

## Summary

### Juvenile Delinquency in the Period 1996-2010

Developments with regard to self-reported offenders, suspects arrested by the police, and prosecuted offenders, on the basis of the Juvenile Crime Monitor 2010 (*Monitor Jeugdcriminaliteit 2010*)

The reduction of juvenile delinquency is an important theme in the policy pursued by the Ministry of Security and Justice. The approach to juvenile delinquency has been intensified with the policy programme 'Tackling Juvenile Delinquency' (*Aanpak Jeugdcriminaliteit*). The justice budget for 2011 has included the reduction of juvenile delinquency as a key objective. The Ministry of Security and Justice wants to obtain insight into the number of young people committing offences, the nature of the offences committed by these young people, and the developments in this respect over time. Studies describing the developments in juvenile delinquency have been published in the Netherlands with some regularity. The Youth and Crime Prevention Department of the Ministry of Security and Justice requested the Research and Documentation Centre (WODC) to describe and interpret the developments in juvenile delinquency in relation to and specifically aimed at juvenile offenders and juvenile suspects. The reason for this is to be found in the offender-focused approach that has been chosen by the Ministry in its approach to fighting crime. This report presents the various developments and the numbers of juvenile suspects and juvenile offenders aged between 12 and 25 years of age. We distinguished the developments in juvenile delinquency among minors (12 to 18 years of age) and among young adults (18 to 25 years of age). We will also discuss the delinquent behaviour of minors younger than 12 years of age (minors of 10 and 11 years of age). The study was primarily aimed at *developments* in indicators of the number of juveniles engaging in delinquent behaviour/juvenile offenders and the number of settlements. More specifically, we examined the developments on the basis of self-reported delinquency ('*self-reported offenders*'), suspects of a crime arrested by the police ('*arrested suspects*'), and offenders of a crime in respect of whom the Public Prosecution Service considered it advisable to initiate criminal proceedings ('*prosecuted offenders*'). This research was carried out on the basis of data collected in the Juvenile Crime Monitor (*Monitor Jeugdcriminaliteit 2010*). The Juvenile Crime Monitor is the result of a co-operation between the Research and Documentation Centre and Statistics Netherlands.

### Term of Reference

*What developments occurred in the proportion, nature, and settlement of juvenile delinquency in the period of 1996-2010?*

### Method

This study examined the developments in the number of juvenile offenders. In determining the numbers of juvenile offenders among the population of young people, we were faced with the problem that the proportion of *real* juvenile delinquency and

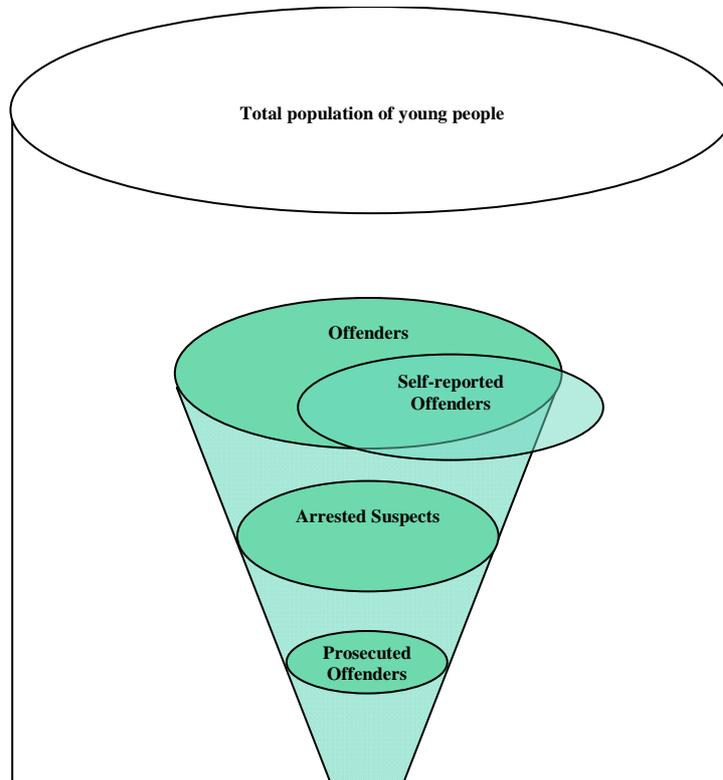
the number of *real* juvenile offenders are not known. Committing a crime is by definition something that occurs in secrecy, and offenders would rather not be identified.

Various methods made it possible to roughly examine the developments in the number of young people who commit crimes. These methods may be divided into methods on the basis of self-reported delinquency on the one hand, and police and judicial statistics on the other hand. By means of self-reporting, we obtained insight into the number of young people who stated that they had been guilty of committing an offence in a specific period, the '*self-reported offenders*'. Police statistics provided us insight into the number of *arrested suspects* of an offence. The judicial data provided insight into the number of *prosecuted offenders* in respect of whom the Public Prosecution Service considered it advisable to initiate criminal proceedings and whose offence had been settled in court. Each of the data sources provided insight into a portion of the population of juvenile offenders, as a result of which we may roughly conclude that the delinquent behaviour of the offenders increased in seriousness. The number of offenders decreased as we examined the data from bodies further down in the criminal justice system, and the diagram depicting these numbers is funnel-shaped (Figure S1).

In this study, we examined the developments in juvenile delinquency on the basis of self-reported delinquency and on the basis of police and judicial statistics. The sources used provided an insight into different, partly overlapping groups of juvenile offenders in the population of young people. Each of the sources have their own possibilities and restrictions. Police and judicial statistics relate to all possible offences and relate to the entire population of suspects – arrested or otherwise – or prosecuted offenders of crimes. Significant restrictions of police and judicial statistics are, however, that not all offences – and the offenders committing these offences – become known to the police, or are solved. These statistics strongly depend on the criminal investigation efforts made by the police and the judicial authorities as well as the on the priorities set for specific types of offences and groups of offenders.

The method on the basis of self-reporting is independent of these efforts, but is limited mainly to minor offences and offences committed frequently. In addition, the disadvantages of self-reporting are that people may have over-reported or under-reported their offences, that it was not possible to verify all offences, and that only a limited number of young people could be asked for information. By examining multiple measurements over time on the basis of various statistics, we obtained a rough picture of the changes that occurred in the proportion of juvenile offenders.

**Figure S1 Diagrammatic representation of the population of young people, offenders, self-reported offenders, arrested suspects, and prosecuted offenders**



Note: Proportions in the figure are not conform reality.

## Results

This summary outlines the most important findings from the study. In the report, a more detailed and statistical summary is given of the most important findings at the beginning of each chapter.

### Minors Younger than 12 Years of Age (10 and 11 years of age)

Formally, children younger than 12 years of age are not punishable by law, even if they exhibit behaviour that is indeed punishable by law if it had been exhibited by persons older than 12 years of age. For the sake of convenience and unambiguity, we still used the term 'delinquent' behaviour. National systematic registrations are absent, as a result of which we do not know anything about developments over time in respect of the number of children that have been in contact with the law on account of committing an offence. The results are solely based on self-reports of delinquent behaviour among a representative research group of minors of 10 and 11 years of age. A comparison was made between self-reported delinquency in 2010 and in 2005. The most important developments were as follows:

- *In 2010, the percentage of self-reported offenders of 10 and 11 years of age was equal to that in 2005.*

- *In 2010, the percentage of minors of 10 and 11 years of age who reported to have committed an offence against property was lower than in 2005, in particular among girls.*

There were not any indications that the proportion of children exhibiting delinquent behaviour has changed over time. The percentage of minors younger than 12 years of age that stated to have been guilty of committing an offence is much lower than among the age groups of older children, but with one out of six, it is still a considerable percentage. It is likely that self-reporting children report relatively more minor offences than young people of 12 years and older; it is assumed that this would mainly relate to the violent incidents. It is also conceivable that delinquent behaviour will be limited to a single occasion in the majority of children. Other research reported that frequent and serious delinquent behaviour among children is rare.

### **Minors (12 to 18 years of age)**

The developments in the proportion of juvenile offenders among minors of 12 to 18 years of age were examined on the basis of self-reporting, and police and judicial data. By the proportion of offenders, we mean the number of offenders in relation to the total number of persons in the relevant age group. The most important developments were as follows:

- *In the most recent year of measurements, there was a decrease in the proportion of offenders among minors of 12 to 18 years of age compared to the preceding year, irrespective of the type of data source used.*

In 2010, the percentage of self-reported offenders of one or more offences was lower than in 2005. In 2008, it was the first time that the proportion of minor suspects of offences that were arrested by the police was lower than in the preceding year, after many years of increases in the period up to and including 2007. This also applied to the different groups of suspects, such as first offenders, habitual offenders, and recidivists. In addition, the proportion of prosecuted offenders among minors of 12 to 18 years of age was also lower for the first time in 2008 than in the preceding year. Two-year recidivism among prosecuted offenders also showed a decrease – however slight it was – in the most recent year of measurements. The decrease in the number of prosecuted offenders and in recidivism was also due to the decrease in the proportion of arrested suspects among minors. In addition, the introduction of a new registration system now used by the Public Prosecution Service may also have contributed to a decrease in the number of prosecuted offenders, at least of those that were registered. Despite the decrease in the most recent year of measurements, the proportion of arrested suspects and prosecuted offenders per 1,000 young people was not yet back to the level recorded in 2003.

The data seem to point to the fact that – for the first time in the most recent years – there was a decrease in the actual proportion of offenders of one or more offences among minors of 12 to 18 years of age. The data related to offenders who had committed minor offences and frequently committed offences (whether or not self-reported), arrested suspects of crimes, and prosecuted offenders of crimes in respect of whom the Public Prosecution Service had considered criminal proceedings advisable. The decrease corresponded with the proportion of citizens that were victims of crimes, as shown by a survey of victims. It must also be noted that it is not impossible that the introduction of the new registration systems now used by the police (Basic Facilities for Enforcement, BVH) and the Public Prosecution Service (Integrated Criminal Process System, GPS) have contributed to the decrease in the

registration of the number of arrested suspects and prosecuted offenders in the police and judicial statistics in the most recent year of measurements.

- *The decrease did not occur in all the respective subgroups (gender and origin).*

Breaking the sources down into subgroups, the sources did not reveal a decrease in all groups. Among boys, only the proportion of arrested suspects and prosecuted offenders decreased, among girls the decrease was only seen in the proportion of arrested suspects.

It was found that there was a decrease in the proportion of suspects among all respective groups of origin (native-Dutch young people, Surinamese, Antilleans, Turks, or Moroccans). On the basis of self-reporting, however, the decrease in self-reported delinquency only appeared to apply to native-Dutch young people.

- *In the most recent year of measurements, the proportion of offenders among minors who had committed an offence against property showed a decrease in respect of all data sources. Violent offences and vandalism decreased only slightly among arrested suspects and prosecuted offenders.*

In 2010, the proportion of self-reported offenders who had committed offences against property was lower than in 2005, both among boys and girls. Among arrested suspects and prosecuted offenders as well, the proportion of suspects of offences against property had decreased in the most recent year of measurements. Surveys of victims also revealed a decrease in the number of victims of offences against property in the most recent period. As the decrease occurred in all data sources used to measure crime, it is valid to state that the decrease in the number of offenders who had committed offences against property is real.

In the most recent year of measurements, a decrease in the number of violent offences and acts of vandalism was seen only among arrested suspects and prosecuted offenders. The self-reported offences did not reveal a decrease in violence. The decrease in the police and judicial statistics corresponded with the findings from surveys of victims. The data on the proportion of victims of violence showed a slight decrease in the period of 2003-2008.

- *The number of community service orders offered by the Public Prosecution Service to minors decreased for the first time in 2008, after many years of increases. Community service orders imposed by the courts were still increasing. The decrease in the number of court orders for deprivation of liberty that started in 2005 continued.*
- *It is still too early to tell whether or not this is a declining trend.*

This was the first time that we identified a decrease in the proportion of self-reported offenders, arrested suspects or prosecuted offenders among minors of 12 to 18 years of age. It is very well possible that the decrease in the most recent year of measurements is a once-only event. We cannot speak of a change in the trend until the recent decrease continues in the next few years.

### **Young adults (18 to 25 years of age)**

For the purpose of establishing the number of suspects and offenders among young adults, we only had police and judicial statistics available. Both sources revealed comparable developments. The most important findings were as follows:

- *In the most recent year of measurements, the proportion of arrested suspects and prosecuted offenders among young adults decreased for the first time, after many years of increases.*

In the period 2003-2008, the proportion of arrested suspects and prosecuted offenders among young adults whose offence had been settled in court initially showed an annual increase; it subsequently stabilised, and was followed by a decrease in the most recent year of measurements. We do not know whether the decrease in the number of offenders among young adults concerned real crimes, as we can only base our findings on the statistics registered by the police and the judicial authorities. There are not any time series on self-reported offences among this age group. It is not impossible that changes in the registration systems have contributed to the decrease in the number of arrested suspects of offenders. Despite the decrease, the proportion of arrested suspects and prosecuted offenders among young adults was not yet back to the level of 2003.

- *The recent decrease occurred among men and women and among most groups of origin, with the exception of the group of Moroccans.*
- *The proportion of offenders who had committed offences against property was still decreasing and the proportion of offenders of violent offences among young adults remained more or less stable in the last few years.*
- *The proportion of community service orders among young adults imposed by the Public Prosecution Service showed a decrease for the first time after many years of increases. The proportion of court-imposed community service orders was still increasing. The decrease in the proportion of orders for deprivation of liberty imposed on young adults also continued in the most recent year of measurements.*

## Conclusion

With regard to the developments in delinquent behaviour among *minors younger than 12 years of age*, we may conclude that there were not any indications that the proportion of children exhibiting delinquent behaviour has changed over time. The results from the different sources that can be used to measure the occurrence of delinquent behaviour among *minors* (12 to 18 years of age), seem to indicate that – after many years of increases – the most recent year showed – for the first time – a decrease in the proportion of offenders who have committed minor offences and frequently committed offences. The decrease did not apply to all subgroups and all types of offences. Among *young adults* (18 to 25 years of age) as well, the proportion of arrested suspects and prosecuted offenders whose offence had been settled in court has decreased in the most recent year of measurements.

In addition, the decrease in severe sanctions, such as the deprivation of liberty of young people, points to the fact that fewer offenders of serious offences came into contact with the law. This applied both to minors and young adults. The exception to this trend concerns the number of court-imposed community service orders. The number of these orders still increased among delinquent minors, in the last year, as well; among young adults, the number of community service orders per 1,000 peers remained stable over the last few years.

On the basis of this research we can not point the underlying causes for the most recent decrease in the proportion of self-reported offenders, arrested suspects, or prosecuted offenders. The findings could point to a decrease in the number of of-

fenders of real crimes. The introduction of new registration systems now used by the police and the Public Prosecution Service may, however, also could have contributed to the decrease in the numbers of arrested suspects and prosecuted offenders registered in the police and judicial statistics. In addition, we cannot yet speak of a declining trend, as the decrease in the number of arrested suspects and prosecuted offenders was not visible until the last year. It is conceivable that this is a once-only dip.