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CHINA / National

## Rural kids lead spike in teenage crime rate

By Xie Chuanjiao (China Daily)  
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Teenagers are committing more crimes, and children from rural areas are primarily responsible, a top court official said Thursday, citing a year-on-year rise of 13 percent since 2000.

Children in rural areas left behind by their parents when they migrate to cities account for the majority of juvenile crimes nationwide, said Shao Wenhong, head of the research bureau under the Supreme People's Court.

Additionally, teenagers from other provinces or regions in the country commit 70 percent of juvenile crimes in Beijing, according to the bureau.

"Without normal family guardianship and education, some of the children quit school at an early age and commit crimes," Shao said.

She estimated the number of so-called "left-behind" children who are left behind in rural areas is around 23 million.

Chinese courts hand down sentences to more than 70,000 juvenile criminals a year. This comprises nearly 10 percent of the total number of criminals.

The average age of these young offenders is getting younger and crimes of violence are increasing, Shao said.

She said more than 70 percent of convicted juveniles were jailed for property-related crimes such as robbery and theft.

Experts are concerned the situation is getting out of hand and could lead to social upheaval.

"For migrant workers the costs of supervising and educating their children have become greater," said Tong Lihua, director of the minor protection law committee of the All China Lawyer's Association.

"It is a sure thing and will never stop given the pace of urbanization."

Tong said there were "work-study schools" for juveniles guilty of theft, hooliganism and minor assault, but the number was shrinking.

"We need more detailed legislation on how to supervise and educate left-behind children who have committed minor crimes," the lawyer said.

Fan Chongyu, a professor with China University of Politics and Law, said migrant schools should provide education about the law and special institutes should be set up for migrant teenagers who do not attend school.

Crimes by minors are handled by juvenile courts, of which there are 2,420 in the country, with more than 7,200 judicial officers.

"For teenage criminal suspects we prioritize education rather than punishment, taking into full consideration their motives and family background," Shao said.

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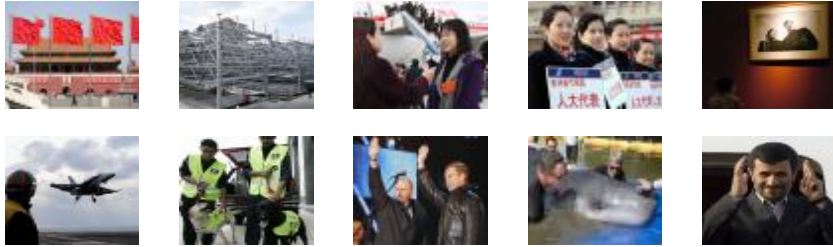
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