

# Justitiële verkenningen

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## Criminal careers

### Summaries

Justitiële verkenningen (Judicial explorations) is published nine times a year by the Research and Documentation Centre of the Dutch Ministry of Justice in cooperation with the publishing house Gouda Quint BV. Each issue focuses on a central theme related to criminal law, criminal policy and criminology. This section contains abstracts of the internationally most relevant articles of each issue. The central theme of this issue is: Criminal careers.

#### **Development pathways to severe juvenile delinquency**

*R. Loeber*

This article treats the development from troublesome child behavior to severe (juvenile) delinquency and is mainly based on American longitudinal studies of boys and young men. Information shows that both severe delinquent behavior as well as the percentage of severe juvenile delinquents have increased over the last years. Severe delinquents are for the most part chronic delinquents. The survey has focussed on mapping development pathways. These pathways show that non-delinquent troublesome behavior in different forms precedes delinquent behavior of increasing severity. Development pathways are often connected with developmental lags in controlling developmental tasks such as non-aggressive and honest behavior. The development to severe delinquent behavior is closely connected with an accumulation of risk factors within the child itself, the family, school and community. The best interventions aim at diminishing those risk factors. Early, preventive interventions as well as interventions with juvenile delinquents can be successful. That is why it is never too early and never too late to intervene.

#### **Delinquent careers of boys during adolescence**

*J.A. Nijboer and F.M. Weerman*

The relationship between crime and age, and the (relative) stability of individual criminal offending during the life course are among the most consistent findings in criminological research. The interpretation of these findings however has given rise to much discussion. A fundamental question is to what degree on the one hand relatively stable, early established personality traits (population heterogeneity) and on the other hand state dependency and life course events affect the age-crime distribution and the continuity of offending. Another question is whether different explanations are needed for different types and different stages of criminal careers. Our results from longitudinal research among adolescents indicate that: the age-crime distribution has to be differentiated for different types of offenders; during adolescence, delinquency patterns show alternating periods of activity and inactivity; and actual changes in social circumstances and social bonding are related to variation in delinquency. The results ask for more dynamic models of explanation - that allow for different stages, but not necessarily for different types - in criminal career research.

#### **Delinquent adolescents; the difference between lifecourse persistent- and adolescence limited criminal behavior**

*E.T.H. Luyfers and W. Meeuws*

This study tries to distinguish life-course-persistent delinquents from those who show adolescence-limited delinquency and non-delinquents. The sample consisted of 1851 Dutch (post-)adolescents aged between 12 and 27 years. Fairly consistent differences between the three groups were found. Life-course-persistent delinquents show more serious and violent delinquency, truancy, running away and use of soft drugs. They also report poor relations with parents, low levels of commitment to school, work and societal norms, low levels of self-control and a high prevalence of negative life-events. Using discriminant-analysis we found it more easy to discriminate between non-delinquents and adolescence-limited delinquents than between adolescence-limited delinquents and life-course-persistent delinquents.

## **Shady careers; development and character of foreign adolescents' criminal careers**

*H.B. Ferwerda*

This article gives an account of a qualitative exploratory research into the development and character of criminal careers amongst foreign adolescent males. Exploring the criminal career's first phase and the importance of risky habits such as gambling and the use of alcohol and drugs, a description is given of three different criminality patterns in the criminal career's second development phase. These are: criminality as a burden (criminality type 'junks or losers'), criminality as a life ('unsocials') and criminality as a living ('the tough guys'). Criminal careers' development and character seem to depend on two elements. On the one hand the possibility to stop committing offences (existence of social perspectives as well as important social contacts) on the other hand the will to do so (the ability to resist convenience, temptation and risky habits as well as important social contacts).

## **Rites de passage; supporting structures in the transition towards adulthood**

*D.H.J. van Bekkum*

Cultural anthropologists are searching for constancies in different cultures. Transition towards adulthood is such a constancy. Boys in every culture have to make the difficult crossing into the adult world. This life stage brings about a specific transitional, liminal vulnerability. Conflicting loyalties, the main source of bad feelings and strong tensions, are triggers for dangerous and risky behavior. The 'locus operandi' for initiation of many criminal careers is a provoking atmosphere of the peer group. In rural regions and traditional societies supporting transitional structures, called 'rites of passage', are still in operation. Cultural translation of these structures to urban youth problems offer new roads for preventive programs. Rites of passage have three stages starting with separation from the old ways and social context. The second is liminal, on the threshold, period: no boy anymore but still no man. The final stage is the ceremonial reintegration into the community as an adult. Different kinds of rite of passage programs can be developed from this basic structure. Groups of boys, preferably in their own neighbourhood, can be taken into rite of passage programs fitting to their own class, ethnicity and religion.

## **Girls and crime**

*B.J.W. Docter-Schamhardt, N.M. Mertens and M. Grapendaal*

The article discusses the question whether delinquent juvenile girls tend to develop a criminal career. The term criminal career not only implies frequent offenses, it also carries the connotation of progress, of economic success. Both sides of the term are attended to. A recently published study into the frequency, kind and origin of crime among Dutch juvenile girls, revealed that over the last 15 years an increase of the frequency and a slight change in the kind of offenses can be observed. According to police statistics, since 1980 the frequency has doubled and the proportion of violent crime increased also. Self-report figures, however, show a stable image during the last 10 years. A comparison with their male counterparts shows that recidivism rates are remarkably lower for girls. A small group of girls do, however, frequently commit offenses. Given the fact that there is little diversion or progression in the categories of crime committed (mostly petty theft), there is little evidence that the girls in question develop a criminal career. Also in-depth interviews with delinquent girls give us no reason to expect them to set course for a successful criminal career. Girls who are most at risk, invariably are in the slipstream of boys, they rarely take the initiative and are prone to be influenced by male peer group members. These facts can hardly be considered as pre-conditional to a successful career.

## **Sex offenders; plurality of offenders and recidivist patterns**

*P. van den Eshof*

In general, both the media and the general public are of the opinion that sex offenders are specialised in sex crimes of a certain nature. Scientific study of recidivist patterns, however, has shown that most sex offenders commit different kinds of crimes, and that the chance of recidivism is relatively small. However, the methodology of many of the studies of recidivist patterns is subjected to criticism. Random surveys are rare, and the follow-up period is often very limited; the surveys are almost always based on judicial classification, and sex offenders are usually seen as a homogeneous group. Apart from the distinction that is made between rapists and child molesters, it is desirable to divide both groups further into subcategories, taking into account the offenders' sexual preferences, motivation, and criminal behaviour. Research has shown, for example, that not all child molesters are paedophiles. When sex offenders are divided into groups, it might be possible to recognise certain categories of specialised sex offenders. In relation to the total number of sex offenders, the number of these categories is rather small.

