



# Youth *as* risk vs. youth *at* risk

Research on young people in the Flemish  
Community of Belgium

Stefaan Pleysier

*Leuven Institute of Criminology, KU Leuven  
MacCormick Fellow, Edinburgh Law School*

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# Content and aim



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- Content
  - Introduction
    - Research line Youth Criminology
    - Youth Research Platform
    - Belgium and its structure
  - First study
    - Young people and violence
  - Second study
    - Young people and public safety
  - Concluding remarks

# Content and aim

- Aim
  - Impression of research on young people in the Flemish Community of Belgium
  - Illustration of a growing imbalance between ‘youth *at* risk’ vs. ‘youth *as* risk’

# Introduction



# Research line Youth Criminology

Leuven Institute of Criminology



# Research line Youth Criminology

- Leuven Institute of Criminology (LINC)
  - Research centre at Faculty of Law, KU Leuven
  - 10 research lines
- Research line Youth Criminology
  - Research and teaching on youth crime and juvenile justice
  - Team
    - Johan Put and Stefaan Pleysier
    - +/- 14 research and teaching assistants

more on <http://www.law.kuleuven.be/linc/english/index.html>

# Research line Youth Criminology

- Research topics
  - Phenomenological and etiological research on offending, victimization and fear of crime of young people
  - Research on processes of criminalization
  - Research on policy and practices in juvenile justice



# Research line Youth Criminology

- Approach
  - Multidisciplinary
  - Theory and methods
  - Criteria of 'good criminology'
    - Quality
    - Autonomy
    - Responsibility

*cf. address delivered by Lode Walgrave on the occasion of his receipt of the 2008 European Criminology Award of the European Society of Criminology, Edinburgh, 5 September 2008*

# Research line Youth Criminology



*“My plea for a socially responsible criminology does not oppose purely scientific emphases in criminological work. But if it were only that, criminologists would behave like chickens.*

*Chickens lay their egg without concern about how it will be used. Whether used for an omelet, or boiled hard, scrambled, or laid out to hatch, chickens do not care. Likewise, some scientists lay their ‘egg of knowledge’ and do not care how it will be used. (...) Their only mission is, they claim, to produce knowledge. Just as the chickens’ mission is to produce eggs.*

*I view criminology’s mission as higher than laying eggs.”*

# Youth Research Platform

Policy Research Centre, Flemish  
Government

# Youth Research Platform

- Youth Research Platform (JOP)
  - Policy Research Centre by Flemish Government (1 of 21)



- Third generation
  - 2001-2006
  - 2007-2011
  - 2012-2015

# Youth Research Platform

- Youth Research Platform (JOP)
  - Interuniversity and multidisciplinary cooperation
    - Research line Youth Criminology, KU Leuven
    - Department of Social Welfare Studies, Ghent University
    - Research group 'Tempus Omnia Revelat', Vrije Universiteit Brussel
  - ~ criminology and juvenile justice
  - ~ educational sciences
  - ~ sociology

# Youth Research Platform

- Youth Research Platform (JOP)
  - Needs
    - Lack of youth research
    - Lack of overview and alignment of youth research
  - Aims
    - Inventory of youth research
    - Development and administration of a 'youth monitor'
    - Platform for youth research and policy, both at national and international level

*more on <http://jeugdonderzoeksplatform.be/eng/index.htm>*

# Youth Research Platform

- Developing a youth monitor
  - JOP-monitor
    - Point of comparison
    - Monitor of evolutions
    - On 'conditions, convictions and conduct' of Flemish youth
  - Method
    - Repeated cross-sectional surveys
    - General (postal) survey and school surveys

# Youth Research Platform

- Developing a youth monitor
  - Fieldwork postal survey
    - JOP-monitor 1 (2005-2006)
      - Flemish youth 14-25y
      - general postal survey (sampling National register)
      - N=2503 (response rate 53%)
    - JOP-monitor 2 (2008)
      - Flemish youth 12-30y
      - general postal survey
      - N=3710 (response rate 46%)
    - New JOP-monitor 3 in 2013



# Youth Research Platform

- Developing a youth monitor
  - Fieldwork school survey
    - JOP-monitor Brussels (2010)
      - Brussels youth 12-20y
      - School survey (Flemish community in Brussels)
      - N=2502 (response rate 76%, 89%)
    - JOP-monitor Antwerp-Ghent (2012)
      - Antwerp and Ghent youth 12-20y
      - School survey
      - N=3867 (response rate 63%, 88%)
    - New school survey in Brussels, Antwerp and Ghent in 2013

# Belgium and its structure

Crash course



# Belgium and its structure

- Federal state
  - Structure
    - Federal level
      - Parliament (legislation), King and ministers of government (executive power)
    - 3 Regions
      - Flemish region
      - Walloon region
      - Brussels capital region
    - 3 Communities
      - Flemish community
      - French community
      - German community
    - Provinces (10) and communes (589)

# Belgium and its structure



# Belgium and its structure

- Flemish community
  - Powers
    - Culture
      - theatre, libraries, audiovisual media, etc.
    - Education
    - Health policy
      - curative and preventive medicine
    - Assistance to individuals
      - protection of youth, social welfare, aid to families, immigrant assistance services, etc.
    - Scientific research (in relation to their powers)
    - International relations (associated with their powers)

# Belgium and its structure

- Political context
  - Carrousel of media, political speech and public opinion
  - Crime and public safety
    - Liberal, neo-conservative rhetoric
      - tough on crime
      - tough on antisocial behaviour and public nuisance

# Belgium and its structure

- Political context
  - Youth crime and juvenile justice
    - Focus on young delinquents rather than ‘youth at risk’
      - MOF: + 5%
      - POS: + 17%
      - MOF >< POS
    - Focus on ‘usual suspects’
      - urban youth (specific neighbourhoods)
      - ethnic minority groups
  - French vs. Flemish community
    - New constitutional reform
      - youth law transferred to community level
      - new legislation to tackle antisocial behaviour for cities and communes

# First study: Young people and violence

commissioned by the Flemish Peace  
Institute





# First study

- Young people and violence
  - Commissioned by the Flemish Peace Institute
    - Independent institute hosted by Flemish Parliament
  - Questions
    - Balanced report
      - on offending *and* victimization of young people
      - on ethnic background and delinquency
    - Counterbalance some 'popular myths'

more on <http://www.flemishpeaceinstitute.eu/index.php/research/peace-a-society/young-people-and-violence>

# First study

- Young people and violence
  - Research on offending *and* victimization
    - Separate etiological traditions
      - little on young people as victim
      - less on linking offending and victimization
    - Theory
      - importance of routine activities and lifestyle
      - move from offender or victim towards 'criminogenic' settings
    - Empirical research
      - lack of data both on offending and victimization

# First study

- Young people and violence
  - Research on offending *and* victimization
    - Consistent observation
      - remarkable (strong) relation between offending and victimization
    - Exploring the relation: theory
      - thin line between offending and victimization
      - complex interaction
      - direct and indirect relation

# First study

- Young people and violence
  - Research on offending *and* victimization
    - Exploring the relation: research
      - JOP-monitor 2 and JOP-Brussels

	Observed freq. of victims - offenders	Expected freq. of victims - offenders	Chi <sup>2</sup>	Odds ratio
vandalism	267	153.7	148.2*	3.48
theft	281	180.4	102.6*	2.65
physical violence	33	6.7	112.8*	7.35
carrying a weapon / threatened by weapon	37	3.7	320.5*	21.52
dealing drugs / offered drugs	55	16.6	123.1*	20.39

Source: JOP-monitor 2

\*  $p < 0.001$

# First study

- Young people and violence
  - Research on offending *and* victimization
    - Exploring the relation: research
      - JOP-monitor 2 and JOP-Brussels

	Observed freq. of victim - offenders	Expected freq. of victim - offenders	Chi <sup>2</sup>	Odds ratio
vandalism	186	137	35.11*	2.00
theft	341	291	24.25*	1.62
physical violence	88	26	197.13*	8.66
carrying a weapon / threatened by weapon	62	14	207.77*	10.86
harassment / being harassed	60	34	25.24*	2.28

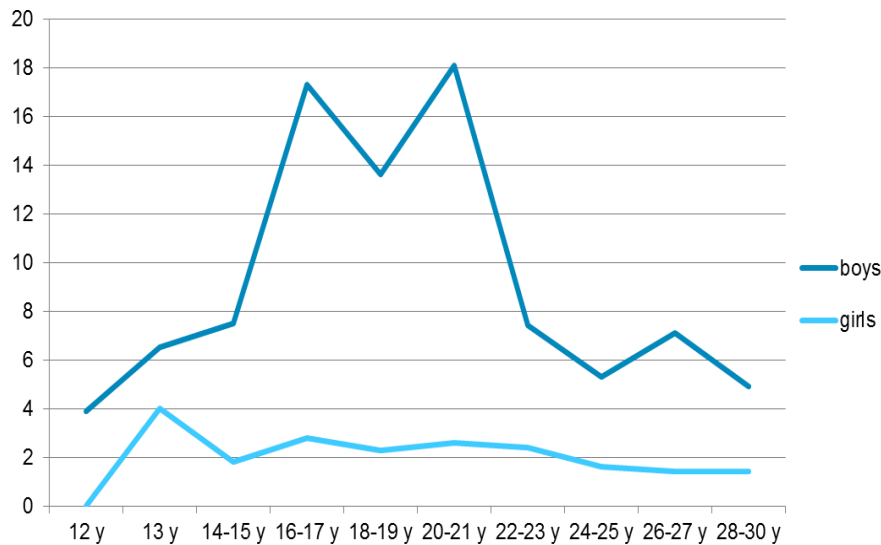
Source: JOP-Brussels

\*  $p < 0.001$

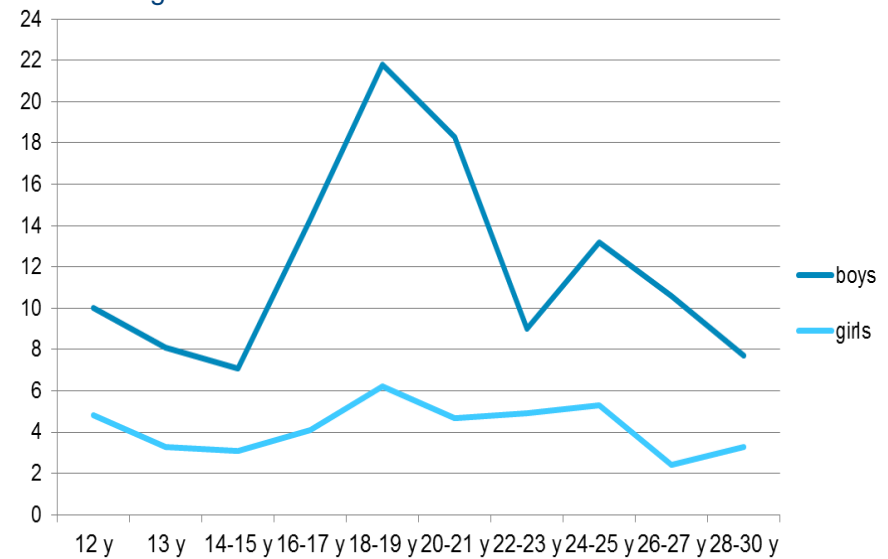
# First study

- Young people and violence
  - Research on offending *and* victimization
    - Exploring the relation: research
      - similar profiles for victims and offenders (JOP-monitor 2)

% offenders of physical violence and carrying weapon by age and gender



% victims of physical violence and carrying weapon by age and gender



# First study

- Young people and violence
  - Research on offending *and* victimization
    - Exploring the relation: research
      - similar profiles for victims and offenders
      - similar explanatory factors in (logistic) regression models:
        - gender
        - education
        - self-esteem
        - family situation
        - relation with parents (mother)
        - lifestyle: night time activities
    - final analyses
      - does 'offending' adds to explaining 'victimization'?

# First study

	Exp (B)	Exp (B)
	Model 1	Model 4
Age	1.052*	1.04*
Gender (ref cat: boys)	.360***	.233***
Education (ref cat: bso)		
aso	.586**	.616
tso	.762	.821
Socio-economic situation	1.08	1.15
<b>Offending (violent related offences)</b>	<b>5.87***</b>	<b>3.06***</b>
Responsiveness mother		1.01
Responsiveness father		.993
Parental supervision		1.01
Family situation		.500*
School success		1.06
Relation with teachers		1.01
Satisfaction at school		.990
Self-esteem		.976**
Lifestyle: home oriented		.995
<b>Lifestyle: night time activities</b>		<b>1.93***</b>
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	.155	.233

\*p<.05; \*\*p<.01; \*\*\*p>.001



# First study

- Young people and violence
  - Conclusion first study
    - Complex relation between youth offending and victimization
      - victims ~ offenders
      - direct and indirect
      - lifestyle and routine activities
      - 'usual suspects', but 'ideal victims' as well...
    - Recent analyses JOP-Brussels
      - negative binomial and SEM
      - +/- confirmation
      - victim ~ offenders
      - lifestyle risk ~ offending
    - complexity
    - need for further refining and disentangling relation

# Second study: Young people and public safety



# Second study

- Young people and public safety
  - Cf. 'new legislation to tackle antisocial behaviour'
    - Petty crime, public safety and antisocial behaviour
      - powers of federal level
      - 'outsourced' to local level
      - local legislation and system of administrative sanctions (~ ASBO)
    - Judicial and criminological reflection
      - critical comments on system
      - precarious positions of minors and young people

# Second study

- Young people and public safety
  - System of administrative sanctions
    - In general
      - federal legislation as frame
      - local police or community codex
      - issued by police officers, authorized civil servants and public transport servants
      - administrative sanction = fine (<250€)
      - appeal to police court
    - Specific rules for minors
      - minimum age 16y
      - maximum fine 125€
      - offer of mediation (cf. national youth law and international principles)
      - appeal to youth court

# Second study

- Young people and public safety
  - System of administrative sanctions
    - Future changes
      - new federal legislation
        - lowering age to 14y
        - higher fines
        - other sanctions: community service, banning orders...
        - broadening list of intolerable behaviour
      - background
        - cf. political context
        - community council elections in October 2012
        - political bid and populist manoeuvring
        - topic in media and public opinion
      - fundamental critique

# Second study

- Young people and public safety
  - System of administrative sanctions
    - Legal issues
      - pressure on separation of powers
        - local authorities as legislator, police, prosecutor, judge, victim...
        - para-judicial chain at local level
      - legal certainty and equality before law
        - 589 communes, 589 set of rules?
        - absurd situations: e.g. Brussels with 19 communes
      - position of minors
        - compliance with youth law and international principles?
        - principles of mediation?
        - alternative sanctions at local level
        - net-widening

# Second study

- Young people and public safety
  - System of administrative sanctions
    - Social and ethical issues
      - concept of disorder and public nuisance
        - vague legal definition
          - “... behaviour... threat to the harmonic coexistence and normal pressure of social life... quality of life”*
        - level of tolerance
        - large discretionary power
          - “If each of us has a different assessment of behavioural acceptability, and this may change in different contexts, then who decides?” (Millie, 2011: 281)*
    - gateway to criminalization of behaviour
      - guided by principle of ‘early intervention’
      - administrative sanction in early stage to prevent worse from happening
      - ‘usual suspects’: young people, ethnic minority groups...

# Concluding remarks





# Concluding remarks

- Youth *as* risk vs. youth *at* risk
  - Position of young people in society
    - A punitive turn?
      - hybridization of logics
      - young people as ‘usual suspects’ >> ‘ideal victims’
    - From post-crime to pre-crime
      - omnipresence of pre-caution principle
      - early intervention and criminalization of behaviour
      - shift from crime to risk to potential risk
      - emergence of ‘repressive prevention’ or ‘pre-pressure’
        - “It is a pro-active repression that attempts the timely suppression of certain forms of life” (Schinkel, 2011: 373)*

# Concluding remarks

- Youth *as* risk vs. youth *at* risk
  - Position of young people in society
    - Disfigured balance between protection and retribution
    - Evolution from ‘youth *at* risk’ to ‘youth *as* risk’

# Thank you! Questions?

