Summary

The change in the number of juvenile suspects in Amsterdam, from 2005 through 2011
In search of an explanation

The aim of this research was to obtain more insight into the possible backgrounds to the change in the number of registered juvenile suspects in the period from 2005 through 2011 in the municipality of Amsterdam. This study relied on data obtained from the SSB of Statistics Netherlands about all 12 to 24-year-olds registered as residents of Amsterdam. All these youngsters were checked against police registration files. Additionally, we collected data at the municipal level on developments in several social and demographic characteristics, economic characteristics, law enforcement characteristics and characteristics of policy. It was checked whether these developments occurred simultaneously with developments in the registered number of youthful suspects. Figures on these social developments were derived from various sources (Statline of Statistics Netherlands, DUO education data, PolBIS, O+S Amsterdam and Amsterdam Public Prosecution Service).
The descriptive analyses show that there is a drop in the number of suspects among the population of under-age youngsters (ages 12 through 17), regardless of background characteristics. Also among young adults (18 to 24-year-olds) there is an overall decrease, but under certain sub-groups (such as females and certain origin groups) the number of registered suspects per 1.000 peers has barely decreased over the years or has even remained stable (see also Figures S1 and S2).
By means of time series analyses we checked which characteristics show a relation with the development in registered youth crime in Amsterdam. The results correspond with previous research and existing criminological theories. Our research shows that several social developments go hand in hand with changes in the registered juvenile crime in the municipality of Amsterdam, regardless of the type of offence of which the adolescents are suspected (total, property, violence or vandalism). These trends concern the number of single-parent families, the average school size, the percentage of school drop-outs, and the number of community police officers.
For all these results, it should be noted that the developments in the characteristics which we found to correlate with the development in registered juvenile crime also show a strong internal correlation. For this reason we could not examine the unique contribution of each individual development by means of multivariate analyses, and the found results need to be interpreted with some caution. After all, a found correlation does not necessarily mean that the development in characteristic x is also a cause of changes in the registered juvenile crime. It might mean instead that the development in characteristic x by chance correlates strongly with the trend in characteristic y. This problem can probably be attributed to the fact that we were only able to examine a relatively short period (2005 through 2011), given the available data.
Although it is not clear whether the found explanations also apply to other (large) municipalities in the Netherlands, the recent drop in the number of registered suspects in the age group of 12 to 24 is not unique for the municipality of Amsterdam. In part this concerns factors on which national policy has focused in recent years (such as school drop-outs and more targeted law enforcement), but in part it also concerns social developments that have occurred more or less *by chance*. The
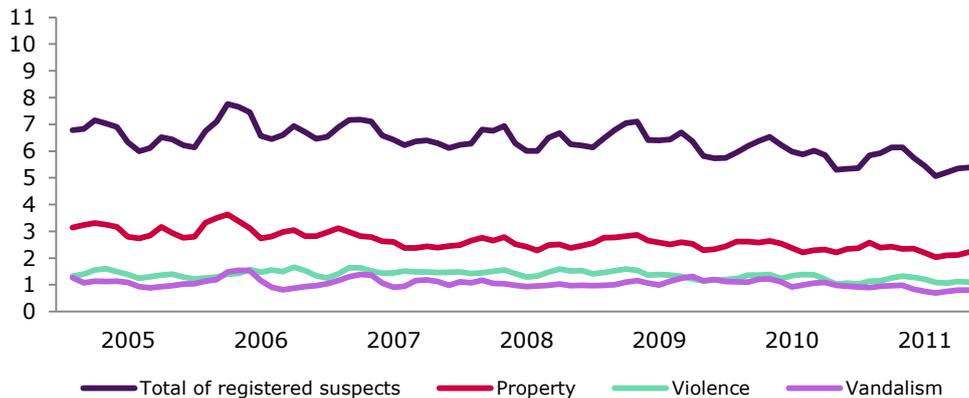
strong correlation between the different social trends made it impossible to identify any single unique factor as being responsible for the drop. However, international research indicates that a decrease in (registered) criminality cannot be attributed to a single factor. Future research will have to show whether the findings of this study also apply to other municipalities and which other characteristics could yield an explanation for the perceived drop in registered youth criminality.

Figure S1   Registered suspects aged 12 to 17 in Amsterdam, per 1.000 of the population group concerned (*moving averages*)
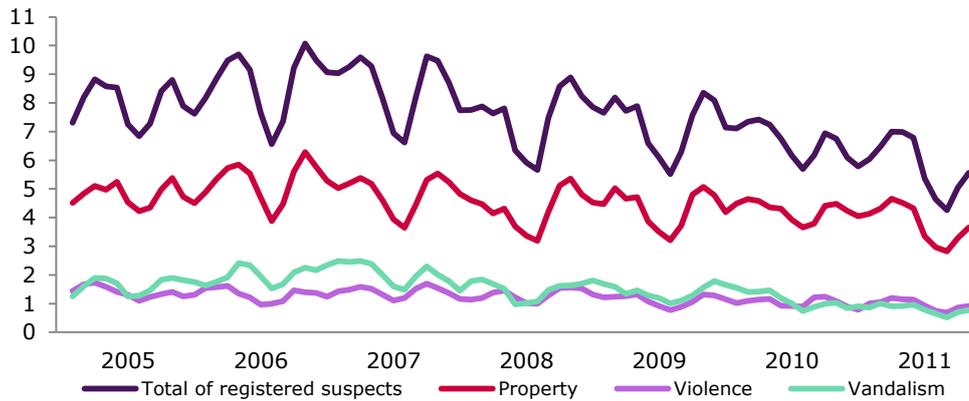
Source: BVH; adapted by WODC

Figure S2   Registered suspects aged 18 to 24 in Amsterdam, per 1.000 of the population group concerned (*moving averages*)

Source: BVH; adapted by WODC