

Summary

Delinquent girls

Background characteristics, risk factors and interventions

Motivation for the study

Tackling juvenile delinquency has been a priority of justice policy for several years now. The Tackling Juvenile Delinquency programme (*Aanpak Jeugdcriminaliteit*), which was launched in 2008, for example, is aimed at early intervention, a person-centred approach, quick and consistent implementation and appropriate aftercare. Key themes within this programme are 'evidence-based' working, working according to the 'What Works' method and seeking to reduce recidivism. Another important aspect within the policy and its implementation is the attention given to specific target groups such as girls. This raised the question in the judicial system as to whether the right approach is being applied with respect to reducing recidivism among girls. The Dutch Ministry of Justice's Documentation Centre (WODC) commissioned this study into delinquency among girls as there is insufficient information on such delinquency, and knowledge about the backgrounds of delinquent girls is needed in order to determine the right approach.

Objective and research question of the study

The first objective of this study is to gain more insight into the characteristics of the population of delinquent girls in the Netherlands, while the second is to identify whether the existing intervention programmes for delinquent young people are appropriate for dealing with delinquent girls. The outcomes are expected to provide more insight into an appropriate approach or treatment for this population.

The underlying question of this study, therefore, is: How can we best intervene in the criminal career of delinquent girls in order to reduce problems and prevent possible recidivism?

The main question is divided into several parts, related to two domains:

- 1) background, characteristics and reasons for delinquency among girls, and
- 2) interventions for delinquent girls.

The questions are:

- 1 How is delinquent behaviour in girls explained in literature? What are the common characteristics of delinquent girls and what are the risk factors for girls' delinquency?
- 2 Have any interventions specifically aimed at girls been reported in literature, and what is known about the effectiveness of these interventions?

- 3 What is the nature and extent of self-reported and official reported crime committed by delinquent girls in the Netherlands, and what are the demographic characteristics of delinquent girls?
- 4 What is girls' average, minimum and maximum length of stay in youth custody institutions (*JJI*)?
- 5 What are the risk factors for delinquent girls in the Netherlands?
- 6 Are there any differences in the common characteristics, nature of crimes and risk factors between the four groups of delinquent girls (i.e. those receiving a suspended sentence, those receiving community punishment, those held in juvenile detention and those placed in a judicial institution for juvenile offenders (*PIJ*)?)
- 7 What conclusions can be drawn from empirical and literature research on the need for gender-specific interventions?
- 8 Do the outcomes of the study suggest a need to develop new behavioural interventions?

The research questions will be answered in detail in Chapters 3 to 8, while this summary outlines the main features.

Research method

The research questions on the backgrounds, characteristics and interventions with respect to delinquent girls have been answered by means of empirical and literature research. Several sources were consulted in this process, specifically national and international literature, self-reporting data, data from judicial databases, files and criminal records, and interviews. Literature review was particularly helpful in enabling us to map the risk domains and risk factors with respect to delinquent girls. Using empirical research, we subsequently examined these risk domains and the relative relevance of the risk domains for the Dutch situation. In other words, a literature review was conducted to establish the risk domains for girls, while empirical research was used to identify which risk domains are the most important.

All relevant national and international literature was studied to answer the first two research questions.

Empirical research was conducted to answer research questions 3 to 7. First of all, we examined the nature and extent of girls' crime in the Netherlands and the length of these girls' stay in youth custody institutions. In addition, we used self-reporting data to examine the ways in which delinquent girls differ from non-delinquent girls. After establishing the risk domains of delinquent girls in the Netherlands and whether these corresponded with the risk domains referred to in literature, we specifically examined whether there were any differences between groups of delinquent girls (suspects versus convicted girls and, within the latter group, the different forms of punish-

ment imposed). We also examined which risk domains were most prominent and whether the groups differed in terms of the number of risks experienced. In this study, we used existing databases, as well as a new database that we built.

The Self-reported Youth Crime Monitor (*Monitor Zelfgerapporteerde Jeugd-criminaliteit - MJZ*) was used to answer research question 3 on the nature and extent of delinquency among girls compared with delinquency among boys, and also to answer part of research question 5, namely 'What are the risk factors of delinquent girls in the Netherlands?' MJZ is a cross-sectional survey, conducted by WODC every two or three years among a representative sample of Dutch youth. For this study, we used the data of the most recent (2005) sample. These data were previously analysed extensively by Van der Laan and Blom (2006). In 2005, 1,460 youths aged between 10 and 18 took part in MJZ, which measured 42 risk/protective factors in five domains: the individual, family, school, friends and neighbourhood.

Police and judicial statistics were used to answer the question on the nature and extent of girls' crime (research question 3). These figures represent the number of crime suspects arrested by the police in 2005, and all criminal cases decided by the court or dealt with out of court by the Public Prosecution Service in 2005. Statistics from 2005 were applied to allow comparison with the MJZ data. Data from 1996 to 2007 were used to identify trends in recorded crime.

Data from the 'TULP' (*Tenuitvoerleggingprogramma*) implementation programme were used to provide information on girls' length of stay in youth custody institutions (research question 4). The TULP database records occupancy periods in youth custody institutions. Since the objective was to determine girls' length of stay in such institutions, data on a less recent group of offenders, whose stay in the institution had already ended, had to be used. Data on girls leaving youth custody institutions between January 2006 and August 2009 were retrieved.

The basic screening (*Basisraadsonderzoek - BARO*) was used to answer research question 6. Since this data source includes only girls who received community punishment, a comparison between groups of girls who received various sentences or orders was not possible here. The data did, however, provide insight into the characteristics of girls who received a community punishment. The BARO data set was collected by Van der Laan et al. (2009) and contains data on girls who came into contact with police because of being suspected of a crime and underwent basic screening. In the present study we opted to describe only those girls who were subsequently convicted. The BARO is a semi-structured questionnaire administered by child welfare

investigators in respect of young people suspected of committing an offence. The child welfare investigators completed the BARO on the basis of conversations with the young people themselves and with other important people in the young people's environment, such as parents and teachers. The purpose of the questionnaire was to provide advice to judicial authorities (sometimes advice on punishment) and to identify any disorder or problems the young person may have.

We used data from the Washington State Juvenile Court Pre-Screen Assessment (WSJCPA) to answer research questions 5 and 6. These data enabled us to identify the characteristics of girls coming into contact with police and of girls who received various sentences and orders. The WSJCPA contains data on about 1,400 young people aged between 12 and 18, including 240 girls, who recently had come into contact with the police and judiciary. The young people had been reported to the Child Protection Board because of committing a criminal offence, after which a BARO was conducted. To obtain a representative sample, the researchers took random samples from the 2005 reportings at five large offices of the Child Protection Board. The WSJCPA is a validated risk assessment tool developed in the United States and designed to estimate the chances of recidivism in juvenile delinquents, based on factors from the criminal and social domains.

Data from criminal records were used to answer research questions 5 and 6. These data allowed us to identify the characteristics of convicted girls and to examine whether these characteristics differed between girls who received other types of sentences. In all sentenced cases of convicted girls in 2006 and 2007, we took a sample from Public Prosecution Service data containing all cases of suspected and convicted persons registered by the Public Prosecution Service. We selected the years 2006 and 2007 as a considerable number of more recent cases are still pending. A standardized form for scoring risk factors was used to collect data from the girls' criminal records.

Data from the Juvenile Forensic Profile (*Forensisch Profiel Justitiële Jeugdigen - FPJ*) were used to answer research question 6, identifying the characteristics of girls who were placed under a 'PIJ' order (placement in a judicial institution for juvenile offenders). Since only a few girls are placed under a PIJ order each year, not many 'PIJ girls' were included in our 2006-2007 criminal records. The FPJ file was, therefore, a welcome supplement. The FPJ file contained data on all young people placed under a PIJ order between 1996 and 2005. For the present study, we selected only the girls. The basis of the original FPJ study of the Judicial Institutions Service (*Dienst Justitiële Inrichtingen - DJI*) was to obtain a picture, which should be as complete as possible, of all young people placed under a PIJ order. Using a standardized list, treat-

ment files of young people placed under a PIJ order were analysed. The list comprised 68 items relating to both static and dynamic risk factors.

Lastly, we interviewed four key figures, all involved in counselling and treating delinquent girls in practice, on the forms of treatment currently used with delinquent girls. These interviews were conducted to obtain a picture of the interventions that are used specifically for girls, but have not been recognized by the Ministry of Justice Behavioural Intervention Accreditation Committee (*Erkenningscommissie Gedragsinterventies Justitie*). These interviews contributed to answering the question of whether gender-specific interventions need to be developed (research question 7).

Literature review of risk factors for delinquent girls

Literature distinguishes various theoretical approaches to explaining criminality among girls. The first approach assumes there are no gender differences in the risk factors for criminal behaviour. Existing criminological theories, often based on research on boys, are tested for girls' crime. The assumption is that the risk factors associated with girls' delinquency are basically the same as those for delinquency among boys. Although the risk factors leading to delinquent behaviour are the same for both genders, some risk factors may be more prevalent in boys than in girls and vice versa. This is sometimes also referred to as differences in *exposure*. In this approach it is assumed that the same theoretical explanations can be applied to boys and girls, with gender differences being due to differences in exposure to the same risk factors.

The second approach, on the other hand, argues that the traditional theories cannot be applied indiscriminately to delinquency among girls. This approach assumes that girls and boys have different risk factors for delinquency, that separate constructs are needed to explain girls' crime and that girls may develop differently from boys. Factors that are important for girls, but not for boys (and vice versa) are also referred to as gender-sensitive factors. In this approach, differences in *sensitivity* or susceptibility to certain risk factors are distinguished. We researched literature on risk factors for delinquency among girls and also examined whether there were any differences in sensitivity and/or exposure between boys and girls.

Based on our literature review within the domains of the individual, family, peers and school, we can conclude that a large number of risk factors were found to be related to delinquency among both boys and girls. Boys and girls share certain risk factors, such as certain personality traits (for example, impulsivity and low intelligence), a risky lifestyle, child-rearing problems, delinquent friends and low bonding to school. These factors are related to delinquency among both boys and girls. A number of factors, however, were found to be of importance with respect to girls but not, or to a much lesser

extent, to boys. These factors lie mostly in the individual or family domain and to a lesser extent in the peer and school domain. Psychological problems, early maturity, a problematic relationship with the mother (little support from the mother or a less responsive mother), delinquency among friends and relationships with teachers, for example, were found to be unique to girls. Differences between boys and girls seem to be found mainly in respect of sensitivity. Despite some researchers suggesting that differences between boys and girls are mainly due to differences in exposure, most research is not conclusive in this respect. Many studies have focused primarily on differences in the association between risk factors and delinquency (sensitivity) rather than on differences regarding the existence of a risk factor or to what extent it is present (exposure). Further research is needed to determine whether the differences identified in sensitivity justify the conclusion that separate theories should be constructed for boys and girls.

Overview of literature on interventions for delinquent girls

A review of foreign literature shows that certain gender-specific interventions targeted at some general and some gender-specific factors are effective. Most of these interventions are not currently applied in the Netherlands, but foreign knowledge about such interventions could possibly be used to adapt the interventions applied to girls in the Netherlands. The foreign interventions applied in the Netherlands that have proven effective for girls are the Multi System Therapy (MST) and the Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care (MTFC).

In all the interventions applied in the Netherlands, behavioural problems, a risky lifestyle, a difficult child-rearing situation and school were found to receive a fair share of attention. Most attention focuses on the domains of personality, parent-child relationship and peers. Interventions recognized by the Ministry of Justice were found to target a large number of factors known from literature. However, several factors of importance to girls are being overlooked. The various interventions pay little or no attention to, for example, the domains of mental health (fear, depressive behaviour and suicidal tendencies), traumatic events and sexual behaviour. There are, however, two NJI-recognized, gender-specific interventions: 'Girls Talk' and 'STEPS'. The former focuses specifically but exclusively on problematic sexual behaviour in girls, while the latter is designed for girls who have experienced sexual violence on a single occasion.

We can conclude from the limited research conducted into interventions for girls, and the current state of affairs in the Netherlands, that existing interventions devote attention to a broad range of risk factors relating to delinquency among girls. However, a number of domains important to girls are underexposed in many of the existing interventions in the Netherlands.

Nature and extent of crime

Differences between self-reporting and police records were sometimes found in respect of the extent and nature of and trends in criminal behaviour in girls. Both sources need, therefore, to be used to obtain a more comprehensive picture of girls' crime. Regardless of the source of data, structural gender differences can be seen in criminality. Fewer girls than boys commit offences, regardless of the type of offence, and girls commit fewer offences than boys. Nevertheless, gender differences were found to be highest in the figures for officially reported crime, which seems to indicate a difference in the way that girls and boys are treated by the police and judiciary, as well as selective self-reporting. Boys are also punished more severely than girls. This could, however, be due to the fact that the offences that girls commit tend to be less serious.

Based on our examinations of self-reporting and police data we can conclude that crime committed by girls has increased relatively faster in recent years than that committed by boys. We can also conclude that girls enter the criminal justice system considerably less often: the boy/girl ratio is 3:2 in self-reporting, but becomes 8:2 once they reach the level of police intervention. This 'prosecution gap' could be due, at least in part, to the different nature of the offences committed by girls (usually less serious), although we suspect this is not the entire explanation. At the level of the Public Prosecution Service and the courts, we observed that cases involving girls are more frequently dismissed and that girls are less frequently given a prison sentence or a suspended sentence or sentenced to compulsory treatment.

The differences within and between groups of ethnic minorities are difficult to explain. Self-reporting and police statistics are contradictory and the findings are inconsistent with patterns frequently reported in literature.

Girls' length of stay in youth custody institutions

Very many of the girls who left a youth custody institution between January 2006 and August 2009 were only being held on remand. The periods of time that the girls stayed in the youth custody institutions were very short, usually less than two weeks. Apparently, they were subsequently given a lower or no prison sentence. Interventions are, in principle, not offered to these girls held on remand. We also came across many cases where girls had been sentenced to juvenile detention. Almost half of this group, too, was held in a youth custody institution for less than two weeks. Although they were offered intervention, their stay was too short to implement it. Girls detained for longer periods were usually held in a judicial institution for juvenile offenders (*PIJ*). In the case of these girls there was more time to offer intervention. However, only a few girls (6%) are in this category. In summary, for the vast majority of

girls placed in an youth custody institution there is not enough time to initiate intramural intervention.

Risk domains of delinquent girls in the Netherlands

Self-reporting data collected through MZJ show that in all domains – the individual, family, peers and school – seriously delinquent girls have more problems than non- or less delinquent girls. The difference is gradual, with the distinction between delinquent and non-delinquent girls mainly being determined by differences in personality and behavioural problems and in having deviant friends. The main differences between mildly and seriously delinquent girls were found to relate to behavioural and school problems.

A notable result, specifically in the self-reporting data, was that the upbringing by the father plays a different role than the upbringing by the mother. Whereas the father's role in a difficult child-rearing situation is not at all distinctive for non-, mildly and seriously delinquent girls, the role of the mother in a difficult child-rearing situation clearly distinguishes between mildly and seriously delinquent girls. A high-risk upbringing by the mother may, therefore, contribute significantly to girls developing seriously delinquent behaviour. A review of literature had already shown that the relationship with and upbringing by the mother can be unique factors for delinquency among girls.

As we expected, girls convicted of a crime were also found to have more problems in almost all risk domains than the suspect group. The main differences noted were in the extent of previous help or care received, behavioural and school problems and risky sexual behaviour. The problems appear to be more complex, therefore, for the group of girls who are eventually convicted of an offence than for those suspected of a crime.

Not unexpectedly, the girls who received a suspended sentence (according to the criminal records) had the fewest number of problems in the various risk domains. These girls were mainly convicted for the minor offence of violating the Compulsory Education Act (*Leerplichtwet*). Even though they generally had fewer problems than those who received a different sentence or order, the girls still had a considerable number of problems. This group was also very similar to the group of girls who received community punishment, except for the fact that they were younger at the time of committing the offence. They had the same number of, or sometimes even more, problems than girls who received community punishment, particularly with regard to support previously received and behavioural and mental health problems. This group, therefore, seems to be a group in need of focused attention as its members seem already to have serious problems, even though the offences they commit are still relatively minor.

Are interventions in need of amendment?

There are no interventions in the Netherlands that have been recognized by the Accreditation Committee and are specifically aimed at girls. The existing recognized interventions have been developed for boys. Among the existing interventions, interventions such as the Multi System Therapy (MST) and ‘new perspectives after return’ (*Nieuwe Perspectieven bij Terugkeer* – NPT) appear to be the best options for girls because of the breadth and flexibility they offer. Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care (MTFC) and Workwise, too, seem to target a large number of risk domains. In addition to using and possibly combining existing programmes, foreign literature seems to suggest that the gender-specific interventions that are effective in reducing recidivism in girls are those aimed at such things as good relationship skills. Although these interventions are not currently applied in the Netherlands, knowledge about such interventions could be used to amend existing interventions in the Netherlands.

Literature and the present study seem to provide a sufficient number of indications for applying extra modules at least in the areas of mental health, traumatic experiences, home and school relationships and sexuality. Completely new interventions do not seem immediately required, but more attention to problems specifically faced by girls, either within existing interventions or through modified modules, seems desirable. Given the problems that girls face, it would seem particularly important to apply broad interventions targeting several risk domains.

Based on the present study we have formulated the following recommendations:

- 1 With respect to girls who come into contact with the judicial system, it is important to give priority to broad-focused interventions, whereby instruments to intervene in every domain are available.
- 2 With the current knowledge and state of affairs, completely new broad interventions do not seem immediately required. Existing interventions can, if necessary, be adjusted by adding modules focusing on mental health, traumatic experiences and sexuality.
- 3 Early intervention in several domains is necessary, given the diverse problems already faced by girls who are at the start of the judicial process. The emphasis is currently on the end of the judicial process, while the majority of the girls receive a light sentence but already face a lot of problems. Many of these girls may already have experience of being in youth care. Coordination between youth care organizations and the judicial system, therefore, seems desirable.
- 4 As little is yet known about the effectiveness of interventions implemented on girls, proper assessment of precisely these interventions is important.

- 5 Literature review has shown that an accumulation of protective factors may prevent delinquency. Girls may also have more protective factors than boys. Although we do not know exactly which factors act as protective factors for girls, research into interventions needs to consider the question of protective factors.
- 6 Lastly, the results of this study need to be aligned with the new National Toolset for the Juvenile Criminal Law Chain (*Landelijk Instrumentarium Jeugdstrafrechtsketen* (LIJ)), which identifies risk factors for repeated criminal behaviour in order to better gauge the chances of recidivism and move towards suitable interventions. An assessment of the risk of recidivism among girls, which includes the risk factors important to girls, is important for deciding on the application of interventions suitable for girls.

Lastly, we would like to point out that this study focused to a large extent on girls. Some of the recommendations will also be relevant to boys, such as the possible importance of gender specificity, the need to properly identify risk factors before applying an intervention, or ensuring proper coordination between intramural and extramural organizations. Proper comparison between the two groups, especially with regard to the backgrounds and risk factors of convicted boys and girls, will only be possible, however, once similar data for both groups are available. No data for convicted boys were collected in this study.