

A perspective on juvenile delinquency

Handholds for the drafting of a periodic trend report regarding at-risk and criminal youth and a survey of approaches

Summary

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At the request of

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Translated from

Kijk op jeugdcriminaliteit

Handvatten voor het opstellen van een periodieke trendrapportage jeugd- en jongeren-criminaliteit en een overzicht van veelbelovende aanpakken

Henk Ferwerda, Tom van Ham en Donald Jager

Conclusions and summary

In this chapter, the main findings and outcomes are discussed. Consecutively, we will look at the background of the research, the research questions, the research methods that were used and the research results.

Background of the research

Since 2007 the National Police has been using the group crime shortlist to obtain a clear picture of problematic youth groups. This taking stock forms the basis of a shared approach to problematic youth groups. The number of problematic youth groups has greatly decreased in recent years. Nevertheless, attention for juvenile delinquency should persist. In this context, in the 2015-2018 Security Agenda (*Veiligheidsagenda*) the security partners (in this case, the police, the municipalities and the Public Prosecution Service) argue in favour of a broader approach than one that is solely focused on problematic youth groups. This has been partly inspired by the observation that juveniles increasingly commit offences in changing rather than in fixed groups, and that their range of criminal activities is wide. An implication of this is that the monitoring of (the approach to) youth groups will be shaped differently from 2015. During the Article 19 consultations¹ it was decided that the basis will consist of an integrated analysis of the nature and scope of juvenile delinquency (including problematic youth groups). In addition, attention will be paid to (the results and effects of) approaches implemented in regard to at-risk and criminal youth (groups). In view of the developments described in the above or, as the case may be, in response to the needs voiced in response to the Article 19 consultations, the Directorate General for the Police (DGPOL) of the Ministry of Security and Justice has requested a study.

It is important to point out in advance that this study was carried out in a very short period of time. The literature research that was conducted is not exhaustive as a result of this. In addition, the current report should be viewed as a

proposal for the drafting of a youth and juvenile delinquency trend report, to be composed from existing sources such as the Juvenile Delinquency Monitor (*Monitor Jeugdcriminaliteit* MJC). Accordingly, the current report may be seen as a start, based on which the parties may decide on the *content* of such a trend report.

Research questions and methods

The study at hand has centred around three research questions. These questions deal with the theoretical knowledge of and the approach to juvenile delinquency, as well as with indicators that may help produce a picture of at-risk and criminal youth (groups). It concerns the following three research questions:

- 1^a. What are recent and significant insights in the literature regarding at-risk and criminal youth (groups)?
- 1^b. What regional approaches to at-risk and criminal youth (groups) are there?
2. What available, theoretically substantiated and measurable indicators offer relative, quantitative information with regard to:
 - the nature and scope of juvenile delinquency in the Netherlands;
 - the nature, volume, qualification and geographical distribution of problematic youth groups in the Netherlands;
 - the approaches to at-risk and criminal youth (groups) and the results/effects thereof?
3. How and by whom are those indicators recorded? Are the indicators reliable and valid? Are they periodically accessible? Are they accessible both regionally and nationally? How? Is there any certainty that the indicators will be available also in the future?

Several research activities were undertaken to answer these research questions: desk research, a start-up meeting and interviews. The execution of each of these research activities is discussed in a separate subsection below.

Desk research

In the desk research, attention was paid on the one hand to insights from the scientific literature, which were mainly used to demarcate concepts, to outline trends and developments and to get an insight in (possibly) relevant indicators. On the other hand, three channels were used – websites on which the various approaches were gathered, letters to Dutch municipalities of over 100,000 inhabitants and questions to youth sponsors inside the National Police – to gather documentation about the

shape and form of the approach to juvenile delinquency in the Netherlands. Thus, an insight was gained in some 128 unique approaches.

Start-up meeting WODC

A start-up meeting with the Dutch Scientific Research and Documentation Centre (*Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek- en Documentatiecentrum WODC*) was organised. Participants either had extensive knowledge of juvenile delinquency or knowledge of and experience with registration systems. During the meeting, the demarcation of the concept of juvenile delinquency was discussed, as well as possible useful indicators for the periodic trend report.

Interviews

A total of fifteen persons from the security and social care domain were interviewed. The interviews centred on possible useful indicators and, in line with this, on the reliability, (future) accessibility and level of detail thereof.

Main findings

In this section, the main findings resulting from the research activities that were carried out are discussed. We outline the scientific literature, relevant indicators and the approach that was used.

Scientific literature

Based on the desk research that was carried out we consider it useful to use two concepts in the trend report: at-risk youth and criminal youth. We see ‘at-risk youth’ as persons with psychosocial problems and/or summary offences committed alone or in a group. As ‘criminal youth’ we designate those who, either alone or in a group, commit online and/or offline crimes. Naturally, psychosocial problems and summary offences may also occur in this group. The use of these terms links in with the connection the literature shows between problem behaviour, delinquent behaviour and crime. The age limit to be used for youth and juveniles is also significant. Based on adolescent criminal law, which applies to those under 23 years of age, we choose to operationalise criminally culpable behaviour to ‘persons of ages 12 to 23’. In addition, inspired by the social domain or, as the case may be, by factors known to be related to delinquent behaviour, attention may be paid also to those under 12.

Examples of such risk factors may be in the area of the family, the school and the person in question. Also leisure time activities are worth taking into account. Digitalisation has led to an increase in young people’s online social lives, which may affect their loitering behaviour. The documentation studied also shows that digitali-

sation may contribute to new forms of nuisance and crime, and to the facilitation of peer group pressures.

Relevant indicators

Insights from the scientific literature and the interviews that were conducted have resulted in an overview of indicators deemed useable and feasible by the experts. In addition, there is a continuity in or, as the case may be, a repetition of measurements taken earlier, as well as unequivocal national registration. It is important to remember that the indicators to be discussed below concern persons rather than (the course of) processes. Since the WODC – in cooperation with Statistics Netherlands (*Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek CBS*) – has been drawing up the juvenile delinquency monitor (MJC) for many years, the indicators that are part of the MJC constitute the point of departure for the intended trend report. The available indicators may be divided into four categories: 1) general, 2) early warning and risk behaviour, 3) offences and crimes and 4) (judicial) process.

In the table below, an overview is provided of the indicators that are available, useful and feasible. The following is significant in this regard. Key indicators alone cannot offer a sufficient framework, even when combined. Their validity should also be considered, i.e., whether what should be measured was also actually measured. It is important, therefore, to provide an interpretation of findings or trends that seem to result from the indicators used. It is proposed that a group of independent experts be asked periodically to provide such interpretation of the key indicators in question.

Table 6.1 – overview of indicators for the youth and juvenile delinquency trend report.

Clusters	Indicators
General	Age group, gender and ethnic background
Early warning and risk behaviour	Planned activities, media use, substance use, early school dropout, youth unemployment, care reports, youth welfare, families below the poverty line and youth protective measures
Offences and crimes	Self-reported offenders, arrested suspects, recidivism and group scan
Judicial process	HALT settlements, youth or adult rehabilitation procedures, Public Prosecution Service settlements, judiciary settlements and juveniles in young offenders institutions

The approach

Inside the approach a distinction can be made between methods (or models) and interventions. The former concern methodologies that may be used to gather information (for example about young people and the groups of which they are part),

after which interventions may be tailored to those groups and then be implemented. (Nearly) none of the 128 approaches of which we took stock centres on repression. Approaches focus in particular on the indicators listed in the ‘early warning and risk behaviour’ category. The results of our stocktaking show that for almost every indicator in this category, relevant interventions exist. Media use is the only exception in this context.

Scientific research has shown that effective approaches or interventions typically focus on several risk factors at the same time. To what extent the interventions we listed have proven effectiveness is difficult to say based on the available scientific research. The interviews that were conducted in the context of this research show that municipalities are positive about some of the interventions used because they achieve the targets established beforehand. To what extent the research design used – in those cases where the intervention was (scientifically) researched – makes it possible to draw conclusions about any causal relationship is the question, however. That the effectiveness of interventions is difficult to verify also shows from the assessments of the Dutch judicial behavioural interventions accreditation committee (*Erkenningscommissie Gedragsinterventies Justitie*). Ex ante assessments were analysed to find out whether interventions can contribute to a decrease in recidivism based on a description and scientific substantiation (including research abroad). Based on this, 32 interventions have been accredited (for now). In the meantime, eleven interim assessments were carried out, to see whether the target group in question was reached, whether the intervention was executed as intended and whether the programme targets were met. About half of those eleven interventions meet the requirements in question. Finally, to date two interventions have been established ex post to have been effective; in addition, there are strong indications of several other interventions’ effectiveness.

Conclusion

In this report, the outcomes are described of research that will result in a proposal for the drafting of a trend report on youth and juvenile crime. The proposal consists of three parts:

1. an overview of available and necessary indicators that provide a picture of risk factors for juvenile delinquency, the nature and scope of juvenile delinquency and the manner in which this is processed (judicially);
2. the advice to have the indicators interpreted by a group of independent experts;

3. a method by which to take stock of approaches and interventions that link in with these indicators (see 2.1) and a framework in which to present any outcomes (see 5.2 and annex 2 of the research report).

Endnote

1. Article 19 of the Dutch Police Act 2012 provides that regional mayors, the president of the Board of Procurators General and the Minister of Security and Justice will periodically discuss the management and execution of tasks by the National Police.



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