

# Recidivism research in The Netherlands

## Survey of Dutch research on reoffending behaviour

### Summary

In 1998 the WODC, the research institute of the Ministry of Justice, carried out a survey of Dutch literature on recidivism. More than 160 publications, most often research reports and articles, were reviewed, all pertaining to data on reoffending criminals. Over the years Dutch recidivism data have been used in four different ways: in descriptive studies of particular types of offenders, in research on criminal careers, in etiological research and in evaluation studies, in which recidivism data form some sort of measure of the success of some kind of penal intervention.

The research on criminal careers has revealed that reoffending cannot be forecasted on the basis of simple group characteristics like gender, age or previous offending. The correlations that were found are too low to warrant any accurate prediction of who is likely to recidivate. Longitudinal research among minors has shown that patterns of self-reported crime vary considerably with age. In one study only a minority of the interviewed youths reported a regular pattern of escalating, stable or diminishing criminal activity as they grew older. In another, the vicissitudes of criminal behavior could be attributed to changes in the strength of social bonds, viz. the attachments the adolescents have to family members, to school, to their peers and so on.

Dutch evaluation research on penal interventions has not yielded many indications that some interventions are superior to others in reducing recidivism. Most evaluation studies however, suffer from small sized research groups, a short observation period and the absence of a carefully balanced comparison group. Another characteristic of present-day recidivism research in the Netherlands is the great variety in the way the concept of recidivism is measured. In the cited publications the observation period for example, ranged from several months to more than six years. Some of the reviewed studies rely on self-reported data, others on records of officially documented delinquency. Some focus on particular types of crime, others on all possible offences.

Final assessment of the relative effects of different penal measures awaits large scale research with a well-controlled design. First however, efforts should be taken to bring some uniformity into the measurement of recidivism. Only when studies are methodologically balanced their outcome can be compared. Standardization therefore, is a prerequisite for the improvement of Dutch recidivism research.