

Summary

This is a report on a study on the questions and needs of Antillean, Moroccan, Surinamese and Turkish parents concerning their children's problems with the police and court system. The underlying reasons for this study are the over-representation of young suspects from these four ethnic groups, the observed lack of familiarity on the part of their parents with the Dutch criminal law system, and the notion that the way information and support are now provided does not meet their needs. It is felt to be important to involve parents in dealing with juvenile crime so as to make every effort to keep children from turning to more serious crime. Involving parents not only means keeping them informed, it means appealing to their sense of responsibility in raising their children and giving them a role in the pursuit of purposeful interventions.

The study has two aims:

- 1. to gain insight into the questions and needs of ethnic minority parents concerning their children's problems with the police and court system*
- 2. to design an approach to involve parents more in the events after their children's criminal conduct so as to make every effort to prevent any further criminal conduct.*

In addition to a literature survey, there are two parts of the study, one among 66 parents and one among 13 key figures from the police and the courts. The study among the parents is confined to Antillean, Moroccan, Surinamese and Turkish parents of juveniles in the 12 to 18 age group in trouble with one of more of the following agencies in the criminal law chain: the police, Halt office, criminal law unit of the Child Care and Protection Board and judicial institution for minors. The study is conducted in the Nijmegen / Arnhem vicinity and in Rotterdam. An effort is made to maintain an even distribution of the parents over the stages of the criminal law chain and the four ethnic groups. The parents are approached in writing and in person with a request to take part in the study, and many of them are willing to do so. The parents are interviewed using a standardized questionnaire including open and closed questions. The key figures are staff members of the police, Halt office, Child Care and Protection Board and judicial institution for minors who have ample practical experience. They are interviewed by telephone.

In the study attention is devoted to the explanatory models of parents: how they interpret their children's criminal conduct and think they can deal with it. There is also a focus on how parents view the police and court approach, their experiences with criminal law agencies, and the role cultural differences play. Questions are also asked about how familiar the parents are with the criminal court agencies and how they work. The role of the parents' social network and their needs for support are also addressed. We also examine the parents' involvement with how their child is dealt with. Attention is always focused on whether there are differences between the various ethnic groups or between the parents of juveniles at various stages of the criminal law chain.

Parents mainly put the blame for their children's criminal conduct outside their own realm of responsibility and attribute it to external factors, such as the negative influence of the wrong friends. They definitely do however see themselves as playing a role in the solutions to their children's criminal conduct and also attribute a role to the staff at school. In the talks with key figures, less of a willingness is observed on the part of parents to work towards solutions for their children, particularly in the case of Moroccan Berber parents and to less of an extent in

the case of Turkish parents. Parents prefer to deal with their children's criminal conduct by authoritative control, support and greater supervision. Parents expect a different approach from the police and courts: the emphasis here is more on punishment and working very specifically on prospects for the children's future.

Most parents feel the alternative sentences at Halt or the Child Care and Protection Board are a good response to their children's offences. They are less positive when it comes to imprisoning juveniles: they sometimes feel their children's sentences are too long and complain that imprisonment interrupts their children's education. The police reactions to criminal conduct by juveniles are not evaluated so positively, and this is especially the case when parents and children are at a more advanced stage of the criminal law chain.

The more advanced parents are in the criminal law chain, the less confidence they generally have in the police and court approach. This is evident from the study among parents as well as the talks with key figures. Personnel at the end of the chain note that so much went wrong at the previous stages of the chain that it is very difficult to still involve the parents and appeal to their sense of responsibility.

The parents are not at all familiar with the Dutch criminal law system, particularly the tasks or responsibilities of the criminal law unit of the Child Care and Protection Board. Moroccan parents are the least familiar with the system. According to key figures who were interviewed, they not only lack insight into court procedures and interventions, they are also poorly informed about the pedagogical approach to juvenile offenders that court agencies use.

According to half the parents, the cultural differences between themselves and the court agency representatives are obstacles to a good solution for their child. In addition to language differences, there are different norms and values and different views on how to raise children. The parents also sense a certain amount of discrimination, particularly on the part of the police, and feel that none of the court agencies have much understanding of their cultural background. The key figures also note an important difference between how open ethnic minority and Dutch children are with their parents. An important aspect of the cultural differences between ethnic minority parents and court agencies pertains to their views on raising children. As the interviewed key figures see it, the parents of youngsters who have committed a criminal offence often act in an authoritarian fashion. The parents in our study state that they prefer to deal with the criminal conduct of their child by authoritative control. It is however also observed that some parents, particularly Turkish and Moroccan ones, wish to act in a more authoritarian way. They do not feel the court agency personnel understands this, nor do they themselves understand the Dutch approach. It is clear from the talks with the key figures that to a certain extent and not in a structural way, the cultural background of youngsters and their parents is taken into consideration. This is evident from the use of translations and interpreters, the consideration for the shame felt by parents and their children, and the greater efforts to reach ethnic minority parents and recruit ethnic minority personnel.

According to the parents, the agencies do not make enough of an effort to involve them in dealing with their children. At the very least, all the parents have a need to be informed about the offence committed by their child and the resulting criminal law interventions. In practice the parents do not feel this is done enough, especially not by the police. The study among the parents shows that when agencies approach them, they tend to cooperate. The study among the key figures makes us question this finding though, since they do not report a high percentage of especially the Moroccan or Turkish parents showing up. However a number of key figures do note a willingness on the parents' part, but also note that more efforts should

be made to get them past the threshold. This willingness on the parents' part is also observed in the study. Almost half of them state that they are willing to make an extra effort to help bridge the gap between themselves and the court agencies.

There are however limits to how involved parents can be in dealing with their children. It is clear from the study that not all parents take an offence committed by their child that seriously, they play it down or make excuses, particularly in the case of violent offences and Antillean parents. There does not seem to be much point to involving these parents in the interventions pertaining to their children, though they should at least be kept informed. Key figures also note that it is sometimes difficult to manoeuvre between the youngsters' interests and the importance of informing and involving their parents. It is sometimes in youngsters' interest not to have their behaviour discussed in the presence of their parents, particularly if it is behaviour their parents disapprove of such as smoking, drinking or having sexual relations. There is friction here between reality and the desirability of involving parents in dealing with their children. If parents are not aware of certain behaviour by their children, they can hardly be expected to help find a solution.

Parents receive support from their spouse and the other children in the family who also appear to play a role in dealing with the child who has committed an offence. These people and other relatives also play a role in the contact with the police and court system. Key figures evaluate this support by individuals other than the parents in various ways. It is clear from the talks with key figures that it would be good to enlarge the role and involvement of Moroccan and Turkish mothers because they often bear the main responsibility for the upbringing and are apt to have more influence than fathers.

Two fifths of the parents express a need for support in maintaining contact with the police and court system, and two fifths of the parents express a need for help in bringing up their children. Their preference is for individual talks and advice from professionals and support in raising their children and information specifically geared to their situation, in other words that pertains to the age group of twelve and above and provides information on ways to prevent undesirable conduct. Parents also prefer to receive support from professionals, including school personnel. They express an equal need for support from Dutch and ethnic minority professionals.

Following from what is noted above and on the basis of ideas for improvements suggested by the key figures, recommendations have been formulated on

- a more active agency approach to parents
- interculturalization and greater accessibility of agencies
- involving other relatives and reinforcing the role of mainly Moroccan and Turkish mothers
- appealing to parent's skills and supporting their use of child-raising strategies to prevent further criminal conduct by their children
- providing parents with information
- working together with school personnel.