

Girls and delinquency in the Netherlands

Risk and protective factors for the development of delinquent behaviour in high-risk juveniles

Summary

This report contains the results of an explorative study into the delinquent behaviour of juvenile girls; these are girls in the 12-18 years age group. Compared to their male counterparts, relatively little is known about the extent and nature of crime committed by these girls. Recently, anecdotal evidence appeared in the media as if the participation of girls in criminal behaviour is sharply increasing. Since juvenile delinquency has become a major policy topic in the Netherlands, it was decided to do a state of the art study on girls criminality. To achieve an image as complete as possible several methods have been applied:

1. Literature was studied extensively.
2. Available statistics and other quantitative data were analysed in order to show the development of girls delinquency over the past 15 years.
3. Interviews were conducted with convicted girls and significant actors in the field of juvenile delinquency, such as judges, public prosecutors, social workers and police officers.
4. Finally, case studies were analysed using the theoretical framework of the eclectic developmental approach, as described in the chapter on theory.

The literature review shows that in the past little attention has been paid to this specific kind of criminality. Women, and girls for that matter, were not considered to be interesting because they committed hardly any offences. Some criminological theories try to explain why women do not commit crimes. These explanations vary from a biological approach to sociological and psychological points of view. The most recent eclectic theory tries to combine these different angles and argues that there is not a single explanation but that the arguments from the various disciplines should be combined to achieve an overall explanation. This study makes use of this developmental theory in analysing the cases of nine delinquent girls. Since the expertise of the research team is limited to the social sciences, the biological/genetic/evolutionary side of the debate was passed over. Theory fails to supply convincing evidence that there are specific causes for girls delinquency that are unique to girls. The differences are a matter of degree rather than basic.

Statistics show that in the course of 15 years the amount of girls delinquency has increased by 120%. Boys delinquency is also rising, but less sharply. However, girls' delinquency still is very limited in volume, compared to boys. Also the severity of the crimes committed is less serious for girls. Moreover repeat offending with girls is less prominent than with boys. The conclusion is that statistically girls delinquency is a minor problem (still). This conclusion is shared by the significant actors in the field of juvenile delinquency. Nevertheless some girls *do* commit crimes. For this study we interviewed nine girls and analysed their records. The offences varied from petty theft to aggravated assault and arson. Their history was analysed using a list of risk factors. This analysis gives a tentative three-way typology:

- Girls whose life history is without any major problems. They commit petty crimes, infrequently and often on their own. They hardly score on the list of risk factors.
- Girls at risk. They participate in a group of friends that is rather criminal. They do not play a major role in the group but because of their susceptibility to group influences it is not impossible (perhaps even likely) that they will continue on the criminal path.
- Very problematic girls. In their childhood everything went wrong that could possibly go wrong. Physical and sexual abuse
- are frequently found, parents using drugs or having a drinking problem, truancy, etcetera. The crimes they commit are very serious.

The study ends with some policy recommendations:

1. It is not necessary to develop a sex specific policy on juvenile delinquency.
2. On the contrary, in police contacts, girls shouldn't be treated differently from boys.
3. Early prevention activities in families at risk is a possibility that should be discussed extensively.

Meisjescriminaliteit in Nederland

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