

# Hard-core projects

## Effect evaluation of intensive ambulatory counselling

### Summary

In recent years the small share of juvenile delinquents responsible for serious social nuisance has given rise to increasing concern. These juveniles are known as the hard core. They commit many and quite serious offences, and have frequent brushes with law enforcement. Over the past few years a few experimental projects have been launched to reduce the nuisance from recidivist perpetrators by improving their social integration. Juveniles committing a punishable offence are offered a choice between the heaviest possible sanction or intensive counselling within the project. Such (ambulatory) supervision aims to offer prospects for the future combined with firm agreements and discipline. Violating these rules may be cause for the imposition of sanctions nonetheless.

The study examines the execution and results of five projects: De Kans in The Hague, Omslag in Deventer, Agadir in Leiden, Retour Zaanstreek in Zaanstad and Stelselmatige Dader Aanpak in Groningen. As of March 1997, 143 persons had undergone such counselling. The individual counselling covered periods ranging from over six months to over a year. The records of the participants varied: 48% had served time in prison, 22% had received sentences not involving detention, and 30% had no previous convictions: not all members of the group were repeat offenders. The projects in Leiden and The Hague focused on juvenile delinquents involved in petty crimes. For many of these the counselling was a voluntary arrangement rather than a court order. The backgrounds of the subjects covered a broad range with extremes in Leiden and Groningen. The youngest subjects were in Leiden (where the average age was 17) and the oldest in Groningen (where the average age was 29). While most juveniles in Leiden lived with their parents and attended school, their counterparts in Groningen were all addicted to hard drugs and unemployed.

The types of counselling provided by the projects were similar in many respects. Clients received assistance in finding employment or programmes of study, restoring family ties, getting off drugs and handling practical matters, such as accommodations and financial affairs. The counsellors met with their clients an average of twice a week, depending on the current stage (the contacts were more frequent in the beginning). Counsellors and clients reached firm agreements that included periodic verification of the client compliance.

The subjects who completed or nearly completed the project (the majority) have improved their lifestyle. Such improvement is hardly discernible among the group (one quarter of the subjects) that dropped out of the project at an early stage because of delinquent conduct or lack of motivation. The measure of recidivism after counselling varies depending on the project. The rates for Groningen (100%) and The Hague (74%) reveal that these projects have been less successful than the ones in Deventer (60%), Zaanstad (56%) and Leiden (52%). Recidivism is relatively high among clients with serious criminal records and among those who participated in the project voluntarily. The conduct of clients ordered to undergo counselling by the court may reflect the threat of sanctions for failure to stick to the agreements.

The hard-core projects appear to have yielded to relatively favourable results. Clients receive support in meeting their daily responsibilities in their own place of residence; most improve their quality of life. Although a large portion of the clients proves recidivist, the rate is equal to or lower than that of similar counselling projects.

### **Kiezen voor een kans: evaluatie van harde-kern projecten**

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