

# Substance use of incarcerated boys in the Netherlands

The use of tobacco, alcohol, cannabis and other drugs among boys with and without compulsory treatment

## Summary

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## Summary

This report describes the findings of a study on substance use among male adolescents in juvenile justice institutions in the Netherlands. The study is conducted within the PIJ program of the Scientific Research and Documentation Centre (WODC) of the Ministry of Justice (boys with a PIJ, are placed in a juvenile justice institution and receive compulsory treatment). Questionnaires on substance use were filled out by 155 boys who were placed in 10 (out of 12) juvenile justice institutions in the Netherlands between March and July 2009. Respondents were recruited by a contact person from the juvenile justice institution. More than half of the sample was placed in detention with compulsory treatment (55%), a small number was placed in detention without compulsory treatment (7%), and 38% of the sample was placed in pre-trial arrest for five weeks or longer. The sample was largely comparable to the total population of boys in juvenile justice institutions with or without compulsory treatment and pre-trial arrest for five weeks or longer. The self-report questionnaires were filled out by the respondent, under supervision of an interviewer. In order to secure the validity of the self-reports, the questionnaires were never completed in the presence of an employee of the juvenile justice institution, the interviewer signed a declaration of confidentiality and provided the respondent with a written declaration stating that all information the respondent gave would be used for scientific purposes only. In addition to the questionnaires, registrations of the Justice department were requested in order to assess the respondent's detention category (detention with compulsory treatment, without compulsory treatment or pre-trial arrest) and to determine how long the respondent had been staying in the juvenile justice institution.

First, results were presented of the use of alcohol and drugs prior to the incarceration. These findings were compared to the use of alcohol and drugs among boys in the same age category who attend regular education, special education or stay in residential youth care institutions. The results demonstrated that incarcerated boys had a high level of alcohol and drug use prior to their detention or pre-trial arrest. This applied to boys in detention with compulsory treatment as well as to boys without compulsory treatment or pre-trial arrest. Especially in the youngest age category (13-14 year) the differences in substance use compared to boys that attend regular education were large. For example, compared to male adolescents in regular education, incarcerated boys were 13 times more likely to be a daily tobacco smoker and 7 times more likely to have used cannabis prior to their placement in a juvenile justice institution. More than half of the incarcerated boys in the age of 13 and 14 years used cannabis in the month prior to their placement, compared to 5% of the boys in regular

education. Incarcerated boys who used cannabis, also smoked more joints per occasion. Furthermore, incarcerated boys drank more alcohol in the month prior to their incarceration than the other boys. Again, these differences were most pronounced in the youngest age category. For instance, detained boys in the age of 13 and 14 years drank on average a total of 10 glasses of alcohol during weekdays (Monday till Thursday) and 17 glasses during the weekend (Friday till Sunday). In addition, the use of hard drugs (XTC, cocaine, amphetamine, hallucinogens, GHB, LSD, crack or heroin) was higher among incarcerated boys. More than 20% of the interviewed boys used one or more hard drugs at least once prior to their incarceration, including boys in the age of 13 or 14, whereas this percentage was only 4% among boys that attended the regular education in that same age category. Among the incarcerated boys in the age category 17-18, 27% previously experimented with hard drugs.

Second, all boys were asked about the use of alcohol and drugs since their stay in the juvenile justice institution. We asked whether the boys used alcohol or drugs in the institution and during leave (both at home and outside the home). The results showed that the use of alcohol since detention or pre-trial arrest is less frequent compared to the use of alcohol prior to the detention or pre-trial arrest. Approximately one third of the boys reported alcohol use since detention. Almost all of these boys (26% of the study population) drank alcohol within the juvenile justice institution. These figures were found to be much higher for cannabis use. The majority (65%) of the boys reported the use of cannabis since incarceration and almost all of them (64% of the study population) used cannabis within the institution. The use of hard drugs seems to have decreased since the detention or pre-trial arrest: over 20% of the incarcerated boys reported hard drug use before their stay in the juvenile institution, compared to 6% hard drugs use since detention. These hard drugs were all used within the institution and not on leave.

Furthermore, almost all of the interviewed boys (90%) reported that it is easy for them to obtain cannabis in the juvenile justice institution. According to 75% of the interviewed boys even hard drugs are easy to get hold of. This shows that in the perception of the detained boys the availability of drugs inside the institutions is high. The relatively high availability and the use of alcohol and drug use within the institutions was reported in almost all participating juvenile institutions. Only the use of hard drugs was reported in just three institutions.

The results of this report illustrate that the use of tobacco, alcohol, cannabis and hard drugs among incarcerated boys is problematic. Boys in juvenile justice institutions were found to be frequent and heavy substance users prior to their detention or pre-trial arrest. Furthermore, the results showed that the differences in substance use between incarcerated boys and boys in the regular and special education are especially large in the youngest age category (13-14). Therefore it is important to start preventive

interventions at an early age in order to prevent (future) problematic substance use. Within the institutions there seems to be a 'user culture' with a high prevalence of cannabis use and a perception of easy access to substances (including hard drugs). These findings indicate that it is difficult to stop the pattern of high substance use among these incarcerated boys while staying in the institutions.

The results of this study are of high importance to the treatment of incarcerated boys in Dutch juvenile justice institutions. The treatment programs should also target the use of alcohol and drugs. Not only because of the harmful effects of these substances on behaviour, but also because the offences which were reason for the arrests, are often related to the use of substances. If substance use is neglected in the treatment of the incarcerated boys, the chances of a relapse into the old behaviour pattern seems to be high.