



## Spotlight on Preventing Juvenile Delinquency



### Key Developments in the Field

Valuable progress has been made within the field of juvenile delinquency prevention, over the last 30-40 years, with greater emphasis on early intervention and a more holistic approach to understanding the criminality of young people. There has been a distinct move away from reliance on reactive and punitive approaches to offending behaviour, focusing instead on its prevention. This prompted greater emphasis on the onset of offending, a quest to identify risk and protective factors and investment in individual, family and community-based developmental prevention programmes. Multi-risk factored programmes and initiatives have gained traction over single risk-factor interventions.

There has been a move away from a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to more catered approaches that incorporate contextual aspects of communities, such as socio-economic status. The introduction of diversion programmes seeking to avert youths from entering the formal criminal justice system and avoid the stigma of criminalisation also grew in popularity across Europe. Where possible, there has been a growing appetite for the use of non-criminal, civil and administrative regulatory responses to tackle low-level behavioural problems, in place of recourse to criminal sanctions. This trend has been strengthened by the evidence that increased levels of contact by young people with the police and criminal justice system may inhibit desistance and entrench patterns of criminal behaviour.

### Other key trends include:

- A greater awareness of the harmful effects of criminal justice responses and interactions with police and penal institutions, particularly for young people, and the importance of support for early intervention at onset and structured opportunities for desistance further into the life-course.
- An increased acknowledgement of the importance of early childhood development, adverse childhood experiences and trauma in influencing subsequent individual behaviour and future trajectories of vulnerability, victimisation and offending, as well as lifelong health and wellbeing.
- A recognition that unintended consequences can arise from well-intentioned interventions. Hence, the need to ensure the parsimony of interventions with children and young people and the guiding principle of 'do no harm'.



- The growing emphasis on the rights of children and young people and ensuring international standards and safeguards to ensure the application of those rights.
- Generally, across many European jurisdictions, there have been significant declines in the numbers of young people drawn into the criminal justice systems and in youth offending, as well as young people engaging in other 'deviant' behaviours – i.e. drinking, drug-use and smoking.



Juvenile delinquency represents a field with specific definitional challenges, as many countries, across Europe and beyond interpret the concept of juvenile or youth differently from cultural, social and legal perspectives. The age of criminal responsibility, for example, varies considerably across jurisdictions. Relatedly, the term 'delinquency' is broadly construed and tends to incorporate acts that are not necessarily criminal in themselves, including incivilities, deviant acts and antisocial behaviour – prevalent among young populations – which also vary across countries and cultures.

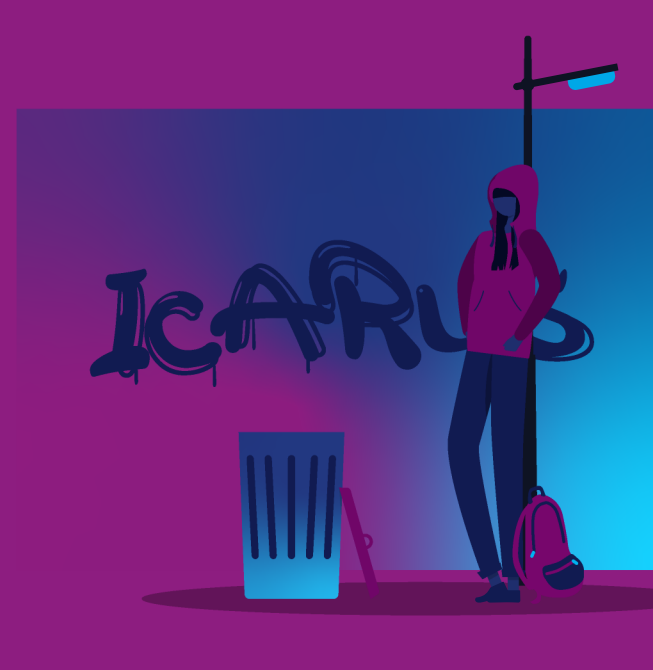
### Intervention Focus

The following four categories of prevention focus provide a structure to the breadth of research in the field of preventing juvenile delinquency: addiction; antisocial behaviour; violence; and multi-risk factored programmes. In a field dominated by North American research, multi-risk component programmes (programmes that targeted multiple risk factors) generally appear to be more successful than single-factor programmes, but much of the data indicates that this may be a result of inadequate testing and measures for the intended behaviours. While developmental-focused interventions have demonstrated promising results, more research on prevention specific programmes and later outcomes on delinquency (and potential criminal lifestyles) is needed.

**Addiction:** Overall, there are a number of reasonably effective addiction-focused prevention programmes that target juveniles.

**Antisocial:** Targeted parenting and family-based programmes indicated successful outcomes in the majority of findings.

**Violence:** Overall, the school-based/targeted programmes were found to be effective in reducing violent behaviours. The universal programmes were generally effective across a wide variety of school years and different types of populations, while the targeted programmes found modest results for aggression in high-risk children.



**Multi-Risk Factor:** Likely due to the nature of this approach, the most successful findings for multi-risk factor programmes included mixed levels of delivery and target population.

### Future Considerations

Additionally, the icon with researchers in front of graphs symbolising results and evaluation] Much progress and learning has been made in better understanding the value and limits of prevention in relation to youth crime. Nonetheless, the current knowledge base of juvenile delinquency reveals the need for more high-quality research and subsequent evaluation of interventions to enhance further our understanding of delinquent behaviours, as well as to inform effective preventive tools. Moreover, the mechanisms intended to bring about change for most intervention programmes could not be determined. Clearly defining and understanding the underlying mechanisms in any intervention is a crucial element of any intervention. Further work designed to test, measure and evaluate these subtle mechanisms in relation to various contexts and populations could provide valuable insight into empirically tested effective prevention programmes and interventions.

### In summary, research in the field of juvenile delinquency consistently calls for:

- more empirical and rigorous research regarding the prevention of juvenile delinquency and intervention outcomes particularly what works for whom and at what stage in their development;
- a focused decoupling of causation from correlation in understanding outcome effects of interventions;
- a greater understanding of youth pathways across the life-course and attachment to pro-social values;
- a greater awareness of how gender impacts on youth crime and its prevention; and,
- more targeted research on specific populations and contexts.

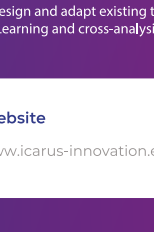
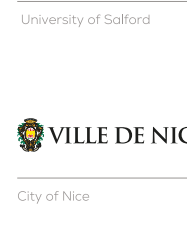
### Additionally it is clear that we need to understand better:

- The implications of digitalisation and social media platforms for new trends in juvenile delinquency, as well as the interconnections and interdependencies between harms in virtual and real spaces.
- How organised criminal networks take advantage and exploit vulnerable youth to involve them in illicit businesses.



IcARUS is a 4-year project funded under the European Union's H2020 programme.

#### Consortium



The IcARUS project Innovative Approaches to Urban Security aims to rethink, redesign and adjust existing tools and methods to help local security actors anticipate and better respond to urban security challenges. This factsheet is based on the IcARUS Review of Accumulated Learning and cross-analysis of urban security.



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 882749

Website  
www.icarus-innovation.eu

Contact us  
info@icarus-innovation.eu

Follow us  
f t i y @icarus42020