

Summary

What is the 'ProKid 12- identification tool'?

In the context of the national approach of the Dutch Ministry of Security and Justice to tackling juvenile crime, the government is co-operating with partners in the juvenile criminal justice system on the early identification, registration and referral of young people. One of the basic principles on which this approach is based, is that the screening and registration of under-12s forms a good basis for tackling juvenile crime at an early stage.

In order to detect young people at risk, the Gelderland-Midden police force has developed the identification tool 'ProKid 12-', also referred to simply as 'ProKid'. Existing police data (i.e. reports of children who have come into contact with the police and of addresses where children live) is sorted based on risk factors identified in academic research and then used by ProKid to identify children in four risk categories: 'red' (indicates critical danger), 'orange' (indicates a problem child or an address where there are problems), 'yellow' (indicates that a potential risk is developing) and 'white' (no indication of any risk). The identification tool is comprised of a number of computation rules and a computer program that extracts data on children at risk from the police registration system. Use of the identification tool has been incorporated into the ordinary police Early Identification and Referral Procedure, which describes the steps taken by the police to identify children and then refer them to the Youth Care Agency, as well as the provision of feedback to the police by the Youth Care Agency. It has been agreed that the police will take follow-up action with respect to children in the risk categories red, orange and yellow.

ProKid is used to achieve three aims:

- 1 to improve the police's performance of their task in relation to juvenile crime by ensuring that identification and referral take place in a more objectively verifiable manner based on criteria substantiated by academic research;
- 2 to speed up the identification and referral of children who are in a situation in which they have little or no opportunity for development;
- 3 to refer children for help more quickly through co-operation between the partners in the chain.

In mid 2009, the identification tool began to be introduced in four pilot regions: Gelderland-Midden (the region in which the tool was developed and was already in use), Amsterdam-Amstelland, Brabant Zuidoost and Hollands Midden.

Structure of Evaluation Study

By order of the Scientific Research and Documentation Centre (WODC) of the Ministry of Security and Justice, DSP-groep carried out a study on the added value of the police using ProKid as compared with the ordinary Early Identification and Referral Procedure. The study, comprised of a process

evaluation and an output evaluation, was performed between September 2009 and May 2011.

A variety of research techniques were used during the process evaluation. National and regional policy documents were studied in order to discover whether the ProKid Identification Tool was used in the intended manner in the four pilot regions. Semi-structured interviews took place with 34 respondents from the various chain partners during the first phase of the pilot schemes. At a later stage, 15 respondents were re-interviewed in order to obtain an up-to-date picture. The quality of 118 forms used to report cases of concern (the forms used to transfer children identified with the aid of ProKid to the Youth Care Agency) was screened in the four pilot regions. Employees of the police force and Youth Care Agency filled out time sheets for three months in order to provide an insight into how much time was spent working on the various steps of the ProKid procedure.

The output evaluation studied whether ProKid was leading to referrals of children who remained off the radar screen of the ordinary identification process and who needed help. For the purpose of the output evaluation, extracts from police records were requested on children under 12 who had been registered and referred in the four pilot regions and four control regions during a three-month period in the year prior to the introduction of ProKid (pre-measurement) and in a similar period after the introduction of ProKid (post-measurement). Due to the transition to a new police registration system (BVH) in 2010, it was not possible to compare the data from the pre-measurement and post-measurement of registered and referred children. During the post-measurement there were also technical problems, as well as problems with the link between the extraction program and the BVH system. This meant that the sample drawn in the control regions was too small to enable any reliable pronouncements to be made. Therefore the output evaluation is limited, in the pre-measurement, to the output in the pilot regions of the ordinary reports of cases of concern and, in the post-measurement, to ProKid reports of cases of concern.

Research Findings and Conclusions

The ProKid tool

The ProKid tool does not operate well in any of the four pilot regions. There are difficulties in all of them as a result of system errors and technical problems. As long as the system does not function as intended, there will be a lack of confidence as to whether ProKid measurements are correct.

The academically substantiated computation rules are not applied in all of the regions. It is not possible to check the past 12 years' police records in all of the regions. Furthermore, the allocation to risk categories has little effect on how cases are handled, as is confirmed by the output evaluation. No differences were found in the manner in which follow-up action was taken in response to reports in the various categories.

The ProKid procedure

In all of the pilot regions, the procedure followed does not correspond entirely with the procedure laid down at national level. However, the chain partners in all of the regions are generally satisfied with the manner in which

the tool was incorporated in their procedures. On the basis of the process evaluation, we have concluded that the procedural deviations do not form an obstacle to achieving the objectives of ProKid. Although the tool does not yet function as intended, the co-operating chain partners have an overwhelmingly favourable view of their co-operation in relation to ProKid.

Children flagged up with the aid of ProKid

The crucial question is whether ProKid leads to reports of children who had previously remained off the radar screen and who are believed to need help.

Based on the study, we have concluded that between 1 September 2010 and 1 December 2010, 2,444 children were reported by the ProKid tool as being in the risk categories red, orange and yellow. A third of these reports involved system errors or registration errors or reports based on irrelevant incidents. The number of rightful reports was 1,542. Quality controllers referred 681 of those children to the Youth Care Agency. The police had already referred 529 children to the Youth Care Agency through the ordinary Early Identification and Referral Procedure, and the youth care agency had become involved with the last incident on which the report was based in 37 cases. These children were therefore already known to the Youth Care Agency. There were also 295 Pro Kid cases pending.

Based on studying a sample of 191 children referred through ProKid, we estimate that in the four pilot regions, from 1 September 2010 until 1 December 2010, between 115 and 202 children who were not yet known to the care services and who needed help were referred through ProKid. Extrapolated to annual figures, this would mean that, with the aid of ProKid, between 460 and 808 children who were not yet known to the care services and who needed help would have been flagged up in the four regions.

Of the children in need of help who were referred with the aid of ProKid, slightly more than half were referred to a local agency for help, around a quarter were identified as requiring specialist youth care and around a quarter were the subject of further investigation by the Child Abuse Counselling and Reporting Centre (AMK) and/or child protection authorities.

Besides identifying and referring children who are newly flagged up, earlier identification has also been understood to mean identifying when less intensive forms of care are required. However, that assumption was not confirmed by this study. Without it being possible to draw any firm conclusions, the results in the Gelderland-Midden region (the region in which ProKid was developed and where the tool has already been in use for some time) indicate that there may *possibly* be a long-term effect in this area. Further research will be required in order to confirm whether that is the case.

We conclude that ProKid supplements the ordinary system of reporting cases of concern.

Only once the system errors and technical problems have been resolved and a number of facts that are currently investigated by the quality controller are checked automatically will it be possible to make a good estimate of the time investment required by the police in order to use ProKid. The quality controllers currently spend a relatively large amount of time on problems with the tool.

Basic conditions for national roll-out

On the basis of the study, four basic conditions have been formulated for the national roll-out of ProKid:

- The operational relevance of the computation rules will need to be re-evaluated.
- The ProKid tool will need to function well. System errors and technical problems will need to be resolved.
- Police officers must be aware of the importance of early identification and of recording children in risky situations in the police registration system.
- There must be greater clarity about which information may (and may not) be transferred.