Recidivism among Dutch juveniles who stayed at a residential judicial treatment facility

Summary

The present study may be regarded as a sequel to the ones conducted by Boendermaker (1996, 1998, 1999). Her study concerned a group of 383 juveniles incarcerated in a residential judicial treatment facility in 1993. Recidivism after release was one of the aspects she investigated. Within a year after having left the facility, 30% of the youngsters had been in contact with the police. The results presented here relate to a longer follow-up period: up to five years after release. Furthermore, the recidivism assessment is based on adjudicated cases rather than police records.

On average the juveniles are 15 years of age at admission in a judicial treatment facility. Most of them are boys (73%). The majority is admitted under a civil measure (80%). The remaining 20% enter treatment under a penal measure. All juveniles show a wide range of (severe) behavioural problems at the time of admission in the treatment facility. The behavioural problems of boys mostly relate to delinquency. Girls, on the other hand, mainly experience problems that originate in running away from home and drug abuse. Moreover they show attachment problems. Most juveniles have a history of previous placements in various facilities and more than half of them acquired police records (55%) or criminal records (53%) prior to admission. Boys, more frequently than girls, already have a criminal history at admission in a judicial treatment facility.

To account for the percentage of juveniles that acquired criminal records after leaving the residential treatment centre, a technique was used that corrects for the fact that not all juveniles leave the facility at the same day. Survival analysis takes into account these differences in observation period. Overall recidivism percentages amount to 30% in the first year after departure. Hereby every single judicial contact not leading to a dismissal on technical grounds or an acquittal, is regarded as recidivism. Three years after release, this percentage amounts to 57%, a significant increase. After two more years the increase is less sharp.

If the recidivism rate is restricted to the more serious offences the percentages drop. The recidivism rate of juveniles who are (once more) convicted unconditionally amounts to no more than 25%, even after three years. The percentage of overall recidivism after one year is exactly the same as the percentage reported by Boendermaker which was based on police figures (30%). A considerable part of the recidivists are juveniles admitted under a civil measure (76%). Factors that contribute to the occurrence of judicial contacts include male gender, the occurrence of previous judicial records, a high number of previous judicial contacts and young age at first referral to a youth institution or a foster home. On average the 225 recidivists acquired 1.2 new criminal cases each year. The mean time between two contacts was more than 20 months. The severity of the offences committed by recidivists can be deducted from the maximum prison sentence the court may impose. The mean total amounted to 289 months.

Although the results presented here allow to draw conclusions regarding recidivism that may be expected following treatment in a juvenile judicial treatment facility, the absence of a control group precludes a satisfactory interpretation of the results. Repeated recidivism surveys may give an advanced insight into the effectiveness of juvenile judicial treatment. Therefore, those who are released from a judicial treatment facility will be included in the so called Recidivemonitor (monitoring recidivism), a research project that aims to measure recidivism among groups of juveniles, based on standardised methods measuring recidivism at regular points in time.