

Status Offender

Details

Status offender is a term that describes a person who is legally charged with an offence, but has not actually committed a criminal act. Rather, the 'offence' is more to do with the person's personal condition or characteristics. In the context of child welfare in Australia, children and young people charged with 'neglect', or 'exposed to moral danger' could be described as status offenders, as could young people who ran away from home to escape violence and abuse. Juvenile status offenders can be distinguished from juvenile offenders who have actually been convicted of criminal acts. The term is commonly used in the United States, but is also heard in the Australian context.

For example, the Senate Committee's 'Forgotten Australians' report of 2004 stated that:

Many children were made wards of the state after being charged with being uncontrollable, neglected or in moral danger, not because they had done anything wrong, but because circumstances in which they found themselves resulted in them being status offenders (Executive Summary).

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