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The Halt program: diversion of juvenile vandals by M. Kruissink

In the Netherlands, like in many other Western European countries, vandalism among juveniles increased dramatically in the sixties and seventies (Society and crime, 1985). Because of the overburdening of the police and justice system, vandalistic offenses were, even when the offenders got caught, seldom prosecuted. In the few cases in which the offenders came into contact with the authorities, long periods of time elapsed between the offense and sanctioning.

The sanctioning was inadequate; it consisted of a scolding by the public prosecutor or, at best, of a fine eventually paid by the parents. In fact, juvenile vandals themselves hardly experienced any consequences of their destructive deeds at all. From this undesirable situation, involving great expenses for society, the need for an adequate way of handling these offenses emerged.

In 1981 the city of Rotterdam took the initiative to start a program aimed at preventing and suppressing vandalism (Van Hees, 1983; Kruissink, 1987). In the program municipality, police and judiciary work closely together. Juveniles, aged 12 to 18, caught by the police on account of vandalism can be sent to the program. The program offers vandals the opportunity to avoid prosecution, under the condition that they themselves repair and/or retribute the damage they caused, or clean up the graffiti they made. So the delinquents carry out work as an alternative to being prosecuted. If the work turns out to be successful and the damages are recovered, the case is disposed of and there will be no criminal record.

The alternative settlement is meant to be an educative reaction; juvenile offenders themselves are held responsible for their own behaviour. Besides, the settlement has some specific advantages. The stigmatizing side-effects of a judicial contact, such as the juvenile being labeled a criminal, can be avoided. At the same time, the injured party obtains satisfaction and moreover the overburdened police and justice system is spared. The name of the program is derived from the alternative settlement: the program is called 'Halt', a contraction of Dutch words that stands for 'the alternative'. Often the program is called a 'diversion program' because of the fact that juveniles are kept outside the judicial system. Besides that, the character of the Halt program itself resembles mediation and reparation programs. Actually the settlement is at best characterized as a combination of diversion programs on the one hand and mediation or reparation programs on the other hand. See for diversion programs for example Palmer and Lewis (1980) or Lemert (1981) and for mediation or reparation programs among others Davis et al (1988) or Hughes and Schneider (1989). Besides providing alternative settlements for juvenile vandals that are caught by the police, the Halt program performs activities in the sphere of prevention. These activities can be pointed towards a specific neighbourhood, a school, or the entire municipality as well. The activities include intervention, information and assistance.

As has been pointed out, the Halt program started in 1981 in Rotterdam. In subsequent years some other cities followed this example. Recently however, the government decided to stimulate the establishment of Halt projects, resulting in 43 projects in the Netherlands at this moment. However, little was known about the actual practice of settlement of juvenile offenders, the characteristics of those juveniles, the organization of the program and its effectiveness. This was the motive for starting this evaluation study.¹

This evaluation study concerns:

- a A study among a sample of vandals who participated in the Halt program.
 - What kinds of juveniles - in terms of delinquent behaviour,

school and family situation and the use of alcohol and drugs - come into contact with the Halt program? And how do these juveniles relate to modal Dutch juveniles?

- In what way was the settlement carried out? Does the program succeed in meeting the conditions for an educative reaction?
 - Is the program effective in tackling vandalism. In other words, does the program reduce recidivism?
 - Is the effect of the program in reducing vandalism stronger than the effect of traditional settlement (dismissal after a scolding by the police)?
 - How does the effectiveness of the program relate to characteristics of the vandals and the way the settlement was carried out?
- b A short description of activities aimed at prevention, undertaken by the Halt program.
 - c An overview of the organization and working methods of the 43 projects.

A study among juvenile vandals

Method

A sample of 179 juveniles sent to the projects in Rotterdam, Eindhoven and Dordrecht², participated in this study. Data have been collected on the reason for referral to the Halt program and the way the alternative settlement proceeded. Data have also been collected by means of a self report questionnaire³ which covered some characteristics of the juveniles (such as committing several types of vandalism, violence against persons, shoplifting) and factors known to be related to delinquency (school and home situation and the use of alcohol and drugs). The questionnaires were filled out by the juveniles at the moment they came into contact with the program and one year after that. On both occasions the questions concerned a reference period of one year. As far as possible the characteristics of the juveniles are compared to a national sample of juveniles of the same age, who answered some of the same questions. These data were collected in another RDC study on self reported delinquency among juveniles (Junger-Tas and Kruissink, 1987).

In order to establish any effects of the Halt program on the vandals who participated, a quasi-experimental design⁴ has been used (see figure 1). Data on the committing of vandalism among the Halt group in a period of one year before and one year after entrance into the program have been compared. Those data were also collected among a control group consisting of juveniles who had committed vandalism but did not participate in the program; instead these juveniles had been sent away by the police after a scolding and/or eventually the parents being informed about the misbehaving of their child. The juveniles in the control group were selected from the day and night reports of the police in the city of

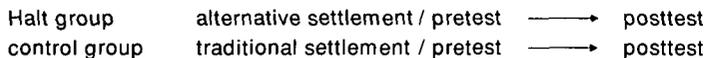
¹ This paper is an annotated summary of an integral report (in Dutch) published by Kruissink and Verwers (1989).

² Rotterdam is a large harbour city with about 550,000 inhabitants. The populations of Eindhoven and Dordrecht are respectively 200,000 and 100,000 inhabitants.

³ See for a discussion of the validity and reliability of self report questionnaires for example Elliott and Ageton (1980) or Hindelang et al. (1979).

⁴ The design used in this study is known as the 'untreated control group design with pretest and post test' (Cook and Campbell, 1979).

Figure 1: Design for effect analysis of the Halt settlement



Utrecht. In Utrecht the program in fact did exist but was functioning so badly that only a few vandals a year were referred.

The Halt group on the pretest consisted of 179 vandals, sent to the projects in Rotterdam, Eindhoven and Dordrecht. More than a quarter of this group did not participate in the posttest (29%). The control group consisted of 90 juveniles of which 21 (32%) did not take part in the posttest.

The samples appear to be composed as follows (pretest data). Both the Halt and control group mainly consist of boys (respectively 96.1% and 91.1%). The mean age in Halt and control group is respectively 15.4 and 14.5 years old. The nationality in both samples is mainly Dutch: 88.3% in the Halt group and 72.2% in the control group.

Concerning these demographic variables the Halt sample matches the total population of juveniles who were sent to the three Halt projects under consideration.

Characteristics of the vandals

By definition, the clients of the program are juveniles who have been caught by the police because of vandalism.

Vandalism as such has no legal basis. In practice, a checklist of 'Halt offenses' is used by the police in referring juveniles to the program. In the sample of 179 juveniles the most frequent reasons for referral to Halt were: criminal damage (33.7%), graffiti (23.9%), mischief⁵ (13.5%) and arson (6.7%). These offenses were not the first offenses committed by these juveniles.

On the contrary, the self report data showed that the Halt clients do offend rather frequently. About half of the sample committed graffiti in the year preceding the settlement. Damaging public phones, damaging lampposts and smashing windows were reported by respectively 36.0%, 17.8% and 31.1% of the juveniles. Almost 30% set fire to something and more than 75.0% ignited fireworks when not permitted. Besides these vandalistic offenses, the juveniles committed shoplifting (32.0%) and violence against persons (33.1%) as well.

A comparison of these data with a national, representative sample - from which only the boys were selected since 96% of the Halt sample consists of boys - showed that the Halt clients are far more delinquent than the national sample. In this respect the Halt group differs dramatically from the national sample (see figure 2).

Concerning the situation at school, home and the use of alcohol and drugs, the following picture emerges. Most of the clients attend school (90.5%) and, generally speaking, enjoy this. The clients report to have good relationships with teachers and class mates, and their marks are satisfactory. About 20% of the clients report to stay away from school sometimes. Almost all juveniles live with their parents (97.8%). About 25% of the households are one parent families. Serious quarrels with parents do not occur very often. Nevertheless, in the preceding year 15% of the vandals did run away from

home with the intention to stay away forever. Almost half of the vandals never drink alcoholic beverages and only 15% sometimes use softdrugs.

These background characteristics slightly differ from the national sample. The Halt clients do come from incomplete families more often, they play truant and run away from home more often in comparison to the national sample. The Halt clients drink less and use more soft drugs than the average Dutch juvenile.

Recapitulating the offender characteristics, it can be stated that concerning the school and home situation and the use of alcohol and drugs, the Halt clients are slightly deviant from the national sample. Concerning delinquent behaviour however, especially vandalism, shoplifting and violence against persons, the Halt clients differ extremely from their peers. Halt clients commit these delicts far more frequently than the national sample.

The Halt program in practice

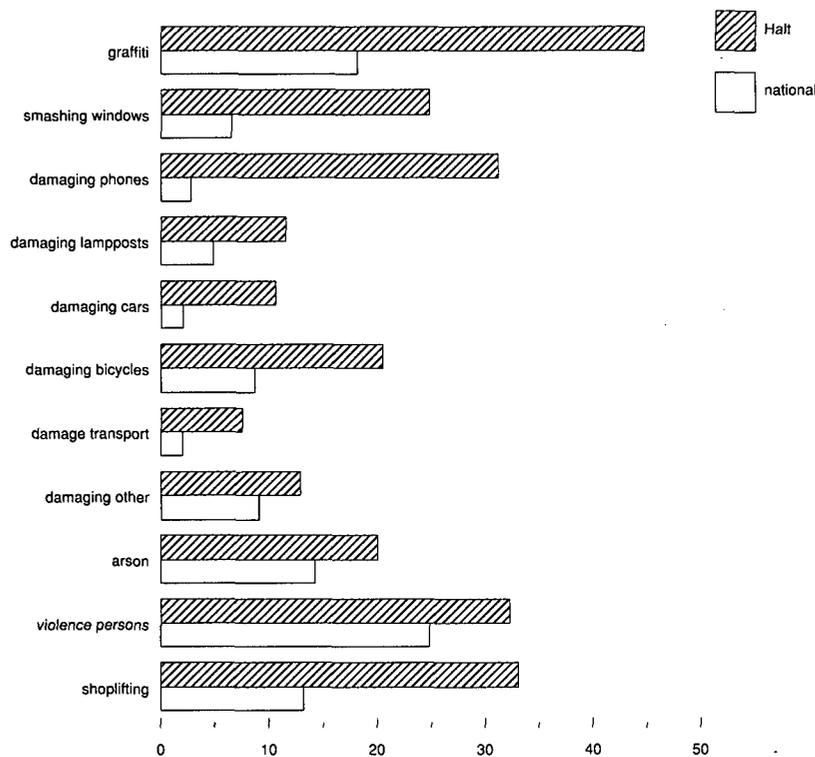
After juvenile vandals have been referred to the program they have two meetings with the Halt workers. Those meetings should result in agreement on the kind and duration of the alternative work. The total amount of compensation must also be assessed. When the public prosecutor concedes to the agreement and when the Halt workers have arranged the work, the vandals can start working. The alternative Halt settlement is meant to be an educative kind of reaction. In principle, a clear relation between the offense and the kind of alternative work is pursued. In this way an educative kind of reaction can be realised while at the same time satisfying the injured party. For example a boy being caught because of plastering a school building is dealt with by having him clean up this graffiti. The speed of settling (in comparison to judicial settlement) and the compensation are also meant to contribute to the educative element.

In what way was the settlement of the vandals in the sample carried out? And did the program succeed in meeting the conditions for an educative reaction? In practice about 60% of the sample performed work that was closely related to the offense for which the juvenile was referred to the project. In the remaining 40% of the cases Halt did not succeed in arranging work showing a relation with the committed offense. The duration of the work varied from 2 hours up to 32 hours, the average being about 7 hours. The mean time between the offense (the reason for referral) and the start of working was two months. That is over two times faster than settlement of comparable cases by the public prosecutor.

In principle, compensation is part of the settlement. This is realized through mediation between the offender and the injured party. Outside this mediation by Halt there are few possibilities for victims of vandalism to receive compensation. There appears to be a need for compensation. More than half of the sample had caused damage that needed to be compensated. In those cases Halt did realize compensation

5 Mischief includes facts such as trespassing, being a nuisance in apartment buildings etc.

Figure 2: Self-report delinquency of Halt juveniles compared to a national sample of boys



by means of payment and/or work. In the other cases damage was negligible, for example in cases of mischief. Generally speaking it can be stated that the sample in practice was indeed settled alternatively according to the principles of the program. Most of the vandals carried out work showing a relation to the offense (the ground for referral), the settlement was handled rather fast and if necessary the victim received compensation.

Effectiveness of the program in tackling vandalism

Questions concerning the effectiveness of the program will be discussed in this section. Is the program effective in tackling vandalism? In other words, does the program reduce recidivism? And if so, are the effects of the program stronger than the effects of traditional settlement (dismissal after a scolding by the police)?

To begin with, the occurrence of offenses before and after the alternative settlement in the Halt group will be looked at (see table 1). The pre- and posttest scores of the Halt group differ dramatically. After the Halt settlement less petty crime is reported than before (statistically significant for almost all offenses).

These results give an indication as to the effects of Halt. But what happened to the control group? The vandalism scores⁶ of both Halt group and control group have been analyzed with paired t-tests.⁷ Again the posttest scores of the Halt group decreased significantly ($t = 2.63, df = 123, p < 0.01$) in comparison to the pretest, whereas for the control group no significant difference ($t = -1.55, df = 68, p = 0.127$) was found between pretest and posttest.⁸

One can look at these data in another way - and perhaps get more insight - by computing relative difference scores.⁹ Based on these scores four groups can be distinguished (see table 2). In 21% of the cases vandalism stopped after the Halt settlement and about 42% of the clients offended less after the Halt settlement than before the Halt settlement. So, for more than 60% of the juveniles Halt seems to have had an effect, whereas in the control group only 25% committed less vandalism after being settled by the police and none of the control subjects stopped this behaviour ($p < 0.01$). These results (envisioned in figure 3) show that the Halt settlement does have an effect in reducing vandalism by juveniles! And moreover, the Halt program is more effective in reducing recidivism than the traditional way of settling.

6 Since the major concern of this study is vandalism, a scale has been constructed, based on the vandalistic offenses from the self report list. Non-linear homogeneity analysis (Gifi, 1981) showed enough association among the items to justify the summing of the frequencies, whereby one vandalism scale was constructed.

7 According to Cook and Campbell (1979) and Edwards (1979) the most suitable analysis for a design with pre- and posttest and an experimental and a control group is analysis of covariance. In this way the posttest scores of the experimental group are tested against the control group, while for both groups the pretest measures are treated as covariates. One important assumption in this analysis is that the regression slopes of the covariate on the posttest measure are parallel. If this assumption is not warranted, interpretation of the results is rather difficult and subject to bias. The Halt and control group data were analysed in this way, resulting in a significant effect for the group factor, but the condition of parallel regression slopes was not fulfilled, so other methods of analysis are used.

8 Before testing, the scores on the vandalism scale have been rescaled.

9 The relative difference = (pretest - posttest)/pretest.

Table 1: Number of offenders before and after Halt settlement, based on self report data, in % (N= 127)

offense	before		after		effect
	number	%	number	%	
graffiti	67	52.8	3	25.2	**
smashing windows	38	30.2	19	15.0	**
damaging public phones	43	34.1	26	20.5	**
damaging lampposts	20	16.1	5	4.0	**
damaging cars	20	16.1	5	4.0	**
damaging bicycles	26	20.8	21	16.7	n.s.
damage in public transports	12	9.6	11	8.7	n.s.
damaging other things	30	27.0	14	11.7	**
arson	35	30.2	17	13.4	**
let off fireworks	91	78.4	83	65.4	**
burglary	28	22.0	15	11.8	**
violence against persons	43	33.9	44	34.6	n.s.
shoplifting	43	33.9	31	24.4	*

* $p \leq 0.05$ (one sample χ^2 test)

** $p \leq 0.01$ (one sample χ^2 test)

Table 2: Effects on vandalism, based on relative difference scores

effect	Halt group		control group	
	number	%	number	%
stopped	26	21.0	0	0.0
decreased	52	41.9	17	25.0
no difference	13	10.5	10	14.7
increased	33	26.6	41	60.3
total	124	100	68	100

$\chi^2 = 31.34$, $df = 3$, $p \leq 0.01$

Other interesting questions concern the effectiveness of the program in relation to characteristics of the vandals, and the relation between effectiveness and the way the settlement was carried out (see figure 3).

Effects and characteristics of the vandals

The effectiveness of the program is not dependent upon the frequency of vandalism before Halt intervention (see table 3). About 35% of the incidental offenders (who committed vandalism 0 to 2 times in the year preceding the settlement) has stopped vandalising after the alternative settlement. Among the notorious offenders (more than 11 facts in the year preceding the Halt intervention), about 15% has stopped vandalising. The effects on the last group may seem weaker than among the incidental offenders. But almost 70% of the notorious offenders showed a decrease of vandalism whereas only 4% of the incidental offenders showed a decrease. At the same time the percentages of vandals who showed no difference or increased vandalism, are much higher among the incidental offenders than among the notorious offenders. These findings suggest that the Halt settlement is more effective for notorious than for incidental offenders. However, these results have to be interpreted with care; one should realise that extreme pretest scores tend to regress to the mean on a posttest.

None of the background characteristics of the vandals showed a connection with the effectiveness of the Halt program. Age, more or less problems at school or at home and the frequency of alcohol and drug usage do not influence the effects of Halt. It should be noted however, as mentioned before, that the vandals don't make up a very problematic group and the Halt group shows little variance on these background characteristics. So it is still questionable whether the program would be as successful for more problematic juveniles.

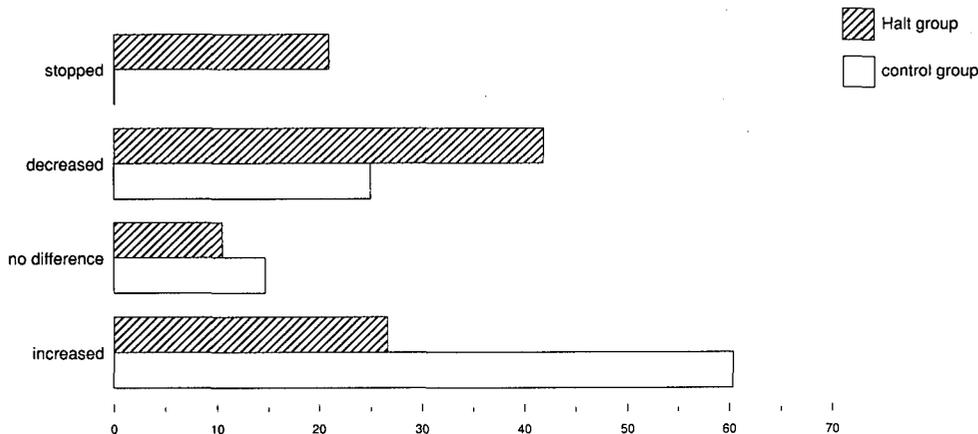
Effects in relation to program characteristics

The settlement can be carried out more or less according to the Halt principles regarding fast settlement, relation offense-work and compensation. Because these elements are expected to have an educative effect, it can be hypothesized that the settlement is more effective when these conditions are better met.

This hypothesis must be rejected. Duration of settlement and effect showed a low, non significant correlation. Likewise, whether or not the work was related to the offense and whether or not the damage was compensated for, did not influence the effectiveness of the program.

Nevertheless, it should not be concluded that these principles of the program do not contribute to its success. There are several explanations for the lacking of the expected

Figure 3: Effects on vandalism, based on relative difference scores



association. The relation between offense and work might be quite clear in the perception of the vandals. The two conversations with Halt workers before the juveniles start working, might contribute to that. With respect to the duration of settlement one should keep in mind that it is already rather short in comparison to judicial procedures. The absence of a relationship between effectiveness and variation in duration (within this short period) does not rule out the possibility of relatively fast settlement being (partly) responsible for the success of the settlement. Moreover, the two meetings with Halt workers take place within a few weeks after offending. Consequently the reaction is in fact starting a lot sooner than is indicated by the start of the alternative work. The fact that financial compensation did not contribute to the effectiveness is perhaps due to payment by parents. In that case the juveniles themselves don't experience negative consequences. Unfortunately, the data do not reveal whether the juveniles themselves or the parents actually paid for the damage. Finally it should be kept in mind that compensation meets the needs of the injured. For those injured by vandalism very few possibilities for restitution exist without mediation by the program. That is why compensation is an important feature of the Halt program (even if it would not contribute to lowered recidivism rates).

Activities aimed at preventing vandalism

Besides arranging alternative settlements for vandals who are caught by the police, the Halt program concerns itself with prevention of vandalism and intervention in situations in which vandalism occurs. The Halt projects have organized a wide variety of activities in this area. Some of these activities, undertaken by the program in Rotterdam, Eindhoven and Dordrecht have been followed for a few years. To give an impression of the variety of these activities, some examples will be given.

In Dordrecht for example, Halt was involved in a school project that was started in order to prevent vandalism in a neighbourhood of the city. Parents, pupils, the police, the municipality and Halt cooperated in organizing an information market and cleaning up the neighbourhood. Besides that, Halt assisted a few groups of juveniles in finding and arranging youth homes for themselves. In Rotterdam Halt started experiments in which unemployed juveniles guarded bicycle

stores, parks and shoppingcenters, while keeping their unemployment benefit. In the same framework, reparation and cleaning teams were installed. And Halt was involved in tackling several problems concerning vandalism, graffiti and burglary in a newly built quarter of Rotterdam. In Eindhoven, Halt is responsible for the organization and execution of a municipal anti graffiti program. This Halt project is also involved in cleaning activities by pupils; Halt supervises the activities and provides material for cleaning. It might be clear that the activities of the program aimed at preventing vandalism can vary from a slight intervention in one neighbourhood to a more elaborate project involving the city as a whole. Sometimes Halt operates on its own, whereas at some other times Halt is part of a joint venture of several organizations and persons, cooperating to prevent vandalism or tackle special problems with juveniles.

Overview of the 43 projects

This evaluation of the Halt program would be incomplete without information on the principles, criteria and actual working methods of the 43 projects in the Netherlands. A systematic overview did not exist and for that reason the 43 projects were surveyed. Besides, information was collected on the actual settling in the projects. This yielded information on the settling of about 3000 vandals. Information was collected by interviewing Halt workers of the 43 projects. The most important findings of the survey are discussed, as far as they might be of interest to the (foreign) reader.

Though all the projects copied the model that was developed in Rotterdam, several differences among them do exist. These differences are due to slight modifications of the original model as a result of the working methods and preferences of local authorities such as the prosecutor, the police or the municipality.

The bulk of the projects is organized as part of the municipality (69.7%). The remaining projects (30.3%) are organized as welfare institutions or are part of existing welfare institutions. Whatever the chosen organizational form, the public prosecutor is always responsible for the alternative settlement. All of the projects are monitored by a conducting committee in which the municipality, the public prosecutor and the police are almost always represented. The program is financed partly by the local municipalities and partly by the

Table 3: Effects on vandalism in relation to vandalism before intervention

effect	number of vandalistic offenses before intervention					
	0 - 2		3 - 10		≥ 11	
	number	%	number	%	number	%
stopped	16	35.6	4	10.5	6	14.6
decreased	2	4.4	22	57.9	28	68.3
no difference	10	22.2	3	7.9	0	0.0
increased	17	37.8	9	23.7	7	17.1
total	45	100	38	100	41	100

Chi² = 45.60, df = 6, p ≤ 0.01

government within the framework of the national crime prevention policyplan Society and Crime (1985). In principle a juvenile vandal is referred to the Halt program by the police. Because the police might by mistake fail to refer, the possibility has been created for the public prosecutor to refer to the program as yet. Whether a juvenile vandal is actually referred to the program is dependent upon several criteria concerning among others: the type of offense, financial loss, age, and the number of former referrals to the program. The criteria are established by the conducting committee and the public prosecutor has a major role in assessing them.

As far as the offense is concerned, the majority of projects is limited to vandalism. In practice, the police are using a list of Halt offenses in deciding on referral to the program. In some projects a rather flexible interpretation of vandalism is handled. A damage, accompanied with a small theft can be referred to those projects. For example, some kids are smashing windows, one gets the idea of sneaking in through the broken glass and takes something away. In such cases the ground for referral is vandalism, though formally spoken it would be burglary. In a few projects other petty crime than vandalism is explicitly included in the list of 'Halt facts'. In practice the most frequent occurring grounds for referral are graffiti (37.4%), malicious damage (33.5%) and mischief (13.6%), thus appeared from the information that was collected on the actual settling of about 3000 cases. In 70% of the projects a maximum limit is set to the financial loss caused by the offense being settled alternatively. Mostly these maximum limits are set on dfl. 1500,-. Cases in which the loss exceeds dfl. 1500,- cannot be settled by the program. Concerning the age criterium, to all projects juveniles from 12 to 18 can be referred. In almost all projects the possibility to deviate from these age limits does exist. In those projects juveniles from eighteen and older can also be settled. This being used for juveniles who have been caught together with 12 to 18 year old juveniles. In about half of the projects it is even possible for kids younger than 12 to be referred to the program. The way in which those cases are handled is adapted; those kids don't have to work but instead have to write a paper or make a small piece of work. In practice deviation from the age limits 12-18 seldom occurs. More than 90% of the 3000 referred cases concerned 12 to 17 year olds. The bulk of the clients are 14 to 16 year olds. Only 1.7% was younger than 12 and about 7% was 18 years or older. With respect to the possible number of referrals to the

program, in most projects a vandal can participate in the program only two times. Being caught again because of vandalism, for the third time, results in sending the case to the public prosecutor who will decide on the way of settling. Just like the referral procedure, the actual settling is bound by guidelines, assessed by the conducting committee. In all projects the juveniles have two meetings with Halt workers before the start of work and compensation. In those conversations, Halt workers and juveniles talk about the circumstances and reasons for committing the offense. Besides that, information is collected on the background of the offender. Finally these two conversations should result in a proposal for settling and all the parties involved have to agree on it: the juvenile, his parents, Halt, the public prosecutor and the injured. When everybody agrees and the work is arranged the actual settling can take place.

All projects aim at establishing a relation between alternative work and offense (the reason for referral to Halt). This means cleaning up or repairing the plastered or damaged objects. If establishing such a relation appears to be impossible, other kinds of work in favor of the harmed are pursued, thus still establishing a certain kind of relation between work and offense. Most of the Halt workers reported to experience little trouble in establishing a relation between offense and work. In all projects a fast settlement is pursued and it appears that this is realized in fact. The average settling duration in the 43 projects amounts to eight weeks (between the moment of referral to the start of work). In half of the projects four weeks or less elaps between referral to the project and the start of work.

Generally the duration of work is bound to upper and lower limits differing from project to project. Actually the duration of work in practice varies from 2 up to 80 hours, the average being about 8 hours.

With the exception of one project, all projects mediate in arranging compensation. In practice the percentage of cases with mentionable financial damage is about 40%. The program mediated successfully in about 80% of those cases. Failing mediations are in most cases due to a lack of cooperation from the injured party.

Conclusion

The Halt program, in which prevention activities and alternative settlement of juvenile vandals are combined, appears to be an effective way of dealing with vandalism.

The program seems to reach a group of juveniles that are quite 'normal' considering characteristics such as functioning at school, home situation and the use of alcohol and drugs. Considering delinquency however, the Halt group is rather delinquent, far more delinquent than average Dutch juveniles. The alternative settlement appears to be effective, resulting for more than 60% of the referred vandals in lowered self reported recidivism or even stopping with vandalism, while only 25% of a control group that was settled by the police in a traditional way, showed a decrease of vandalism and no one stopped. Given the effectiveness of the program it is recommended to extend it so that the whole country can be covered. Furthermore, it should be seriously considered to expand this alternative approach to other petty crime because the program has proven to be effective and has some specific advantages. The settlement is fast, about two times as fast as the settling by the prosecutor. The vandal is confronted with the negative consequences of his own malicious behaviour. Because the program is a kind of diversion program, the juvenile offenders are not recorded in the judicial documentation, thus preventing stigmatizing side-effects to occur. And last but not least the injured party is compensated. At the moment a small scale experiment is being carried out with the alternative settlement of juvenile shoplifters. The results of this experiment will shed light on the question whether or not this much promising alternative approach to vandalism is as suitable and effective in tackling other kinds of petty crime.

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