

Executive summary

The Youth Delinquency Survey investigates self-reported offending behaviour of 12- to 23-year old Dutchmen and -women. The survey is conducted every five years. As such, additional information on trends in juvenile delinquency are obtained through a measure of self-report, supplementing official registration of juvenile delinquency by the police and the justice department. A number of changes were introduced in the most recent publication of the monitor, with the most important change being the introduction of additional cyber-enabled and cyber-dependent offenses. The results of an in-depth study into the latest survey of the monitor are presented in the current report. Three topics are discussed:

- 1 The psychometric properties of a self-report questionnaire concerning offline, digital and cyber offenses – the 'core' component of the Youth Delinquency Survey.
- 1 The consequences of a change in assessment mode from CAPI/CASI to CAWI regarding the monitoring and self-report of juvenile offending behaviour.
- 2 The use of the Youth Delinquency Survey as a means to estimate the absolute number of digital and cyber offenses committed by Dutch youths.

In regards to the first topic, the results suggest that a single factor underlies self-reported juvenile delinquency. In other words, operationalizing self-reported delinquency as an overall prevalence scale (i.e., somebody has either committed no offenses at all, or at least one offense once, with no distinct clustering of offenses) is statistically the best approach. A second approach that differentiated between offline and cyber-enabled offenses on the one hand, and cyber-dependent offenses on the other hand, was also statistically adequate.

Moreover, lower prevalence and frequencies, as well as less severe offenses, were observed when participants were interviewed through an internet questionnaire, compared to the traditional assessment of CAPI/CASI, while controlling for differences in sample characteristics. A change in assessment mode would therefore result in retrospectively incomparable statistics.

The Youth Delinquency Survey is not considered an adequate means to estimate the number of cyber-enabled and cyber-dependent offenses committed by Dutch youths. This is mostly caused by the broad definition of certain online offenses, which as a result include both minor offenses as well as very serious offenses and everything in between. Hence, when a certain offense item is reported as having been committed, it is unclear what sort of crime is specifically committed and how serious the crime is. Moreover, it is also unclear how many offenses are exactly committed, where the offenses are committed, and how these numbers change over time.

Concluding, the Youth Delinquency Survey is an adequate instrument for its intended purpose – a self-report measure of juvenile crime that supplements official registration statistics. However, a change in assessment mode will result in comparison issues over time, and the current monitor is not an adequate means for estimating the absolute number of online offenses committed by Dutch youths.