

Criminogenic risk factors and protective factors in boys preventively detained in a juvenile detention centre

This preliminary study is part of the onset of a renewal process to develop an effective approach to adolescents that are imprisoned in a juvenile detention centre (JJI) because they committed a criminal offence. In particular this study focuses on the group of preventively detained boys. For most of these juveniles the stay in a JJI (75 %) is just a short stop-over. Research of Wartna, El Harbachi and Van der Laan (2005) shows that preventively detained juveniles have high recidivism rates after they leave a JJI. To prevent juveniles from developing a criminal career after they have been preventively detained in a JJI, it is important to efficiently utilize the short stay of the juveniles to examine if further treatment during or after the detention period is necessary and if so which kind of treatment (Bogaerts, 2007). The empirical literature shows that criminogenic risk and protective factors play an important part in this examination. More insight into these factors can provide some more information about the needs and suitable treatment of these juveniles (Van der Laan & Slotboom, 2002). According to Van der Laan (2006) criminogenic risk and protective factors can be divided into different categories, namely individual, family, school related, social environmental, peer related and situational factors. Because research into criminogenic risk and protective factors is evolving constantly we cannot take the overview given in literature for granted or consider it a complete overview. This study aims to provide more insight into the group of preventively detained juveniles, and focuses mainly on the criminogenic risk and protective factors that characterize this group.

To efficiently gain more insight into this subject – considering the short time available for this study and the quality of the study- we preferred to carry out an explorative research by asking experts in the field about their experiences. They were asked to divide the group of preventively detained juveniles into different types by showing them an overview of the criminogenic risk and protective factors. During expert meetings ten different types were identified: The ‘street urchin’, ‘the short-tempered boy’, ‘the criminal career maker’, ‘the frequent offender’, ‘the schoolboy’, ‘the prince’, ‘the extremist’, ‘the odd boy’, ‘the symptom carrier’, and ‘the illegal juvenile’. Juveniles that belong to one type resemble on a number of factors. On the other hand the group as a whole can also be characterized by certain factors, particularly vulnerabilities regarding the regulation of aggression and impulsivity, their empathic capacity, their moral development and their self-control. At the same time there are individual differences between juveniles that belong to the same type. For example there may be differences in the level of intelligence or the level of social skills.

It is remarkable that despite the fact that the experts who came to this result all had received a terse overview of the criminogenic risk and protective factors divided into all the different categories (individual, family, school, peers, environment and situation), they only had an eye for certain specific factors: the personality characteristics of the boy, the situation in which the offence occurred and the extent of support from parents at home. Situational factors and factors related to the school situation are considered to a lesser degree. Finally, environmental factors are not at all considered by the experts. According to the experts, when filling in the time served preventively in detention, one should focus both on the common characteristics of the group of the preventively detained, as well as on the common characteristics within every prototype and the individual characteristics of the juveniles which may be prototype-crossing.