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## **YouPrev**

*Youth deviance and youth violence: A European multi-agency perspective on best practices in prevention and control.*

### **Delphi survey: Expert views on youth deviance and violence and its prevention and control in the coming decade**

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### **Results from the Belgian study**

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## **1 Introduction**

The aim of the YouPrev Delphi survey was to examine future societal changes and challenges and their implications for prevention and control of youth problem behavior. Since any type of strategic planning necessarily presupposes assumptions on the future, the challenge is to put these assumptions on a basis as solid as possible. The Delphi survey undertook to go beyond the level of “implicit predictions” by including expert opinions and expert knowledge in a systematic and structured manner. The Delphi technique is a multistep interactive survey method using panels of experts (cf. Armstrong, 2006a; Häder, 2009; Powell, 2003; Rowe, 2007; Rowe & Wright, 1999; 2001); results of the first survey round are reflected and re-discussed with the same respondents in following rounds.

As the survey focused on developments in the upcoming decade, the year 2025 was picked as time horizon for the respondents’ prospects. The survey was conducted in two waves. The first wave focused on anticipated changes and developments in society and in the field of youth crime. In round 2, core results from the first wave were summarized as a basis for new judgments and, additionally, experts’ recommendations for prevention in selected fields of juvenile problem behaviour were addressed.

## **2 Methodology**

Before we started to build our sample for the Nationwide Institutional and Expert Survey (workstream I) we elaborated a thorough study into the field of youth deviance and crime prevention in Belgium. This framework has also helped us to construct the sample for our Delphi survey. Of course a significant part of the respondents that was contacted for the institutional survey, was also used for the Delphi round 1 and 2. We launched the first Delphi wave in September and finished it in December 2011. The second round started in March 2012 and lasted until June of the same year.

Because we dealt with a very low response rate with the institutional and expert survey, it was decided to conduct additional in-depth interviews for the Delphi round one. We first contacted all the (possible) respondents by email asking them to participate in the survey through a paper version. In a second contact round we proposed to do the Delphi survey through a personal telephone interview. In the first wave only 11 paper versions were send back (10 through email, one through mail). Afterwards we conducted 13 interviews. Some of these interviews involved several

respondents (group interviews). These additional expert views were taken into account, but not as separate respondents because they may have influenced each other's answers. In the second Delphi wave 14 experts participated. We can conclude that the response rate for both rounds was very low. In the first wave only 15,6 % of contacted respondents participated in the survey. Unfortunately this figure didn't increase with the second round. On the contrary: only 9,2 % respondents participated in the survey.

### 3 Sample description

The sample of the first Delphi round consisted of experts from very different domains. Table 1 makes clear that most participating experts are working at "policy" levels. However it is important to mention that these policy backgrounds can be very different. These experts come from local prevention and security policy services as well as the general direction of prevention and security on the federal level (Minister of Internal Affairs). Moreover, the children's rights commissariat of the Flemish Parliament is part of this policy category. The same goes for the judicial domain: juvenile justice magistrates as well as public prosecutors and two directors of closed juvenile detention centers were placed under this category.

Many police actors were contacted for this Delphi survey, but only 1 police officer participated. Several explanations can account for this low response rate. On one hand, it is very hard in Belgium to collect personal email addresses of individual police officers. On the other hand, non-response can also be the consequence of the fact that police officers perceive prevention as not their core business. Several contacted police-respondents pointed out that police work was about repression, not prevention.

*Table 1 / Professional background Delphi survey round 1*

<b>Professional Background</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Policy	7	29,2
Judicial domain	5	20,8
Social work	5	20,8
Police	1	4,2
Academics	1	4,2
Crime prevention service	5	20,8
Total	24	100

The sample of the second Delphi round is similar to the first wave. Indeed 6 out of the 14 respondents participated in the first wave as well. However some differences can be pointed out. First, there is a significant decline in the number of experts working in the policy domain. Only one extra police officer could be convinced to participate. Unfortunately the second wave sample remains remarkably small, which makes it almost impossible to draw any significant conclusions.

Table 2 / Professional background Delphi survey round 2

Professional Background	N	%
Social work	3	21,4
Judicial domain	3	21,4
Crime prevention services	3	21,4
Police	2	14,3
Policy	2	14,3
Teacher	1	7,1
Total	14	100

**4 Findings**

**4.1 Anticipated societal changes until 2025**

The first round of the Delphi survey focused on expected changes within the Belgian society until 2025. In general the respondents did not draw a very bright or optimistic picture of the future.

They expect an increase of poverty (especially when it comes to underprivileged families), unemployment and social inequality due to the ongoing economic crisis. Together with the technological developments respondents predict further automation of labor market, which will lead to labor exclusion for low skilled populations. Especially youngsters are at risk, in the view of our respondents, for this increasing unemployment of the “unqualified” labor force. Therefore a significant group of young people is or will be confronted with a blocked perspective on their future. And precisely this can, according to several Belgian experts, have a negative effect on youth offending. Hence, several experts foresee an important role for education. But, if there is no significant investment in education, these respondents fear a continuing polarization between the rich and the poor, as well as between natives and immigrants.

The largest part of the respondents foresees an ongoing and increasing immigration. Experts point out that it is necessary to anticipate this tendency through appropriate education and social policy

measures. However, experts don't foresee many positive developments in social policy. They fear a limitation of budget and financial resources for a decent social policy. Together with the economic crisis, this will enhance the number of underprivileged families and even more of young people.

Concerning law enforcement many respondents agree that social reaction policy will become more severe and more repressive to juvenile crime.

With regard to demographic developments it is expected, by our respondents, that population will increase and the ageing problem will increase. When it comes to family and life style, a majority of respondents agrees the classic (nuclear) family structure will elapse. Hence, respondents foresee more single parents and newly 'recomposed' families. In general most respondents agree that society will become more individualistic and less based on or expressing solidarity. These expected evolutions like technological progress, cutting budgets for education and social policy, the interplay of ageing and migration, diminishing classic family structures and individualization of society are seen as important factors in the rise of conflicts both intergenerational and intercultural.

#### **4.2 Anticipated developments in the field of youth crime / youth violence**

In general the majority of the respondents are convinced that youth crime will increase. In the paper version of the Delphi I experts were asked to give their estimation for the number of minors, who have committed an act qualified as an infringement of the law, that were registered at the youth prosecutor's office up until the year 2025. Only one expert believed that the number of youth crime would remain stable. All the other respondents (10 in total) expected an increase of youth crime. When taking a look at the answers of our interviewed experts, we cannot observe this consensus. Respondents were asked (again) to give a general estimation of the quantitative development of youth crime. Although their answers were evenly divided, four experts did nuance their view of increasing youth delinquency. They stated that not so much youth Crime *an sich* would augment, but rather social reaction would become more important. New phenomena (like for example cyber crime) will come to the foreground and more types of behavior may become criminalized (cf. the field of incivilities and youths in public space).

The experts who participated in the paper and pencil version were asked to give differentiated estimates for the development of certain types of offenses for boys and girls. The results of this survey are displayed in the figures below.

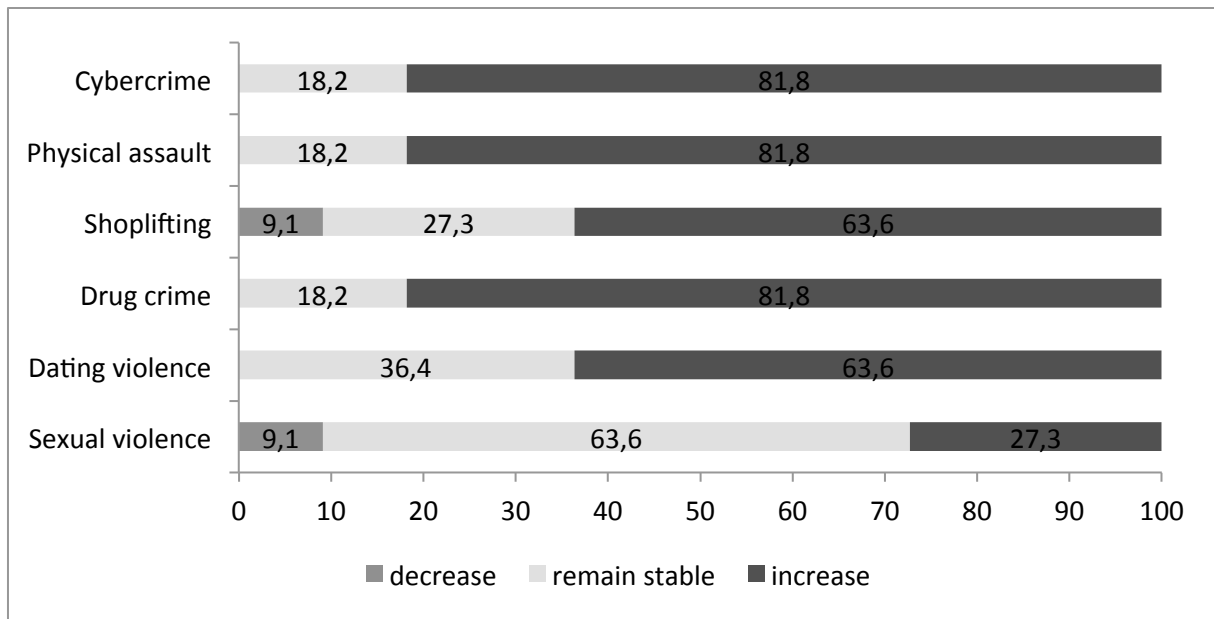


Figure A / Overview respondents' estimates on the development of offense types committed by minor girls

Cyber crime, drug related crime and physical assault are expected to increase the most. Moreover, a significant number of respondents believe that girls will commit more dating violence and shoplifting. The number of sexual violence is largely agreed to remain stable.

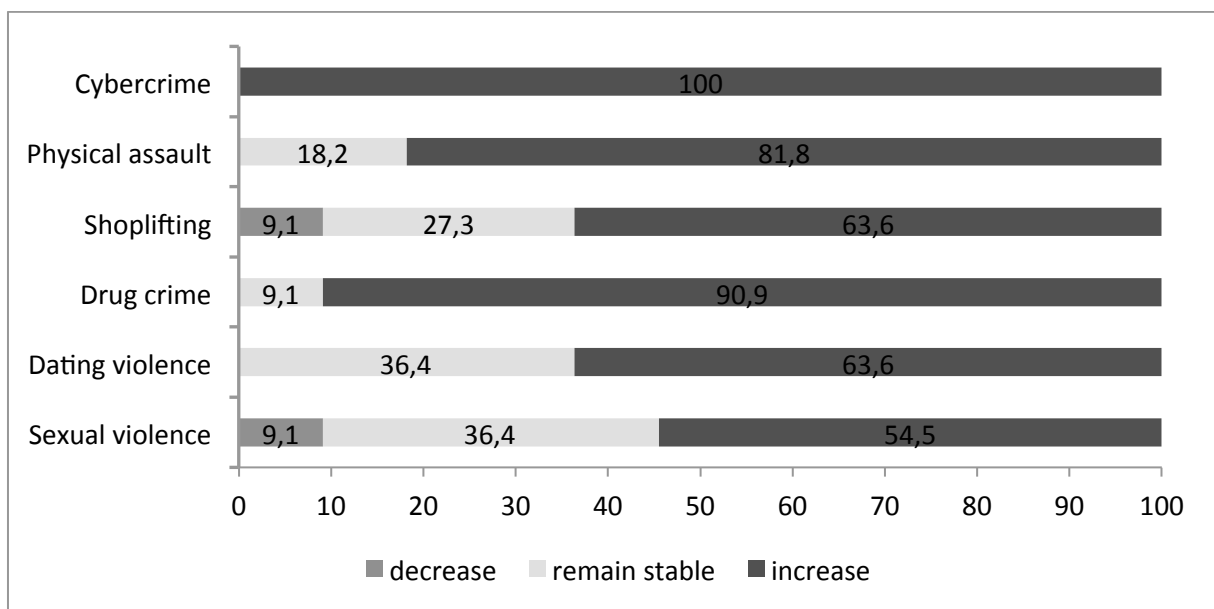


Figure B / Overview respondents' estimates on the development of offense types committed by minor boys

When we take a look at the given estimates for young boys we can detect somewhat similar results. Experts believe that in the case of boys cybercrime, physical assault and drug crime will increase. However slightly higher estimates were given for young boys committing drug related crime and cyber crime than for girls. Especially regarding cyber crime all experts agree that it will become more important. A remarkable difference can be noticed regarding experts' views on sexual violence. Where respondents expected the phenomenon of girls committing sexual violence would largely remain stable, more than half of them think this phenomenon will increase when it comes to young male offenders.

Interviews with experts yielded somewhat similar results: namely drug related offenses, shoplifting and theft, cybercrime and all sorts of violence (like sexual violence, dating and family violence but especially physical violence) were considered as probably increasing in the future.

Noteworthy is that several respondents brought forward incivilities committed by youngsters and developing practices of the municipal administrative sanctions in Belgium.<sup>1</sup> However regarding this type of problem behaviour, the experts did not predict an actual increase of incivilities but expect that reaction towards this typical youth behaviour will become more severe. Experts explained this by growing intolerance in our society. Administrative sanctions as an answer to youth problem behaviour was perceived by our respondents as ignoring the importance of tackling causes of deviant or delinquent behaviour, focussing merely on visible symptoms.

Besides the topic of incivilities several respondents mentioned the difficulty of giving estimates on expected evolutions. Experts refer to the problem of how to understand (official) rates of juvenile crime. Consequently according to them youth crime will not explicitly rise in terms of more youngsters committing delinquency, they however think that reaction will become more repressive or harsh. This will have an effect *registered* youth crime. Some causes were linked to this observation. Within this perspective growing intercultural and intergenerational gap related to the decline of tolerance, understanding, solidarity and feelings of safety and the overall trend of increasing diversity and migration are seen as important evolutions.

In an attempt to sketch out the profile of the delinquent or deviant minor, a significant number of respondents feared in general a decrease in the age and girls 'catching up' on boys. Reflecting on their possible background, many experts assume that more vulnerable youngsters are likely to

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<sup>1</sup> In Belgium federal strategic and security plans are created to provide local authorities with financial resources to establish a proper prevention policy. It is within this context that municipalities can impose administrative sanctions that are typically aimed at incivilities (more often committed by youngsters).



commit crime: professionally under- or unqualified, migrant, youths from disadvantaged families and/or from lower economic status. Hence one expert described this profile strikingly as the 'usual suspects'. Experts pointed again at the important divide between public and private space. In their view, people from lower social economic strata spend more time in the public space. Therefore, they are more visible for the public and for legal actors. Also, some respondents expressed their concern regarding non-accompanied (illegal) minors and current problems with Roma families.

If we take a look at the image respondents described for the victims of youth crime, a lot of experts agreed that it might be more directed towards older people (due to the aging) but also towards people from their direct environment. Also some advocated that victims and offenders in this domain have the same profile and that it is often interspersed. This observation has already been confirmed in scientific research (Goedseels, Vettenburg, & Walgrave, 2000).

Recent research has pointed out that youth gangs as such do not really exist within the Belgium society, or at least are not dominant (Enhus, Christiaens, & Bruier Desmeth, 2011). Nonetheless, some respondents claimed that youth crime would just become more organised or in groups, others foresee more youth gangs in the (Belgian) future. Several experts stated that due to frustrations (cf. disadvantaged social and economic position in society as described before) juveniles would commit delinquent acts more spontaneously. In the same line, the use of weapons is expected to increase. Some experts are convinced that more blade weapons will be used.

Drug use was also perceived as an important factor in the modus operandi. Some experts fear that this might contribute to more use of violence. Also more security and protection of properties might have its influence on more reckless acts of crime.

### **4.3 Youth crime in relation with technological developments in the Belgian society**

In the first Delphi round it appeared that several respondents expected an important influence from technological developments on youth delinquency. Notably, cyber crime is seen as an important offense type that will increase. This may imply new challenges for prevention approaches in the future. Therefore the experts in the second round were asked which important changes according to them may entail these technological developments in the field of youth crime until 2025.

Respondents indicated that because of expected technological developments new forms of crime will arise and overall (youth) crime will increase. In their view, certain types of crime will increase, will last longer before any intervention takes place and will have a major impact on victims. Due to low visibility, low controllability, increasing accessibility or opportunity, the threshold for certain deviant behaviour (cyber bullying) is much lower. Bullying behaviour can continue after school via

the social media. Youngsters have, from behind their computer, a (false/fake) feeling of safety and power. This counts for both young perpetrators and/or victims. Therefore some ought it important to give more attention within education to the protection of human rights and the right use of information.

#### **4.4 Controversial issues**

From the first Delphi round several controversial issues were brought forward. The first one implied the increase of conflicts within the Belgian society. The second one dealt with contradictive views on the role of education. Both will be discussed in the following sections.

##### **4.4.1 Rising conflicts in society: the battle against uncivil youths**

Due to ageing of population and migration, experts foresee more intergenerational and intercultural conflicts. An important mechanism that is pointed out by our respondents is the use of communal administrative sanctions applied to youngsters for incivilities. We asked respondents in the second Delphi round how they expect the issue of incivilities would evolve. According to them incivilities will grow in the future. The cause of this is perceived in trends like overpopulation, population ageing, youth unemployment and increasing diversity. Respondents fear a growing threatening of the social cohesion in neighbourhoods and in public spaces in general. Decreasing tolerance is expected and an increasing focus will be on immigrants. Focus on individual responsibility of youngsters (punishing instead of re-integrating) will increase. Owing to a perceived slow and bad functioning of our justice system, municipal administrative sanctions will be expanded and more behaviour will be sanctioned / punished.

In general the respondents are not quite positive about this form of sanctioning since it targets symptoms of specific behaviour but ignores the underlying social problem. Only one expert thinks this is a good approach because it works fast and it reduces the workload of the public prosecution. However the majority of our respondents opinion that instead of this local sanctioning approach, policy should focus more on investing in education (initiatives), youth houses, schools and sport clubs. They emphasized the importance of useful leisure activities. Finally one respondent indicated that intergenerational communication and mediation could positively influence interactions between different generations and cultures without stigmatising or discriminating one another. Another respondent claimed that illegal immigrants especially commit (more) incivilities and therefore a more appropriate asylum policy should decrease migration trends.

#### **4.4.2 Tackling and prevention youth crime: the role of education**

Experts who participated in the first round indicated schools and education in general as an important instrument to prevent youth crime, delinquency and violence. Nonetheless, several respondents claimed the opposite. Asking experts in the second round their opinion regarding what role according to them education should/could fulfil when it comes to preventing youth crime it appeared that this issue didn't remain that ambiguous. Everyone, except one respondent, agreed that education is a very important actor in the prevention of youth crime. Schools play an important role in the socialisation of young people. Schools are considered to have a responsibility in offering youngsters a good (labour) reference. They emphasized the importance of positive attachment with school in the development of youngsters in order to achieve a place in society (integration). Schools should work on a positive and non-violent school climate. They need to focus on defensibility of pupils by training social skills and assertiveness. Teachers should be informed and sensitized about actual problems concerning juvenile crime. Respondents also foresee an important task for schools to detect at a very early stage certain problems and to refer them to appropriate services. Nevertheless one expert warned for the risk of over-problematizing and stigmatising of (certain) youngsters. Another one argued that the waterfall (Duquet, Glorieux, Laurijssen, & Van Dorsselaer, 2006, p. 26) effect that characterizes the Belgium educational system is contradictory to the aim that pupils should achieve a fully-fledged position at school.

#### **4.5 Prevention of youth deviance, crime and violence: What should or can be done?**

##### **4.5.1 General challenges for prevention**

The experts, participating in the first Delphi round (interview) were asked to offer their opinion on future challenges for the prevention of youth crime and violence (bearing in mind the expected changes in the field they brought forward). Firstly, several respondents stressed the importance of education as a primary instrument. For example an expert claimed that raising children should already be taught in schools. In general more investment was stressed as necessary in order to guide youngsters and give them more opportunities for future labour market perspectives. Secondly several respondents foresee an important task for social policy strategies. They advocate a proper policy that activates people's responsibilities without patronizing them yet with equal chances for everyone. Furthermore when it comes to social work they indicated following approaches: to give more responsibility, to show commitment, involve the whole context of the youngster in question, to give

them a voice and to get to know their world better. In general experts indicated that problem behaviour has to be tackled as soon as possible. The phenomenon of incivilities was mentioned several times. This issue requires more investment into the underlying causes of the related conflicts and has to be taken seriously. On the other hand one respondent asked for more tolerance when it comes to this issue.

Experts stated that more social control is required. Several respondents mentioned specific strategies like: education services, time-out, individual guidance of criminal youth, training of youngsters, more rights for youngsters initiated by Europe and a decent frame for unguided minors. In general two controversial questions were raised. One position claimed that prevention (by schools and police) doesn't work. Another respondent was even advocating the abolishment of the use of this term<sup>2</sup>. Finally more cooperation between several institutions and related bodies is, in our respondents' view, deemed necessary.

#### **4.5.2 Prevention of specific types of youth crime and deviance**

In the second Delphi round the experts were asked about their opinion regarding the prevention of different types of youth crime. They needed to indicate which actors they consider the most appropriate to tackle different types of youth crime or deviance. For these distinct types they were also asked to give their view on what can or should be done by social workers and police officers. The several types implied drug use, cyber crime and youth violence.

##### **4.5.2.1 Drug abuse and prevention**

- Most appropriate actor:

Firstly the experts were asked to give estimates on how important they think several actors are in preventing drug abuse. They had to indicate their answers on a four-point scale (deriving from 1 'not all' to 4 'very much'). The figure below shows that a significant part of respondents think that parents and social work are very important actors in preventing juvenile drug abuse. Also schools appear to be relevant. It may be concluded that the experts in general estimated actors who have daily contact with youngsters as very important. When we take a look at the results for the formal actors of prevention, it is clear that the respondents think that social work is more relevant than police or prevention services. Other answers that were given were: actors related to leisure time activities like youth movements or sport clubs but also discotheques and cafés. Finally, projects that include peers were seen as very important.

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<sup>2</sup> See: 4.4. controversial issues

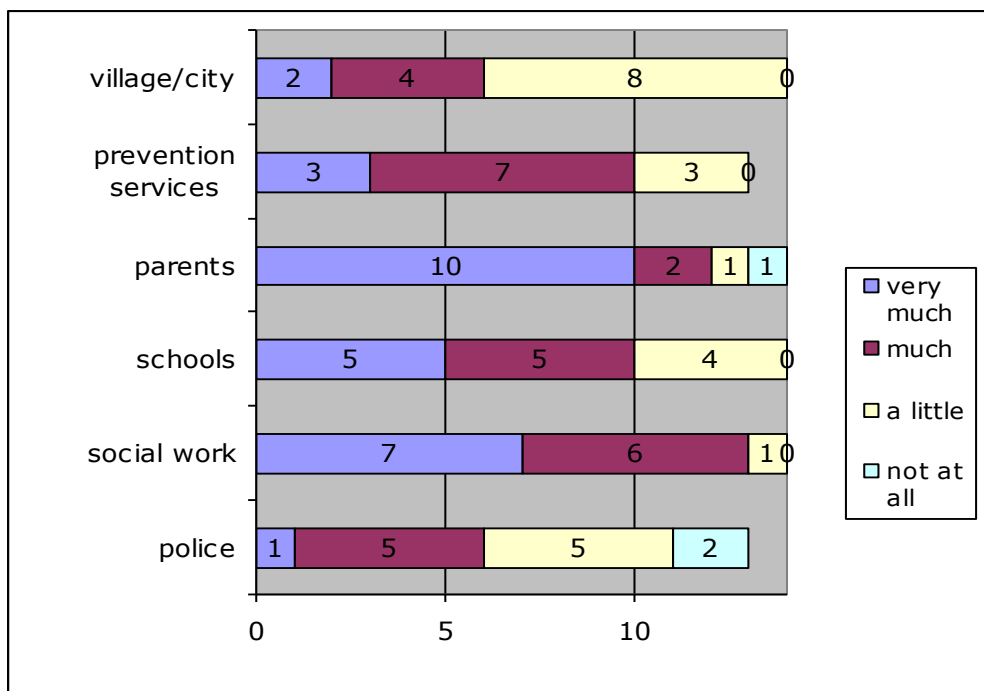


Figure C / Respondents' estimations on prevention actors for drug abuse

- Recommended approaches for social workers:

In the view of the respondents social workers should work 'location directed': they must go on the street and connect with youngsters in a positive way. A great deal of importance was attached to listening, giving attention to dialog, supporting and approaching youngsters as total persons. Social workers need to sensitize and inform different authorities, pointing out the consequences of drug use, they need to teach young people some assertiveness but in a non-patronizing way. Social workers also have to inform teachers and monitors in youth movements through offering for example testimonies and experiences of ex-addicted drug users at school. An integrated approach was also mentioned as significant. The different life domains of young people need to be brought together and therefore a better cooperation between several services is necessary.

- Recommended approach for police:

The respondents think that the police only has a small role in the prevention of drug use. According to them they must focus on detection of drugs dealing and the battle against illegal drugs sale around schools and on the street. Therefore visibility of police on 'drugs places' is deemed necessary. Their work can imply detecting problems and referring youngsters to the appropriate service. Therefore they need to work together with the government, social workers and schools.

#### 4.5.2.2 Cybercrime

- Most appropriate actor in prevention:

Also for the topic cyber crime, the experts were asked to give their perceptions on the contribution to prevention of several actors. From the figure below it can be derived that again parents, social work and schools are deemed necessary in preventing cyber crime. Also prevention services are seen as very relevant. When they chose to provide other categories, the respondents also mentioned the importance of media-education at school and (again) the role of youth movements and sports clubs.

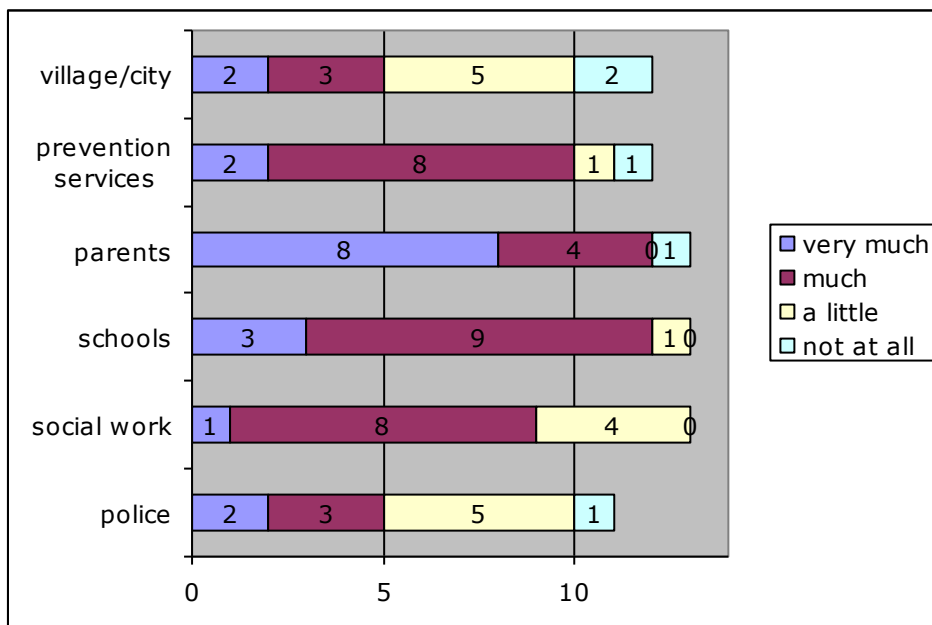


Figure D / Respondents' estimation on prevention actors for cyber crime

- Recommended approach for social workers

Every respondent insisted on informing and sensitizing youngsters. Social workers should make the risks of using the internet discussable in a professional way through projects and media-education. According to the experts it is necessary to teach young people to express themselves in group and in society, with respect for themselves and others. Social workers have to be trained about the cyberspace in order to stay up to date and to understand the world youngster live in.

- Recommended approach for police

In the opinion of the experts the police must develop a structural approach to cyber bullying and a proper prosecution- and sentencing policy in cooperation with the public prosecutor and the juvenile

court. Also police teams and staff need to be informed on this issue. That way they will understand the cyber space better and can provide preventive information on types of cyber crime. The respondents also indicated the need for protocols and international cooperation agreements on the topic.

**4.5.2.3 Violent crime**

- Most appropriate actor in prevention:

When it comes to violent crime the experts estimated again social work, parents and schools as most relevant for prevention. When asking the experts to provide other actors, they mentioned again people from youth movements or other leisure time activities. We can conclude that also here more importance is given to the ones closest to minors in their daily life.

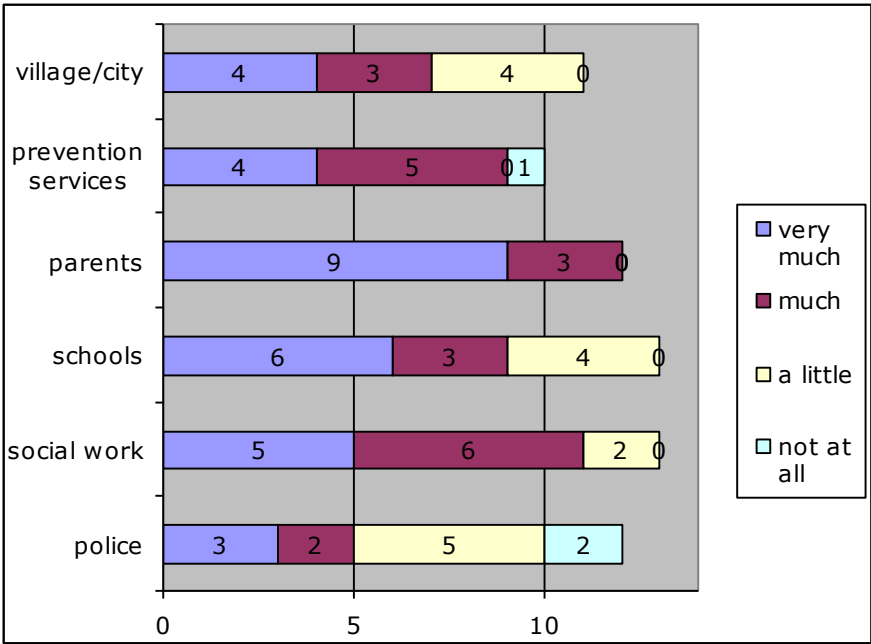


Figure E / Respondents' estimations on prevention actors for violent crime

- Recommended approach for social workers

The experts argue that social workers need to make conflicts discussable through for example projects that focus upon the impact of violent crimes. They stressed the importance of interacting, listening and supporting youngsters and entering into dialogue with them. Social workers need to teach youngsters non-violent communication strategies and need to focus on communication and verbal and non-verbal emotions. Also family is perceived as an important factor in the appearance of violence hence social workers should focus on the advance of family conditions and support

education. Remarkably one respondent indicated that violence and aggression aren't necessarily bad, according to him or here there must be a place for this in society and aggression should be canalised through for example "go to a box club" or the creation of free expression rooms.

- **Recommended approach for police**

Most respondents think that police should act more as a community police by increasing the visibility and approachability of policemen on the street. They need to learn how to understand youngsters better and communicate better with them. They need to get a clearer view on risk factors and causes of violence by youngsters through their training. In general a more qualitative preventive approach is necessary with attention for dialog and avoidance of stigmatisation.

#### **4.6 Fundamental discussion: the role of prevention**

Finally the respondents were asked in the second Delphi round to give their opinion on prevention in general. In the first round several respondents claimed that prevention does not work in stopping young people from committing crime. All the respondents in the second round denied this statement. In fact, they believe that it is effective but only when it is applied on a long-term base in an integrated (meaning in cooperation with all involved partners), integral way. This refers to the classic chain of proactive, prevention, repression and aftercare. Respondents do claim that prevention in Belgium has to be generally better funded and coordinated through a (more) globally coherent policy.

Moreover, different respondents claim that target groups, namely youngsters themselves, are too little involved in the prevention projects.

## **5 Conclusion**

The Delphi survey was used in this research phase to shed light on possible future developments of youth crime by integrating opinions and views of experts in the field. By sketching out certain expected evolutions we attempted to reconstruct an image of anticipated developments and future challenges for the prevention of youth deviance, crime and violence. However this entails several difficulties. Our respondents (as we) are not able to look into the future. Notably when it comes to societal developments, nobody can predict what will happen within the upcoming decades. This problem was also stressed by a large part of the respondents. Therefore the results displayed in this



report have to be treated with caution. Not only are they merely an attempt to reflect the perceptions and views that live amongst actors in the field. Moreover, these results are based on a very small number of experts. Therefore the reader should bear the low response rate in mind. We want to emphasize that these results are merely descriptive.

In general the respondents did not predict very positive developments. The overall picture is rather pessimistic. They expect more unemployment especially amongst unqualified youngsters. Increasing individualization, economic crisis and the interplay of ageing and migration tendencies are seen as important influencing factors for growing conflicts within society. Consequently, youth crime is expected to rise or to change. Respondents fear less tolerance towards youngsters and therefore expect that (typical) youthful behavior will increasingly provoke a social reaction (and or legal response). The administrative municipal sanctions that address incivilities were frequently brought forward as an example.

Shedding a light on the evolution of specific types of juvenile delinquency, it appeared that cyber crime, physical assault and drug crime are expected to rise the most. Especially cyber crime appeared to be a challenge for prevention in the future. It is expected that this form of behaviour will not only increase but will also be hard to tackle due to the low visibility.

Furthermore a decline in age, girls 'catching up' on boys, more youth gangs and increasing use of weapons (especially melee weapons) was also brought forward by a significant part of the respondents.

The profile drawn of young offenders and victims of youth crime appeared to be very similar: migrant youths from disadvantaged families of low economic classes who are under qualified (educational level).

Offering their views on recommended approaches for the prevention of cyber crime, drug use and violence amongst youngsters, a majority of the interviewed experts indicated more often actors that are present in the every day life of youngsters (schools, parents, social work). The most important recommendation for future prevention approaches mentioned was: to support and listen to youngsters.

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