

Summary

Youth probation service in practice

In the Netherlands, since the mid eighties youth probation service is provided for juvenile offenders. Youth probation is a kind of counselling and/or supervision in the context of the juvenile criminal law. It might be applied in various stages of the criminal justice proces. The goals of youth probation are to stop or reduce criminal behaviour and to realise a behavior change in juvenile offenders in order to promote participation and integration in society. This can be realized by teaching juveniles skills to help them in their functioning at school, work, at home and in other social contexts as well.

Though not all the parties involved agree completely on the target group yet, youth probation service appears to be aimed at the more serious cases only. It is intended for juvenile offenders who appear to be starting a criminal career.

This evaluation study concerns the characteristics of the juveniles involved, the modes of operation as well as procedures in everyday practice and the outcomes of this program. However, the very important outcome of recidivism is not studied yet. This will be carried out in a follow-up research.

Information was collected by interviewing about 60 probation officers on two recently finished cases each. Moreover, these workers were interviewed on their own experience and opinions regarding youth probation and its bottlenecks in practice.

Youth probation clients are mainly boys (90%). About 80% of the clients is 15, 16 or 17 years old. Half of the juveniles is of Dutch origin. The other half comes from Turkey, Morocco, Suriname or the Netherlands Antilles.

Combining several characteristics of the clients, in the sample four types of youth probation clients can be distinguished.

occasional offender

This is a juvenile who committed only one offense or just a few minor offenses. Socially and psychologically spoken this juvenile is in a stable non-problematic situation. This occasional offender quickly returns to the straight.

high risk juveniles

This juvenile is already been in contact with the judicial authorities before. The living conditions in psycho-social respect are problematic. This juvenile does not

have day-to-day activities in terms of school or work, is too often smoking dope, hanging around with bad friends, receives little attention from parents and has difficulties with social skills. The situation of this juvenile includes risk factors so badly that he or she could easily start a criminal career.

very high risk juveniles

This type is in line with the previous one. The living conditions resemble those of the kids in the previous category. However the *very high risk juveniles* has had more contacts with the police and judicial authorities and the reason for the contact with the youth probation service is a more serious offence. This type has already made a small start with a criminal career and tends to continue that path.

psycho-socially hurt juveniles

These clients are socially and or psychologically in very deep troubles. These kids are rather victims (of a situation) than offenders. Probation is focussed on their problems. According to the workers, a civil measure would be indicated. These cases would not belong to the youth probation service.

The occasional offenders represent about one quarter of the sample, about one third of the sample can be characterized as high-risk juveniles and almost one third as *very high-risk juveniles*; 13% of the cases are *psycho-socially hurt juveniles*.

What is youth probation service in practice like? In the majority of cases a scheme is made up of planned activities for the supervision/counselling. The workers themselves play a major part in that. They have conversations with the clients (insight giving, motivating etcetera) and often they make contact with persons in the social network of the cliënt: the school, the parents, and depending upon the situation with varying agencies and projects which provide help in the medical or psycho-social field. Besides, the workers have contacts with the authorities, involved in the the judicial proces. The youth probation in about half of the cases is completed within one year and a half. The other half of the cases needs more time.

Finally, the main outcomes are discussed. There are some standard aims which the probation officers try to achieve, as a matter of principle. They are about keeping commitments made with the youth probation officers, arranging meaningful day-to-day activities in terms of school or work and arranging meaningful leisure activities (that means not just hanging around with bad friends and preferably applying for membership of a sporting club).

The majority of the clients appears to succeed in achieving one or more of these standard goals. In particular arranging meaningful day-to-day activities in terms of school or work turns out well. The same holds for keeping the commitments that

were made with the youth probation officers. Arranging so-called meaningful leisure activities is achieved in less cases.

In addition to this, in almost all cases specific goals are formulated, designed in particular for the situation in question. There were countless goals. Most often occurring are goals in the field of social skills and psycho-social development (in 56% of the cases). This is mostly about learning how to say 'no', to learn norms and values, getting more self-confidence. In almost one quarter of those cases achievement of these goals is unsatisfactory, according to the workers, but in the remaining cases this turned out very well. The second most formulated specific goals (in 50% of the cases) are goals in the field of school and training, that means about the reduction of skipping classes. Two thirds of the juveniles succeeds sufficiently in achieving goals regarding school and training and in one third of the cases goal achievement in this field is unsatisfactory.

This study has shown that a large proportion of the clients, almost two thirds, indeed matches the profile of the target group, as far as there is agreement on the target group. However, it seems to appear that a non-intended group is reached as well, consisting of occasional offenders on the one hand and psycho-socially hurt cases on the other hand.

The research shows that the outcomes of youth probation service with respect to goal achievement are fairly good, in the perception of the workers at least. The standard goals appear to have been reached in more than half of the cases and the specific goals show positive results as well.

Finally, there are aspects of youth probation service which are still not clear, in particular the important issue of recidivism. Future research has to shed light on that topic. After all, it seems however reasonable to conclude that youth probation service appears to be on the right track.

