



Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek- en  
Documentatiecentrum

Cahier 2023-2

# Van incident tot misdrijf?

*Het verband tussen betrokkenheid bij  
incidenten en verdachtenregistraties  
onder COA-bewoners 2017-2021*

Summary

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Summary

Noyon, S.M.  
Latenko, A.  
Vink, M.E.

**Cahier**

De reeks Cahier omvat de rapporten van onderzoek dat door en in opdracht van het Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek- en Documentatiecentrum is verricht. Opname in de reeks betekent niet dat de inhoud van de rapporten het standpunt van de Minister van Justitie en Veiligheid weergeeft.

## Summary

### From incident to crime?

#### The relationship between involvement in incidents and suspect registrations among COA inhabitants 2017-2021

In 2022, WODC published the report 'Incidents and crimes among COA inhabitants 2017-2021' (Noyon et al., 2022)<sup>1</sup>. The current study builds on this by further analysing some of the figures reported there. Specifically, the research focuses on the question whether we can speak of a relationship between involvement in incidents and criminal behaviour. This way, it implicitly questions the structure of the annual report on incidents and crime, which jointly presents the two and thereby suggests a relationship. In addition, by predictive factors underlying criminal behaviour, the current study informs policy aimed at prevention of crime.

#### Definitions and method

We may distinguish different types of incidents that take place at COA reception locations. The current study includes instances of verbal suicide threats, self-destructive actions, and physical, verbal, and/or nonverbal violence. In describing types of crime, we follow the Statistics Netherlands categorisation. This does not include misdemeanours (e.g. speeding tickets).

COA aims to improve problematic behaviour by taking measures following incidents. Possible measures include withdrawal of allowances or services, transfer to a reception centre with increased surveillance, or alternative measures (for instance a corrective conversation or letter).

The current research is based on the same data that were used for the previously published incidents and crime report (Noyon et al., 2022)<sup>12</sup>. The analysis focused on all incidents and suspect registrations for criminal offenses that had been recorded among those who lived in a COA reception centre between January 2017 and December 2021, including information on frequency and type of the events. The analysis unit was a month. Adopting a panel Poisson model allowed for including the actual time that people had spent in a reception centre in the analyses.

The majority of the analyses focused only on those who had been involved in at least one incident and/or criminal offense during their stay with COA. This implied limiting the research population to about 12% of the total group of COA inhabitants. For this reason, the figures reported here apply only to this subselection and cannot be generalised to the entire population of COA inhabitants.

The analytical approach is discussed in more detail in section 2.2.

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<sup>1</sup> Noyon, S.M., Latenko, A., Vink, M.E., & Van den Braak, S.W. (2022). *Incidenten en misdrijven door COA-bewoners 2017-2021*. Den Haag: WODC. Cahier 2022-6.

## Research questions and results

The study focused on the following research questions, which will be answered below.

- 1 Is there a relationship between involvement in incidents and crime?  
As the study shows, we can indeed speak of a relationship between involvement in incidents and crime. Among COA inhabitants who have been involved in an incident of one of the types included here, the average number of people who are suspects in a criminal investigation is 2.75 times higher than among inhabitants who have never been involved in an incident. This number increases by 2.75 for every incident involved in. If we focus only on those who were involved in at least one incident and/or crime, the rate increases by 33% for every incident involved in. It is important to note that the rates are generally low: the large majority of COA inhabitants is never a suspect in a criminal investigation.
- 1a Does this relationship vary by the type of incident and offense?  
Controlling for the type of incident a person was involved in corresponds to a 22% increase of the average number of suspects in a criminal investigation for each incident involved in. This implies that the type of incident explains part of the relationship between incidents and crime. In other words, the type of incident someone is involved in has an effect on the number of registrations as a crime suspect. The analyses indicate that especially those involved in incidents concerning physical violence are more likely to be suspects in a criminal investigation. This seems to apply in particular to property damage and acts causing harm or intending to cause harm to a person such as assaults and threats.
- 1b Does this relationship vary by background variables (e.g. age, gender, nationality, reception type) of the person involved?  
Controlling for relevant background variables (age, gender, nationality, reception type, total duration of stay and number of transfers) does not have any noteworthy influence on the relationship between incidents and crime. This implies that the relationship between incidents and suspect registrations cannot be explained by group composition effects.
- 2 What is the effect of measures imposed by COA on the relationship between incidents and crime?  
The analyses show that the number and type of measures imposed by COA play into the relationship between incidents and crime, but it is hard to understand how exactly. This is because the imposed measures are endogenous to the incident(s) COA inhabitants are involved in (i.e. the more serious the incident, the more severe the corresponding measure). Moreover, the reasoning behind imposing a certain measure is not always clear based on the quantitative data. More research is needed to better understand the importance of imposed measures for the relationship between incidents and crime.
- 2a Does this relationship depend on the location where the person involved is staying?  
The analyses suggest that we can speak of differences between locations, but these results should be interpreted carefully due to the complexity of the model. More research is needed to gain insight in the ways in which locations differ from one another and whether these differences are indeed due to the local 'regime' or to other factors (e.g. the composition of the group of inhabitants).

### Directions for future research

The current study shows that there is a relationship between involvement in incidents and criminal behaviour. This implies that an adequate response to incidents at COA reception locations can contribute to the prevention of escalation of behaviour – i.e. crime. Preferably, this happens before people can be considered a 'systematic nuisance' (*Kamerstukken II 2019/20, 19 637, nr. 2572, p. 3*). To this end, future research should provide further insight into the importance of measures for the relationship between incidents and criminal behaviour and the way location effects play into this. This research can be of both qualitative and quantitative nature. Moreover, it is important to develop a deeper understanding of root causes. Whereas the results of the current study underline the importance of behaviour, thereby providing a starting point for policy aimed at prevention of crime, the reasons why some COA inhabitants display such behaviour in the first place remain unclear at this point. Possible underlying causes are problems of psychological or psychiatric nature, but abuse related issues or accumulative issues could be of importance, too. Future (qualitative) research should further explore the importance of these factors.

Het Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek- en Documentatiecentrum (WODC) is het kennisinstituut voor het ministerie van Justitie en Veiligheid. Het WODC doet zelf onafhankelijk wetenschappelijk onderzoek of laat dit doen door erkende instituten en universiteiten, ter ondersteuning van beleid en uitvoering.

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