

Summary

Juvenile crime monitor

Developments in the number of suspects and criminal offenders from 1997 through 2012

Reducing juvenile crime is a major theme of the policy of the Ministry of Security and Justice (VenJ). VenJ wants to monitor developments in the number of juveniles (minors and young adults in the age 12 through 24 years old) who come into contact with the police and the judiciary for committing a crime. VenJ also wants to understand the nature of registered crime committed by juveniles and the settlements by the Public Prosecutor and the court. The Judicial Youth Policy directorate of VenJ has asked the Research and Documentation Centre (Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek- en Documentatiecentrum, WODC) to describe and interpret developments in juvenile crime throughout the law enforcement and judiciary chain. This study is based on data collected in the Juvenile Crime Monitor (MJC). The MJC is a collaboration between the WODC and Statistics Netherlands (CBS).

Research question

The main research question is:

What developments occurred in the proportion, nature and settlement of registered juvenile crime during the period 1997 through 2012?

Method

The MJC periodically examines developments in (registered) juvenile crime based on multiple indicators from various sources. Current reporting on trends in juvenile crime is based on statistics from the police and the judiciary (once in five years self-reported crime is added). The following indicators are used to describe developments in registered juvenile crime in this report:

- Registered suspects: individuals about whom there is a reasonable suspicion that they have committed an offence and are for that reason registered with the police.
- Arrested suspects: individuals about whom a police report has been drawn up on the suspicion of having committed a crime and for whom prosecution is deemed appropriate. Juveniles who have been referred to youth rehabilitation (Halt) are not included in these statistics.
- Criminal offenders: individuals whose case has been dealt with by the public prosecutor (OM) or the judiciary (ZM).
- Crimes: violations that are not included.
- Settlements: settlements reached through Halt rehabilitation or settlements reached by the prosecution and the judiciary.

This MJC summarises the developments in registered crime which may differ from actual trends in crime. The main reason why not all instances of criminal behaviour are reported is because priorities have been set as a policy for investigation and prosecution and because offences are filtered within the criminal justice system. Furthermore, because of the annual fluctuation in the number of 12- through 24-

year olds in the general population, trends are primarily described for every 1,000 peers of the same age group in addition to absolute numbers of suspects and offenders. Although the long-term trends since 1997 are described here as well, the main emphasis of the report is on trends occurring during the period 2007 through 2012.

Main findings

We describe the most important findings point by point. Each chapter begins with the most important findings.

General developments (12- through 24-year olds)

The absolute number of suspects and the number of suspects per 1,000 juveniles has decreased annually over the past five years.

There is a sharp increase in the number of suspects among minors and young adults up until 2007. A decrease in the number of juvenile suspects starts in 2007 and lasts until the end of 2012. The number of suspects among minors declines more than the number of suspects among young adults. The proportion of criminal offenders per 1,000 peers reveals a more gradual increase, and a decrease in the number of juvenile offenders becomes apparent only one or two years later. The number of criminal offenders among young adults even remains stable during the last two years of the study, while the number of criminal offenders among minors continues to drop.

The difference in numbers between arrested suspects and criminal offenders decreases.

During the first years of the 21st century, we see that the difference between the number of arrested suspects and the number of juveniles that were sentenced as offenders by the OM and ZM first increases substantially, to then drop as substantially from 2008 on. In other words, the number of cases dealt with earlier in the judicial process instead of through the OM increased from 2001 and then decreases in the final five years of the study. This development is most obvious among minors, but a similar trend can be observed among young adults. Although in 2010 the difference between the number of suspects and offenders increases among young adults per 1,000 peers, this seems to be attributable to an incidental drop in the proportion of criminal offenders that year. Remarkably, over the course of the years studied, the difference between the number of arrested suspects and the number of criminal offenders changes. It is not clear why this development takes place. It could indicate a change in how the judicial process operates or in how crimes are registered during the years studied.

Minors (12- through 17-years old)

The number of suspects among 12- through 17-year olds increases significantly since the beginning of the 21st century and peaks in 2007. After 2007 and through 2012, this number declines annually. The relative number of criminal offenders in this age group rises from the year 2000 on, to peak around 2008. From then on, the number declines. The number of arrested suspects declines sharply compared to the number of criminal offenders (compared to 2007, -47% and -35% respectively). This downward trend can be observed in each subgroup, though this trend is not equally manifested everywhere.

The major trends among minors are:

- Since 2008 there has been a decrease in the absolute and relative numbers of juvenile suspects irrespective of individual or family background, region or type of crime committed.
- A reduction in the absolute and relative numbers of juvenile criminal offenders irrespective of gender or type of crime committed.
- A decline in the relative number of minors that receive a sentence from Halt, but in the final year of the study there is a slight increase in the number of boys who receive a sentence from Halt.
- The relative and absolute number of cases dealt with by the OM decreases, however more cases were also dismissed during this time period due to policy or technical reasons.
- The relative and absolute number of cases dealt with by the ZM decreases, although proportionally more cases resulted in an acquittal.

To summarise, there is a reduction in the number of cases that are handled by the OM (minor offences) and the judiciary (more serious offences, but not exclusively).

Young adults (18- through 24-year olds)

The relative number of suspects aged 18- through 24-years old rises after 2000 and reaches its peak in 2007. That number decreases significantly thereafter. The number of criminal offenders among young adults increases until 2007, decreases in the immediate years following 2007, and then stabilises during the final two years of the study. As with the other subgroups, for young adults the decrease in arrested suspects is greater than the decrease in criminal offenders compared to 2007 (-27% and -16% respectively).

The major trends are:

- The relative and absolute number of suspects decreases regardless of individual and family background, region and type of crime committed.
- The number of offenders among young adults declines sharply between 2009 and 2010.
- The relative number of cases among young adults dealt with by the OM declines sharply in the final two years of the study.
- The relative number of cases among young adults dealt with by the ZM declines sharply and reaches a historical low in 2012.

To summarise, there is a decrease in registered crime committed by young adults. In particular, the number of cases dealt with by the judiciary (primarily serious offences) declines, whereas the number of cases handled by the OM (primarily, but not exclusively, minor offences) rises.

Adolescents (16- through 22-years old)

In the Netherlands from April 2014 the adolescent penal code can be applied to juveniles aged 16 through 22-years old. Adolescents form the largest group of both suspects and criminal offenders. The trends observed in this group are similar to those observed in both the minors and the young adults.

- There are proportionally more cases handled by the ZM among 16- through 17-years olds than among 18- through 22-year olds.
- The number of cases where adult penal code is applied to 16- through 17-year olds is limited and declining. Application of juvenile penal code is also limited in cases involving 18- through 21-year olds, but has increased during the final two years of the study.

Conclusion

After the publication of the first MJC a few years ago, we see now that the relative decline in the number of young suspects that began in 2006/7, and began one or two years later in the number of criminal offenders among minors and young adults, continues until the end of 2012. The decline among minors is greater than among young adults for both suspects and criminal offenders. An interesting development is that the number of criminal offenders among young adults per 1,000 peers appears to be stabilising in the last two years.

Another interesting development is that the discrepancy between the number of suspects and the number of criminal offenders during the final years of the study declines sharply (a similar pattern can be observed among young adults). By 2012, proportionally more cases are dismissed by the OM and more acquittals are awarded by the ZM than in 2007. The number of suspects decreases more from 2007 compared to the number of young people who are sentenced by the OM and the judiciary.

For minors, the decline in registered crime during the last five years of the study applies to cases dealt with by both the OM and the judiciary. In cases involving young adults, there is a relative decline in the number of cases brought before a judge (primarily serious offences), while the number of cases dealt with by the OM (primarily minor offences) increases.

Finally, this study also considered young people in the age group for whom adolescent penal code will apply starting in 2014. We note that for this group, the atypical penal code (i.e. the application of adult penal code to 16- through 17-year olds and the application of the juvenile penal code to 18- through 21-year olds) is applied on a very limited basis. The application of adult penal code to cases involving 16- through 17-year olds has decreased significantly in recent years, while in absolute terms, the application of juvenile penal code to cases involving 18- through 21-year olds has increased somewhat in the last two years.