



Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek- en
Datacentrum

Cahier 2024-14

Self-reported juvenile delinquency in the Netherlands in 2022/2023

Summary

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Cahier

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

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Introduction

The Monitor for Self-Reported Juvenile Delinquency (MZJ) is a periodic study conducted by the WODC in collaboration with Statistics Netherlands (CBS) to track developments in juvenile delinquency in the Netherlands. This is done by describing developments based on juvenile delinquency registered by the police and justice system. However, a significant proportion of the offenses and offenders do not come to the attention of the police and justice system. It is estimated that more than three quarters of the experienced offenses are not solved. Therefore, information is also periodically collected from an independent source, namely self-reported juvenile delinquency by young people themselves. Since the 1980s, the WODC has been conducting research based on this source. Since 2005, the Monitor for Self-Reported Juvenile Delinquency (MZJ) has been in place, in which a random sample of young people between the ages of 10 and 23 (in 2015 increased to young people up to 23 years of age) from the Dutch population is questioned about their delinquent behavior. A face-to-face survey was conducted every five years to measure self-reported offending and victimization of offenses, as well as risk and protective factors. Measuring self-reported delinquency by means of a survey is an important source for gaining further insight into juvenile delinquency, because this source is not affected by registration or reporting effects, such as those that can play a role in police and justice registrations.

Research method

The Monitor for Self-Reported Juvenile Delinquency (MZJ) consists of an online survey with closed questions about offending and victimization of a wide range of offenses (varying in type and seriousness), various risk and protective factors for delinquency in the individual, family, friends and school context and demographic characteristics. As far as delinquency is concerned, it is about self-reported delinquency in the twelve months prior to the survey. A sample of 80.000 was drawn from the basic personal records of all young people in the Netherlands aged 12 to 23. In total, 21.771 young people (27.1% of the sample) completed the questionnaire in full in the spring of 2023. This is higher than expected. The sample was designed to overrepresent young people from a risk group (previous police contacts). The final selectivity on socio-demographic characteristics is comparable to other CBS online surveys among the Dutch population. After reweighting on nine characteristics, the results from the study group are representative of the population of 10- to 23-year-olds living in the Netherlands. The size of the sample from the general population of 10- to 23-year-olds and the overrepresentation of young people from a risk group make the study unique in its kind, not only for the Netherlands but also internationally.

Results

Self-reported delinquency in 2023

Pre-teens (10 to 12 years old)

In 2023, 12.7% of pre-teens reported having committed one or more offenses in the past year. Offenses in the category of violence were most commonly reported, followed by property offenses and cyber offenses. For pre-teens, it was mainly about hitting someone else without injury, followed by theft at school or logging into someone's account without permission. Weapon possession was rare. It was probably largely about very minor offenses in this age group, where there is a good chance that these reported offenses will not lead to police action. However, this cannot be said with certainty because the seriousness of it cannot be derived from the self-reporting items themselves.

If we break down the results by different socio-demographic background characteristics, it is striking that there are no differences in the prevalence of self-reported delinquency by country of origin (for traditional offenses), household income, degree of urbanization or region. However, more boys than girls report having committed an offense, as do young people from a single-parent family compared to other family compositions. More pre-teens with a European background report cybercrime than pre-teens from other background groups.

Minors (12 to 18 years old)

In 2023, 16.5% of minors reported committing one or more offenses in the past year. Violence and online offenses were the most commonly reported (9%), with the latter mainly involving cybercrime (7%). Drug offenses were rare; less than 1% of minors reported such an offense (mainly soft drug sales). Serious forms of cybercrime, such as sending viruses, carrying out DDoS attacks, or hacking, were also reported by less than 1% of minors.

Within the group of minors, there are differences according to various demographic background characteristics. 16- and 17-year-olds report slightly more offenses than minors aged 12 to 16, with the exception of property offenses, vandalism, weapon possession, and online offenses. Property offenses and weapon possession were again reported slightly more often by 12- to 16-year-olds. More boys than girls report an offense, with a few exceptions such as shoplifting and weapon possession for defense.

Broken down by country of origin, minors of Dutch origin report slightly more often than youth with another origin an offense (violence and property). More minors of Dutch origin also report an online offense, particularly cybercrime. There are no differences by country of origin for weapon possession and drug dealing. Broken down by socioeconomic status (SES), it appears that youth with their own income report an offense slightly more often than other groups, and youth from the highest household incomes report an offense relatively more often than youth from the lowest household income group. Differences are particularly evident for property offenses and cybercrime. There are no significant differences in the occurrence of delinquency according to the type of household of the family.

There are hardly any differences in self-reported delinquency among minors broken down by the degree of urbanization of the municipality of residence. This applies to all categories. There are also hardly any differences by region. Self-reported delinquency by minors occurs about equally often everywhere in the Netherlands. Finally, at least twice as many minors who have had previous contact with the police report one or more offenses in the past year than young people who have not had previous police contacts. This applies regardless of the type of traditional offense. Violence is reported 2 times as often, weapon possession 2.5 times, property offenses 3 times, and drug dealing 9 times as often. It is possible that the chance of previous police contacts is greatest for drug dealing. There are no differences between the groups in terms of reporting cybercrime. A significant proportion of young people who self-report offenses (between 13 and 17%) had not been in contact with the police in the three years prior to the study.

Young adults (18 to 23 years old)

Just over 17% of young adults reported involvement in one or more offenses in 2023. The offenses were mainly property offenses (6.4%), followed by cybercrime (5.1%) and violence (4.7%). Involvement in drug dealing was the least common (1.7%). However, all percentages in this age group are higher than in the younger age groups.

When broken down by different background characteristics, similar differences emerge as for minors. Young men report involvement in all categories of delinquency more often than women, with the exception of weapon possession and cybercrime, which do not differ between the sexes. Young adults of Dutch or European origin report more offenses than those from non-European countries. This is particularly true for property offenses, violence and cybercrime. There are no differences between young people from different backgrounds in terms of vandalism, weapon possession, drug dealing or digitized offenses.

In terms of characteristics such as being in school, type of household, household income, degree of urbanization and region, there are hardly any differences in the prevalence of self-reported offenses over the past year. As with minors, significantly more young adults who have had previous contact with the police report one or more offenses than young adults who have not had previous contact with the police (at least twice as many). This difference applies especially to violence and drug dealing and not to other traditional offenses (not significant), cybercrime and digitized offenses, where the groups do not differ.

Age differences in delinquency

A comparison between the surveyed age groups shows some striking differences. The 12-to-18-year-old age group (minors) reports the most traditional and online offenses, compared to the 10-to-11-year-old age group (pre-teens) and the 18-to-23-year-old age group (young adults); in traditional offenses, young adults report the fewest offenses, while pre-teens report the fewest online offenses.

For different types of offenses, minors report vandalism offenses most often, young adults report drug dealing and digitized offenses most often. If no distinction is made between traditional and online offenses, then minors appear to report the most offenses, followed by young adults and then pre-teens. Weapon possession, although not very common, appears to increase with age. The same applies to drug dealing.

Delinquency groups

In this study, delinquency among young people was classified on the basis of frequency and severity for 12- to 23-year-olds. The following three groups are distinguished:

- non-delinquent (79%);
- slightly delinquent (19%);
- seriously delinquent (1%).

The non-delinquents have hardly committed any offenses, the slightly delinquent have committed few and minor offenses, and the seriously delinquent have either committed many minor offenses and/or serious offenses. As the severity of delinquency increases, the number and diversity of types of offenses increases, the percentage of males increases, the percentage of single-parent households increases, and the percentage of young people of non-European origin increases.

The differences in risk and protective factors between the groups are small but do show the expected direction. As the severity of delinquency increases, problem behavior increases, antisocial attitudes increase, openness to parents decreases, parental control decreases, delinquency by friends increases, school performance decreases, and satisfaction with school decreases. Furthermore, more alcohol is drunk more often, drugs are used more often, and more problems at home and problems with money, alcohol, drugs and gaming/internet use are reported.

Relationship between risk and protective factors and delinquency groups

After correcting for demographic characteristics, various risk and protective factors appear to be very strongly associated with belonging to the slightly and seriously delinquent group, compared to non-delinquents. However, on the basis of this study, it cannot be said whether there is a causal relationship. With a (+) we indicate that the more one has of a factor, the greater the chance of belonging to the slightly and seriously delinquent group, with the strength of the association being stronger for the seriously delinquent group. With a (-) we indicate that this relationship is the opposite (the more, the less likely to belong to the slightly or seriously delinquent group). The strongest correlation with the severity of the delinquency group is found in having delinquent friends (+), antisocial attitudes (+), self-control (-) and openness to parents (-). A strong effect was also found of the number of self-reported experienced problems (+). This indicates that young people who report many or serious offenses also experience many problems in other areas of life. The findings based on a sample from the general population of young people are consistent with those in the literature.

Conclusion

This study measured delinquency in 2023 using an online survey, the Monitor Self-Reported Youth Delinquency (MZJ). The three distinguished age groups, pre-teens, minors, and young adults, differ in the types of offenses they most often commit. For example, young adults commit fewer violent offenses but have the highest rates of weapon possession and drug dealing, pre-teens commit fewer property offenses, minors commit the most vandalism and cyber and digitized offenses. The peak for committing offenses regardless of type (online or offline) is in the minor period.

The level of self-reported delinquency by young people differs greatly from that based on official police or justice data. For example, the percentage of young people who report online offenses is relatively high, while this type of offense is almost non-existent in the registrations. Other types of offenses are also reported much more often than police registrations show. On the one hand, this may be because relatively minor offenses are reported but not prosecuted. On the other hand, it may be because many offenses are not solved by the police and justice system or are not reported. Future measurements should show how self-reported youth delinquency develops over time.

The MZJ survey could also be used to measure the effectiveness of interventions and sanctions. The data from the MZJ report provide a reference group against which specific youth delinquency groups can be compared. Furthermore, the picture of risk and protective factors among (delinquent) youth groups can be used to provide input for justice policy and interventions in relation to youth crime.

Het Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek- en Datacentrum (WODC), Kennisinstituut voor de rechtsstaat, is een onafhankelijk kennisinstituut dat valt onder het ministerie van Justitie en Veiligheid. Het WODC draagt bij aan behoud en verbetering van de rechtsstaat via het (laten) uitvoeren van kwalitatief hoog wetenschappelijk onderzoek. En door het aanbieden van gevraagde en ongevraagde kennis, verbeterpunten en (waar mogelijk) denkrichtingen.

Meer informatie:

www.wodc.nl