



Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek- en
Documentatiecentrum

Cahier 2023-3

Meisjescriminaliteit

*Een onderzoek naar de kenmerken en
risicofactoren van delinquente meisjes en
jongvolwassen vrouwen in algemene,
politie- en justitiële populaties*

Summary

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Een onderzoek naar de kenmerken en risicofactoren van delinquente meisjes en jongvolwassen vrouwen in algemene, politie- en justitiële populaties

Summary

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Cahier

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

Summary

Delinquent Girls

[A study of characteristics and risk factors of delinquent girls and young women in general, police and judicial populations](#)

This report contains several studies on delinquent girls and young women in the ages 12 through 27, which from now on will be referred to as girls. The different studies address delinquent girls that have, and have not, been in contact with the police and justice department. The three main research questions are:

- 1 What does (international) literature say about risk and protective factors of delinquent girls? How do girls in judicial populations differ from delinquent girls in general populations?
- 2 What is known about (self-reported) delinquency among girls (aged 12 through 22) from a general population of Dutch youths? What is known about their characteristics and risk factors?
- 3 What are considerations of justice professionals in the treatment of delinquent girls (aged 12 through 27) in the criminal justice system, concerning criminal suspicion, prosecution and judgment?

Where possible, the studies compares girls to boys. The results are divided in two parts: firstly, the results from studies concerning delinquent girls from general populations, and subsequently, the results concerning judicial populations.

Delinquent girls in general populations

Girls in general populations report less delinquent behaviour than boys, but girl delinquency is not non-existent. In the most recent edition of the Youth Delinquency Survey (YDS) the prevalence of self-reported traditional delinquency (i.e., excluding cybercrime) is 29% among girls aged 12 through 17, and 21% among young adult women aged 18 through 22. For boys and young adult men this prevalence is, respectively, 45% and 39%. Overall, the crimes reported by youth mostly concern petty crime, and the number of youths suspected or arrested by police are much lower.

Sex differences in delinquent behaviour might be due to sex differences in exposure and sensitivity to risk and protective factors of delinquent behaviour. More specifically, girls may experience less exposure to risk factors. While the literature rarely addresses sex differences in exposure, instead focusing more on sensitivity, the sub-study using YDS data does suggest that girls, for instance, report less use of alcohol and drugs, fewer delinquent friends, and more involvement from their parents in their daily lives. Analyses on the 2010, 2015 and 2020 cohorts of the YDS support this line of

reasoning, as sex is no longer a significant predictor for self-reported delinquency, after controlling for characteristics and risk factors.

Furthermore, the literature suggests that girls experience different risk factors than boys, besides experiencing a number of shared factors. Sexual abuse would be a more prominent risk factor among girls, whereas psychopathic tendencies and antisocial attitudes would be more prominent among boys.

Delinquent girls in police and judicial populations

When girls report self-delinquent behaviour, police less likely suspect or arrest them compared to boys who also report such behaviour. For instance, discrepancies between the prevalence in self-reported delinquent behaviour and arrest rates are larger for girls than for boys. Furthermore, analyses on self-report data enriched with police registrations also show similar discrepancies. When delinquent girls and boys have similar characteristics and risk profiles, arrest odds are still lower for girls than for boys.

In addition, delinquent girls and boys differ in the type of behaviour they exhibit. Not only are girls involved with fewer and less violent crimes, girls also have different roles. For example, girls more often have social roles, such as recruiting victims for fraud and extortion. Boys on the other hand, fulfil more physical and violent roles. These differences in types of behaviour and roles might lead to lower suspicion and arrest rates for girls. Nevertheless, interviewed police officers do say that the stereotype of the non-delinquent girl is losing traction, and that girls are now considered more often as suspects, even for serious and violent crimes.

While interviewed justice professionals report sex differentiation in the treatment of delinquents, such differentiation is also reported to be undesirable. Instances of different treatment for girls than boys, when circumstances are similar, do happen. These differences could be due to different behaviour by girls towards justice professionals. For example, girls are more communicative and transparent, and are less likely to use their right to remain silent.

However, justice professionals also mention that more effort is made to make girls feel more comfortable. For example, by matching the sex of interrogators with those of suspects, or inquiring whether any arrangements need made for any children at home. Furthermore, lawyers say that they do try to put girls in a different light than boys, by enforcing stereotypes such as 'loving mother' or 'victim of sexual exploitation'.

Despite the above-mentioned sex differences in treatment, justice professionals do claim that one's sex plays little role in actual judicial decisions and judgments. Analyses of interviews and judicial decisions show an emphasis on personal circumstances and age of the offender. One found exception comes from logistical issues, with fewer available detention cells for girls than boys, which might result in fewer pre-trial detentions for girls.

Conclusion and recommendations

The results from the quantitative analyses are not necessarily generalizable to all Dutch girls and boys who (claim to) exhibit delinquent behaviour. This, however, does not nullify the observation that delinquent girls differ from delinquent boys in risk and protective factors, as the literature study suggests this as well. Furthermore, girls seem to commit different types of crime than boys, and play different roles in criminal acts. Lastly, interviewed justice professionals suggest that they perceive girls differently than boys.

Given what is mentioned above, it is likely that girls have lower odds than boys of being suspected and arrested when they exhibit delinquent behaviour. Once they do enter the criminal justice system, there seems to be a blind spot with justice professionals that they actually treat girls different from boys.

Future studies should focus on verifying whether the currently observed phenomena are found more widespread within the criminal justice system. When, for instance, sex differential treatment is common, studies should evaluate whether differential treatment is beneficial for both girls and boys. After all, delinquent girls and boys do differ from another, and might have different needs for resocialization.

Lastly, it is recommended that justice professionals and policy makers invest in education on the topic of delinquent girls. The interviews show that knowledge on delinquent girls might be lacking among justice professionals, as they rarely encounter girls in their daily work. Education might contribute to awareness of how justice professionals treat delinquent girls (differently) and to a more equal criminal justice system for both girls and boys.

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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