
Prevention of Juvenile Crime and Deviance: Adolescents' and Experts' Views in an International Perspective

VARSTVOSLOVJE,
*Journal of Criminal
Justice and Security*
year 15
no. 4
pp. 531-550

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Purpose:

This article analyses perspectives on youth crime prevention in samples of 13–17 year old students from 6 European countries and of practitioners/experts in Belgium and Germany.

Design/Methods/Approach:

Surveys were conducted among urban and rural school students (n = 10682). Expert and practitioner perspectives were taken into account using Delphi surveys, standardized surveys on the state of youth crime prevention, and semi-structured interviews with practitioners in the areas where the school surveys were conducted.

Findings:

While the majority of students have been targeted by drug abuse prevention measures, rates for violence prevention are lower. Students ascribe moderate preventive potential to school and they regard peers and parents as most influential in prevention while professional agents are viewed as less important. Punitive approaches are not rejected, but approaches focusing on individual resources and problems are given priority. Experts point at the significance of socioeconomic factors related to the problem of (youth) delinquency and hence of social policy measures. They recommend prevention starting at an early age, strengthening social skills and following multi-professional approaches.

Research Limitations/Implications:

Schools surveys excluded special schools, and response rates in expert surveys were low or moderate.

Practical Implications:

Findings point to young persons' understanding of factors influencing their behaviour and at connections between involvement in offending and accessibility for approaches to prevention. Expert surveys show needs for improvement in the field of prevention, especially in terms of funding, evaluation, and fundamental strategic approaches.

Originality/Value:

Perspectives of both actors and targets of preventive approaches are taken into account.

UDC: 343.91-053.6

Keywords: prevention, juvenile delinquency, school survey, expert survey, drug abuse, violence

Preprečevanje mladoletniške kriminalitete in deviantnosti: pogledi mladostnikov in strokovnjakov z mednarodne perspektive

Namen prispevka:

Članek na podlagi analize, ki vključuje vzorec 13–17 let starih dijakov iz šestih evropskih držav in praktikov/strokovnjakov iz Belgije in Nemčije, prikazuje poglede na preprečevanje mladoletniške kriminalitete.

Metode:

Raziskave so bile izvedene med dijaki (n = 10.682) v mestnem in podeželskem okolju. Pogledi strokovnjakov in praktikov so bili pridobljeni s študijo Delphi, standardiziranimi raziskavami o stanju preprečevanja mladoletniške kriminalitete in pol-strukturiranimi intervjuji s praktiki z območij, kjer so bile opravljene raziskave v šolah.

Ugotovitve:

Medtem ko je bila večina dijakov ciljna skupina preventivnih ukrepov o zlorabi drog, je stopnja preprečevanja nasilja nižja. Dijaki šoli pripisujejo zmeren preventivni vpliv. Svoje vrstnike in starše obravnavajo kot najbolj vplivne pri preprečevanju, medtem ko so strokovnjaki manj pomembni. Kaznovalnih pristopov ne zavračajo, vendar so v ospredju tisti, ki se osredotočajo na posamezne vire. Strokovnjaki opozarjajo na pomen družbenoekonomskih dejavnikov, povezanih s problemom (mladoletniškega) prestopništva in posledično ukrepov socialne politike. Priporočajo, da se preprečevanje začne že v zgodnjih letih s krepitvijo socialnih veščih in interdisciplinarnih pristopov.

Omejitve/uporabnost raziskave:

Ankete, opravljene v šolah, ne vključujejo šol s posebnimi programi, stopnja odziva v raziskavah, opravljenih med strokovnjaki, pa je bila nizka ali zmerna.

Praktična uporabnost:

Ugotovitve kažejo razumevanje dijakov o pomenu dejavnikov, ki vplivajo na njihovo vedenje, in povezave med udeležbo pri kršitvah in dostopnostjo do preprečevalnih ukrepov. Raziskave, opravljene med strokovnjaki, kažejo potrebo za izboljšanje na področju preprečevanja, zlasti v smislu financiranja, vrednotenja in temeljnih strateških pristopov.

Izvirnost/pomembnost prispevka:

Upoštevani so pogledi izvajalcev prevencije in ciljne skupine glede preventivnih pristopov.

UDK: 343.91-053.6

Ključne besede: preprečevanje, mladoletniška kriminaliteta, raziskava, šola, strokovnjaki, zloraba drog, nasilje

1 INTRODUCTION

The study *Youth deviance and youth violence: A European multi-agency perspective on best practices in prevention and control* (Görgen et al., 2013) collected data on prevention of youth crime and deviant behaviour, both from the perspective of adult practitioners and experts, and from adolescents (as “targets” of prevention measures). It has expanded the scope of traditional self-report studies by including young persons’ experiences and views related to prevention. As everyday lay theories, such views are important for perceptions of social situations, decision-making, and choices between alternative courses of action. Generally, preventive measures going beyond situational prevention (such as control of access to alcohol, or better lighting of streets and public spaces) depend upon active participation of the target groups, whether they are approached as potential offenders or as victims. This research offers the possibility to compare young persons’ experiences with crime prevention and their evaluations, perceptions and attitudes across a number of European countries.

2 BACKGROUND

The *YouPrev* study was carried out simultaneously in Belgium, Germany, Hungary, Portugal, Slovenia, and Spain in 2011 and 2012 (see Görgen et al., 2013). One central element was a set of locally focused studies on youth crime and its prevention, and in each partner country, one urban and one rural area were taken into consideration. The main goal of these studies was to analyse local and regional conditions of youth deviance and violence and its prevention and control. Data presented here are from student surveys on the one hand, and from expert interviews and surveys on the other; in addition to local samples of experts (i.e. practitioners from different fields linked to youth crime and its prevention), experts were also surveyed at a national level.

3 METHOD

School survey – local self-report studies in schools: Self-report surveys are a well-established instrument going beyond law enforcement’s data on reported crime and providing information on situational conditions, personality variables and further background factors of deviance and victimization (cf. Görgen & Rabold, 2009). The survey applied in the study was based on questionnaires used in the tradition of the International Self-Reported Delinquency Study (see Enzmann et al., 2010; Junger-Tas et al., 2010, on the second wave ISRD-2, and Junger-Tas, Marshall, & Ribeaud, 2003, on the first wave). Other instruments like the one developed by the

Criminological Research Institute of Lower Saxony (Hanover, Germany; cf. Baier, Pfeiffer, Simonson, & Rabold, 2009) were used for specific components. When adapting the instrument for the purposes of this project, a special focus was put on questions regarding young people's views on crime and violence prevention.

Local interview studies: In order to provide a coherent multi-perspective picture of (perceived) problems in the field of juvenile deviance and attempts to prevent and reduce young people's crime and violence, interviews were also conducted with relevant actors in the areas where the self-report studies were done. These interviews addressed multi-professional and multi-agency samples, including the police, judiciary, and juvenile social work. Purposive samples were selected according to the interviewee's assumed expertise and with regard to professional and institutional heterogeneity. The interviews were conducted as semi-structured interviews based on an interview guideline (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002), and the specific focus was on the local situation of youth crime and prevention and on what works (or is perceived as working) and what does not work (or is perceived as not working).

National institutional and expert surveys: Each country conducted a national survey of relevant institutions and experts, which included researchers, practitioners, and policy makers as respondents. The survey was conducted primarily via an online questionnaire. It focused on the perceived state of prevention in each country, preventive approaches that are taken in the field of juvenile delinquency/deviance, and the quality and status of evaluation of the approaches taken.

Delphi survey: In another step, a future-oriented expert perspective was applied to the topic of youth problem behaviour and its prevention and control. By conducting two-wave national Delphi surveys and a third multinational round, anticipated demographic and social changes of the decade to come were taken into account. While attempts to predict future developments always run the risk of being inaccurate, planning for the future inevitably requires prognosis or prediction. Among different methods for forecasting purposes, the Delphi method as a multistep interactive survey method using panels of experts (cf. Powell, 2003; Rowe & Wright, 1999, 2001) has gained particular significance. The panels of the national Delphi surveys consisted of a multi-disciplinary group of experts, including practitioners from different relevant fields, researchers and policy makers. The survey instrument focused on future developments in the field of youth deviance and youth violence and the challenges arising for prevention and control.

4 YOUNG PEOPLE'S VIEWS ON PREVENTION OF YOUTH CRIME AND DEVIANCE: THE SCHOOL SURVEY

4.1 Sample Description

The school survey was conducted in two regions per country, one rural and one urban; in Belgium, three regions (urban, semi-urban and rural) were chosen in order to include French as well as Dutch speaking students. In total, 10682 students participated. Table 1 displays the distribution of some key characteristics in the national samples.

Characteristics	Belgium	Spain	Germany	Portugal	Slovenia	Hungary	Total
<i>n</i>	1058	1766	2186	1577	1991	2104	10682
Mean age (in years)	15.9	15.3	14.8	15.3	14.5	15.5	15.1
Sex: Female	51.9	50.8	47.5	52.9	55.7	47.3	50.8
Region: Urban	45.1 ¹	77.5	47.2	62.4	51.4	52.3	56.0
Migr. Background (1 st and 2 nd Gen.)	38.6	19.9	25.4	32.8	22.7	5.7	22.5
Language spoken at home: Native ²	65.2	34.8	31.5	18.5	34.1	6.7	33.8
Single parent household	15.4	12.9	17.2	22.2	13.7	23.6	17.6
Both parents unemployed	10.4	6.1	2.9	9.7	3.1	4.7	5.6

Table 1:
Sample characteristics of the international school survey dataset (in per cent)

The mean age of respondents is 15.1 years ($SD = 1.186$); students in Belgium are the oldest (15.9 y.) and Slovenians are the youngest (14.5 y.). The percentages of females vary between 47.3% in Hungary and 55.7% in Slovenia. The Spanish (77.5%) and Portuguese (62.4%) samples consist mainly of students who attend school in urban areas; in both cases, this overrepresentation of urban students is due to difficulties with sampling in sparsely populated rural areas. Samples also differ regarding the ethnic origin of the participants. Only 5.7% of the Hungarian students had a migration background, in contrast to the heterogeneous population structure of especially Belgium and Portugal, where around one third of the participants had their origins in other countries. Differences can also be found regarding the migrants' language spoken at home: While 65.2% of Belgian students with foreign origins spoke their native language at home, only 6.7% of migrants in Hungary did not speak Hungarian with their parents. In Portugal (22.2%) and Hungary (23.6%), nearly one fourth of students lived in single parent households, while these rates are considerably lower in Spain (12.9%) or Slovenia (13.7%). On average across the six participating countries, 5.6% of all students lived with an unemployed mother and father. Belgium and Portugal had the highest rates of households with both unemployed mother and father (10.4% and 9.7%).

¹ Belgium: 3 regions; 45% urban, 32% semi-urban, 23% rural.

² Participants with migration background ($n = 2379$; 89 missing values) were asked for the language the participant most often speaks with the people he/she lives with: Native language ($n = 777$); Language of the Country, where the study is conducted ($n = 1520$).

4.2 Results of the Local Self-Report Surveys among Students

4.2.1 Young People's Experiences with Prevention Measures

Referring to the last twelve months, subjects were asked whether they had "been given information on alcohol, drugs, and other harmful substances" and whether they had participated "in any activities aimed at avoiding / reducing violence by young people or against young people". Table 2 presents the results.

Table 2: 12-month prevalence of provision of substance abuse information to respondents and of respondents' participation in violence prevention measures (%)	Information on substance abuse provided?	Belgium <i>n</i> = 1016	Spain <i>n</i> = 1729	Germany <i>n</i> = 2096	Portugal <i>n</i> = 1550	Slovenia <i>n</i> = 1959	Hungary <i>n</i> = 2070
		Yes	61.6	78.2	70.8	80.8	55.9
	Participation in violence prevention measures	Belgium <i>n</i> = 1006	Spain <i>n</i> = 1700	Germany <i>n</i> = 2042	Portugal <i>n</i> = 1523	Slovenia <i>n</i> = 1952	Hungary <i>n</i> = 2011
		Yes	18.3	39.8	25.6	33.7	22.1

Measures related to substance abuse are widespread across countries, ranging from 5% in Slovenia to rates around 80% in Portugal, Hungary and Spain. Proportions of students who participated in violence prevention measures are much lower and range from 18% in Belgium to 40% in Spain.

Table 3 presents data on characteristics of receivers and non-receivers of violence prevention measures in the last 12 months. Both groups show similar profiles, with respondents from urban schools, youths with a migration background and those having violent peers slightly overrepresented among participants in violence prevention measures. In Belgium, students from highly disorganized neighbourhoods make up 18% of participants of violence prevention measures while among non-participants their share is 13%.

Table 4 presents data on groups with differential involvement in delinquency and their participation in violence prevention measures. It differentiates between students who reported five or more violent offences for the period of the last twelve months (FVO), students reporting at least one offence other than illegal downloading for the same period, and those students who reported no offence at all or no other offence than illegal downloading. With regard to the high 12-month prevalence of making illegal downloads ranging from 40.5% per cent in Germany to 84.9 per cent in Spain, youths who reported no other offence were grouped together with the non-offenders.

Characteristics	Belgium		Spain		Germany		Portugal		Slovenia		Hungary		Total	
	VP+	VP-	VP+	VP-	VP+	VP-	VP+	VP-	VP+	VP-	VP+	VP-	VP+	VP-
<i>n</i>	822	184	676	1024	522	1520	514	1009	432	1520	463	1548	2791	7443
Mean age (in years)	15.9	15.9	15.1	15.4	14.7	14.8	15.1	15.4	14.5	14.6	15.5	15.5	15.3	15.8
Sex: Female	52.2	53.6	51.9	51.0	49.8	47.7	55.9	52.0	52.3	57.3	48.4	47.0	51.7	51.2
Region: Urban	45.1	44.4	80.3	73.5	42.1	47.9	66.3	59.7	59.5	48.9	51.2	52.3	58.6	54.7
Migr. Background	44.2	36.5	19.9	18.9	24.3	24.6	34.4	30.2	28.7	21.3	7.4	5.5	24.3	21.2
High level of NSDO	18.2	13.3	16.9	20.7	4.6	4.0	20.0	18.8	11.4	11.3	12.6	13.1	13.7	12.7
Having violent peers	17.8	17.4	22.6	24.0	21.1	16.7	19.6	16.7	17.4	10.8	7.3	7.2	18.1	14.7

Table 3:
Characteristics of participants (VP+) and non-participants (VP-) in violence prevention measures in the last 12 months
 (in %; NSDO = neighbourhood social disorganization)

Table 4:
Participation in violence prevention measures in the last 12 months by country and level of involvement in delinquency (participants in % of the respective subsample)

	Belgium	Spain	Germany	Portugal	Slovenia	Hungary
≥ 5 violent offences (FVO)	28.9	51.7	37.7	58.6	25.9	23.7
Other offenders	18.1	39.0	26.2	33.5	21.8	22.0
Non-offenders	17.7	39.9	24.9	33.2	22.2	23.3

In Belgium, Germany, Spain and Portugal, there is a clear connection between delinquency and participation. While, for example in Germany, 38% of frequent violent offenders participated in violence prevention measures during the last twelve months, this is only true for 26% of other offenders and 25% of non-offenders. So there appears to be some selection process towards those highly involved in violent behaviour. However, in Slovenia and in Hungary, differences between the three groups are minimal or non-existent.

4.2.2 Young People's Perceptions of Prevention

Perceived preventive impact of school: Subjects were asked about the potential for prevention they ascribe to school. Questions were focussed on violence and substance use. Results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5:
Students' perceptions of school's potential influence on substance use and violence by country (5-point scale from 1 = no influence at all to 5 = very strong influence); mean values (SD)

Potential influence of school on ...	Belgium 995 ≤ n ≤1005	Spain 1718 ≤ n ≤ 1740	Germany 2099 ≤ n ≤ 2109	Portugal 1533 ≤ n ≤ 1525	Slovenia 1952 ≤ n ≤ 1946	Hungary 2047 ≤ n ≤ 2053
substance consumption	2.48 (1.067)	2.40 (1.052)	2.62 (1.141)	2.88 (1.133)	2.67 (1.145)	2.15 (1.009)
violent behaviour	2.65 (1.011)	2.90 (1.055)	2.94 (1.082)	3.11 (1.066)	3.03 (1.047)	2.61 (.977)

Table 5 shows that in all countries, students perceive the potential influence of school on substance use on one hand and on violence on the other as only moderate. Overall, students in Portugal and Slovenia hold the most positive views, followed by those in Germany. Respondents in Hungary and Belgium see the least potential. Across countries, respondents share the view that school's possible influence on substance use is lower than the impact it can have on violence. Hungarian students hold the most sceptical views regarding prevention in the field of substance use. This is in line with the high rate of heavy alcohol use among Hungarian youngsters. 37.1% had been severely drunk during the last month, while in the overall sample this rate is 24.2%. Thus, they feel that school does not influence their behaviour in this respect.

Table 6 breaks down youngsters' views by their level of involvement in delinquency.

Potential influence of school on ...	≥ 5 violent offences (FVO) 238 ≤ n ≤ 241	other offenders 2720 ≤ n ≤ 2741	no offence 7372 ≤ n ≤ 7410
substance consumption	2.15 (1.227)	2.33 (1.099)	2.61 (1.111)
violent behaviour	2.42 (1.098)	2.73 (1.061)	2.96 (1.044)

Table 6: Students' perceptions of school's potential influence on substance use and violence by level of involvement in delinquency (5-point scale from 1 = no influence at all to 5 = very strong influence); mean values (SD)

The three groups differentiated in Table 6 have in common the view that school may rather have some influence upon young persons' violent behaviour than on their use and abuse of alcohol and drugs. At the same time, the "optimism" that respondents place on the preventive potential of educational institutions has a clear link with their involvement in offending. Frequent violent offenders see the least potential for successful intervention by schools, whereas those without any delinquent involvement (except – in a number of cases – illegal downloads from the internet) see the strongest possible influence of teachers and schools. However, even the judgments of the non-offenders remain below the mid-point of the scale.

In sum, students perceive the influence of school on problem behaviour and delinquency as moderate, especially regarding to substance abuse. The level of influence attributed to school is negatively linked to young people's involvement in delinquent behaviour.

Perceived importance of preventive agents: As seen above, the potential of school for preventing substance abuse and violence is perceived as limited. This raises the question as to whom young people would possibly regard as influential and how they judge other persons, professions, and institutions. The question used to measure this was: "In your opinion: Who is important when trying to keep young people from doing forbidden things?" Table 7 presents results.

Agent	Belgium 1020 ≤ n ≤ 1033	Spain 1679 ≤ n ≤ 1754	Germany 2107 ≤ n ≤ 2069	Portugal 1511 ≤ n ≤ 1549	Slovenia 1955 ≤ n ≤ 1960	Hungary 2087 ≤ n ≤ 2066
parents	1.49 (.738)	1.43 (.699)	1.48 (.749)	1.28 (.567)	1.89 (.788)	1.21 (.519)
friends	1.53 (.789)	1.41 (.704)	1.37 (.698)	1.56 (.751)	1.76 (.843)	1.43 (.709)
police	2.43 (.998)	2.40 (1.014)	2.03 (.961)	2.12 (.931)	2.44 (.943)	1.88 (.937)
sports coaches	2.68 (1.005)	2.45 (.901)	2.75 (1.009)	2.34 (.949)	2.63 (.976)	2.12 (.997)
teachers	2.74 (.913)	2.67 (.879)	2.79 (.930)	2.29 (.806)	2.70 (.869)	2.35 (.885)
social workers	2.86 (.871)	2.55 (.867)	2.46 (.944)	2.51 (.863)	2.70 (.900)	2.87 (.945)

Table 7: Students' views on the importance of formal and informal preventive agents by country (4-point scale from 1 = very important to 4 = unimportant), sorted by means of the total sample; mean value (SD)

Unanimously, the largest importance is attributed to parents and peers – with a slight preponderance for the former in Belgium, Portugal and Hungary, and for the latter in Spain, Germany and Slovenia. This view goes hand in hand with criminological findings on the importance of parenting styles and parental supervision and on the significance of peers for juveniles' behaviour and the relative gain of peers over family in adolescence as compared to childhood. Deviant and violent peers are risk factors for delinquency (see e.g. Farrington, 2008). There is a high level of covariation between a young person's deviance and the behaviour of peers, even when selection effects are controlled (see Gifford-Smith, Dodge, Dishion, & McCord, 2005). New research points to the impact of social networks. Thus, Kreager & Haynie (2011) found a significant influence of friends of adolescents' romantic partners on young persons' drinking behaviour. Shakya, Christakis, & Fowler (2012) showed that excessive consumption of alcohol, smoking, and use of marijuana are linked to maternal parenting styles in the families of the respective juvenile's friends, with an authoritative style being most favourable.

The high importance attributed to parents and peers can be found across levels of involvement in delinquency. However, while for non-offenders, parents ($M = 1.42$) are slightly more important than peers ($M = 1.51$), rank orders are reversed for frequent violent offenders (parents: $M = 1.71$; peers: $M = 1.59$) and other offenders (parents: $M = 1.57$; peers: $M = 1.49$).

In all countries, the police are "next on the list". However, the gap between the importance attributed to a young person's everyday social network and different professional actors is substantial. Hungarian, German, and Portuguese youngsters have the most positive views of police, and their judgments concerning this group differ from those for other professions. Students from Spain, Belgium, and Slovenia are less optimistic regarding the impact of police on controlling deviant behaviour.

Little importance is attributed to teachers and social workers. In Spain, Germany and Slovenia, teachers are regarded as the least important professional group. Given the frequency and intensity of contact between teachers and students, this is an astonishing finding. The low level of influence attributed to teachers may be connected to their perceived role as educators, not as a controlling agency. Students may also draw upon their everyday perception of the low impact of teachers on control of students' behaviour. At the same time, they may underestimate the actual, at least indirect, influence (see Suldo, Mihalas, Powell, & French, 2008). Findings for the police have to be seen in light of their actual and perceived specialist role in "trying to keep young people from doing forbidden things".

Perceived efficacy of preventive approaches: Students were given a set of approaches which could prevent young people from engaging in forbidden acts ("like violence, stealing something, taking drugs") and were asked to express their view on the effectiveness of these approaches. Results are given in Table 8.

Approach	Belgium 1018 ≤ n ≤ 1027	Spain 1723 ≤ n ≤ 1720	Germany 2118 ≤ n ≤ 2131	Portugal 1551 ≤ n ≤ 1559	Slovenia 1962 ≤ n ≤ 1956	Hungary 2077 ≤ n ≤ 2088
Listen to their sorrows and problems.	1.94 (.710)	1.92 (.757)	1.79 (.794)	1.82 (.700)	1.76 (.736)	1.57 (.759)
Improve their prospects to get a job.	2.04 (.758)	1.84 (.753)	1.75 (.756)	1.69 (.691)	1.81 (.745)	1.72 (.828)
Give them a good general education.	2.05 (.758)	1.71 (.749)	2.02 (.827)	1.64 (.701)	2.00 (.791)	1.84 (.830)
Provide good opportunities for leisure time activities.	2.07 (.771)	2.17 (.869)	1.85 (.792)	1.84 (.733)	1.82 (.750)	1.69 (.813)
Provide training for better social behaviour.	2.10 (.734)	2.21 (.838)	1.97 (.824)	1.90 (.714)	2.03 (.793)	1.93 (.861)
Give information on possible consequences.	2.27 (.788)	2.21 (.839)	2.06 (.878)	2.02 (.777)	2.05 (.807)	1.73 (.829)
Provide counselling to their parents.	2.26 (.795)	2.26 (.845)	2.26 (.903)	2.26 (.707)	2.26 (.814)	2.26 (.870)
Punish them severely when caught.	2.23 (.882)	2.46 (.927)	2.22 (.925)	2.02 (.833)	2.35 (.877)	2.19 (.930)

Table 8:
Students' views on efficacy of preventive approaches by country
(4-point scale from 1 = works very well to 4 = is rather harmful); mean values (SD)

Students' answers can be considered as expressions of lay theories about effects of measures on young persons' behaviour. Such lay theories have been the topic of psychological research for decades. The importance of these everyday concepts lies in the fact that "people's perceptions are guided by their lay theories, helping them to understand, predict, control, and respond to their social world" (Levy, West, & Ramirez, 2005: 190).

Across countries, most preventive approaches are evaluated positively. However, there is a clear tendency to attribute less significance to punitive approaches on the one hand and to parent counselling on the other. Priority is given to person-centered approaches ("listen to their sorrows and problems") and to educational and labour market perspectives ("give them a good general education" and "improve their prospects to get a job"). Portuguese youngsters have the most positive stance towards prevention via deterrence ($M = 2.02$), while their Spanish neighbours most clearly reject this approach ($M = 2.46$). Crime prevention via improved job prospects receives the strongest support in Portugal ($M = 1.69$), Hungary ($M = 1.72$) and Germany ($M = 1.75$).

If groups with differential involvement in delinquent behaviour are compared, offenders generally have less positive views than non-offenders, and among the

former, frequent violent offenders deliver the most negative evaluations. However, in all three groups, addressing a person's sorrows and problems, and improving his or her job prospects are seen as the most promising approaches.

5 EXPERTS'/PRACTITIONERS' VIEWS ON PREVENTION OF YOUTH CRIME AND DEVIANCE

Doing research into the field of the prevention of youth crime requires not only a study of official documents, academic literature or policy measures, it is of essence to study perceptions and opinions of people involved in day-to-day practice. While the views of youngsters have been discussed before, we will now turn to those of the professional actors in the field. In the course of the *YouPrev* study, their views and perceptions have been included in multiple ways. First of all, a nationwide institutional questionnaire addressed the state of youth crime prevention in the six countries. Experts' opinions were collected on prevailing strategies in practice, how the prevention landscape is organised, and on the state of the art regarding policy and organizational aspects. In a next phase, Delphi surveys explored potential future developments related to the domain of youth crime and its prevention and the possibilities for anticipation. Finally, in the same regions where the school surveys were conducted, experts and practitioners were interviewed about local specificities of youth crime and how it is approached by local institutions and actors. This article will focus upon the views of Belgian and German experts, and we will elaborate on the main differences and similarities between both countries and reflect upon possible implications for the youth crime prevention field.

5.1 Significant Future Developments as Anticipated by Experts

Important developments that are considered influential in the field of juvenile delinquency are mainly seen in three dimensions: demographic change, technological developments, and social processes of change.

Several issues were raised on a macro level that are expected to be or already are of great influence on youth delinquency. Even in Germany with its comparatively good economic situation, the experts expect more social inequality, a growing polarization between social groups, shrinking income and precarious jobs, all this affecting the most vulnerable families and youngsters and depriving their future perspectives. Respondents fear a decline of government spending in social policy and education, which will stimulate even more the expected negative developments for certain groups.

If we take a look at expected trends in numbers of juvenile offenders registered by the police, we can observe contradictory views. In the eyes of German experts, this number will drop, pointing in the same direction as the official estimated decrease of the number of youngsters aged 14 to 17 which predicts a drop from 3.3 million in 2009 to 2.8 million juveniles until 2020 (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2009). Although Belgian official prognoses point as well to a general decrease of the

number of 14 to 17 year olds (ADSEI – waarnemingen, 2012) the experts predict an increase of juvenile offenders. Some Belgian experts indicated that youth crime as such will not rise, but the social reaction will become more severe. In this context, the experts often referred to the use of administrative sanctions to tackle incivilities committed by youngsters. It is expected that this system will expand to include more and more types of behaviour (that is more often typical for youngsters).³

In the eyes of the experts from both countries, intergenerational and intercultural conflicts will increase, traditional family structures will further diminish, and society will become more and more individualistic. However, German respondents expressed both optimistic and pessimistic perspectives regarding these societal changes.

Finally, experts from both countries stressed the impact of technological developments creating new opportunities for crime. They assume that cyber crime will rise and cyber bullying will take an important place in the field of youth crime. The use of social media creates room for the bullying behaviour to continue after school. Youngsters can also get a false sense of security, which may have consequences for potential young victims of cyber paedophilia. In Germany, computer fraud, copyright infringements and attacks on privacy and personal data were mentioned; concerns with the latter phenomenon were also shared by the Belgian experts.

5.2 Experts' Views on and Recommendations for the Field of Prevention

Main Current Approaches of Prevention:

Dominance of Targeted Prevention

Experts were asked about the major problems and target groups that are being addressed by preventive activities. It appeared that in both countries, a focus on "classic" risk factors is prevailing. Prevention seems to be focused primarily on young male (migrant) adolescents aged 14 to 17 years. Furthermore, abuse of alcohol, illegal and legal substances, (school related) violence and truancy (particularly in Belgium) were named as the most important phenomena that are being addressed. Both Belgian and German experts mentioned living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods and/or families as additional background factors for juvenile offending. The Delphi survey pointed out that the Belgian experts also think that the above-mentioned type of problems will increase the most in the upcoming years. It is not that surprising considering the fact that violence, truancy, alcohol, drug and other (legal or illegal) substances abuse are rather "classic" problems that are commonly related to deviant or criminal youngsters and addressed by preventive measures. German experts in general perceive youth crime as a relatively stable phenomenon; some of them predicted increases in these

³ It is striking that at the time of writing, the legislation on administrative sanctions in Belgium is reformed. From now on minors from the age of 14 can receive an administrative sanction (instead of 16 with the previous legislation).

everyday types of juvenile delinquency especially for disadvantaged youngsters with a low educational background.

The experts were asked to indicate which approach prevails in preventive work directed at youth. Both German and Belgian experts consider primary prevention models less influential than secondary and tertiary approaches in the current practice of youth crime prevention; prevention of youth crime is described as focusing on young people that are at risk of becoming an offender/victim or are already. However, the results of the local interviews show that the majority of experts are in favour of primary approaches and perceive this as an important challenge and potential improvement of preventing and reducing youth delinquency. Furthermore, from the analysis of the Belgian local case study, it seems that secondary (targeted) prevention is more present in the urban/semi-urban area than in the rural area. This may suggest that rural areas have more resources or tools available to invest in general preventive measures (youth associations, leisure time activities, etc.) without a predefined focus on security and safety, which are often important topics on urban policy agendas. Nevertheless, this observation could not be made in the German study.

In both countries, police, social work and schools are perceived as the most important actors in the field. However in Belgium the prevention services are seen as the key players.⁴ Both German and Belgian experts consider psychological and physical health professions as the least important. This may point to the fact that the respondents do not immediately relate causes of problems or problematic behaviour with the general health and wellbeing of children and youngsters.

Recommendations Regarding Preventive Strategies

Summarizing results from the different kinds of expert surveys that were conducted in the course of the study, the most important recommendations for general strategies in the field of youth crime prevention were the following:

- In the written surveys as well as in interviews, experts highlighted the significance of **interagency cooperation/multi-professional approaches**. In their eyes, youth crime prevention cannot be the task of only one institution. The most relevant professional agents are social work, police, and schools, and in case of juveniles that have already become delinquent, also the judicial system. Lots of experts also stress that parents should be involved in preventive programmes whenever possible. German experts were relatively optimistic about the current state of multi-professional cooperation in prevention. Local experts described positive cooperation between relevant actors, and in the nationwide survey the state of cooperation was rated rather positively (but still less than would be ideal). In Belgium, views were divided in the different selected regions. Only in the urban region was it clear that experts saw a lack of communication and information exchange due to the diverse (fragmented) policies in the city.

⁴ This comes as no surprise if we take a look at the Belgian security and prevention policy. Local governments can establish strategic security and prevention plans with (and financed by) the federal government. Within these kinds of 'contracts', local prevention officers and services were created.

- According to the experts, prevention has the best chances to have positive effects when it aims at **reducing risk factors** and **strengthening juveniles' positive social skills**.
- Respondents stressed the benefits of tailoring preventive measures to **individual needs of juveniles and of particular target groups**. For instance, the small group of repeat offenders that commits a large share of the registered offences might need different approaches than the majority of juveniles whose delinquency is much more temporary.
- The majority of experts were rather sceptical about punitive/repressive approaches and instead pointed out the benefits of educational measures, the need for participation, and the importance of "trustful" relationships in working with youngsters. In case of the German experts, celerity is an exception; that means reducing the time passing between an offence and the succeeding judicial sanctions.
- Respondents pointed out that prevention – at best – should **start at early ages** when "criminal careers" have not yet begun and the chances to intervene and have positive influences on the life course of a youngster are better.
- Anticipated developments in society remain an underlying perspective of experts' views on preventive efforts. A number of recommended approaches for prevention of juvenile problem behaviour refer to social policy and the need of investment in social and educational work. If phenomena of disintegration are core problems in the upcoming years, social policy measures should try to create more inclusive social and educational conditions, and to support the participation of disadvantaged groups and reduce social inequality.

As the most important tangible needs for improvement in the field of prevention, the following aspects were raised:

- In Belgium as well as in Germany, **funding** in the field of prevention is rated as neither sufficient nor stable in the national surveys. Practitioners who were interviewed in the selected regions, especially in Belgium, also describe the lack of funding for preventive programmes. In the areas where the German local studies were conducted, the funding situation was described as relatively good compared to other regions in Germany.
- The expert survey results show the need for a more **systematic and coherent strategy/policy** in dealing with juvenile delinquency. In Belgium as well as in Germany, the majority of experts think that there is only a partially developed political strategy in this field. Interviews in Belgium show that mainly in the selected urban area fragmented policies are seen as a problem.⁵
- The status of **evaluation** in the field of crime prevention was rated as quite poor in Belgium and Germany. More and better scientific evaluation of preventive measures/programmes is needed to be able to assess the actual outcomes and effects of preventive efforts and to use resources wisely.

5 *In the Belgian local study Brussels was selected as the urban region. The fact that in this city several governments have competing and/or complementary competences in the domain of youth thwarts possibilities to cooperate and makes it very difficult to have a clear overview of what is organised by which institution.*

6 DISCUSSION

This study has explored young persons' and experts' perspectives on prevention of juvenile delinquency in six European countries. The major findings can be summarized as follows:

- In each of the participating countries, the majority of students had been reached by substance abuse prevention measures during the last year. Rates of participation in violence prevention measures during this period vary between 18% and 40%. Except for Slovenia and Hungary, students classified as frequent violent offenders show a higher rate of inclusion in violence prevention measures than non-offenders or those offending at a lower level.
- Across countries, young people regard the potential influence of school on substance abuse as very limited. With regard to violence prevention, views are slightly more positive.
- Students see parents and peers as the most important sources of preventive influence on a young person's behaviour. Compared to these everyday social network partners, the perceived potential influence of institutions and professions is limited. While the police gain relatively positive ratings, youngsters view social workers, sports coaches, and especially teachers as little influential. Again, this is similar across countries.
- Students show clear tendencies to ascribe preventive potential to measures and approaches strengthening social integration, especially integration in the labour market, and addressing individual strains and problems. Punitive approaches are not rejected summarily but are seen as less influential. Again, this general finding is consistent across countries. Within this common frame, country specifics, such as the high value attached to education as a resource for prevention in Spain and Portugal, are visible.
- The stronger a young person's involvement in delinquency, the more negative will be his or her views on preventive actors and approaches. However, the differences between frequent violent offenders, other offenders and non-offenders are relatively small and the rank orders of actors and approaches are very similar across groups.
- To some extent, young persons' views on prevention mirror findings from criminological research. This holds true with regard to the importance of delinquent peers and parental supervision, but also to the limited value of punitive approaches to control juvenile delinquent behaviour.
- The experts perceive current preventive efforts in Belgium and Germany to be mainly targeted at "classic" risk factors and target groups, using secondary and tertiary approaches. As an important supplement to these approaches, they see a high potential in primary prevention and stress the importance of social policy measures. This corresponds with the "customers' views" of students who, as mentioned above, also stress the significance of measures that focus on social integration and perspectives.
- Experts particularly recommend preventive measures that intervene at an early age, aim at reducing risk factors and strengthening social skills, and follow a multi-professional approach.

- Needs for improvement in the field of prevention are especially seen in more stable and sufficient funding, a more systematic and coherent policy in dealing with juvenile delinquency, and in more and better scientific evaluation of preventive measures and programmes.
- In the eyes of experts, future developments in the field of youth crime will be affected by demographic, technological and social processes of change. However, the results of the expert surveys also showed that youth crime will retain its basic characteristics as a ubiquitous mass phenomenon and a behaviour that is mainly episodic and in most cases of low severity.
- This international study has expanded the scope of well-established self-report surveys to include experiences with crime prevention and views of preventive approaches and actors. Given its cross-sectional character, it cannot establish causal connections between self-reported delinquency on the one hand, and experiences with and views on prevention measures on the other. Students' views on prevention are (of course) not "objective data" on what controls their behaviour. They are lay theories about who and what can influence behaviour – and as such they are involved in interpreting everyday situations and experiences and choosing between different possible courses of action.

Limitations to the study can be found in different regards. In all participating countries, the school survey did not include special schools and did not reach those students who were absent, refused to participate or did not provide parental consent forms. Furthermore, sample composition and characteristics of regions chosen differed to some extent between countries.

The expert surveys faced several pitfalls at the level of methodology that can only permit a descriptive analysis of the findings since they cover merely individual perceptions and views. The most important issues can be located at three levels. First, expert samples in Germany and Belgium differ with regard to participants' professional background. In Germany in particular, the two expert survey samples are characterized by strong police participation, whereas in Belgium almost no police officers took part.⁶ This sample is built largely out of social workers and people employed at prevention services (who were a minority in the German samples). Secondly, the regions selected for the local interview study did not exhibit the same characteristics. The local study in Germany (and the other participating countries) was conducted in an urban area and a rural one, whereas in Belgium three areas were selected. Because of the Belgian bilingual context an urban, rural and semi-rural/urban region was chosen. These three areas were not equally represented in the sample, again due to a low response rate especially in the rural area. Finally, response rates were quite low. In case of the national institutional and expert surveys, only 20.9% participated in Germany, an even more problematic rate can be observed in Belgium where only 11% took part. Also the Delphi survey could not reach a high amount of experts. Although the performed analysis is rather limited, we will briefly reflect upon some interesting findings with the purpose of contributing to the discussion on youth crime and its prevention.

⁶ Except from the local interview study, where seven Belgian police officers took part.

First of all, the comparative analysis pointed out that both German and Belgian experts are in favour of closer cooperation between the relevant actors in the field. It appeared that the main professions involved in preventing youth crime were police, social work and schools. The question can be asked whether a close cooperation between actors that are welfare oriented and actors who are occupied with security matters will not entail a risk, not only for the “trustful” relationship between social workers and youngsters (seen as important by the experts) but also a risk of becoming more easily “punished” or sanctioned. In Belgium for example, the prevention services become more and more responsible for administrative sanctions for incivilities, at the same time these services were exactly in this country perceived as the key player in the youth prevention landscape.

Asking the experts what they perceive as challenges for the prevention of youth crime resulted in a broad consensus on investment in more primary prevention strategies. Along the same lines, they identified developments at a societal macro level that are of significant influence for youth delinquency, like poverty, social inequality, and precarious job perspectives. Therefore the respondents stressed more investment in education and social policy. The experts clearly relate negative socioeconomic factors to the problem of (youth) delinquency. If we take into account the current risk focused and targeted character of the prevention field in Belgium and Germany, the question can be asked as whether the most vulnerable of our society do not become the most targeted ones. The same goes for the experts' advocacy for early intervention strategies. At first sight, it seems logic to try to restore as soon as possible what seems to head in the wrong direction. Nonetheless, this approach entails the danger of again discriminating disadvantaged children and families, stigmatizing them and entailing far-reaching net-widening effects. Under the guise of “it's better to prevent than to cure”, the most vulnerable risk becoming targets of state intervention without any actual infraction of the law. This does not imply that socioeconomic factors need to be put aside in thinking about prevention of youth crime. Continuous investment in social policy is necessary but it should not become an instrument to defend the idea of “les classes laborieuses, les classes dangereuses” (Chevalier, 1958).

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