

Annual Report **2015**

nsCr

Netherlands Institute for the Study
of Crime and Law Enforcement



This is the 2015 annual report from the Netherlands Institute for the Study of Crime and Law Enforcement (NSCR). NSCR is involved in a wide range of research activities in a number of different disciplines, from fundamental scientific research to policy research. The principal goal of the research carried out at the NSCR is to understand how and where criminal behaviour occurs (such research, focusing on spatio-temporal aspects of offending is mainly conducted within theme group 1). Further, our research looks at how criminal behaviour is responded to (such studies, investigating for instance incarceration and its aftermath, as well as the workings of the criminal justice system are conducted within theme group 2). Lastly, we investigate the development of criminal behaviour over the life-course, and the manner in which criminal careers are intertwined with other careers, such as employment careers and romantic relations (these studies also include intergenerational continuity in offending and are conducted within theme group 3).

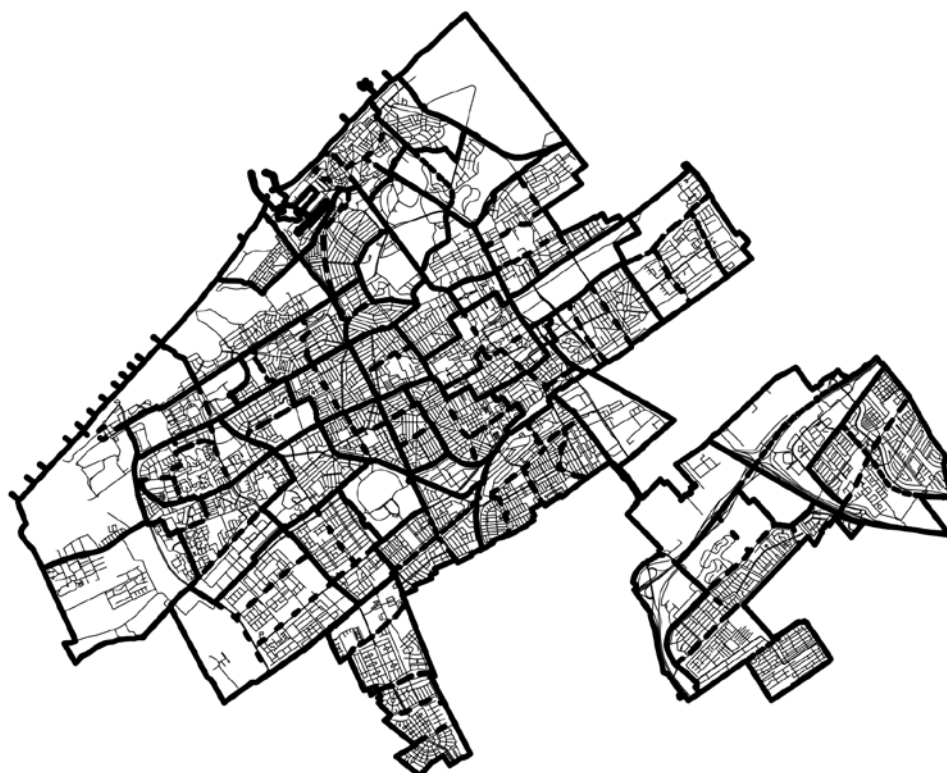
This annual report provides a sample of the research projects carried out at the NSCR over the past year, as well as more 'technical' information on staff, budget, publications, and organisational structure.

Catrien Bijleveld
Director

How does crime concentrate within cities?

Over the last decades, criminologists have begun to recognize the importance of micro geographic units in the study and prevention of crime. A key reason for this has been the startling evidence surrounding the concentration of crime in a small number of places in a city: a very large proportion of crime is committed at a very small proportion of addresses, street segments, or clusters of street segments.

Previous studies were often not able to compare geographic units. In the U.S., for example, the commonly used unit for neighbourhood or community boundaries is the census block group or tract. However, micro-geographic units such as street segments are often inconsistent within these units. For example, a street segment may be placed in two block groups or tracts. The Dutch definitions of street segments, neighbourhoods, and districts largely overcome these complications, because street segments are nested within neighbourhoods ('CBS buurten'), which in turn are nested within districts ('CBS wijken').



More than 15,000 street segments nested within 114 neighborhoods, nested within 44 districts, in The Hague, The Netherlands.

Combining these geographic units with geocoded reported crime data from the Police Unit of The Hague over the period 2001-2009, Wouter Steenbeek's quantitative analyses of the data show that about 58–69 percent of the variability of crime can be attributed to street segments, with most of the remaining variability at the district level. These findings suggest that micro (i.e., street segments) and macro (i.e., city districts) geographic units are key to understanding the crime problem, and that the neighbourhood, contrary to what has been postulated, does not significantly add to the explanation of crime occurrence, beyond what is learned at the micro and macro levels.

The results of Steenbeek's research are pivotal for law enforcement and policy-makers, showing that crime is a spatially very local phenomenon, with some street segments experiencing many crimes over a longer period and other street segments hardly experiencing any crime. At the same time, street segments of high (or low) crime tend to cluster together in high (or low) crime districts ('CBS wijken'), while the smaller neighbourhood units ('CBS buurt') do not add much explanatory value.

This is the first time Dutch official crime data has been analyzed at the street segment level, and replications of this work are recommended. Nevertheless, these first results strongly imply the need for further focus on micro geographic units for the explanation of crime occurrence.

This research was funded by a VENI-grant (VENI 451-12-011)

Steenbeek, W. and D. Weisburd. (2015) Where the Action is in Crime? An Examination of Variability of Crime Across Different Spatial Units in The Hague, 2001-2009. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*. Online first. doi:10.1007/s10940-015-9276-3.

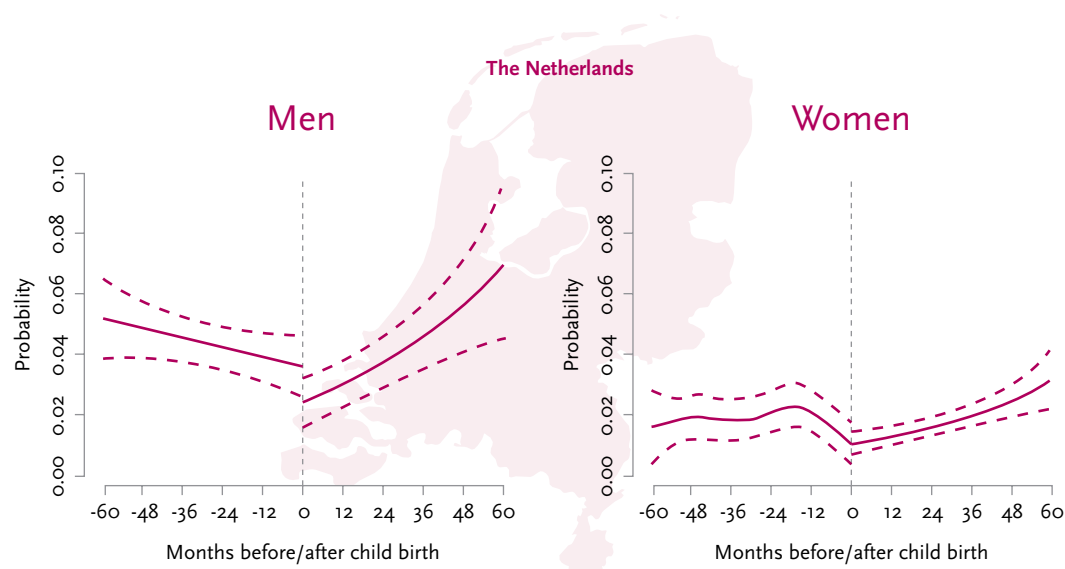
NSCR staff (in fte) 2015 average

	employed by NWO (tenured)	employed by NWO (temporary)	employed by VU	external	total
Director	0,95	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,95
Research staff	12,43	5,30	2,00	0,00	19,73
Fellows	0,00	0,00	0,80	0,00	0,80
PhDs	0,00	3,25	3,00	1,00	7,25
Junior researchers	0,00	1,94	0,00	0,00	1,94
Support staff	2,21	1,76	0,00	0,00	3,97
total	15,59	12,25	5,80	1,00	34,64

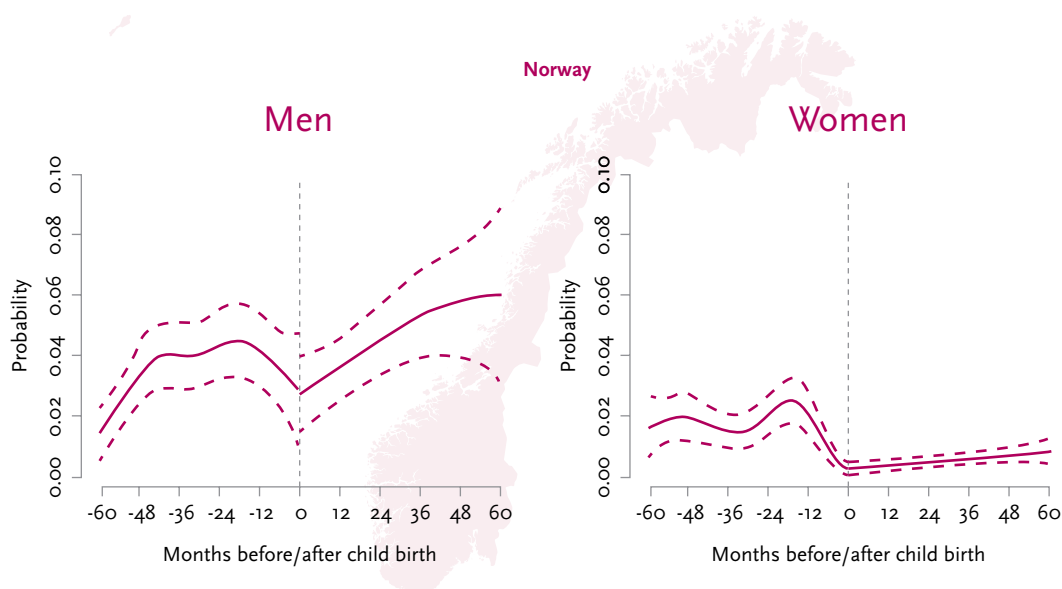
Criminal offending and parenthood

Criminologists often assume that, besides marriage, parenthood also has the potential to change the direction of a criminal career. However, concrete evidence for this pattern has only been recently provided. Research conducted by Mioara Zoutewelle and colleagues showed that the beneficial effect of parenthood on crime is even stronger than that of marriage. Furthermore, in a modern society where individuals might get married but not have children, or might have children but not marry, research distinguishing the influences of these two family events on crime is increasingly important. Previous research has shown that individuals who were both married and had children have the strongest reduction in crime. Scholars refer to this effect as the “full family package”. In other words, a stimulation of traditional family norms seems beneficial for criminally engaged individuals.

Mioara Zoutewelle and Torbjorn Skardhamar, at the NSCR and Statistics Norway respectively, compared changes in criminal offending around entrance into parenthood for Dutch and Norwegian high-risk individuals. Results showed that, in both countries, involvement in crime is indeed lowest around childbirth (see figures below). However, importantly, the probability of offending starts to decline well before the actual transition into parenthood.



Smoothed probabilities for criminal offending – The Netherlands



Smoothed probabilities for criminal offending – Norway

These figures also illustrate that this reduction in crime only lasts for a short period. Soon after the child is born, the monthly probability that parents will offend increases again. One may think that this increase after childbirth is related to financial problems that individuals might encounter once having had a child, and involvement in crime represents a solution to these problems. However, the analyses show that only a very small part of the increase in crime is explained by engagement in property crime. It could be that the increase in crime is determined by emotional stressors, brought on by parenthood, and translated into crime in this high-risk group. Alternatively, the increase may still be due to economic factors, but that these are addressed by types of offenses other than property offenses (e.g., drug dealing).

All in all, the study shows that part of the decrease in offending around childbirth is likely attributable to factors other than childbirth itself, and that the decrease is short-lived. The patterns are remarkably similar across the Netherlands and Norway.

This study was conducted in collaboration with Statistics Norway.

Zoutewelle-Terovan, M.V. (2015). *Criminality and family formation; disentangling the relationship between family life events and criminal offending for high-risk men and women*. PhD thesis VU University Amsterdam. Enschede: Ipskamp Drukkers.

NSCR sources of income in 2013, 2014, 2015

Income 2013-2015 in k€	2013	2014	2015
NWO	1.493	1.685	1.676
VU, cash & in-kind contributions*	895	925	494
Ministry of Security & Justice**	426	341	0
Direct funding	2.814	2.951	2.170
NWO	763	611	451
Other subsidy providers	139	166	119
Research grants	902	777	570
Contract research	108	112	150
Other	52	136	216
Total	3.876	3.976	3.106

* 2013, 2014 as stipulated from contract, indexed per year; 2015 real contribution

** The Ministry of Security and Justice ended its subsidy of NSCR by 2015

Output 2015



In addition, presentations at conferences were held, and numerous valorisation activities undertaken (e.g., press contacts, presentations, information provided to policy makers and field workers).

Staff were involved in teaching activities, both at VU University, as well as elsewhere in the Netherlands and abroad.

Mental health problems and health care use in prisons

Many offenders suffer from mental health problems. This generates a major challenge for criminal justice systems. The high levels of mental health problems are particularly pronounced in prison populations. This high prevalence of mental health problems in prison populations complicates prison life, diminishes personal well-being, and jeopardizes successful prisoner reentry. On the upside, prisons may offer a unique opportunity to improve inmates' mental health by providing prevention, health education, and treatment interventions to a disadvantaged, and generally underserved, 'hard-to-reach' population. In the Netherlands, every prisoner has free access to health care that should meet the same quality requirements as care outside prisons. Despite the high levels of mental health problems in prisons, knowledge on how such problems develop over time and on health care use in prison is still limited.

NSCR researcher Anja Dirkzwager examined the longitudinal course of mental health problems and health care use in Dutch prisons using data from the Prison Project, one of NSCR's large-scale and longitudinal studies. In the Prison Project, 1,900 male prisoners were followed and interviewed repeatedly in prison (3 weeks, 3 months, 9 months, and 18 months after arrival in pre-trial detention), and 6 and 24 months after their release. Information about their mental health (e.g., overall distress, depression, anxiety symptoms) and health care use before, during, and after imprisonment was collected.

The findings, using all four waves of the Prison Project, showed that the level of prisoners' mental health problems declined during imprisonment. Shortly after their arrival in pre-trial detention, a quarter of the prisoners reported a very high level of mental health problems, whereas just ten percent of them experienced such problems after being in custody for eighteen months. Although this decrease is substantial, ten percent is still twice as high as for men in the general population. This decline in mental problems was observed across different types of problems (see Figure 1).

As expected, prisoners who entered prison with pre-existing problems (i.e., mental health problems prior to imprisonment, frequent drug use prior to imprisonment, and homelessness prior to imprisonment) reported more mental health problems upon their arrival in custody. However, during detention their mental health problems decreased more, compared to those without these pre-existing problems. Therefore, differences in mental health issues between high-risk groups and other inmates seemed to decline during detention.

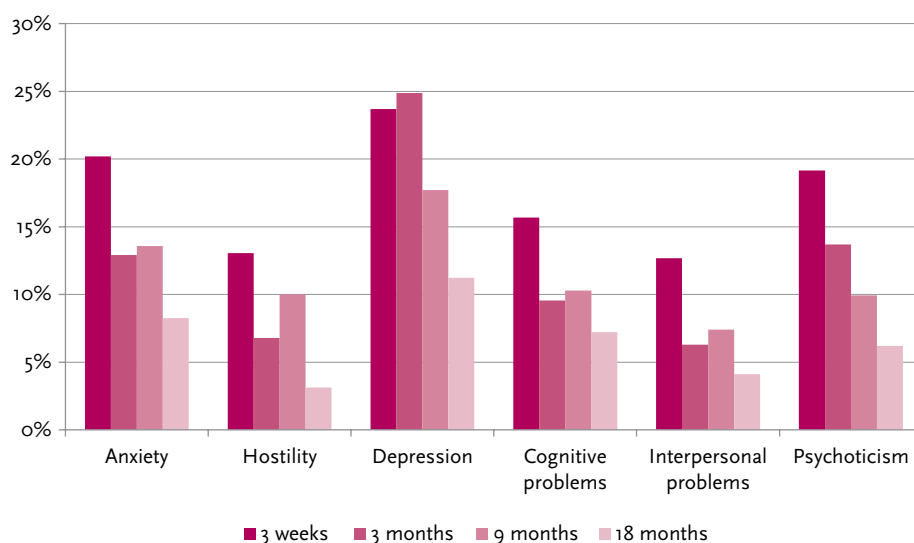


Figure 1 Percentage of prisoners with a very high level of mental health problems

The study, furthermore, revealed that most of the prisoners who had high levels of mental health problems shortly after arrival in custody received mental health care during their detention. However, about a third of them did not see a psychologist and about half of them did not see a psychiatrist in the first eighteen months of their detention.

In summary, the correctional health care system seems, to a large extent, to address the mental health care needs of prisoners. Most mental health problems in prison decrease over time and prisoners with high levels of mental health problems upon arrival in custody are more likely to receive mental health services. However, there may still be unmet needs for mental health care, as a substantial proportion of the prisoners reporting high levels of mental health problems shortly after their arrival in custody, did not see a psychologist or psychiatrist during the following months of their custody.

In the future, this research will focus in more depth on the evolution of mental health problems during imprisonment, the bi-directional relationships between imprisonment, mental health, and criminal behavior, and the mechanisms that may explain these relationships.

This study is a collaboration with Leiden University.

See also: www.prisonproject.nl

Dirkzwager, A.J.E. (2015). *Het verloop van psychische klachten tijdens detentie: Het Prison Project*. NSCR workshop 'Gevangen in jezelf. Het effect van detentie op de geestelijke gezondheid', 10 June 2015.

Dirkzwager, A.J.E. (2015). *Mental health problems and health care use in Dutch prisons*. Conference of the European Society of Criminology, 3 September 2015.



Collaboration with VU University

Since 2009, the NSCR has enjoyed the hospitality of the VU University, Amsterdam. Besides being situated in the Initium, the Faculty of Law building, we also work with a number of researchers from other faculties. We collaborated with VU researchers from the Faculty of Law in 2015, studying the long-term consequences of childhood sexual abuse, sexual abuse allegations in divorce proceedings, vulnerable victims, and the relationship between crime and employment. With researchers from the Faculty of Social Sciences, we studied the relationship between offending and relationship formation. These studies are reported on in this year's report.

Numerous collaborations are ongoing, with the Faculty of Law and with researchers from the Faculty of Behavioural and Movement Sciences, Faculty of Sciences, and the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration. These collaborations are framed in an interfaculty research institute: the Amsterdam Law and Behaviour Institute (A-LAB).

NSCR also contributes to teaching in the Criminal Law and Criminology department within the Faculty of Law, as well as providing internships and thesis supervision.

The future self and delinquency

It is often held that delinquents have a tendency to live in the 'here and now' and that they disregard the future consequences of their actions. This corresponds with studies that have shown that delinquents have lower self-control and higher impulsivity. Jean-Louis van Gelder and his co-authors investigated this using an innovative perspective that is based on the assumption that the tendency to live in the 'here and now' is related to the inability to project one's self into the future. In a field experiment, they manipulated the vividness of the future self by having participants, a sample of high-school youth (N = 133), 'befriend' an avatar representing their future self. For each participant, they created a personal page of the future self or present self avatar on the social network website Facebook. The personal profile page that was created for each participant featured the name of the participant and a digitalized picture of his or her face, i.e., the avatar. Believable visual analogs of 15-year-old versions of participants on the basis of digital pictures of their face, were created.

For a period of seven days, participants received one daily message via Facebook to which they had to respond. In the experimental condition, the messages were designed to trigger thinking about the future self (e.g., "Imagine and briefly describe what you do on a day like today in exactly three years from now. Think, for example, of your activities that day, whom you meet, your work, family, sports, hobbies, etc."). Participants in the control group responded to similar messages, but these were situated in the present (e.g., "Briefly describe what you did yesterday."). Messages referred to main life domains such as family, relationships, work, education, social life, sports, and hobbies.

Respondents then indicated how vividly they could imagine their future self, rating vividness both on items, as well through photographic representation of a face (see picture). The authors also asked respondents to self-report their delinquent behaviour.



The analyses showed that participants who had been linked to their future self reported less delinquent involvement than the controls. Mediation analyses revealed that this effect was mediated by changes in vividness of the future self, in the sense that increases in vividness led to lower self-reported delinquency.

The findings are not only theoretically relevant, but also hold promise for interventions aiming to reduce delinquency.

Gelder, J.L. van, Luciano, E.C., Weulen Kranenbarg, M. & Hershfield, H.E. (2015). Friends with my future self: A longitudinal vividness intervention reduces delinquency. *Criminology*, 53, 158-179.

NSCR Practitioners in Residence

NSCR started a programme for structural exchange with policy, practice, and the media in 2015, through its 'Practitioners in Residence' programme. Each year, a number of stakeholders from these segments of society are invited to visit NSCR, individually, several times during the year. During these visits, Practitioners in Residence meet with research staff, take part in work meetings, and generally get acquainted with the NSCR 'on the job'.

Practitioners in Residence reflect on their visits and exchanges, and give feedback on the NSCR research programme during a closing session at the end of the year.

In 2015, NSCR welcomed five Practitioners in Residence: Rinus Otte, judge and professor of Criminal Law at Groningen University, Arie van den Hurk, in charge of knowledge exchange at the Netherlands Department of Prisons, Harald Garretsen, inspector at the Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority, Folkert Jensma, journalist at the NRC Handelsblad with a specific focus on crime and law enforcement, and Wichard Verlaan, operational specialist at the police department Hollands Midden.

The programme was an immediate success, and evaluated by both NSCR staff and practitioners as informative, useful and stimulating.

Privacy of crime victims

Over the past decades, victims of crime have played an increasingly prominent role in criminal proceedings all over the world. While this is generally perceived as a positive development, it may also have its downsides. In the Netherlands, once a victim officially reports a crime to the police, his or her personal information, including name and residential address, is automatically included in the criminal file and can be shared with the accused and others. Sensitive information may be read aloud during public court hearings. Victims and relatives of victims who attend the hearing are visible for the accused, the public, and the press.

NSCR and VU University studied legal and practical aspects of privacy protection of victims using a mixed method approach, comprised of interviews with police officers, the prosecution, the judiciary, lawyers (for defendants and for victims), the National and Amsterdam Bar Associations, Victim Support Netherlands, the Dutch Association of Insurance Companies, the Criminal Injuries Compensation Fund, and journalists. Victims and their relatives completed a survey or were interviewed by telephone.

In the Netherlands, victim identity can be shielded in four ways: reporting/testifying under a different address; reporting/testifying under a number; testifying as a partially anonymous witness (an option included in the law whereby identifying information is shielded); and testifying as a threatened witness (an option included in the law whereby all information is shielded; the witness is not present at the hearing of the case).

The findings of the study show that all four possibilities are made available to only a very limited group of victims. Protection of victims' privacy greatly depends on the commitment of individual processing officials. Sometimes, the victim's identity is initially shielded, but is then unintentionally revealed during or after the criminal trial. The more processing officials involved in the case, the harder it becomes for victim information to remain shielded. In a small number of high profile cases, much is done to protect victim privacy. However, this is not the case for less serious cases. Also, in practice, victims are seldom given the possibility available according guidelines to use another entrance to the court building or to use separate waiting rooms to the accused.

Many respondents indicated that they are afraid of reprisals or retaliation by the accused, their family, or their friends. A substantial number choose not to attend the hearing to avoid confrontations with either the accused or the public. Three quarters of respondents did not know that shielding their address or name was possible. Almost half of the respondents was not aware that their personal information would be included in the criminal file after reporting a crime, and that this information would be forwarded to the accused. More than a quarter of the respondents indicated that they would rather have had their personal information shielded from the accused. In the vast majority of cases, the victim's name and/or address was mentioned aloud at the public hearing. One third experienced this as an intrusion on their privacy.

The study showed that available measures to protect the private life of victims are available, but seldom implemented. While criminal procedures necessarily entail a breach of private life for those involved, among which are victims of crime and their relatives, it is important that there are no *unnecessary* breaches of the privacy of victims. A correct implementation of the EU Directive on minimum standards for victims (2012/29/EU) requires better implementation of the relevant policy guidelines to protect victim privacy.

On basis of the findings of the research, the minister of Security and Justice of the Netherlands announced an amendment of the guidelines governing the privacy of victims who notify the police of a crime, ensuring better privacy protection.

*This study was carried out in collaboration with
the VU University, Amsterdam.*

Malsch, M., Dijkman, N. & Akkermans, A. (2016).
*Het zichtbare slachtoffer: privacy van slachtoffers
binnen het strafproces.*
Den Haag: Boom criminologie.



Juvenile sex offenders: employment and criminal careers

Juvenile sex offenders are often regarded as a special group of offenders, both specialists and chronic offenders. This is reflected in studies on specific risk factors associated with (juvenile) sexual offending. Chantal van de Berg studied the criminal careers of juvenile sex offenders over a long period, from ages 14 to 28, and found that while general recidivism was high (74 percent), sexual re-offending was much lower at 12 percent. Subsequently, she studied how the development of offending over the life-course in this group, characterized by an offending peak in adolescence and a decline thereafter, can be explained by important transitions to adult roles of employment, marriage, and parenthood.

Van den Berg found that entry into employment appeared normative and perhaps even somewhat elevated at younger ages. However, employment quickly stagnated. Many men worked on short contracts, lasting on average around six months. While some men married at relatively young ages, marriage rates also declined as the men aged. The onset for parenthood was similar to employment, with juvenile sex offenders having their first child at a younger age than average Dutch males.

Using tailored models to control for selection effects, the analyses showed that, of the three life events, only employment was associated with a reduction in offending. The reduction was by more than a third overall. Subsequent analyses showed that it was regular employment in particular that was associated with a decline in offending probabilities, while employment by a temporary job agency did not have such an effect.

Overall, results show that despite the low limited labour market participation of juvenile sex offenders, employment was the only investigated factor that could be associated with a reduction in offending. The findings are of particular relevance for policy development. They suggest that tightened rules for issuing sex offenders with a certificate of good conduct may in fact be counterproductive.

Van den Berg, C.J.W. (2015).
From Boys to Men: Explaining Juvenile Sex Offenders' Criminal Careers.
PhD thesis VU University, Amsterdam.

Reintegration of former detainees: an experimental study

Each year around 40,000 offenders are released from prison. Many of these ex-prisoners face challenges rebuilding their lives and reintegrating into mainstream society. A place to live and a conventional source of income can prevent offenders from returning to a life of crime. However, the stigma associated with a prison record may block ex-prisoners' conventional opportunities, and as such contribute to their prolonged criminal involvement. To examine the effect of having a prison record, a field experiment was conducted, to ascertain whether and to what extent being an 'ex-prisoner' reduced individuals' chances of finding a job and a place to live.

Field experiments offer a unique opportunity to examine actual behaviour in real life settings and avoid having to rely solely on what respondents say they would do in a certain situation. For this particular study we responded to 384 online job advertisements and 231 online advertisements offering rental apartments. Each advertiser was sent three fictitious CVs of which some mentioned the applicant had recently served prison time, whereas others did not. In addition, half of the applicants was given a Dutch surname, while the other half was given an Arabic surname. Applicants' CVs were comparable on all other aspects. Discrimination of ex-prisoners in the job and housing market was measured by comparing the number of positive responses between those applicants that had served prison and those who had not.

We did not find that Dutch employees discriminated against ex-prisoners: the percentage of applicants with and without a prison history who received a positive response did not differ. When looking for a place to live however, ex-prisoners were much less likely to hear back: ex-prisoners received a positive response in 23 percent of all applications, compared to 43 percent for those who did not mention a recent prison term.

The results comparing native Dutch and non-native Dutch applicants were opposite to those for ex-prisoners: non-native Dutch were no less likely to receive a positive response when looking for a place to live, but were less likely to be invited for a job interview following their online application.

While the field experiment allowed employers and house owners' behaviours to be observed in a natural setting, the current study remains silent on the reasons behind these patterns. Just as labour market discrimination of minority groups may be explained by prevailing negative stereotypes of minorities being bad workers, house owners discriminating ex-prisoners could be acting on the assumption that ex-prisoners are more likely to cause trouble or be unable to pay the rent on time. The results from the experiment therefore suggest that supporting ex-prisoners to find housing may contribute to their reintegration, which in turn may prevent future criminal behavior.

Dirkzwager, A., Blokland, A., Nannes, K. & Vroonland, M. (2015).
Effecten van detentie op het vinden van werk en een woning: twee veldexperimenten.
Tijdschrift voor Criminologie, 57, 5-30.

See also: <http://www.kennislink.nl/publicaties/liever-geen-bajesklant>

Sexual abuse allegations in divorce and custody disputes

In the Netherlands each year, in around 300-500 divorce cases, one parent accuses the other parent of sexual abuse of the child(ren) (CSA). CSA committed by a parent is hard to establish. Civil judges dealing with these cases face a tough dilemma. Not taking allegations seriously may result in exposing the child to abuse. On the other hand, taking the allegation seriously means exposing the child and the accused parent to an invasive investigation, which may damage their relationship, as well as their well-being. Current Dutch family (procedural) law provides judges with no special guidelines on how to deal with such allegations.

In this study, international literature on allegations of child sexual abuse during divorce proceedings was reviewed. Anne Smit, PhD at A-LAB, attempted to answer four research questions that focus on (1) the prevalence of CSA allegations in divorce procedures; (2) the response of family court judges; (3) the ratio of founded and unfounded allegations of CSA under these circumstances; and (4) the (possible) consequences of the false positives and false negatives in legal decision making for the children and parents involved.

The literature study showed, firstly, that very little empirical legal research has been carried out on this topic. It appeared that sexual abuse allegations are relatively rare, occurring in a small percentage of cases. Civil judges in these kinds of cases often (temporarily) stop contact between the accused parent and child. Many judges enlist professional screening. This, however, tends to 'burden' cases in the sense that many actors become involved and cases tend to take (much) longer before they can be concluded. There are reports that such lengthened procedures are additionally harmful for the children. The literature gave only scant evidence on the prevalence of false allegations.

This study will subsequently interview judges, lawyers, parents, and children who have witnessed such cases. It will also investigate the characteristics of divorce and custody cases in which allegations of sexual abuse have been made, as well as the decisions Dutch judges take.

This research was carried out in collaboration with the Faculty of Law of the VU University Amsterdam, funded by an NWO grant (406-12-156).

Smit, A., Antokolskaia, M. and Bijleveld, C. (2015) Between Scylla and Charybdis: A Literature Review of Sexual Abuse Allegations in Divorce Proceedings. *Psychology*, 6, 1373-1384. doi: 10.4236/psych.2015.611134.



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Dr. S. Dennison	Griffith University, Brisbane
Dr. C. Vandeviver	Ghent University

PhD degrees awarded

Geert Mesters (double degree)	16 January 2015
Marco van Bommel	4 March 2015
Mioara Zoutewelle	12 March 2015
Ruben de Cuyper	22 May 2015
Chantal van den Berg	18 September 2015

Visitors

Rebecca Hayes	Central Michigan University
William Moreto	University of Central Florida
Mikko Aaltonen	University of Helsinki
Alana Piper	Griffith University
Roni Factor	Hebrew University Jerusalem
Matt Vogel	University of Missouri – St. Louis

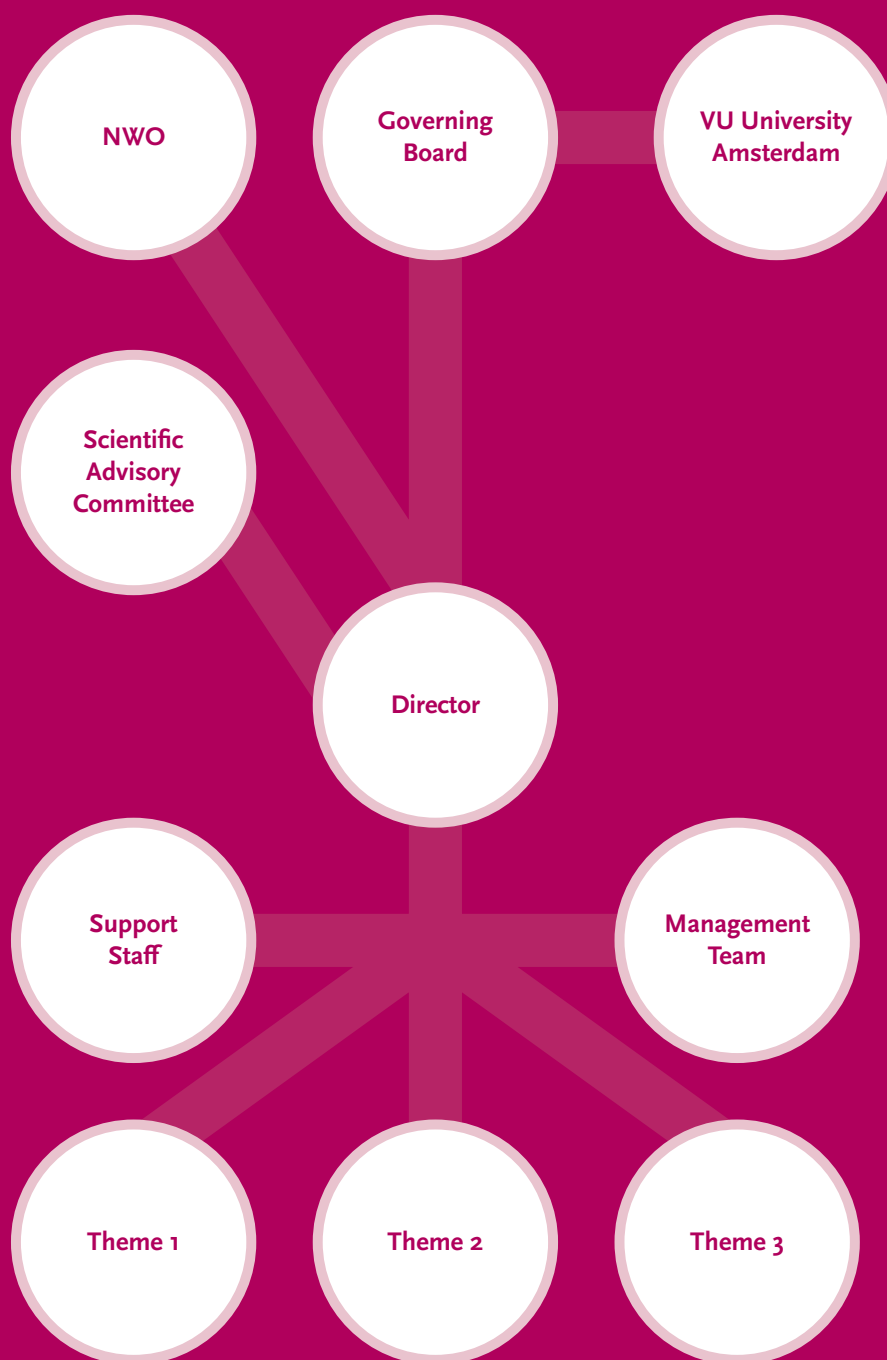
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Prof. Clifford Shearing - University of Cape Town, South-Africa & Griffith University, Australia
Prof. Terence Thornberry - University of Maryland, USA
Prof. David Weisburd - Hebrew University, Israel & George Mason University, USA

Formal structure NSCR





Netherlands Institute for the Study
of Crime and Law Enforcement

Netherlands Institute for the Study of Crime and Law Enforcement
Institute of the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research

Visiting address

De Boelelaan 1077a
1081 HV Amsterdam
The Netherlands

Postal address

PO Box 71304
1008 BH Amsterdam
The Netherlands

tel: +31 20 59 85239
email: info@nscr.nl
website: www.nscr.nl

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