

Summary

High impact crime (HIC) severely and negatively impacts the well- and safe-being of victims, and includes offenses such as violence, robbery and burglary. Hence, preventing HIC is one of the top priorities of policymakers and law enforcement officials. The current study investigates which characteristics in children (10 through 15 years old) are correlated with HIC careers later in life, as to provide starting points for youth prevention measures.

Besides determining who are likely to become HIC offenders, it is also important to determine which high risk youth eventually do not become HIC offenders. Put differently, what are risk factors in childhood and early adolescence for HIC in later adolescence and young adulthood? And what protective factors in high risk youth suppress or prevent the development of HIC?

Through a literature study, the following two questions are answered:

- 1 To what extent do antisocial and delinquent behaviour in childhood and early adolescence predict HIC in later adolescence?
- 2 What other factors in childhood and early adolescence predict HIC in later adolescence? What factors suppress the development of HIC?

Through an empirical study, the following three questions are answered:

- 3 What are risk and protective factors in aggressive and antisocial children and young adolescents who later do not develop a HIC or general criminal career?
- 4 How do these high risk children and young adolescents differ from those that do develop a HIC or general criminal career?
- 5 To what extent does the accumulation of risk factors in childhood and young adolescence predict later HIC or general criminal careers? To what extent does the accumulation of protective factors suppress the development of such careers?

Method

The literature study uses a limited number of overview studies into childhood and early adolescence predictors of later criminal behaviour (e.g., serious violence and theft) as its starting point. These studies are supplemented through a systematic literature search of studies from the past five years, as well as a 'snowball' search of similar studies with no limitation on time of publication. Only prospective or longitudinal method studies are included.

The empirical study uses two nationally representative samples of Dutch youth to predict who would develop a HIC or general criminal career. Self-report data on risk and protective factors are obtained from the Youth Delinquency Survey and police registration data on HIC and general criminal behaviour are obtained through Statistics Netherlands.

Results

The literature study indicates multiple risk factors in childhood and young adolescence for violent and serious criminal behaviour in middle to late adolescence and young adulthood. In the individual domain these are: antisocial and delinquent

or criminal behaviour, substance use, complications at birth, aggressive and problem behaviour, pro-criminal attitudes, and psychopathic tendencies. In the family domain these factors are: young mothers, antisocial or criminal behaviour by parents, poor relationships between child and parents, inadequate parenting style, child abuse, and poverty. In the broader domain these factors include: truancy, poor school motivation and results, antisocial, delinquent or substance-using friends, gang membership, and living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

Furthermore, the literature also suggests protective factors in childhood and young adolescence that suppress the development of later violent and serious criminal behaviour. In the individual domain such factors are: prosocial behaviour, average to high intelligence, high levels of self-control, low levels of hyperactivity, absence of behavioural disorders, no to few psychopathic tendencies, low levels of withdrawing behaviour, and perceptions of high arrest probability. In the family domain these factors include: adequate parental supervision and monitoring, no to little physical punishment, strong involvement in family activities, older mother at birth, good quality of life at home, and higher social economic status of family. In the broader domain factors concern: participation at school and good results, positive attitudes towards school, good relationships with (prosocial) friends, no to few delinquent friends, and living in a good neighbourhood.

The empirical study shows that childhood and early adolescence delinquency, both self-reported as well as police registered, is correlated with later criminal careers (with HIC). Furthermore, dissatisfaction with school is also weakly associated with a general criminal career. Other dynamic factors were not or negligibly correlated with criminal careers. Moreover, males, non-Dutch ethnic youth, youth living in heavy urban areas, and lower educated youth are more likely to develop a criminal career later on. Lastly, the accumulation of risk factors also predicts a later criminal career. However, the accumulation of protective factors does not seem to suppress such careers.

Conclusion

Both the literature and the empirical study indicate that delinquent and antisocial behaviour in childhood and early adolescence are predictors for criminal behaviour later in life. Furthermore, multiple other dynamic factors are also correlated with such behaviour later in life, though generally these correlations are weak.