Youth deviance and youth violence: A European multi-agency perspective on best

practices in prevention and control

(YouPrev)

Delphi survey: Expert views on youth deviance and violence and its prevention

and control in the coming decade

– Results from the Portugal survey -

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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 problems behaviour. 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 focussed 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 judgements and, additionally, experts' recommendations for prevention in selected fields of juvenile problem behaviour were addressed.

2. Methodology

The experts included in the sample have a broad range of professional backgrounds: police officers; social workers working in different areas and services; scientists from different universities and research units; experts from the fields of judiciary as well as crime prevention.

The sample of the Nationwide Institutional and Expert Survey conducted in workstream 1 ("Taking stock") was used as the main source to build the Delphi expert

panels, since many of the experts being able to give valuable information on the status quo coincide with those being able to give estimates on the future.

The surveys were mainly conducted via PDF-templates which were sent out by e-mail. Alternatively, a paper and pencil version was available. Several phone contacts and e-mail reminders were also sent.

The questionnaires consisted of a mixture of closed and open-ended questions; the information from open-ended questions was coded by the research team.

The time frame of the first round was from September until November 2011; the second round was conducted between January and March 2012.

In order to complete the information from Delphi (first round) five interviews were conducted. The topics of the interviews were the same used on the questionnaire. The interviews were addressed to: two researchers; one person working in Social Security System; the person responsible for the Observatory of Safety Organized Crime and Terrorism; one person from Casa Pia de Lisboa – one of the oldest foster homes in Lisbon.

The comments made by some of these interviewees could partially explain the low rates of responses on the Delphi questionnaire. As matter of fact to ask people to think about the future and to make predictions about what is going to happen in society is a rather difficult task. As someone said: "*we are too focused on the present and the scenarios are often designed in five years' time at most. Maybe we should do this exercise more often*" interviewee 1.

On the other hand, the quick changes in society make it "*impossible to know what is going to happen in the future. Let's notice, for instance, how fast immigrants come in and get out of Portugal*" interviewee 4.

A last difficulty mentioned in regards the anticipation of future trends refers to the impact of the evolution of some context dimensions, such as the surroundings of big cities as Lisbon and the "*interactions between local dynamics and the opportunities of being part of marginal networks given by communication technology*" interviewee 2.

3. Sample description

In the first wave of Delphi survey we sent out 150 questionnaires and we received 31 answers which mean a response rate of 20.7%. In the second round we also launched 150 questionnaires and the response rate was 22.7%, which represents 34 answers.

We tried to keep the respondents anonymous; therefore only in second wave we obtained data about experts' professional backgrounds.

Table 1: Overview on sample composition, professional backgrounds of experts, Delphi round 2

Professional field	Number	% (31)
Police	12	38.7
Crime prevention	10	32.3
Probation service	5	16.1
Social work	2	6.5
Public prosecutor	2	6.5
n.a.	3	-
Total	34	100

As we said before we tried to get a large range of professional backgrounds in the sample; however the answers come from a more restrictive group as it can be seen in the previous table: we had no answers from researchers, and there is a strong presence of people in the police forces and of those working in local projects with young people that we can consider as crime prevention initiatives.

4. Findings

4.1 Anticipated societal changes until 2025

In general, the scenario pointed out by the respondents is a rather pessimistic one. In what concerns the main changes in Portuguese society until 2025, a rise of the

unemployment is expected as well as a rise of social inequalities and consequently an increase of social conflicts.

Other important issue is the idea that in the Portuguese society there is a generalization of certain social risks (such as unemployment, for instance) and an erosion of family support and family life due to more and more family unfriendly working conditions, that is "less family time". As one of the interviewees said: *"society is changing and there is less time for the family to be with the children. This is getting worst. We are also assisting to a culture based on the "little prince" which means a "little dictator". The word NO it is not used and children are educated without limits"* interviewee 3.

In the eyes of many respondents, the economical weaknesses in Portugal lead to a weakness of social protection and social welfare gets limited to an assistance perspective in parallel with a growth of individualisation and the loss of a citizenship perspective.

This retraction of the state, in the opinion of some of the interviewed experts, could be a factor for the increase of delinquency: "*It is not the economic crisis, because I don't believe that be unemployed or to be poor means delinquency, but the retraction of the state and of the public and private non-profit institutions, due to financial problems, leads to an inhibition of the socializations institutions that could lead to the growing of "closed cultures where delinquent behaviours take place"* interviewee 5.

Three main aspects characterize the demographic changes:

- Ageing population and decrease of birth rate;
- Desertification of inland and rural areas and strong concentration of population in the suburban areas;
- Change in the migration flows: decrease of immigration; increase in emigration movements.

An optimist point of view came from a minority of respondents: they expect an economic stability and an increase of the educational levels of the Portuguese population, especially among young people. However, in the field of education the

respondents pointed out to a controversial issue: in parallel to a highly educated youth, school dropout among youngsters from underprivileged families should raise, meaning a cleavage among young people and a higher risk of delinquency among youngsters who dropout from school.

This is one of the main ideas reinforced by the interviewees:

- *"School environment will be more and more demanding in the field of competences and knowledge and everybody must study in order to get there. But this is very difficult for those who are coming from a culture where school is not important and family does not give them the adequate support. (…) Kids who do not fit, who are not able to live in society as society demands; who do not fill right in school, who don't have success; these kids are frustrated. Delinquency is another way for them to get success; it is a process of adaptation, a negative one but still of adaptation"* interviewee 1.
- *"We know that a great percentage of the youngsters who are in the judicial system dropped out from school. And now we have a great challenge with compulsory school until 18 years old, because the school system it is not prepared to keep certain young people in school for so long"* interviewee 5.

4.2 Anticipated developments in field of youth crime / youth violence

Generally, respondents expect an increase in the volume of police-recorded juvenile delinquency. For the period up to 2025, 79.3 % of the Portuguese respondents of Delphi round 1 anticipate a growth in the number of juvenile offenders registered by police by nearly 25.6% in average (M = 25.57 %; SD = 5.57). This could be linked to the fact that *"the life of young people in 2015 will be much difficult"* interviewee 1; *"if we put oneself in the other's place, particularly in those from underprivileged areas which expectation does exist? Which possibilities of getting a better life? In these contexts delinquency came up in a "natural" form enhanced by a parallel economy that is growing in times of crisis"* interviewee 4.
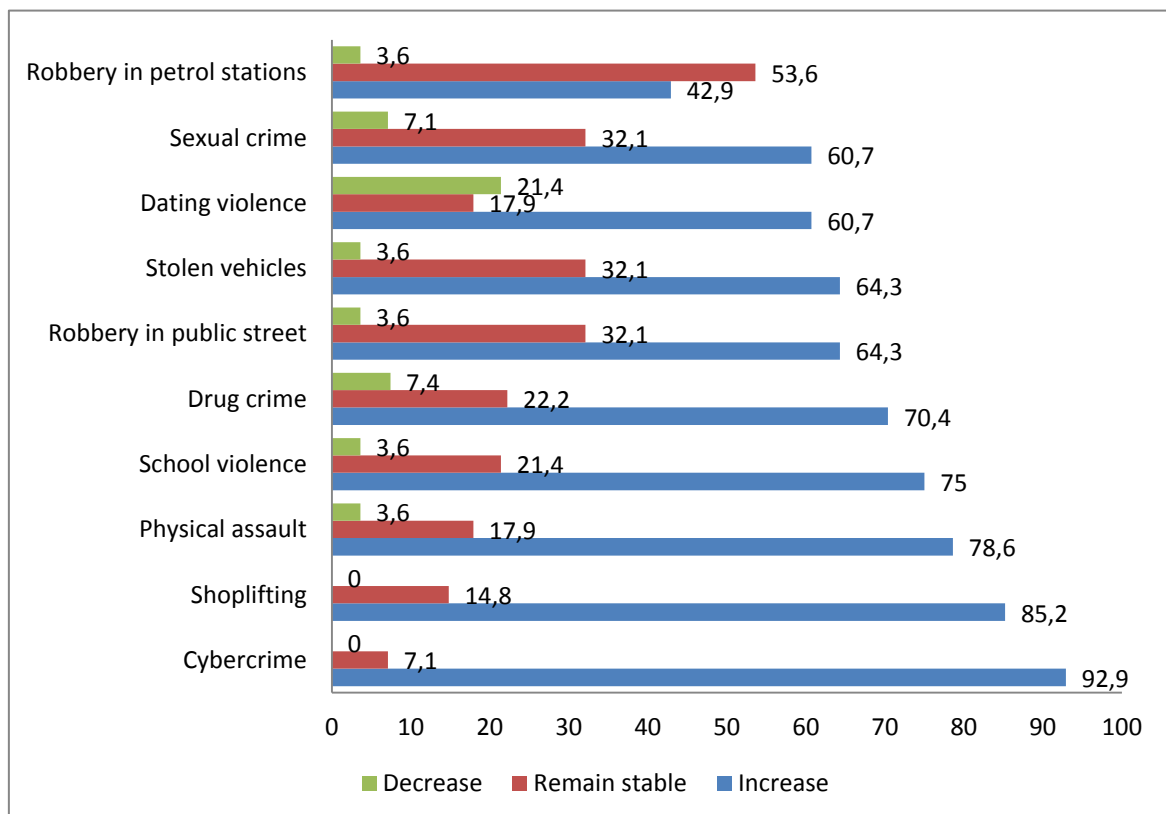
On the other hand 10 % of the experts assume that the number of suspects will remain stable and other 10% tend to be more optimistic saying that police-recorded offences will reduce.

The decrease of young people, among the general population, seems not to be contradictory with the previous perdition. Once again the main focus is put on the state procedures: *"every resources are channelled to the elderly; childhood and youth are forgotten"* interviewee 2.

The increase of youth violence is seen as an issue for boys and girls and some respondents argue that numbers of female offenders – also regarding violent offences – might increase. Still mainly boys will be the dominant group of (juvenile) offenders.

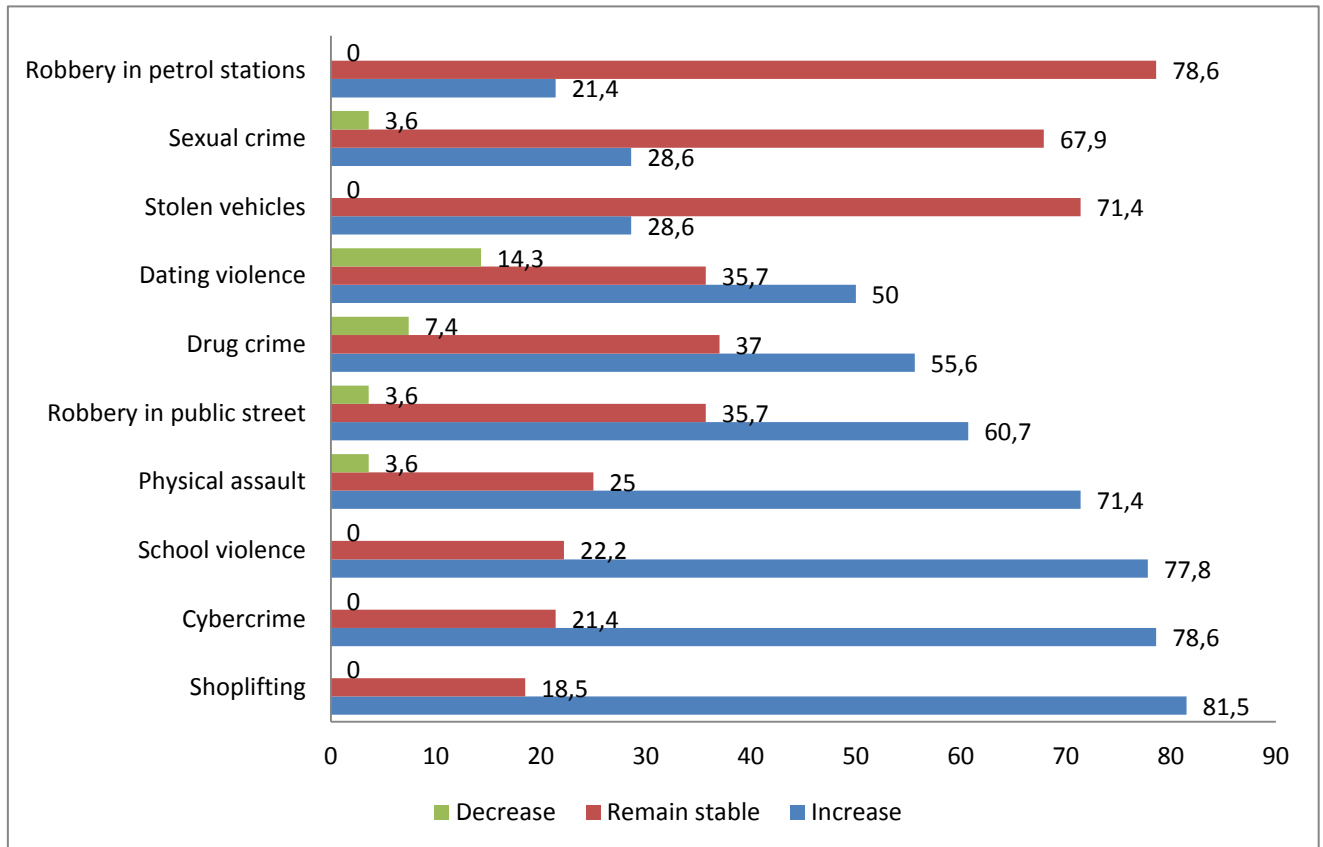Experts were also asked for differentiated estimations about the development of the number of male and female suspects for certain groups of offences. Figure 1 and Figure 2 give an overview of experts' estimates with regard to young males and young females.

Figure 1: Experts' estimates regarding the development of the number of <u>male</u> juvenile suspects in Portugal until 2025, Delphi round 1, 30 < N < 31

In the experts' opinion there will be an increase in the major part of offences practised by young males, with the exception of robbery in petrol stations that will remain stable. However, cybercrime, shoplifting and physical assault are the three types of crimes which seem to increase more.

Figure 2: Experts' estimates regarding the development of the number of <u>female</u> juvenile suspects in Portugal until 2025, Delphi round 1, 30 < N < 31

Concerning young females the situation is different. Not all the crimes are seen as increasing - this is the case of robbery in petrol stations; stolen vehicles; and sexual crime that in the experts' opinion will remain stable. On the other hand, shoplifting, cybercrime and school violence are considered the three main types of crime which will increase.

Comparing young males with young females, shoplifting comes is first place in what concerns crime increase; among young male population the first place is occupied by cybercrime.

This increasing of youth crime and juvenile delinquency is, in the respondents' opinion, closely connected to a decreasing of the families' purchasing power, on one hand, and to a growing dissatisfaction with school among youth, on the other.

Another question is the "symbolic face" of certain robbery in shops and this also could increase: "*The target of the robbery is no longer food but some equipment top-of-the-range and brand clothes*" interviewee 4.

Another important matter is the use of new technologies considered as a factor of new opportunities (such as learning) but also as a tool for cybercrime and for changing the way young people live, in particular regarding the communication process with each other and with the society in general.

Some experts also stated that the rate of juveniles with mental health problems will increase. This was often mentioned in connection with substance abuse.

If a kind of consensus emerged about the evolution tendencies for juvenile delinquency and youth crime a certain contradiction is present in the way the respondents see how those crimes shall be committed.

About 50% of the respondents have the opinion that more crimes shall be committed by organized groups – "*In Portugal we can already see a "culture of gang" which could be an expression of youth identity, the problem is when there is an advocacy of violence*" intervieweeee 2.

The other 50% agree with the increasing of violence committed in a group but they stated that this may occur in an organised way, or not. In fact, a small number of experts mentioned the growth of spontaneous crime in groups of young people.

An increase in the use of weapons and violent crimes, in general, was assumed by a considerable number of experts in the first Delphi round: "*Today there are large opportunities for having a weapon. The incidents that have been occurring in schools are due to the fact that students are carrying out weapons that they find at home. Most part of them bring the weapon to show it to their friends but when there is a problem….(…) It is too easy to buy a knife (…) there are conflicts that before used to be*

spotted with a punch; now the easy accessibility to weapons increases the fights gravity" intervieweeee 2.

"*There are much more opportunities linked to the trafficking of arms. Before that was the drugs traffic but now that is much more than this. (…) As the French say they are "la jeunesse de la galère": young people who are not in school and do no not work*" intervieweeee 2.

Another question stressed out in the interviewees was the younger age of some young people involved in some crime situations: "*I prefer not to speak on delinquency because it happens with too small children that escape any kind of intervention but they are used by their families with experience in organised crime. It is something linked to a family history where state measures failed and it creates a pattern of behaviour*" interviewee 5.

Still concerning boys and girls, it can be said that criminality among young female is a more hidden issue (linked to drugs and prostitution) but when it comes out shows a violent face: "*It is not a matter of girls beeing more violent but a matter of society getting excuses and when they reach the justice system is with major crimes*" interviewee 5.

As to the characteristics of victims of juvenile crime no great changes are expected. Some respondents anticipate an increase in older victims of offences committed by juveniles, but still a large amount of offences will be directed at other juveniles.

4.3 Information and communication technology and the changing face of juvenile crime

In the first Delphi round, respondents indicated that developments in information and communication technology will have a significant impact particularly in the type of crime and that "cybercrime" committed by young people will be an increasing and more relevant field in the near future.

"*Social networks change life style (…) these give more speed to conflicts. The violence committed with the use of technology is anomy*" interviewee 2.

On the other hand, it is a type of crime where it is much more difficult to find the guilty and for the police to operate. It is a process that hides the delinquency or violence but it is also a process making it possible to disseminate images and acts of delinquency. Therefore "*there are several cross lines and divergent paths ways that lead to new forms of delinquency*" interviewee 5.

Since cybercrime can include a wide range of offences, respondents were asked about this issue in the second Delphi round in more detail, using an open question format ("What are the main changes you expect with regard to juvenile offences linked to use of information and communication technology in the era up to 2025?").

Most often an increasing significance of phenomena of cyber bullying, followed by increasing copyright infringements and computer fraud were mentioned. Another major problem is seen in the attacks on privacy and personal data. This includes spying out of personal data and misuse of pictures, financial data etc., amplified by many juveniles handling their own personal data in a very incautious way, as some respondents point out.

Pornography and sexual crimes are also another kind of crime showing a trend towards augmentation.

4.4 Controversial issues

Regarding societal changes expected in the upcoming decade, there were some controversial issues emerging from the first round. For the second wave of the survey, the topics of family cohesion, importance of family structures and school dropout *versus* the increasing of educational levels of young people in general were picked as the most striking controversial issues to be discussed in more detail.

4.4.1. Weakness of family ties *vs* reinforcement of family bonds in parallel with weakness of the State role

In the first Delphi round, divergent views regarding the development and importance of family structures and family cohesion became apparent. Some respondents expected a weakening of familial bonds and continuing societal trends towards individualisation – they expected a society with a life rhythm which will be more and more frenetic and a less "family friendly" labour market. This means less family time; less parental supervision and also a personal and family dissatisfaction with implications on relationships and affection ties.

Others experts anticipated that there will be a reinforcement of the family cohesion. This reinforcement is assumed as a way of facing the economic crisis and a weakness of the state role leading people and families to a life style less consumerist and where social bonds and affection ties are valued.

In the second round, respondents were asked about their opinion on these positions regarding the future significance of the family.

The position of experts in the second round is predominantly (20 out of 34 answers) in favour of the hypothesis "*weakness of family ties*": *"The trend is to a progressive weakening of family ties due to: unemployment; economic needs and the need of finding new ways of economic support".*

In the experts' opinion this has different consequences, one of them is the way how families give support to their children: *"I see the discredit on justice, an increase of social inequalities and a leak of opportunities which is an appeal to revolt and social conflict. Family gives way to problems and they lose conditions to accompany the children".*

However, there are 4 respondents who maintain an optimistic perspective: *"the individualisation that we feel in our days will be enhanced by a strong family cohesion because crisis can unite people. Therefore I think that there will be a reinforcement of the social ties and a weaknessing of the State social role for economic motives".*

We can also find 6 respondents who have the idea that the two different trends may happen in parallel, i.e. they are not mutually exclusive: "*I believe that economic problems will affect families in a severe way. Because of this parents have to work more hours or have to find different smalls jobs and have less time to be with children. But, on the other hand, I believe that the moments of crises bring people together*".

The simultaneous presence of those two different trends is rooted on the existence of strong social inequalities that most probably will get worse: "*Functional families are going to protect themselves; Disadvantaged families are going to collapse*".

In general experts also agree on the diversity of family structures and the growing up of new forms of family and family life.

4.4.2. Education: Social cohesion factor or factor of division?

In the first Delphi round, controversial views concerning the role of education emerge. Some respondents expected that the increasing educational level of population shall contribute to a greater social cohesion. On the other hand, other anticipated that the extension of compulsory education until 19 years old will lead to an increase of school dropout in particular from young people of disadvantaged families.

It must be said that school failure and school dropout, although still a major problem in the Portuguese society, it have been decreasing from some years now. However some experts believe that the economic crises and the high rates of unemployment among young people and, especially among those with higher educational level, creates a general opinion that "*it is not worthwhile spending time with education*" leading to a new increase of early dropout from school.

In the second round, respondents were asked again to express their views on this controversial issue. 18 out of 34 responses reinforce the opinion that the increase in social inequalities is supported by the inequalities in the educational system.

These inequalities have not only to do with economic crisis and school demotivation, as pointed out in the first round, but also with other factors:

- More selective and exclusive educational system;
- Lack of school resources in order to prevent school failure and early dropout;
- Difficulties of the school system with respect to a greater heterogeneity of students;
- Fewer resources for local prevention projects.

"With the decrease of public investment in social policies, namely those addressed to families; and concerning the increasing of economic precariousness and financial difficulties already felt in schools the trends should be towards a higher rate of school dropout".

"The general trend is to increase educational level even if among young people in disadvantaged areas there is an increase of early dropout from school. Equally fundamental will be the existence of local institution in order to support these youngters".

Only 7 people refer the importance of the increasing educational level of young population: *"I predict a general trend among young people towards higher educational levels due to the enlargement of compulsory school. This will contribute to a greater social cohesion, despite the unemployment problems among youth, included those with higher educational levels".* Some experts even reinforce the idea that *"a higher qualification of young people is a protection factor concerning young delinquency practices".*

4.5 Prevention approaches in selected fields

A main topic of the second Delphi wave was the experts' views on prevention, their opinions about what can be done and what should be done in selected fields of juvenile problem behaviour.

4.5.1 Substance abuse among juveniles

At first, experts were asked about their opinion on whose task prevention of drug abuse among juveniles should be. They were asked to give their answers on a four-

point scale from 1 "*not at all*" to 4 "*fully*". Table 2 gives an overview on the experts' perceptions of the importance of several actors or institutions in the field of drug abuse prevention.

Table 2: Experts' opinions on the importance of certain actors or institutions in the field of drug prevention sorted by means, scale from 1 = "not at all" to 4 = "fully", Delphi 2

Actors / Institutions	Mean
Parents	3.94
Schools	3.81
National Institute for Drugs	3.74
Local projects	3.69
Social work (from Private Non Profit Institutions – IPSS)	3.35
Probation services	3.26
Police	3.16
Municipalities	3.10
Social work / Social Security System	2.97

In the opinion of experts, persons or institutions being in daily contact with juveniles – parents and schools – are the most relevant preventive actors regarding juvenile drug abuse. This relevance is, certainly, linked to the proximity to young people and the capacity for a personal approach presented by school and family which is also implicit in the evaluation of local projects and of the social work done by institutions such as IPSS (Private Non Profit Institutions).

National Institute for Drugs and Probation Services are also evaluated as relevant. considering a tertiary level of prevention. Less significance is attributed to municipalities, and the police and the social security system. This may partially be due to the specific nature of these institutions' and professions' contact with juveniles.

Recommended approaches for <u>social work</u> in the field of preventing drug abuse among juveniles

Measures that are most often mentioned by participants of the survey are measures related to educational work in an early phase with the aim of the reinforcement of "soft life skills" that protect children and young people of facing risk factors. These kinds of measures should address both children (Social and Personal Competence Development Program) and parents (Parental Programmes).

Sports, cultural and leisure activities addressed to young people and running in local institutions / associations or at schools are also considered important, as well as awareness campaigns.

It emerges from the experts' responses that social work in schools with young people is very important.

Recommended approaches for <u>police</u> in the field of preventing drug abuse among juveniles

Recommendations for police mainly refer to community policing, on one hand and criminal prosecution, on the other hand.

A programme pointed out as good example of community policing is the programme *Safe School* (*Escola Segura*) where there is a close cooperation between police and schools: "*it is very important that police come to school; the initiatives between police, teachers and youngsters are very important. When they play together it is not only a game, it is a way of learning how to deal as a team and of demystifying police work* " interviewee 5.

Effective criminal prosecution was the second aspect mentioned by several respondents. This includes prosecution of drug trafficking and higher pressure on drug dealers, especially large-scale dealers.

4.5.2 Youth cybercrime

Experts were also asked to give their opinion on whose task prevention of youth cybercrime should be. Table 3 gives an overview on the experts' perception of the importance of several actors or institutions in the field of prevention of youth cybercrime. They were again asked to give their answers on a four scale from "*not at all*" to "*fully*".

Table 3: Experts' opinions on the importance of certain actors or institutions in the field of youth cybercrime sorted by means, scale from 1 = "not at all" to 4 = "fully", Delphi 2

Actors / Institutions	Mean
Parents	3.93
Police	3.83
Local projects	3.69
Schools	3.43
Social work (from Private Non Profit Institutions – IPSS)	2.50
Municipalities	2.47
Probation services	2.45
National Institute for Drugs	2.07
Social work / Social Security System	2.03

Again, parents and schools are considered as the most important persons/institutions whose task should be to prevent youth cybercrime. This time police is also considered as an important institution for this matter.

Recommended approaches for social work in the field of preventing cybercrime among juveniles

With regard to preventive approaches recommended for social work, most respondents referred to cognitive approaches that aim to give young people information and raise their awareness about risks and dangers connected with the

internet. Schools are most often named as the most important institution where juveniles should be addressed.

Other important aspect is seen in the need of parental training and advice for parents about the issue.

Recommended approaches for police in the field of preventing cybercrime among juveniles

Most often mentioned were awareness/information sessions for young people, giving information about dangers (like for instance identity theft or computer fraud) as well as providing information and raising awareness of laws, legal consequences and consequences for victims.

Several experts also referred the need for further research and training of police forces on cybercrime.

4.5.3 Crimes against property

Being asked about their expertise on the prevention of crimes against property, respondents were again sure that all the given actors or institutions are important (see Table 4). Again, they consider parents to have the greatest responsibility but in this case police is also considered very important such as school and local projects.

Table 4: Experts' opinions on the importance of certain actors or institutions in the field of crimes against property violence sorted by means, scale from 1 = "not at all" to 4 = "fully", Delphi 2

Actors / Institutions	Mean
Parents	3.93
Police	3.83
Schools	3.43
Local projects	3.40
Probation services	3.14
Municipalities	2.76
Social work (from Private Non Profit Institutions – IPSS)	2.69
Social work / Social Security System	2.48
National Institute for Drugs	2.19

Recommended approaches for social work in the field of preventing crimes against property among juveniles

The most important aspect experts claim for the field of preventing crimes against property is the implementation of community projects with strong component of citizenship education; support and follow up to youngers and families. These projects should be carried out in strong collaboration with schools and other local institutions.

Recommended approaches for police in the field of preventing crimes against property among juveniles

All the respondents pointed out to the reinforcement of community police.

5. Cross issues

In every type of crime considered there are frequent references about the need of prevention approaches in very early ages: *"prevention should be done since 3-5 years old"* interviewee 5. On the other hand, there is the consciousness that prevention is

something that has been poorly valorised because *"we don't have a vision that prevention is an investment that saves money"* interviewee 5. When there is a line of thought supported by policies of handing out assistance, prevention policies and measures have great difficulties to find their space.

Another vision is that prevention of youth violence /delinquency is something wider than the measures addressed specifically to it and it should also be included in a family policy.

Local projects such as those developed in local communities with financing of the national programme *Choices* (*Escolhas*) are understood as very important in a prevention background. These projects have the ability of working in a partnership framework and they can intervene in different fields of the problem, in different dimensions of young people life's, with the different partners.

Community police and school more open to communities' lives are another cross issue:

- *"I think that police should intervene closer to people in certain neighbourhoods. If they participate in community activities the distance between police and population and police and other institutions closes down"* interviewee 2.
- *"School cannot be a closed institution (…) There are very good examples of school that manage to open to the community: they brought the neighbourhood inside school"* interviewee 5.

Finally we should point out the relevance given to the participation processes of young people themselves.