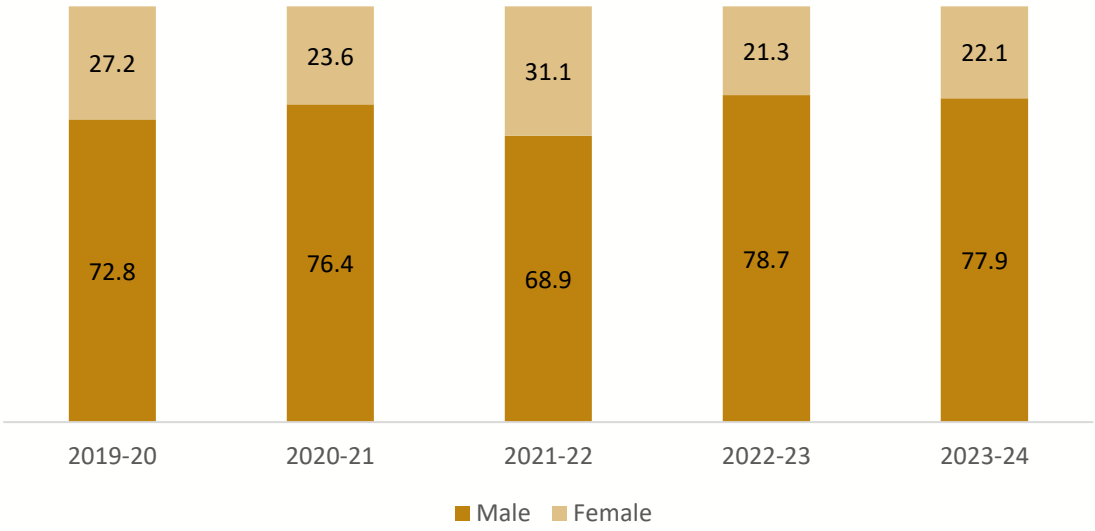
4.6 Changes over time

4.6.1 Characteristics of defendants

The proportion of defendants who were female remained relatively stable over the observation period, averaging 25.1% per year, consistent with the proportion of matters recorded by police (Figure 26). Because of the large volume of missing data relating to the Indigenous status of defendants, patterns over time were not analysed.

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Figure 26: Sex of defendants, by financial year (%)



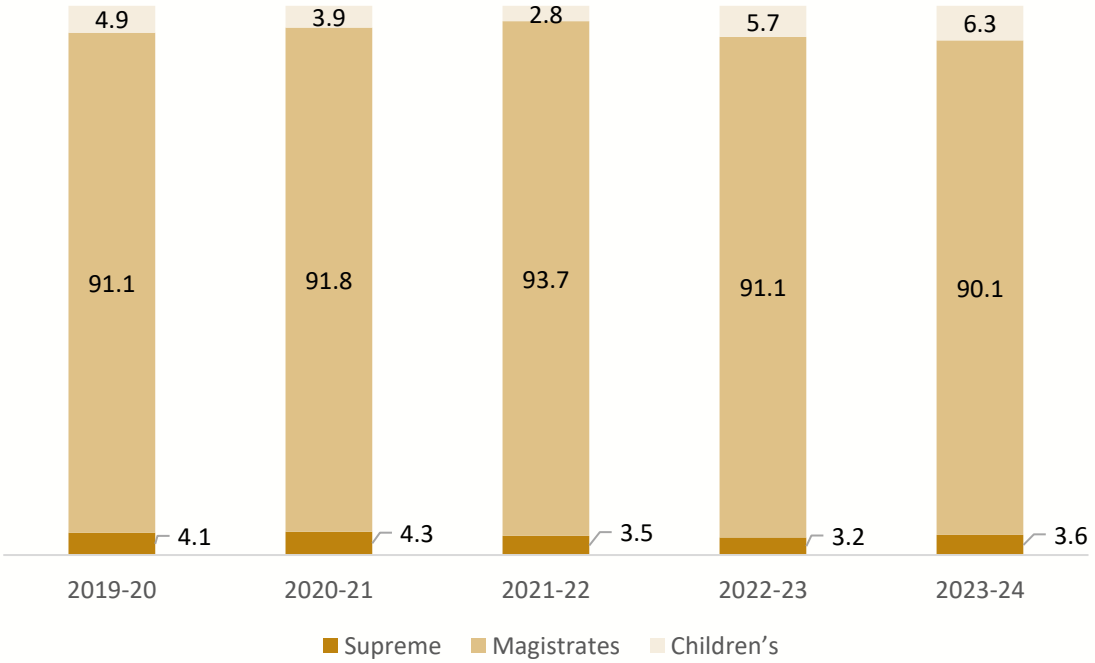
Note: Percentage totals may not equal 100 due to rounding. Excludes 952 episodes where Indigenous status of defendant was not recorded.

Source: ABS, Courts 2019-2024

4.6.2 Court level

Over the observation period, the vast majority of court matters were heard in the ACT Magistrates Court; over this time period, approximately 90% of matters were heard in this Court. The proportion of matters heard in the Children's Court similarly remained stable, ranging between 4-6% of matters, and 3-4% in the Supreme Court (Figure 27).

Figure 27: Court level, by financial year (%)



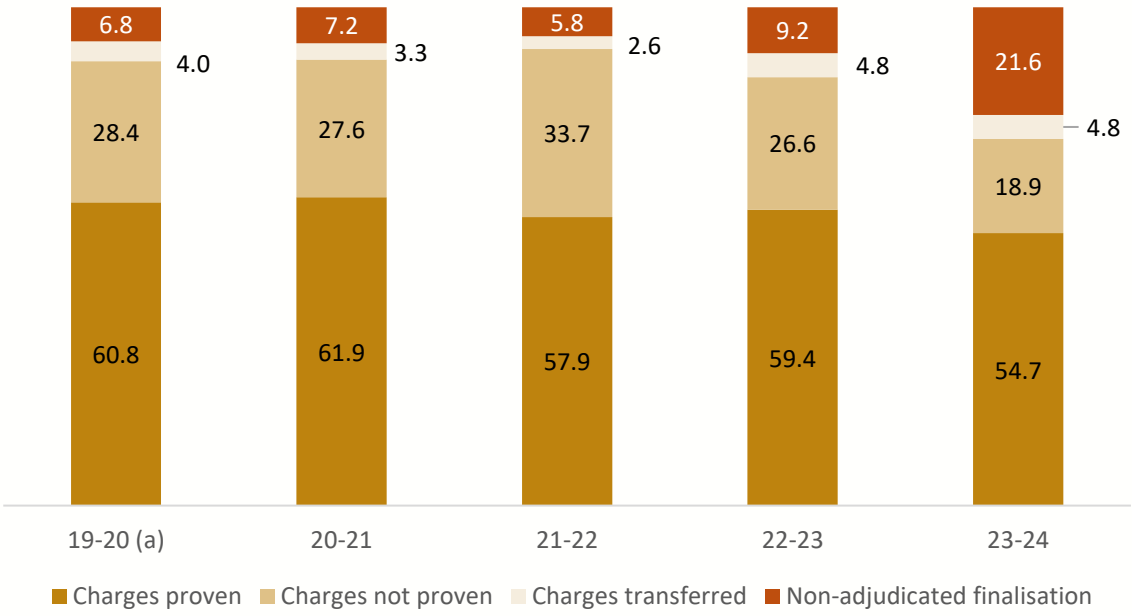
Note: Percentage totals may not equal 100 due to rounding. Excludes 12,586 episodes where Indigenous status of defendant was not recorded. Date of finalization used to categorise matters.

Source: ABS, Courts 2019-2024

4.6.3 Court outcomes

Court outcomes have remained relatively stable over the observation period, although the proportion of matters finalised by charges being proven declined by 6.2% between 2019–20 and 2023–24 (ie, from 60.8% to 54.7%). Over the same period, there were fluctuations in the proportion of matters finalised by non-adjudication and charges not being proven, indicating some variability in how matters progressed through the courts from year-to-year (Figure 28).

Figure 28: Finalisation type, by year (%)



Note: Percentage totals may not equal 100 due to rounding. Date of finalization was used to categorise matters.

a: Excludes <10 episodes where outcome was not recorded

Source: ABS, Courts 2019-2024.

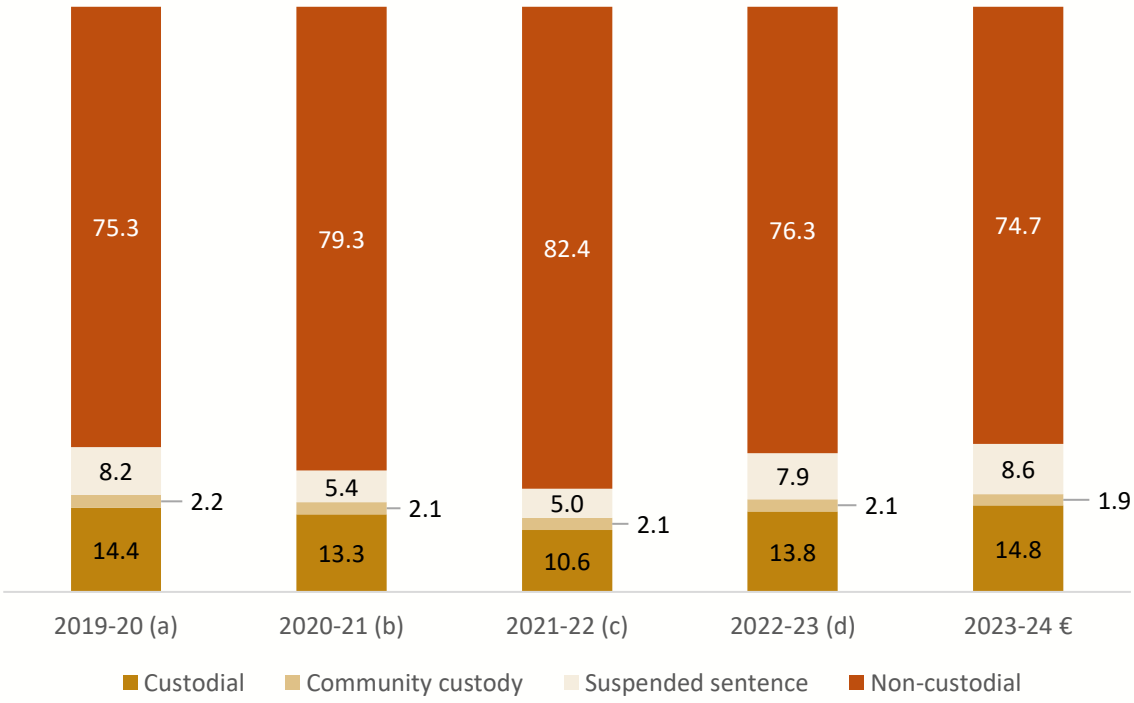
4.6.4 Sentence type

Sentence types remained broadly stable over the observation period, with non-custodial sentences consistently the most common outcome (Figure 29). Custodial sentences comprised approximately 13.0% of all sentenced matters each year, reflecting limited variation in sentencing patterns over time.

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Figure 29: Sentence type, by financial year (%)



Note: Percentage totals may not equal 100 due to rounding. Date of finalization was used to categorise matters.
a: Excludes 1,883 episodes where sentence type was not recorded
b: Excludes 2,135 episodes where sentence type was not recorded
c: Excludes 2,924 episodes where sentence type was not recorded
d: Excludes 1,877 episodes where sentence type was not recorded
e: Excludes 2,235 episodes where sentence type was not recorded
Source: ABS, Courts 2019-2024.

4.6.5 Sentence length

Average sentence length remained relatively stable over the observation period. However, as demonstrated in Table 14, the overall sentence length did decrease slightly over time, from 2.18 years in 2019-20, to 1.89 in 2023-24. This trend was particularly observed for female and Indigenous defendants. In comparison, the average sentence length for young people remained stable over time.

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Table 14: Average length of sentence, by financial year and sentence type (years) (mean (SD))

	Custodial	Community-based	Suspended sentence	Overall
2019-20	3.60 (5.2)	6.42 (8.7)	2.64 (4.4)	2.18 (3.5)
2020-21	3.95 (6.1)	6.41 (11.6)	2.61 (2.5)	2.19 (3.8)
2021-22	3.45 (4.9)	4.46 (4.7)	2.40 (4.9)	2.07 (3.2)
2022-23	3.38 (6.2)	8.00 (14.2)	1.83 (2.1)	1.91 (4.0)
2023-24	2.84 (4.5)	5.06 (5.5)	1.72 (2.3)	1.89 (2.8)

Note: Date of finalization was used to categorise matters.

Source: ABS, Courts 2019-2024.

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5. Prisons

This chapter draws on data from ACT Corrective Services, covering prison sentences that concluded between 1 July 2015 and 30 June 2024. Over this period, 7,287 prison episodes were recorded across 3,497 unique individuals. It should be noted that 682 records were incomplete: the majority of these (63.78%) related to sentences that had not reached a conclusion before the end of the observation period, with the remainder (36.22%) involving persons who were transferred elsewhere prior to release. Additionally, the data do not include details of persons held on remand, and the analysis therefore reflects sentenced prisoners only. This section presents a descriptive overview of these data, examining the characteristics of persons sentenced to imprisonment, the nature of offences for which sentences were served, and patterns of sentence length and type.

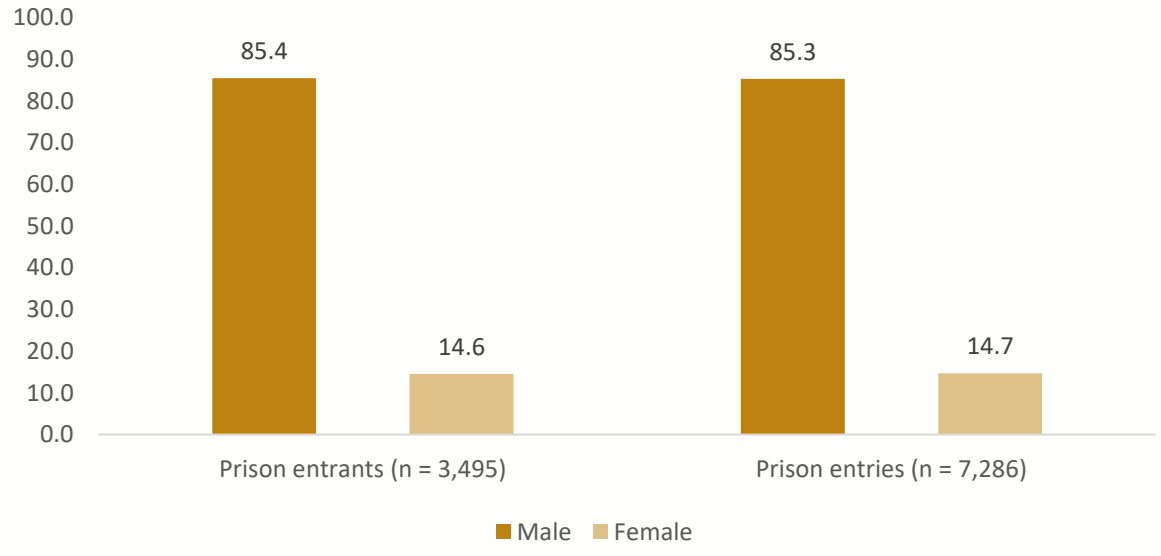
Throughout this section, we distinguish between prison 'entrants' and prison 'entries'. *Entrants* refers to the count of unique individuals who entered prison during the observation period; each person is counted once, regardless of how many times they entered prison, to avoid double-counting. *Entries* refers to the count of individual prison episodes, meaning each instance a person entered prison is counted separately, even where the same individual entered multiple times during the observation period.

5.1 Characteristics of prison entrants

5.1.1 Sex

During the observation period, 3,497 individuals entered prison in the ACT. The majority were male (85.4%, *n* = 2,986), while females accounted for 14.6% of people entering prison (*n* = 509). These patterns align with earlier stages of the justice system, where males also made up the majority of people proceeded against by the police and defendants in court. The sex breakdown of prison entrants did not vary when all episodes of prison were considered (Figure 30).

Figure 30: Sex of prison entrants (%)



Note: Excludes <10 episodes where Individual sex was not recorded.

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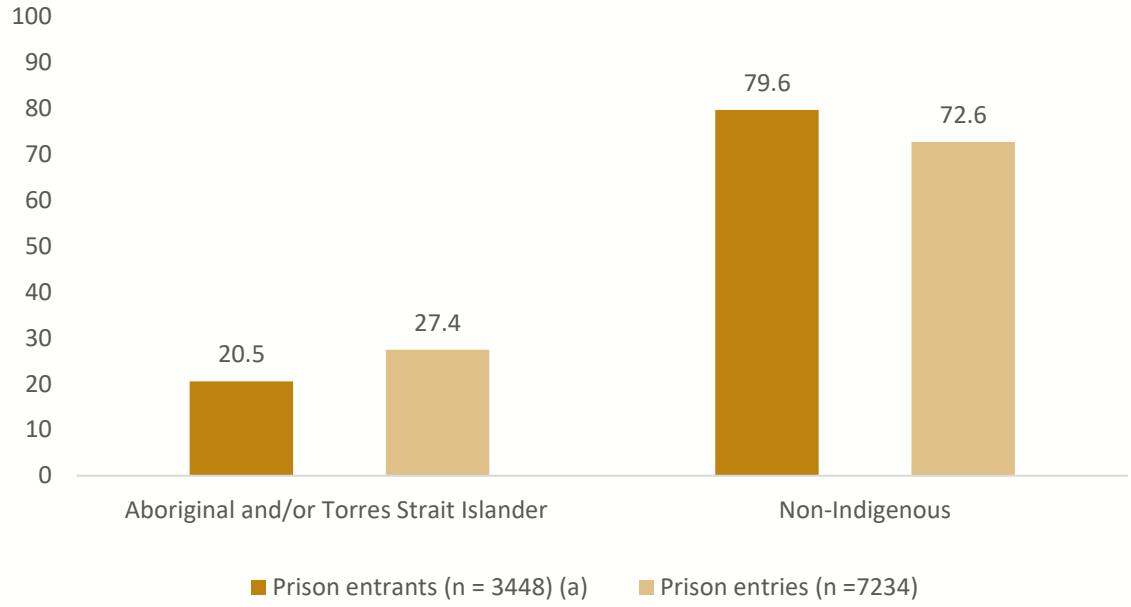
Source: ABS, Prisons 2015-2024.

5.1.2 Indigenous status

Indigenous peoples were significantly overrepresented among those entering custody, with Indigenous people accounting for 20.5% (*n* = 705) of all prison entrants. Indigenous status was missing for a small proportion of individuals (*n* = 49 of total sample).[4]

However, as shown in Figure 31, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples accounted for 27.4% (n = 1,980) of all prison entries during the observation period. This indicates that a larger proportion of Indigenous people entered prison on multiple occasions during the observation period, than non-Indigenous people.

Figure 31: Prison entrants and entries, by Indigenous status (%)



a: Excludes 49 prison entrants where Indigenous status was not recorded

b: Excludes 54 prison entry episodes where Indigenous status of the Individual was not recorded

Source: ABS, Prisons 2015-2024.

5.1.3 Age

People entering prison ranged widely in age. On average, people were aged 34.2 at their first recorded prison entry.

5.1.4 Country of birth (COB)

Most individuals entering custody during the observation period were Australian-born (82.9%, *n* = 2,687), with overseas-born individuals representing a smaller proportion of entrants (17.1%, *n* = 554). Country of birth was not recorded for 7.4% of people entering

[4] A small number of individuals' Indigenous status varied between prison admissions (i.e., were identified as non-Indigenous at one prison entry, and Indigenous at another). In these situations, the individual was categorised as Indigenous if they were identified as such at least once during the observation period.

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prison (*n* = 260).[5] The proportion of prison episodes involving overseas-born individuals was lower than their share of entrants, suggesting that overseas-born individuals were less likely to have multiple prison episodes during the observation period (see Figure 32).

Figure 32: Prison entrants and entries, by country of birth (%)



a: Excludes 260 prison entrants where Indigenous status was not recorded

b: Excludes 369 prison entry episodes where the individual's country of birth was not recorded

Source: ABS, Prisons 2015-2024.

5.2 Characteristics of prison entries

The majority of people only entered prison once during the observation period. Meanwhile, 18.8% of individuals entered prison two times (n = 658), and 24.0% entered three or more times (n = 839; Table 15).

Table 15: Number of prison entries (n = 3,497)

	n	%
1	2000	57.2
2	658	18.8
3	304	8.7
4	189	5.4
5+	346	9.9

Note: Percentage totals may not equal 100 due to rounding.

Source: ABS, Prisons 2015-2024.

[5] A small number of individuals' reported country of birth varied between prison admissions (i.e., were identified as born in Australia at one prison entry and born in another country at another). In these situations, the individual was categorised as born in a country other than Australia if they were identified as such at least once during the observation period.

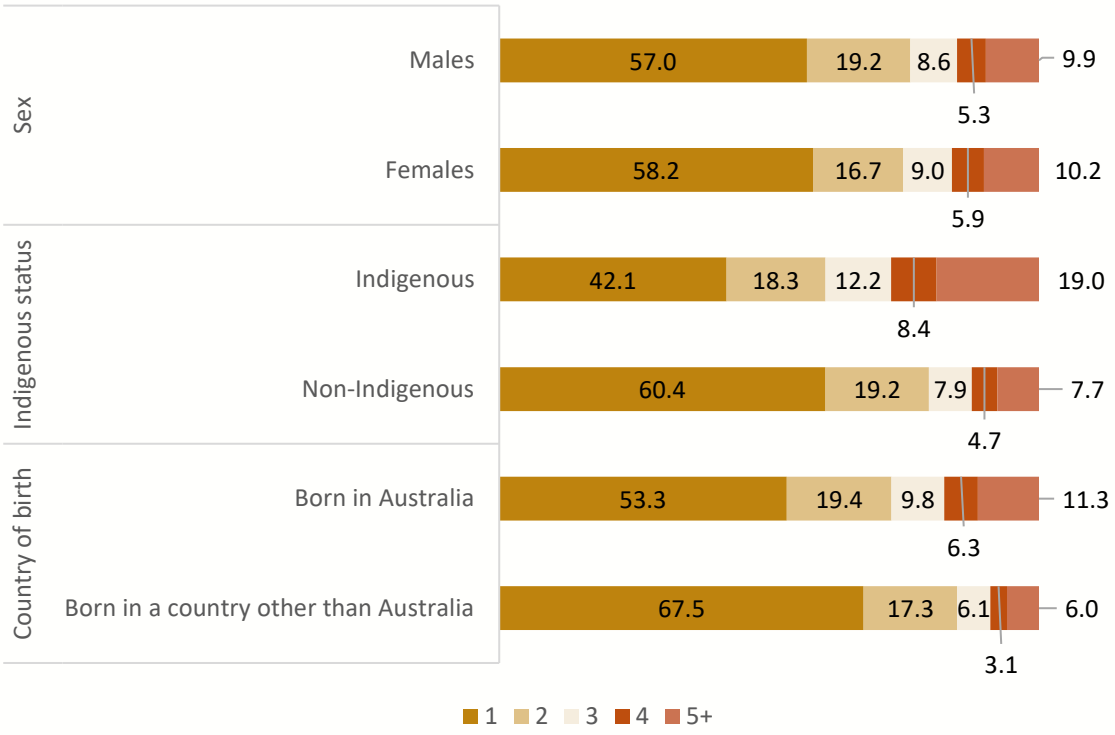
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As shown in Figure 33, there were comparable patterns of prison entry among males and females; the majority only entered prison once (57.0%, n = 296 vs 58.2%, n = 296), with smaller proportions having entered three or more times (23.8%, n = 711 vs 25.2%, n = 128).

A much larger proportion of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples had five or more prison entries during the observation period, compared to non-Indigenous people (19.01%, n = 134 vs 7.7%, n = 212), and were less likely to only have one prison entry (42.1%, n = 297 vs 60.4%, n = 1,658). Meanwhile, the inverse relationship was observed for prison entrants who were born in a country other than Australia; a larger proportion only entered prison once during the observation period compared to prison entrants who were born in Australia (67.5%, n = 374 vs 53.3% n = 1,431), and a smaller proportion entered five or more times (6.0%, n = 33 vs 11.3%, n = 304; Figure 31).

Figure 33: Number of prison entries, by prison entrant characteristics



a: Excludes <10 individuals whose sex was not recorded

b: Excludes 49 individuals whose Indigenous status was not recorded

c: Excludes 256 individuals whose country of birth was not recorded

Source: ABS, Prisons 2015-2024.

5.3 Characteristics of sentences

Across all individuals entering prison, the average sentence length was 142.1 days (SD: 242.8). Males were serving longer sentences on average than females (153.0 vs 82.0 days). Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples also receive slightly longer sentences than non-Indigenous people on average (159.4 vs 136.5 days). Individuals born in a country other than Australia were also more likely to enter with shorter sentences than those born in Australia (105.1 vs 148.3 days).

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As shown in Table 16, the majority of sentences were six months or less (76.4%, n = 5,045). Nearly two-fifths of all sentences (39.3%, n = 2,595) were for under 30 days.

Table 16: Length of sentence in days, by prison entrant characteristics (%)

	30 days or less	31-180 days	181-365 days	366+ days	Mean
Sex[a]					
Male	37.8	36.6	15.1	10.6	153.0
Female	47.4	39.9	9.1	3.6	82.0
Indigenous status[b]					
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	32.8	38.9	17.2	11.1	159.4
Non-Indigenous	41.5	36.5	13.1	8.9	136.5
Country of birth[c]					
Australia	38.0	37.1	14.9	10.1	148.3
Country other than Australia	46.7	37.5	9.9	5.9	105.1
Overall	*39.3*	*37.1*	*14.1*	*9.5*	*142.1*

Note: Sample limited to prison entries where the sentence had been finalised at time of data extraction (June 30, 2024)

a: Excludes <10 prison entries where the individual's sex was not recorded

b: Excludes 45 prison entries where the individual's Indigenous status was not recorded

c: Excludes 318 prison entries where the individual's country of birth was not recorded

Source: ABS, Prisons 2015-2024.

5.4 Reason for exit

The most common reason for prison exit was release on bail or appeal (44.1%, n = 3,021), followed by being released on parole (30.0%, n = 2,057) and then sentence completion (21.4%, n = 1,465). Being transferred to another institution, mental health facility or jurisdiction accounted for only a small proportion of prison exits (3.6%, n = 247), as did 'other' exit reasons (0.9%, n = 63; e.g., death, abscondment).

Few differences were observed across sex, Indigenous status, and country of birth in relation to sentence completion and transferral. However, notable differences were observed for bail and parole exits:

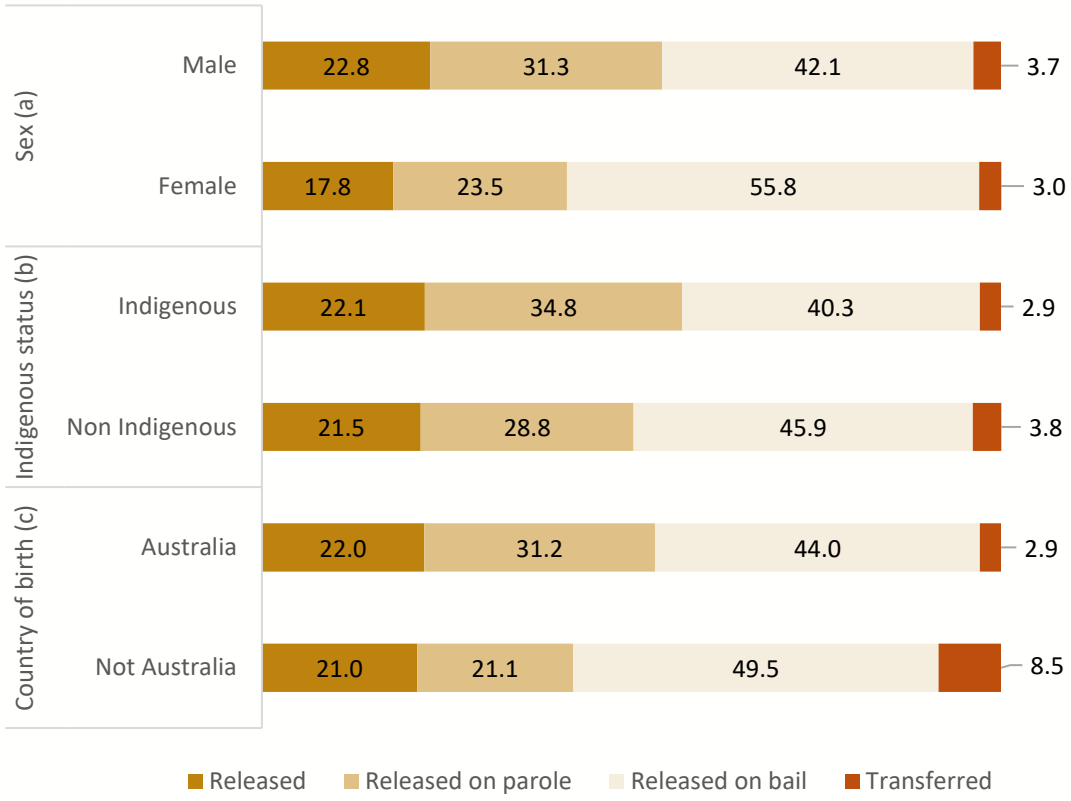
- A larger proportion of female than male entrants exited on bail (55.8%, *n* = 584 vs 42.1%, *n* = 2,435), while more male entrants were released on parole (31.3%, *n* = 1,811 vs 23.5%, *n* = 246).
- A larger proportion of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander entrants exited on parole (34.8%, *n* = 631 vs 28.8%, *n* = 1,420), while more non-Indigenous entrants exited on bail (45.9%, *n* = 2,261 vs 40.3%, *n* = 730).
- A larger proportion of entrants born outside Australia exited on bail, compared to Australian-born entrants (49.0%, *n* = 450 vs 44.0%, *n* = 2,442), while more Australian-born entrants were released on parole (31.2%, *n* = 1,735 vs 21.1%, *n* = 192; see Figure 34).

In the absence of additional information, these trends are difficult to fully explain. However, they may be attributable to differential bail decision-making, with male, Aboriginal and/or

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Torres Strait Islander, and overseas-born defendants being less likely to be granted bail. This is consistent with broader research demonstrating that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and overseas-born defendants are less likely to be granted bail, in part due to factors such as insecure housing and limited community ties recognised by bail decision-makers (Australian Law Reform Commission, 2017; Bartels, 2019; McDonald et al., 2026). Further research is needed to examine the reasons behind these observed trends in more detail.

Figure 34: Reason for exit, by prison entrant characteristics (%)



Note: Sample limited to prison entries which had been finalised at time of data extraction (June 30 2024). Sample excludes 63 prison entries where the exit reason was listed as 'other'. This Is due to small cell sizes.

a) Excludes <10 prison episodes where the individual's sex was not recorded

b) Excludes 51 prison episodes where the individual's Indigenous status was not recorded

c) Excludes 324 prison episodes where the individual's COB was not recorded

Source: ABS, Prisons 2015-2024.

5.5 Prison re-entry

During the observation period, 46.9% (n = 1,445) of prison entrants returned to prison. This estimate is based on those individuals whose prison sentence was finalised during the observation period, and could be followed for a minimum 12-month period following their release. This was to ensure that we were only considering prison re-entry for those individuals who had the "opportunity" to re-enter prison (i.e., had time spent in the community), and to account for the procedural processing times of the police and the courts that would delay re-entry into prison.

As demonstrated in Figure 35, the prevalence of re-entry differed across the population of prison entrants. For example, a larger proportion of male prison entrants re-entered prison

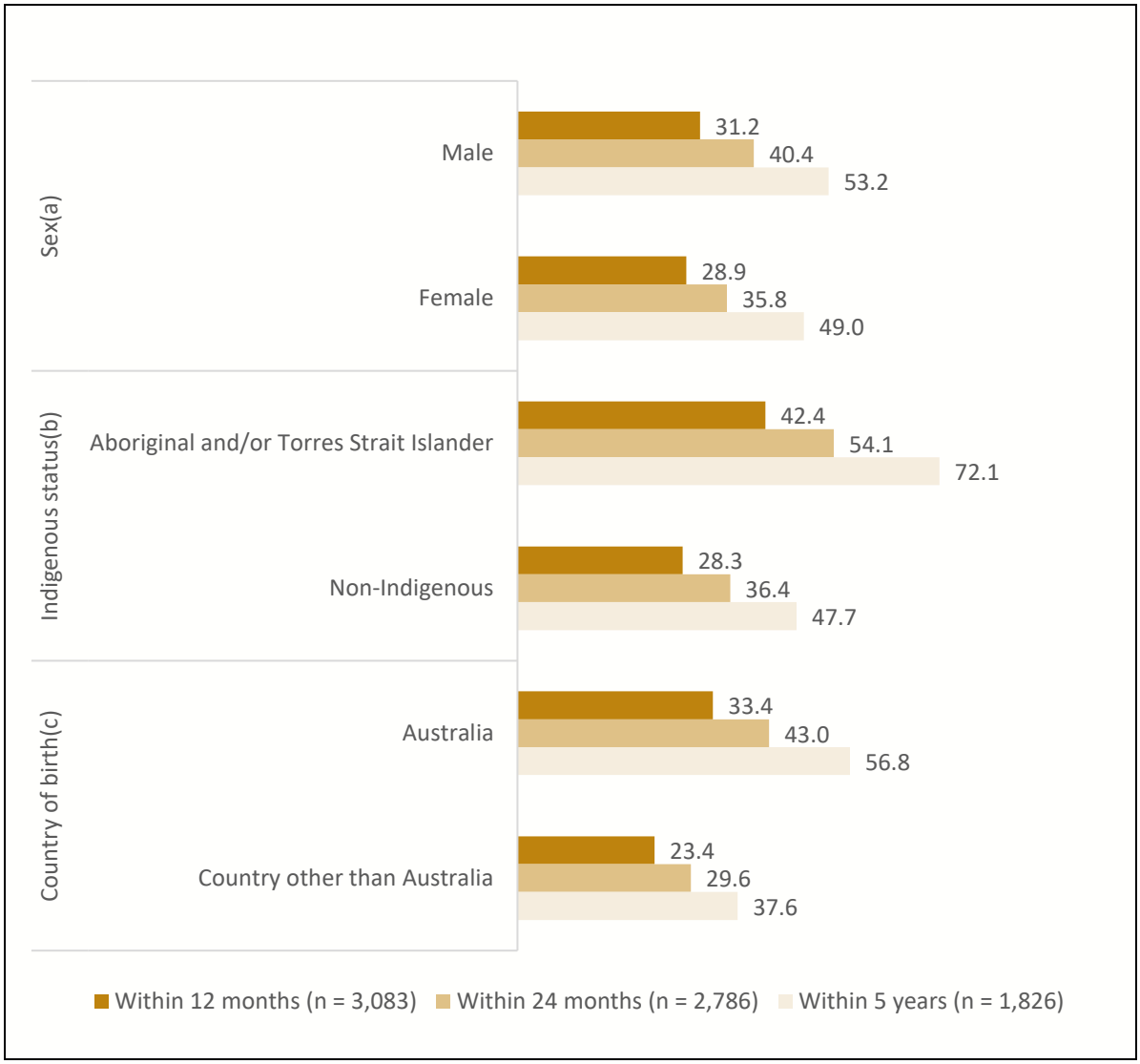
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within 12 months, 24 months and five years, compared to female prison entrants. Comparable trends were observed for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander prison entrants, who were more likely to have re-entered prison at every follow-up point, relative to non-Indigenous prison entrants.

Prison entrants who were born in a country other than Australia were less likely to re-enter prison at every follow-up point, compared to those who were born in Australia. The reason for this is unclear, but could be partly attributable to non-citizen entrants being deported or removed (under sections 200-206 and 501 of the *Migration Act 1958* (Cth)) following release, due to failing the character test associated with their offending. However, this would not account for overseas-born entrants who hold Australian citizenship and the hypothesis requires further analysis, using additional data, such as visa or citizenship status.

Figure 35: Prevalence of prison re-entry within 12 months, 24 months and 5 years, by prison entrant characteristics (%)



Note: Sample limited to those prison entrants who could be followed for a minimum period of time following exit from prison.

a: Excludes <10 prison entrants whose sex was not provided

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b: Excludes 36 prison entrants who could be followed for 12 months but whose Indigenous status was not provided, excludes 28 prison entrants who could be followed for 24 months but whose Indigenous status was not provided, excludes 14 prison entrants who could be followed for 5 years but whose Indigenous status was not provided

c: Excludes 196 prison entrants who could be followed for 12 months but whose country of birth was not provided, excludes 150 prison entrants who could be followed for 24 months but whose country of birth was not provided, excludes 82 prison entrants who could be followed for 5 years but whose country of birth was not provided

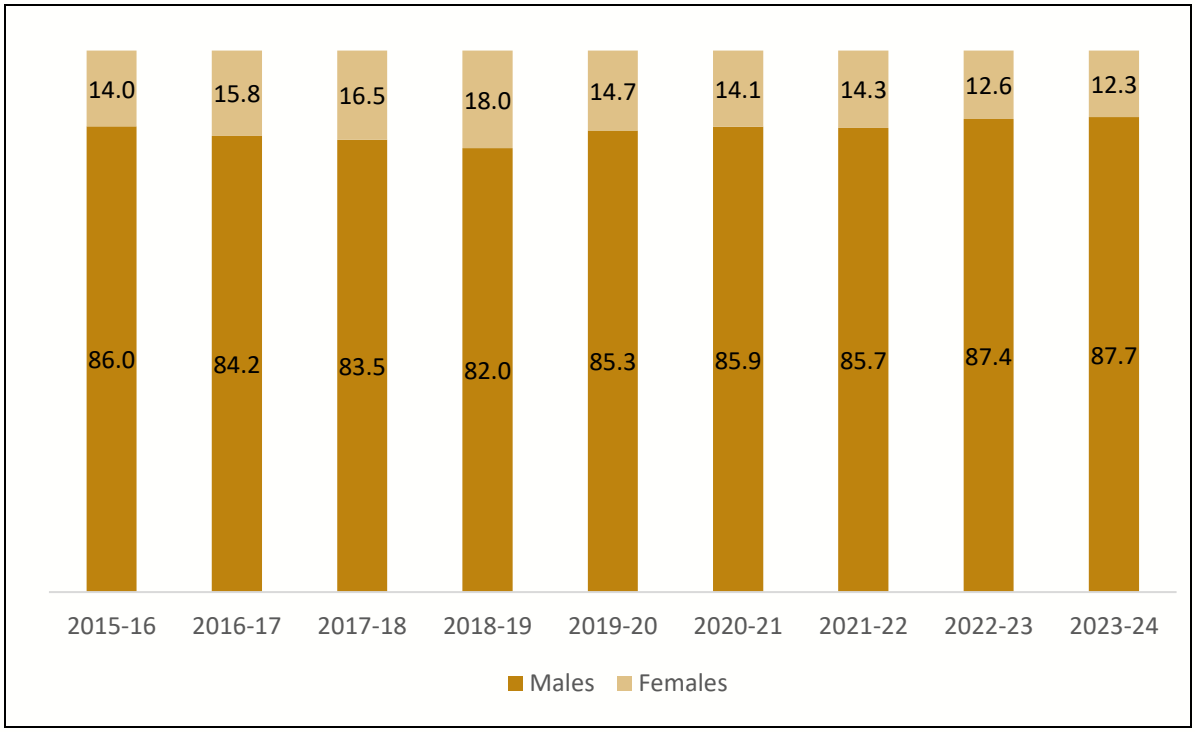
5.6 Changes over time

5.6.1 Characteristics of prison entrants over time

Since 2015–16, the proportion of people entering prison who were female has remained relatively stable, at around 15.0% each year (see Figure 36). In contrast:

- the proportion who were identified as Indigenous increased from 23.1% in 2015–16 to 31.8% in 2023–24 (see Figure 37), and
- the proportion of prison entrants who were born in a country other than Australia has steadily declined over the observation period, decreasing from 19.0% in 2015-2016 to 10.6% in 2023-2024 (see Figure 38).

Figure 36: Sex of defendants, by financial year (%)

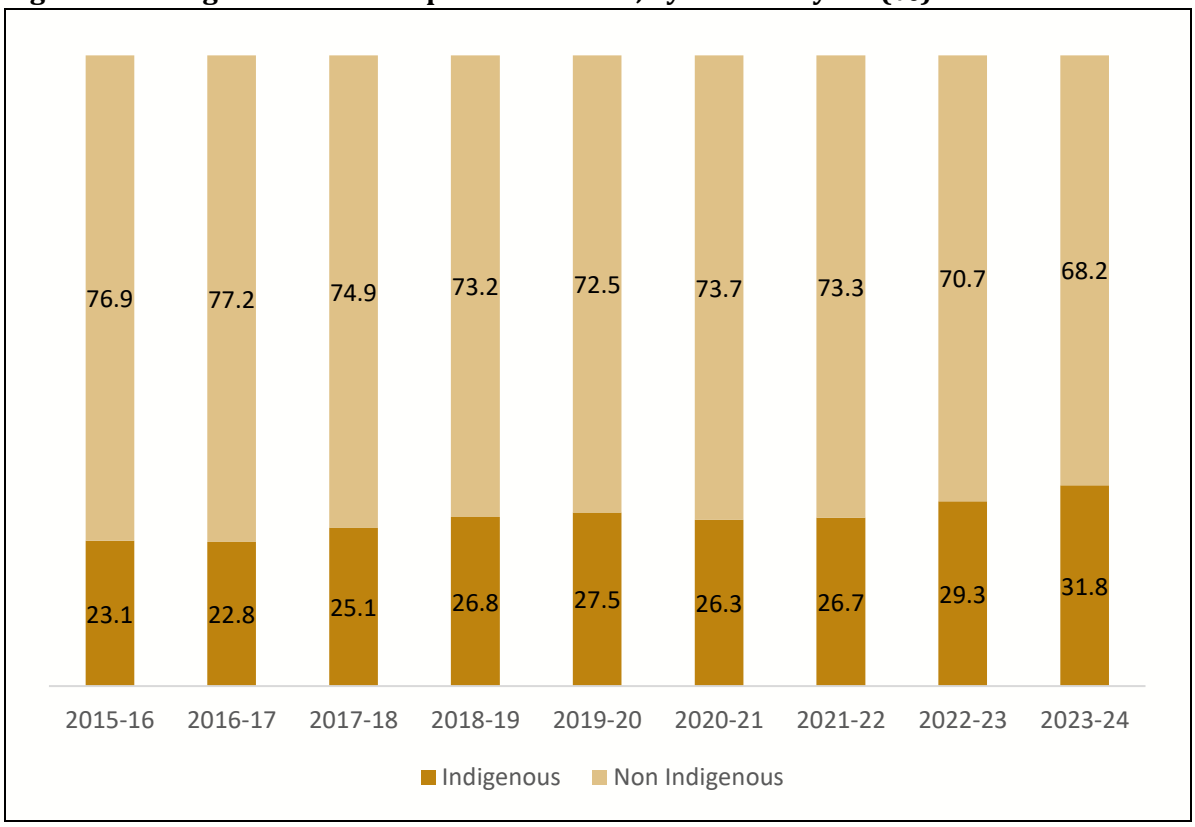


Note: Percentage totals may not equal 100 due to rounding. Excludes <10 prison episodes where the individual's sex was not recorded

Source: ABS, Prisons 2015-2024.

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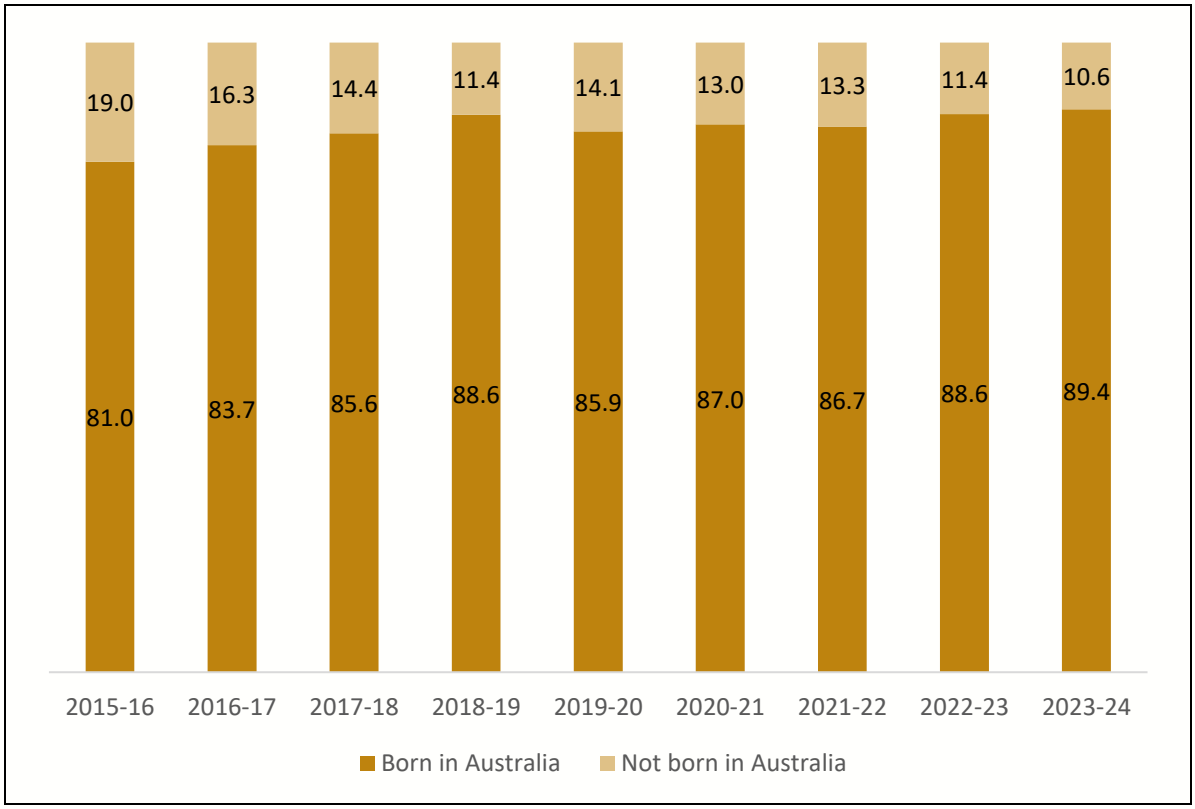
Figure 37: Indigenous status of prison entrants, by financial year (%)



Note: Percentage totals may not equal 100 due to rounding. Excludes 51 prison episodes where the individual's Indigenous status was not recorded

Source: ABS, Prisons 2015-2024.

Figure 38: Indigenous status of prison entrants, by financial year (%)



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Note: Percentage totals may not equal 100 due to rounding. Excludes 324 prison episodes where the individual's Indigenous status was not recorded

Source: ABS, Prisons 2015-2024.

5.6.2 Average sentence length

Average sentence length declined steadily over the observation period. As demonstrated in Table 17, the overall sentence length has decreased from 263.2 (SD = 288.4) in 2015-16, to 114.9 slightly over time, from 2.18 years in 2019-20, to 1.89 in 2023-24 (SD = 70.1). The reasons for this decline are unclear, requiring further investigation.

Table 17: Average length of sentence, by year and sentence type (days)

	Mean	SD
2015-16	263.2	288.4
2016-17	238.6	284.7
2017-18	218.1	244.8
2018-19	197.3	271.7
2019-20	161.0	169.2
2020-21	144.7	167.8
2021-22	130.9	120.0
2022-23	130.9	120.0
2023-24	114.9	70.1

Note: Date of finalization was used to categorise matters.

Source: ABS, Prisons 2015-2024.

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6. Discussion and conclusion

The analyses in this report demonstrated that trends in offending and reoffending remained relatively consistent during the period 2015-16 to 2023-24. This said, it was noted that:

- the proportion of persons accused of a crime by ACT Policing who identified as Indigenous increased over this time period from 11.1% to 14.8% and
- the proportion of prison entrants who identified as Indigenous increased over the same period from 23.1% to 31.8%.

Beyond the trend analysis, several key findings are worth highlighting, due to their implications for policy responses and practice in the ACT.

6.1 Key findings

Age of first contact contributes to subsequent likelihood of reoffending

There was a clear linear relationship between age of first contact with ACT Policing for an accused offence and likelihood of subsequent re-contact. Almost two-thirds of young people who had contact with ACT Policing when they were 10-12 years old went on to have a further re-contact (61.9%), which declined to 52.2%, when age of first contact was 13-15 years and to only 32.4% when the age of first contact was 16-17 years old.

This finding is consistent with broader research and data in Australia, which has explained this, by pointing to the criminogenic nature of justice systems; rather than preventing reoffending, contact with these systems can increase the risk of further offending (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, n.d.; Chen et al., 2005; McAra & McVie, 2010; Ogilvie et al., 2024). Specifically, contact with the youth and adult justice systems can increase risk of reoffending through increased surveillance and the criminalisation of behaviours that are developmentally normal (e.g., underage drinking), the entrenchment of disadvantage that may have contributed to the offending in the first instance (e.g., school exclusion and underperformance), as well as closing off opportunities for accessing factors that may contribute to desistance and more pro-social activities (e.g., extra-curricular activities).

The current findings and this broader evidence highlight the urgent need for diversionary options for young people, to minimise their justice system contact for as long as possible, as well as reinforcing recent moves in the ACT to raise the age of criminal responsibility to 14. While some diversionary options currently exist in the ACT – such as restorative justice conferencing – the current analysis demonstrates the need for these services to be tailored to girls and Aboriginal and /or Torres Strait Islander peoples specifically. A larger proportion of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples had their first contact with ACT Policing as a juvenile, relative to non-Indigenous peoples (19.1% vs 13.7%), as did girls relative to boys (20.5% vs(12.6%).

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples are significantly over-represented in the ACT criminal justice system, including women

Consistent with various other studies undertaken in Australia and the ACT, the analyses provide further evidence of the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

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people at every stage of the ACT criminal legal system. The current analysis was unable to provide much insight into why these communities continue to be over-represented. However, the recent review of Indigenous overrepresentation in the ACT conducted by Cunneen and colleagues (2025) provides invaluable insights into these broader issues (the Jumbunna review). The Jumbunna review identified the following factors as contributing to the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT criminal legal system:

- **Systemic racism and lack of cultural safety:** This is identified as one of the most significant structural drivers. It manifests in multiple forms: racial profiling by police, legislation on bail that fails to account for First Nations circumstances, poor responses to First Nations people's experiences of racism within institutions, and a lack of cultural understanding across government agencies, including Education, Health, and Housing. The review found that government awareness of systemic racism is currently under-developed. Certainly, the current analysis identified that a larger proportion of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples received a custodial sentence relative to non-Indigenous people.
- **Failures at the bail and remand stage:** The very high remand rate is a critical driver of over-representation. Bail laws and decision-making processes are not adequately sensitive to the particular circumstances of First Nations people, as well as insufficient access to culturally appropriate bail support services. This is supported by the current analysis, which found that a smaller proportion of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people were released from prison on bail, compared to non-Indigenous people.
- **Child protection and out-of-home care:** The Jumbunna review confirmed child protection as a key precursor to criminalisation (see also ALRC, 2017). The over-representation of First Nations children in out-of-home care feeds directly into later justice system contact, particularly where family connection and cultural support are disrupted.
- **Education disengagement:** Lack of cultural safety in schools, poor responses to disability, disproportionately high suspension and exclusion rates, and unnecessary reliance on police responses to school incidents all push First Nations students out of education, removing a key protective factor against justice system contact (see also Laurens et al., 2026).
- **Lack of coordinated government response and accountability:** The Jumbunna review found that ACT Government responses are fragmented and siloed across directorates, with poor coordination, limited accountability mechanisms, and inadequate measurement of outcomes. There are few consequences for non-action, and government commitments are not being tracked or implemented effectively. First Nations people feel largely excluded from decision-making about the programs and policies that affect them.
- **Under-resourcing of community-led and ACCO solutions:** Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) and early intervention/prevention programs are significantly under-resourced, relative to their importance. The review found a stark imbalance between resources going into incarceration versus community-led solutions.

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- **Conditions within the Alexander Maconochie Centre:** The prison itself is identified as failing to reduce re-offending. Problems include the lack of a structured day and purposeful activities, widespread drug use, discontinued cultural programs, segregation, use of force, strip searches, and individual and systemic racism. All of these compound trauma and reduce the likelihood of rehabilitation. These findings are reinforced by the POCS project (Boxall & Bartels, 2025) and other research (see ACT Inspector of Correctional Services, 2025).
- **Poor post-release support and housing:** Lack of appropriate housing and support on release is a major driver of reoffending and return to custody. The Jumbunna review calls for much stronger investment in post-release reintegration. This is again reinforced by the findings from the POCS report (Boxall & Bartels, 2025).
- **Inter-generational trauma and historical context:** The Jumbunna review consistently emphasised that many of the immediate drivers are themselves products of colonisation, removal policies, and inter-generational trauma. Solutions that do not address these structural roots are unlikely to produce lasting change.

However, there is also a need to ensure that these services are appropriate for women and girls. The current analysis demonstrated that Indigenous women and girls made up a relatively larger proportion of the female offender population (15.6%) than their male counterparts (12.2%). Although the number of Indigenous females involved in the ACT criminal legal system may be relatively small, the intersection of their gender- and culture-specific needs reinforces the importance of targeted approaches. This is particularly important, given the evidence that female pathways into offending differ significantly from men, as do those for Indigenous men and women, meaning that supporting their desistance is also likely to require a different response. Examples of gender-specific support programs and models currently exist in Australia, which could be relevant in the ACT context. This includes the Transforming Corrections to Transform Lives model developed in NSW Dennison et al. (2026), which was co-designed with incarcerated women.

Rates of reoffending, including prison re-entry, were very high

Overall rates of reoffending across all three datasets were very high. For those individuals who could be followed for a minimum of 12 months, 34.5% had a subsequent contact with ACT Policing, 23.9% appeared before the ACT courts as a defendant, and 46.9% returned to prison during the observation period.

the current analysis was not able to explain why a significant proportion of people involved in the criminal legal system in the ACT are subsequently accused of another crime, appear in court as defendants and/or enter prison, while others are not. However, the POCS report (Boxall & Bartels, 2025) provides some insights to further contextualise these findings. In particular, that report identified the following factors as supporting desistance processes among justice-involved people in the ACT:

- **Cognitive and agentic factors**, including belief in their own ability to change, imagining the person they would become if they did not stop offending, and the cognitive shifts that accompany maturation and growing older.
- **Relationships**, including having children (particularly the desire to be a good role model and avoid letting children down), supportive family members, friendships with people not involved in offending, and stable intimate partner relationships.

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- **External and structural factors**, including employment, stable housing, and connections to community.
- **Health and wellbeing**, particularly reducing or ceasing alcohol and other drug use.
- **Service engagement**, including with alcohol and other drug treatment, mental health services, and community-based organisations.

Importantly, however, the POCS report found that many of these same domains could also function as *barriers* to desistance when working in the opposite direction. For example, family members who were themselves involved in offending — particularly where co-offending was common — could make it harder to stop. Peer networks that normalised or facilitated offending were similarly identified as barriers, with many participants describing the difficult decision to distance themselves from long-standing friendships as a necessary but isolating step. Intimate partner relationships could both support and undermine desistance, with some participants — particularly women — describing how abusive relationships exacerbated their offending and eroded protective factors such as their relationships with their children. Unaddressed alcohol and other drug use was consistently identified as a major barrier. These findings underscore that desistance from crime is rarely shaped by factors that are wholly supportive or wholly undermining; rather, people navigating pathways out of the criminal legal system often do so in the context of relationships and circumstances that simultaneously push in both directions.

6.2 Implications for data infrastructure and criminal justice monitoring in the ACT

The analyses presented in this report demonstrate that ABS data holdings can provide useful insights into the nature and patterns of offending and reoffending in the ACT. However, their utility for supporting ongoing monitoring and evaluation activities is constrained by several factors described in the limitations section of this report, including:

- the inability to link datasets at the episode level;
- the absence of key sociodemographic information about individuals in contact with the ACT criminal legal system, including disability status and gender identity; and
- the absence of information about individual involvement in or referral to jurisdiction-specific programs, such as restorative justice conferencing, the Drug and Alcohol Sentencing List and Circle Court (Warrumbul and Galambany).

These limitations point to the need for more complete and detailed administrative data holdings to support criminal justice monitoring and evaluation in the ACT. Two broad options warrant consideration. The first is to explore opportunities for linking the existing police, court, and prison administrative datasets with other ABS data collections — for example, the Person Level Integrated Data Asset (PLIDA) — which could substantially enrich the range of individual-level information available for analysis. The second is for the ACT Government to explore data sharing arrangements directly between ACT Policing, ACT Courts, and ACT Corrective Services, which could facilitate more timely data extraction and analysis within the Territory, without reliance on the ABS DataLab infrastructure.

Each option carries distinct strengths and limitations that would require careful consideration, including with respect to privacy, data governance, resourcing, and the technical capacity

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required to manage and analyse linked administrative data. However, the second option may be the most appropriate. This is for the following reasons:

- *Timeliness.* An ACT-owned data asset would support more responsive monitoring of trends and more timely evaluation of programs and policy reforms than is currently possible through the ABS DataLab, where data provision timeframes and the limited number of available data items constrain the pace and scope of analysis. This matters in particular for specialist courts and diversionary programs, where decisions about continuation or scaling of funding are often made on cycles considerably shorter than the lead times currently associated with accessing and linking ABS data.
- *Granularity.* An ACT data asset would also facilitate more granular analysis of the system "touch points" for people involved in the criminal legal system, which are not visible in the ABS data. For example, the ACT currently operates some specialist programs, but these are rendered invisible in the ABS data, because of its reliance on nationally consistent, high-level categories and the small sample sizes involved in these programs.
- *Flexibility.* Relatedly, an ACT data asset would likely facilitate analysis of measures on a range of services and programs that are specific to the ACT, providing a more holistic picture of system contacts among people involved in the criminal legal system, and allowing new data items to be added as ACT policy priorities evolve, rather than waiting on national data standards to catch up.
- *Comprehensiveness.* The ABS is currently considering options for integrating the police, courts, and prison datasets with other data holdings such as Person Level Integrated Data Asset, which would provide a greater level of detail about people involved in the criminal legal system, including visa status and health and disability. However, the timeframes and costs associated with this integration are currently unclear. In the absence of this pathway, the ACT may seek to integrate its own criminal legal system data asset with other government and non-government administrative data holdings, including linked data on health, education and housing.
- *Efficiency and return on existing investment.* The administrative data required for this asset is already collected and held separately by ACT Policing, ACT Courts, and ACT Corrective Services. The core investment required is therefore in linkage, governance, and analytic infrastructure, rather than new data collection. This means that the marginal cost of establishing the asset is likely to be considerably lower than the cost of generating comparable evidence from scratch, while the resulting infrastructure would support future evaluation and monitoring and reporting needs on an ongoing basis. A linked ACT data asset would also reduce reliance on repeated, project-specific applications for DataLab access, each of which currently incurs its own lead time and approval costs.
- *Accountability.* A number of ACT-specific programs discussed in this report, including restorative justice conferencing, the Drug and Alcohol Sentencing List, currently cannot be evaluated using national data holdings because they are jurisdiction-specific. A linked ACT data asset would allow the Territory to generate the evidence base needed to assess and justify continued investment in these programs on their own terms, rather than relying on national frameworks that were not designed to capture them

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Beyond these considerations, it is essential that the ACT continues to invest in monitoring and evaluation activities (ACT Government, 2026). A sustained commitment to data-driven oversight is fundamental to understanding whether policy initiatives such as the RR25by25 Plan are achieving their intended outcomes and identifying where further investment, reform, or targeted intervention is needed.

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