

# Declining juvenile crime

## Explanations for the international downturn

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### Summary

In The Netherlands registered youth crime figures show a spectacular downward trend from 2007 (minus 60%). This decrease can be seen amongst girls and boys, and also amongst ethnic minorities and the native Dutch. This trend can also be observed in a lot of other countries. It is striking that also in international terms youth crime has been capped. A strikingly similar picture is apparent to the one in the Netherlands. The level of the available evidence of the decrease in youth crime in a large number of different countries means that the possibility of a coincidental development occurring at the same time is extremely small, and hence there must be a causal connection. It seems that a number of international developments created a climate favorable for juvenile crime reduction: more (techno)prevention, less use of alcohol, more commitment to schooling, more satisfaction with living conditions, and the use of time. For The Netherlands this goes together with an diminished willingness of the Dutch police to follow up on suspicions that a youngster committed a minor offense. However, the real trigger for the freefall of youth crime seems to be the extensive worldwide dissemination of smartphones and online-games that started in 2006/7. This led to a lot of free time spent ‘looking at screens’ and not being present on the street and public space. So the main factor responsible for the fall in youth crime can be found in the use of free time and a different role and influence of peer groups.

**Key words: Youth crime; Crime decline; Technology; Crime prevention; Police registration; Crime trends**

### Introduction

According to police surveys, the number of juvenile suspects of a crime has dropped by about 60% over the past ten years. Despite minor differences, a substantial downturn can be observed across all types of crime, both among boys and girls, as well as among the various ethnic groups (native-born, various types of immigrants). It appears to be a general trend of a decline in the number of juvenile suspects of over 50%. This has directly resulted in a drop in the number of referrals to HALT Bureau, fewer community punishment orders, less juvenile detention and fewer placements in a judicial institution for juvenile offenders, also known as PIJ measures (Kalidien 2016).

Such a significant development requires explication. Is something extraordinary happening among Dutch youth, or is this the result of a successful policy to limit juvenile delinquency? It could also be that this trend is not exclusively limited to our country, and is also seen in other countries, thus requiring a broader explanation.

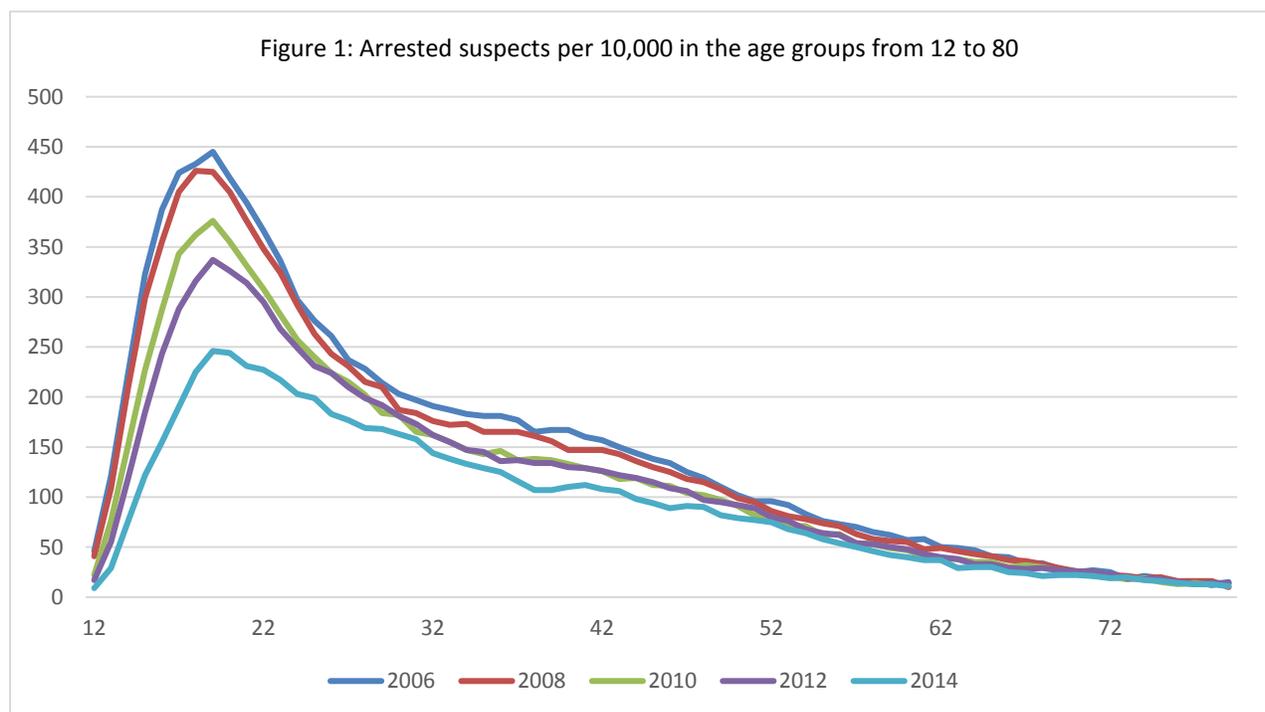
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## A brief diagnosis of the Netherlands

In this section, we briefly explore the developments in the Netherlands, while other contributors shed more in-depth light on the trend in this special issue. Figure 1 shows the age-crime curves across several years.<sup>1</sup> It consistently shows the known pattern that the extent to which minors in a particular age group come in contact with the police shows a sharp upward curve from the age of 12 onwards, peaks around the age of 18/19 and then decreases sharply and later more gradually. However, the noteworthy aspect of this curve is that it deflates like a soufflé: the peak is no longer at 450 out of 10,000 but has decreased to 250. This near halving among youths aged 18/19 is spectacular, but is nothing compared to the even more dramatic drop among youth under the age of 18/19. The decrease among youths aged 16/17 is 50%; among youths aged 14/15 65% and among youths aged 12/13 a whopping 80%. *This means: the younger, the fewer juvenile delinquents!*

**Figure 1. Arrested suspects per 10,000 in the age groups from 12 to 80**



It may appear that the presented age-crime curves suggest that juvenile crime decreases from a consistently high level to a lower level. This would be incorrect, as the level around the year 2007 was extremely high. For instance, the 2002 curve resembles that of 2012, and that of 1997 resembles that of 2013 (Van der Laan et al. 2014). So it appears that the drop from 2007 onwards is not a self-contained trend, but should be viewed in the light of the sharp increase in the preceding period. To be more precise: the number of juvenile delinquents gradually increased from 1980 to 2000 (from 100 to 150 per 10,000), after which the upturn shows a spectacular

<sup>1</sup> The overview shows the even years starting from 2005 - with the odd years showing the intermediate data. We opted for 'arrested suspects' regarding whom a police report has been filed rather than the slighter vaguer 'registered suspects' (when the police has a reasonable suspicion that the suspects is guilty of the crime).

increase until 2007 (to 270), which is followed by a similarly dramatic drop (to below 100). The downturn is even stronger for the most minor crimes (-63% from 2007 to 2014), and less so for the mid-level crimes (-39%) and the most serious crimes(-54%).<sup>2</sup>

This gives rise to observing the development across the entire period from the year 2000 to today. This reveals that the group with the most recent significant decrease, the youngest offenders, is also the group that showed the sharpest upturn in the preceding period: among 12-year-olds the number of suspects (per capita) in the time period 2000-2005 increases by more than 80%, while this is nearly 50% for the 17-year-olds. The question that arises is whether these are real effects, in the sense that the crime of the mainly very young first increases dramatically to then spectacularly drop. Is this connected with police activities and the way in which the police registers crimes?

Police statistics make a distinction between 'registered' and 'arrested' suspects. The registered youths are suspects who have come into contact with the police on account of a crime, while for the second group the police have acted on the suspicion and have drawn up an official report in preparation for further actions, such as a referral to HALT Bureau or prosecution by the Public Prosecution Service. The statistics reveal that there are differences in the development of the categories of young suspects. Shortly before 2007, the number of registered suspects increased, but the number of arrested youths grew even more exponentially. After that year, both groups showed a downturn, while the number of arrested youths declined much stronger than the number of registered suspects. This indicates that the police first filed more and later less police reports when confronted with juvenile offenders. This is especially true for offences such as destruction of property and acts of violence in a public place among the youngest offenders and first offenders.<sup>3</sup> So in this group the changed working method of the police in part contributed to the decline in the figures on juvenile crime. The 'actual decrease' concerns mainly repeat offenders, habitual offenders and multiple offenders.<sup>4</sup>

It is plausible that the more frequent drawing up of police reports on misbehaving youths is connected to the performance agreements made with the police to refer tens of thousands more cases to the Public Prosecution Service after 2001.<sup>5</sup> This goal is in line with the then repressive climate, to which the police and the judiciary responded by handling cases formally rather than their previous method of informally handling cases. This also explains why the number of

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<sup>2</sup> The division according to severity of the offence is based on the extent and the average rate of sentence imposed per type of offence. This is expressed in cell day equivalents (for which fines and community punishment orders have been converted according to the usual calculation rules). This is a method that has been employed by one of the authors since the 1990s, and most recently in Berghuis 2016. The WODC has now developed a similar approach (Beerthuizen et al. 2015), which has also been tried out in the United Kingdom (ONS 2016).

<sup>3</sup> We use the term first offenders to indicate debut offenders. Technically speaking, first offenders have usually committed one or more crimes before being arrested by the police. We applied the same reasoning to repeat offenders and habitual and multiple offenders.

<sup>4</sup> In the period 2005-2007, the number of registered first offenders increased less than the volume of arrestees, followed by a two times as strong decrease in the number of arrestees in that group than the number of registered debut suspects. It is a different case for repeat offenders: whereas the number of registrations decreased in 2005-2007, the number of arrests increased dramatically in that period. From 2007 onwards, the volume of registrations and the number of arrests decreased equally dramatically.

<sup>5</sup> 'To a safer society', *Parliamentary Papers II* 2002/03, 28684, 1.

arrested suspects also continued to increase after 2002, while according to police crime rates and victim surveys crime structurally declined from that year.

Even though it appears that the police's changed response to juvenile delinquents has had a significant effect, this cannot completely explain the developments. The fact that there also is a real change in crime is also supported by the outcome of research in which youths qualify their delinquent behaviour. This research reveals a slight increase from 1988 to 1998, a sharp increase in 2004-2005, followed by a decline (Van der Laan & Goudriaan 2016). This drop in the number of offenders runs parallel to the extent to which youths claim to have been victimised by crimes. This is logical to some extent, as the boundaries between perpetrator and victim are blurred due to a risky life-style, or because of the prevalence of inter-youth crime (Rokven et al. 2013; Cops & Pleysier 2016). Whatever the reason, the number of victims in the age group of 15- to 17-year-olds has declined by nearly 60% since 2005 (CBS 2016).

This could be due to the fact that juveniles are less preoccupied with 'traditional offences', instead opting for newer crime forms, especially cyber crime (including online purchase and sale fraud). Since it appears that juveniles are hardly involved in cyber crime (Zebel et al. 2014), this cannot explain the significant decline in crime figures. This even concerns forms of bullying, with the new form of cyber bullying being far below the old-fashioned form of bullying (meta-evaluation by Modecki et al. 2014).

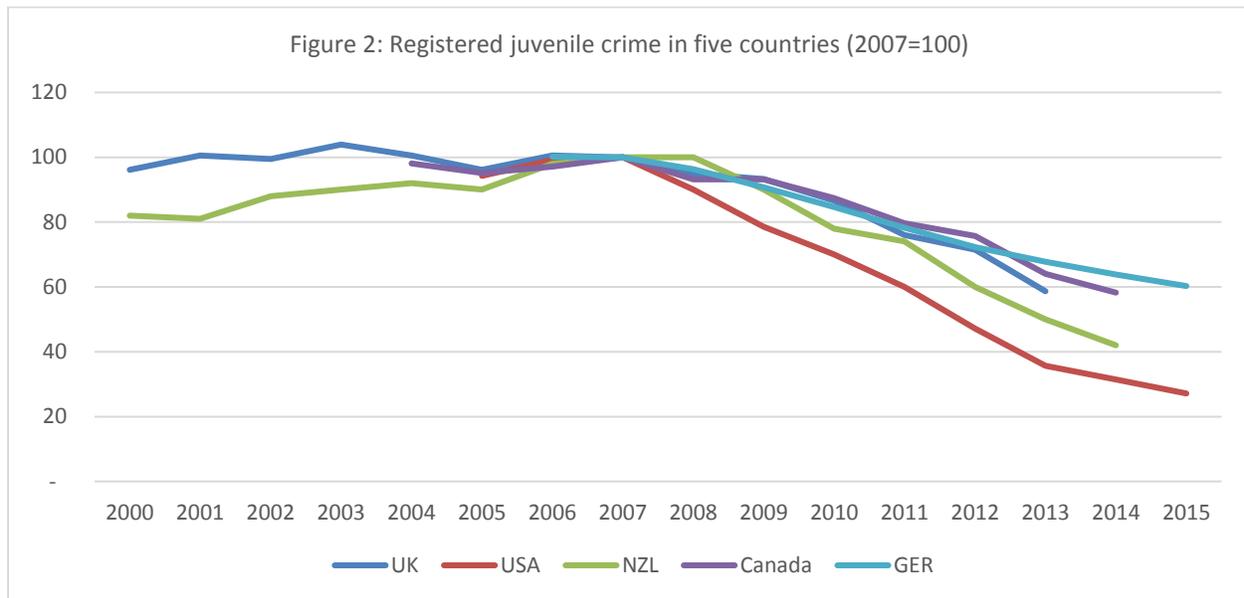
Conclusion: a part of the developments of the past 15 years can be ascribed to the extent to which the police are inclined to respond to delinquent conduct of (very) young persons, including public disorder crimes and destruction of property, by drawing up official reports and referring cases to the Public Prosecution Office. However, there also seems to be a real trend in the way juvenile delinquents display delinquent behaviour.

### ***International developments***

It would be ideal if there were a source which would show the figures on juvenile crime from several countries side by side. Although the *European sourcebook of crime and criminal justice statistics* (HEUNI 2015) has made a first attempt at it, the overviews contained therein has many blank spots and a comparison of several years indicates that the figures are not as valid. It is better to study publications from various countries. Figure 2 provides information on five countries.<sup>6</sup> The figure shows that in those countries registered juvenile crime is dropping dramatically.

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<sup>6</sup> Germany: Polizeiliche Kriminalstatistik 2015: Kinder und jugendliche Tatverdächtigen, Wiesbaden: Bundeskriminalamt; Canada: M.K. Allen & T. Superle, Youth crime in Canada, Ottawa: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 2016; UK: Youth justice statistics, 2014/2015 England and Wales, London: Ministry of Justice, Youth Justice Board; New Zealand: Child and youth prosecution tables, Wellington: Statistics New Zealand, 2016; US: Juvenile arrest rate trends, 2015, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs.

**Figure 2 Registered juvenile crime in five countries (2007=100)**

Focusing on Germany, we see that the number of arrested juvenile suspects (12-17 years old) has declined by 40% since 2006.<sup>7</sup> The decline is more pronounced in the youngest age group (46%) than in the group of 14- and 15-year-olds (42%) and 16- and 17-year-olds (35%). This pattern is similar to that in the Netherlands, where a drop of over 60% in the number of arrested suspects has been detected, a third of which can be attributed to changes in police working methods. However, the developments in Germany in 2006 and 2007 do not present a clear view. The number of *jugendliche Tatverdächtigen* (14- to 17-year-olds) was constant up until 2006, while the younger age group (0- to 13-year-olds) has shown a gradual decline since 1998.

Anglo-Saxon countries also show a distinct decline in juvenile crime, specifically after 2006-2007. This applies not only to the countries shown in Figure 2 but also to Australia and Scotland. The drop in juvenile crime across Europe is also evidenced by the decline in the number of detained youths. In 25 EU countries, the number of detained young people dropped by 41.9% between 2008 and 2014. The most pronounced drop occurred in the year 2014, when 14.2% fewer juveniles were detained (Eurostat 2016). It is tempting to declare this trend applicable to the entire world, but it should be avoided. In Latin America (Uruguay), for instance, such a development is not visible (Munyo 2013).

**Conclusion:** The Dutch development of a dramatic downturn in registered juvenile crime is not unique. This means that general causes typical of Western, industrialised countries should be explored rather than Dutch factors in order to explain the detected trend.

<sup>7</sup> Source: Polizeiliche Kriminalstatistik van het Bundesministerium des Innen in various years – this concerns *erfasste Tatverdächtigen*. The structure of the statistics regarding the age of suspects changed in 2006: as of that year, developments in the 12- and 13-year-old age group is shown separately, whereas before this age group belonged to the broader category ‘*Kinder*’ (0-13 years).

## Explanations

The rise and subsequent fall of some form of delinquent behaviour is not rare among adolescents. Half of adolescents displays delinquent or aggressive behaviour (7% fairly much, 1% serious, 0.02% very serious), and proportionally many of young boys under the age of 15 attending a prevocational secondary school (Prins 2008). There is a plethora of factors that could in theory explain the rise and subsequent fall in (juvenile) crime (Berghuis & De Waard 2011). Sometimes, this involves 'approximate' factors that closely resemble the behaviour, and sometimes more indirect factors, such as character traits and early upbringing situations. We have focused primarily on the more directly linked factors that could explain the spectacular decline. We can divide them into three categories: *can, want and may*. 'Can' refers to the fact that it is no longer possible to commit certain crimes, or that it is has been made so difficult that this requires a substantial effort or special expertise. This covers things such as the strongly improved security against car theft, which contributed to the dramatic decline in car thefts. 'Want' refers to the fact that citizens no longer want to engage in delinquent behaviour, for instance because the takings are insufficient (compared to those of alternative legal options) or because people risk too much for the crime (people have a lot to lose, for instance status). 'May' refers to the normative climate, the moral disapproval that can be connected to delinquency and which can be expressed in formal and informal preventative and corrective measures.

### *Can*

The security hypothesis (*beveiligingshypothese*) asserts that the decline particularly of property offences is due to strongly improved security. The appeal of this hypothesis is that its strong focus on security is an international trend (Van Dijk et al. 2012; Farrell & Brown 2016). It is undeniable that both citizens and businesses also in our country have stepped up security measures to protect their property. This trend showed an increase in the 1990s and appeared to have reached a saturation point in the first half of the 2000s. More anti-burglary and anti-theft measures have been taken and more investments have been made in hiring security staff (De Waard & Van Steden 2012).

This could have resulted in a significant decline in the number of crimes affected by prevention, as well as in a reduction in the number of citizens who mainly commit such crimes from opportunistic motives. This appears less applicable to violent crimes and vandalism, as these crimes are possibly affected by the fact that they are more visible, given that they take place in the public area where CCTV is abundantly present. But the overall drop in crime figures - also for forms of crime that cannot be as efficiently combated with preventative measures - makes it plausible that the security hypothesis cannot provide a full explanation.

The question furthermore is whether the security hypothesis can help explain why the decline in juvenile crime is relatively strong in the youngest age group: from 2007 onwards, the number of arrested 12- and 13-year-olds (per capita) declined by a whopping 20% per year on average, and this tapers down to 4% among the age group of 25-year olds and up. Farrell et al. (2015) have proposed the debut hypothesis for this trend, which was previously also seen in the United States (*debuthypothese*). They assert that for crimes that typically serve as a stepping stone to long-term involvement in anti-social or criminal behaviour security measures prevent that step from being taken. The strongly improved security measures against shoplifting and car theft would

prevent the offenders from committing the same and other crimes later. The objection to this hypothesis is that the decline in juvenile crime, as has been stated above, is mainly visible among recidivists and less among first offenders. The conclusion is that the security hypothesis indeed applies to specific crimes, such as car theft, housebreaking and robberies, but insufficiently explains the recent substantial and overall decline in juvenile crime.

### ***Want***

There is a correlation between the presence of juvenile delinquent behaviour and individual functioning (psycho-social, substance abuse, hobbies) and the nature and quality of the connection with family, school and friends. All of these factors either promote or reduce delinquency. An accumulation of delinquency-promoting factors that are not compensated by protective factors are markedly present in juveniles with the highest levels of delinquency (Van der Laan & Blom 2006). While it remains unclear whether a deterioration in the relation with school or family is a cause or consequence of delinquent behaviour, it appears to play a more prominent role when offenders decide at a later age to give up such behaviour. In any case, the extent of association with other delinquents is a contributing factor in both the rise and decline of anti-social behaviour (Luijpers 2000).

As children grow up, peers play an increasingly important role and having 'bad friends' becomes a dominant factor in starting to display delinquent behaviour. A sound relationship with parents cannot prevent this from happening, but delinquency increases if the parents show a lack of interest in their child's actions (Sentse et al. 2010). The extent of delinquent or aggressive behaviour in juveniles is relatively high in the case of indifferent parents who offer little support and issue few demands (Prins 2008). The opposite also applies: juveniles with an investment in conventional (not anti-social and delinquent) society stand to lose much when caught committing an offence. This mostly concerns loss of status and prestige or prospects of education and employment. These juveniles are more inclined to turn away from delinquent behaviour.

### **We will now discuss several items that are relevant to the possible explanation for the decline in juvenile delinquency:**

***Substance abuse:*** the National Drugs Monitor (Van Laar & Van Ooyen-Houben 2016) reveals that (heavy) use of cannabis, cocaine, opiates, ecstasy and amphetamines occasionally declines among juveniles. For instance, the current use of cannabis has almost halved since 2001. Other countries show divergent developments in this area. Changes in *the use of alcohol* are remarkable. The aforementioned monitor shows that the current use of alcohol among school-going juveniles dropped dramatically in the period 2003-2013 (see also the article of De Looze & Koning in this issue). The phenomenon of 'binge-drinking' has also declined.

The noteworthy aspect of this trend is: the younger the juvenile, the lower the use and the greater the decline; among 12-year-olds the downturn is nearly at 90% and among 16-year-olds over 10%. In most other countries about which data are available, alcohol use has also declined (particularly in the Nordic countries, Ireland and the US, less so in Germany and the southern European countries) - the general trend being that juveniles use less alcohol (EMCDDA 2016). The monitor shows that alcohol is the number one substance used in nightlife: a less heavy use of alcohol could have a dampening effect on violent incidents. The monitor also reveals the finding

that heavy or problematic alcohol use is often accompanied with bad relations with family/relatives/school/, a great focus on friends and limited self-control. In short: the type of factors that stimulate anti-social behaviour and delinquency.

The number of *secondary school drop-outs* decreased intermittently in the period 2003-2013 by, on balance, 20% (CBS/StatLine). International figures on completed (higher) secondary education indicate a limited increase between 2003 and 2013 (from 6% to 7%) and do not present a clear picture when individual countries are observed (OECD 2016, table A2.4; also Eurostat;<sup>8</sup> see also the article of Marie & Paulovic in this issue).

***Satisfaction with life*** among Dutch juveniles (15 to 25 years) appears to have increased gradually from 2002 to 2012, with an accelerated growth over the last few years. The score increased from 7.5 to 8.5 (Boelhouwer et al. 2015). A similar development can be seen in Poland and in Germany (increase after 2006) and, on balance, also a positive trend in the United Kingdom, but not as evidently in Sweden and Spain. A sense of well-being is linked to health, income, social contact and a sense of security (Boelhouwer et al. 2015). Young people who live with their mother and father and who have many friends are relatively happy (Prins 2008).

***Media consumption/free time***: virtually all juveniles (10-18 years) currently have a mobile phone, usually a *smartphone*, which they use heavily, particularly for communication (Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp).. Especially boys (slightly more in the lower education group) have *gaming* as a key hobby (79% compared to 28% among girls), and sometimes also making videos (12% compared to 8% among girls) (Stichting Kennisnet 2015; see also Van Rooij & Schoenmakers 2013). Between 2005 and 2013 the (recent) use of the internet among juveniles gradually increased by 29% (from 71% to 92% of all 12- to 15-year-olds), on the one hand because they obtained more access to the internet, but mainly because they made more use of the internet. Young people mainly use the internet to communicate, such as e-mailing and chatting, and to play games and download films and music (CBS/StatLine; Kok 2014).

The rise in internet use is strongest among juveniles with lower education (primary education, preparatory vocational education): it increased from nearly 40% to almost 70% by 2013. Too little longitudinal data are available on the number of hours spent using the internet, but in the pre-mobile phone era (2002-2004) an increase could be seen to start among juveniles, from five to eight hours per week (CBS/StatLine). In 2011, it was measured that juveniles spent three hours per day 'using media', which appeared to be at the expense of direct social contacts (Cloin 2013). The current trend is alleged to be: '38% of young people aged between 10 and 16 report to spend at least three hours per weekday on gaming.'<sup>9</sup> Using the latest technology for communication and recreation takes up a substantial amount of time and it is plausible that this trend also occurred in other countries.

It appears that young people are 'using screens' more and spend less time loitering in the street, whether or not as part of a problematic group of youths (Van Burik et al. 2013; see also contributions of Weerman & Van der Laan et al. in this issue). This has possibly contributed to

<sup>8</sup> See [ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Early\\_leavers\\_from\\_education\\_and\\_training](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Early_leavers_from_education_and_training).

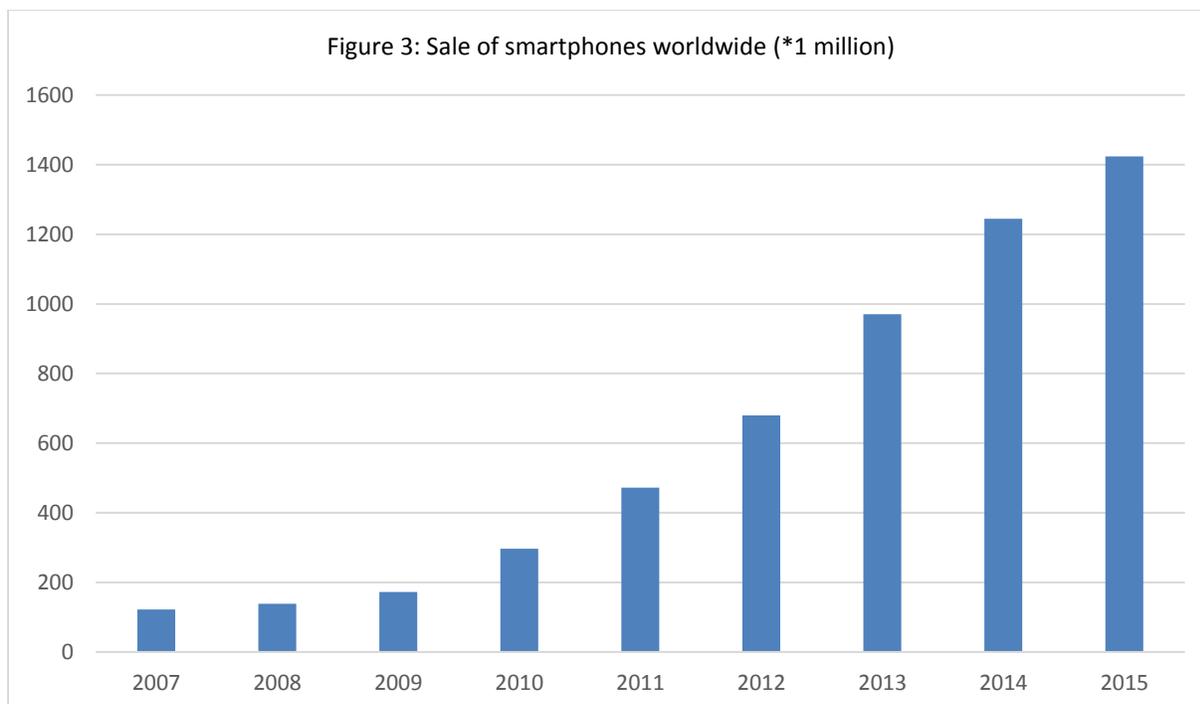
<sup>9</sup> See [www.nji.nl/nl/Databank/Cijfers-over-Jeugd-en-Opvoeding/Cijfers-per-onderwerp/Gamen](http://www.nji.nl/nl/Databank/Cijfers-over-Jeugd-en-Opvoeding/Cijfers-per-onderwerp/Gamen).

the decline in the number of annoying, nuisance-causing and criminal youth groups (Ferwerda & Van Ham 2013; see also these authors' article in this issue).

When young people spend less time in groups (and on the streets), this could also help explain the decline among mainly frequent and multiple offenders, stated above. Any delinquent behaviour could then be viewed as an individual act and is less connected to group processes that could stimulate the continuation of delinquent behaviour in order to show off, by egging each other on, and to maintain a particular status.

The themes discussed here appear to indicate an overall reduction of 'want'. Young people use less alcohol, have more screen time and appear to be hang out with their friends on the streets less. They stay in school more and are generally happier with their lives. If one factor needs to be singled out as the key driver behind the spectacular decrease in juvenile crime, it would have to be technological developments – the rapid rise of the smartphone starting in 2007 (see Figure 3<sup>10</sup>) and games (online via broadband). This apparently ushered in a new form of leisure use among young people, increased fascination with and kicks in the virtual world, leaving less room for hanging out with friends and acting out of boredom.

**Figure 3**      **Sale of smartphones worldwide (in millions)**



<sup>10</sup> See [www.statista.com/statistics/263437/global-smartphone-sales-to-end-users-since-2007/](http://www.statista.com/statistics/263437/global-smartphone-sales-to-end-users-since-2007/).

**May**

The normative climate in society changes over time.

The 1960s saw a cultural transformation in the Western world, in which (survival) values made way for immaterial (expression) values, accompanied with less respect for authority (Inglehart 2008) – the ‘permissive society’. This was followed gradually by a less permissive and more repressive public opinion (see the SCP reports).

In the 1990s, tolerance for law-breaking received criticism and culminated in the policy memorandum ‘Tolerance in the Netherlands’.<sup>11</sup> The turning point in public opinion also occurred in criminal law, with the first official reference point being the policy memorandum ‘Society and crime’ in 1985.

Slowly but surely, crime became an issue that could no longer be swept under the rug (shoplifting, ‘a healthy response to an unhealthy society’), and was seen as a problem with real damage for the victims. Crime was not necessarily punished severely, but received a formal disapproving response more often (Berghuis & Mak 2002). The percentage of discretionary dismissals for juvenile crime dropped from 70% in 1981 to 4% in 2007 (Berghuis & Van Hooff 1991; Kalidien 2016).

More attention was devoted to various ‘resocialisation programmes’, of which we know that they can reduce delinquency by about an eighth (De Waard & Berghuis 2014). So, the moral climate around crime has become more disapproving, also regarding minor (violent) offences, such as insulting a public servant (‘violence against public servants’). This has an inhibiting effect on the inclination to commit crime, enhanced by the increased visibility of much of such conduct (CCTV in the streets and entertainment districts). A parallel trend among the youngest generation in our country appears to be attaching great importance to ‘traditional middle-class mentality’: more appreciation for the institute of marriage and family, more interest in employment, getting ahead and financial security (CBS 2012). This indicates greater conformity to conventional society with less room for unaccepted behaviour, including crime.

**Conclusion**

It appears that the spectacular decline in the number of young crime suspects can partially be explained by the reduced inclination of the police to formally holding young people to account for misconduct. This does not explicate the entire trend, a development which is also visible in other countries. This requires a broader explanation that covers more than just the Dutch situation.

The analysis conducted allows for a conclusion that there are two complementary developments that could explain the dramatic decrease in juvenile crime. The first is connected to technological developments, the rise of the smartphone and online gaming, which heralded a change in leisure time, in which hanging out with friends and seeking out kicks with them by displaying behaviour that oversteps moral standards play a more marginalised role.

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<sup>11</sup> *Parliamentary Papers II* 1996/97, 25085, 2.

This plays out against the backdrop - and second development - of a broader trend in which it has become less possible to commit crime (undetected) due to prevention measures and in which crime in itself has become less acceptable.

There is more than one reason behind the fall in crime rates. This development appears to be less connected to pursued policy (technology), while there is also the interplay between the standard setting and prevention measures taken by citizens and businesses and government policy in that area. Crime prevention has been firmly on the agenda since the 1980s (Van Dijk, Van Soomeren & De Waard, 2017), while anti-(youth) crime policy has been tightened up.

A report was recently published in which experts were asked about developments in juvenile crime (Van Ham & Ferwerda 2016). The experts confirm that police registration takes up a separate role, but that there does seem to be a genuine drop in crime, which requires an international explanation. While a decline in risky behaviour (including substance abuse) has been observed, it must be noted that there is the possibility that the overall decrease in juvenile crime is not observed across the board and not across all (highly problematic) groups. Although the experts welcome the inclusion of macro-indicators in the explanation for this trend, it remains unclear which factors are of specific relevance. The experts thus appear to confirm that which Farrell et al. (2008) ironically dubbed 'criminology's dirty little secret': we do not really know why (juvenile) crime has decreased.

At the same time, we hope that our contribution helps to clarify where to look for the causes. Further research should indicate whether leisure time behaviour and the role of peers can in fact explain the observed drop in juvenile crime. The in-depth insight has a practical relevance, as the downturn in juvenile crime probably also has consequences for the future of the criminal justice system as a whole. We have already witnessed the reduction of the juvenile criminal justice sector, with all attendant consequences for the amount of work and associated capacity needed. The Public Prosecution Service and the courts handled about 60% less cases involving minors in 2015 than in 2007, while the number of community punishment order and detained youths showed a similar sharp drop in the same period. This will have consequences for the future: since a similar reduction has occurred in the adult criminal justice sector, it is plausible that due to the lack of 'new recruits' this trend will probably continue.

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