

## Summaries

*Justitiële verkenningen* (Judicial explorations) is published eight times a year by the Research and Documentation Centre of the Dutch Ministry of Justice in cooperation with Boom Juridische uitgevers. Each issue focuses on a central theme related to judicial policy. The section Summaries contains abstracts of the internationally most relevant articles of each issue. The central theme of this issue (nr. 8, 2008) is *Young children and crime prevention*.

### **The state, child protection and ‘the interest of the child’**

*B. Kruithof*

Parents and professional educators often disagree when it comes to the upbringing of children. What is meant by ‘the interest of the child’? When confronted on the issue of miseducation and even worse, child abuse, child savers strove to separate children from their biological parents and to have them re-educated in asylums. At the end of the nineteenth century there were hundreds of asylums in the Netherlands. However, there was not a single law on child protection until 1901, when the first Children’s law (*Kinderwetten*) was broadly accepted in parliament. This was not a solution to all problems, however. Child savers were generally equipped with little more than a basic knowledge of psychology. After the Second World War professionalism, helped by schooling and more money, took its place. Re-educating children and parents was footed on scientific expertise. Problems however did not disappear and now again a new civilization offensive and a harsher use of penal law arise. Whether this will make an end to child abuse and dangerous children remains unclear. The ideals of the child savers of the nineteenth century, to protect children from the outside world, seem to have given way to new ideals, of protecting society against its abused children. Still, it remains vague how ‘the interest of the child’ can be promoted.

### **Young children and delinquent behaviour**

*P.H. van der Laan, N.W. Slot and M. Hoeve*

In the Netherlands subjects of criminal prosecution must have a minimum age of twelve years. Therefore offences committed by young children are not or insufficiently registered. In spite of this

the authors try to offer more insight into the size and characteristics of young childrens' delinquent behaviour. In the second part of the article they discuss under what circumstances this behaviour requires active intervention. It is important to realise that for many children their delinquent behaviour occurs just once or during a short period: they grow over it. However, ample research shows that certain children run a greater risk of developing an antisocial and/or delinquent lifestyle well into adolescence and adulthood. This is the case when serious delinquent/antisocial behaviour in childhood coincides with the presence of risk factors in the family, social and educational environment and the absence of protective factors. In a recent memo the Dutch minister for Youth and Family presents plans for intervention programs for these children at risk. The focus of the government is more on interventions improving the educational qualities of parents than on 'treating' the children. The authors welcome this policy, but stress that it is also necessary to involve the school and the neighbourhood more closely in the prevention and reduction of conduct problems and delinquency among young children.

### **Dutch youth is doing pretty well**

*I. Weijers*

This article makes clear that, in spite of alarming reports in the media, young people in the Netherlands are generally doing very well. For example, the Netherlands is listed first in the 2007 *Innocenti Report Card 7* comparing 32 rich countries on a list of items relevant to child well-being. The Netherlands is certainly not in a bad position when it comes to youth crime, which has been stable for many years. Nevertheless, there are still serious financial and social problems in the deprived districts of the major cities. Apart from poverty, poor cramped housing and a lot of children hanging around on the street, we also find there many young people with relatively low educational qualifications, high levels of truancy and large numbers of unqualified school leavers. Finally, these children are also at significant risk of experiencing poor parenting.

### **The monitoring of conduct problems**

*E.J. de Wilde*

In this article recent developments in the monitoring of the social and physical health of children and youngsters in the Netherlands

are discussed. There is a long tradition of monitoring within the youth health care institutions, which examine in principle all children on a regular basis. A next step the Dutch government is planning is the digitalisation of existing files: the introduction of an Electronic Child File (ECF). The author discusses the dilemmas of the ECF, thereby focusing on access rights, the reliability of the file content and the length of the storage time. Also the desirability of using the ECF for other purposes is discussed, notably the early detection of conduct problems and the prevention of criminal behaviour. The ECF will bring some logistic improvements and more possibilities for early detection of problem behaviour. However its practical use for prevention of criminal behaviour among children and youngsters so far seems limited.

### **The prevention and reduction of conduct problems**

*L. Boendermaker and T. van Yperen*

What could be done to prevent for childhood behavioural problems? Parents and other adults seem to be crucial in preventing childhood conduct problems. Well implemented early childhood education programs and early childhood prevention programs can prevent antisocial behaviour. Parental skills training in combination with the training of children in problem solving skills or self control is effective in diminishing childhood conduct problems. Family interventions are recommended with older children or children with depressed or antisocial parents. To prevent for childhood conduct problems in the Netherlands, implementation of interventions should get more attention. The existent evidence based interventions are limited in their availability. They need to be applied in all agencies that work with children and parents.

### **Universal prevention; the effects of two promising programs**

*P.A.C. van Lier and B. Orobio de Castro*

Research has amply demonstrated that especially children with serious conduct problems in childhood are at greatest risk of persistent conduct problems, criminal behaviour and convictions for crimes in adolescence and young adulthood. Correctional programs, administered once the problems of these children have developed into criminal behaviour are ineffective. This urges the need of early prevention programs. In this article, the authors present the results of two elementary school-based, universal

preventive interventions: the Good Behavior Game (GBG; Dutch: Taakspel) and Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS; Dutch: PAD) on the reduction of conduct problems. These programs could take a central position in an effective youth policy preventing conduct problems and antisocial behaviour.

### **Effective prevention programs in The Netherlands**

*H. Jonkman and M. Steketee*

This article describes the prevalence, the causes and the effective preventive interventions against violence, delinquency and anti-social conduct among children and youngsters in the Netherlands. A substantial group of children show anti-social behaviour, but not all of them will become anti-social youngsters or adults. There are different trajectories towards anti-social behaviour. We have knowledge about the contexts, the timeframe and factors which are important for the development of anti-social behaviour and the preventive interventions. Nine programs currently available in the Netherlands are described in this article. According to the authors the use of effective programs on a broad scale should be on the top of the agenda of the government and youth health and care organisations.