

Josine Junger-Tas · Ineke Haen Marshall
Dirk Enzmann · Martin Killias
Majone Steketee · Beata Gruszczyńska

The Many Faces of Youth Crime

Contrasting Theoretical Perspectives
on Juvenile Delinquency across Countries
and Cultures

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by

Josine Junger-Tas, University of Utrecht, Utrecht, The Netherlands

Ineke Haen Marshall, Northeastern University, Boston, MA, USA

Dirk Enzmann, University of Hamburg, Hamburg, Germany

Martin Killias, University of Zurich, Zurich, Switzerland

Majone Steketee, Verwey-Jonker Institute, Utrecht, Netherlands

Beata Gruszczyńska, University of Warsaw, Warsaw, Poland

with additional contributions from:

Sonia Lucia, University of Lausanne, Lausanne, Switzerland

Harrie Jonkman, Verwey-Jonker Institute, Utrecht, The Netherlands



Springer

Josine Junger-Tas
University of Utrecht
Utrecht, The Netherlands

Ineke Haen Marshall
Department of Sociology
Northeastern University
Boston, MA, USA
i.marshall@neu.edu

Dirk Enzmann
University of Hamburg
Hamburg, Germany
dirk.enzmann@uni-hamburg.de

Martin Killias
University of Zurich
Zurich, Switzerland
Martin.Killias@rwi.uzh.ch

Majone Steketee
Verwey-Jonker Institute
Utrecht, The Netherlands
msteketee@verwey-jonker.nl

Beata Gruszczyńska
University of Warsaw
Warsaw, Poland
b.gruszczyńska@uw.edu.pl

ISBN 978-1-4419-9454-7 (hardcover)

ISBN 978-1-4614-5840-1 (softcover)

DOI 10.1007/978-1-4419-9455-4

Springer New York Heidelberg Dordrecht London

ISBN 978-1-4419-9455-4 (eBook)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2011936744

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The Many Faces of Youth Crime

Preface

This book is dedicated to our inspiration and dear friend,

Josine Junger-Tas (1929 – 2011)

We have many people to thank now the second book on the results of the ISRD is complete. It is hard to know where to begin. We owe a debt of gratitude to Malcolm Klein who was our inspiration from the early beginnings of this project. Throughout the project, we have learned and benefitted from the many comments and suggestions we have received from our colleagues with whom we talked at conferences, or informally in the halls of our universities or research institutes. The International Self-Report Delinquency Study has been a truly international collaborative effort from its very inception. The results presented in this book were produced by tireless and generous cooperation and collaboration of more than 100 researchers from over 30 countries. The many workshops, personal meetings, and electronic communications together with tremendous energy of the entire ISRD-2 working group have generated an impressive amount of information about different dimensions of young people's life in Europe and several non-European countries. The ISRD-2 Steering Committee at times has tested the research partners' patience and understanding through adjustments and requests that sometimes took longer than desirable. Without the good cheer and positive attitude of the many national partners, this project would not have come to fruition. For all of us, the International Self-Report Study of Delinquency (ISRD2) has been a very rewarding learning process.

To the countless administrators, school principals, class room teachers, and research assistants in each ISRD country without whom this project could not have been completed, we say *Thank you*. And let us not forget the almost 70,000 students who were willing to participate in our study, without any promise or benefit. We are grateful to the European Union which through its Daphne project facilitated the

participation of a number of new EU member countries in this study. We also thank the Swiss National Science Foundation which funded the study in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Russia. We appreciate the different national or local funding agencies that were willing to invest their scarce resources in this project because they recognized the importance of international and comparative research. We hope that – when these funding agencies read the results of our study – they feel that their money was well spent.

In this time of scarce public resources, it is particularly important that research has useful policy implications. As the last chapter of this book shows, we have tried to meet the needs of researchers as well as those involved with policy.

We also owe thanks to the Verwey-Jonker Institute for its generous practical and enthusiastic support of the ISRD-2 project. We thank Welmoed Spahr and Katie Chabalko from Springer who have shepherded us successfully and patiently through the process of completing the second book on the ISRD-2.

Finally, it took us a bit more time than we had originally planned to finalize the manuscript but we are happy with the results. Still, we had to leave many questions unexplored. We invite our colleagues – in Europe and beyond – to take up where we left off and continue the analysis of the rich ISRD-2 data set. Meanwhile, we have started preparations for the third International Self-Report Delinquency Study (ISRD-3).

Utrecht, The Netherlands

Josine Junger-Tas

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Part I

Theory and Design

Chapter 1

Introduction to the International Self-Report Study of Delinquency (ISRD-2)

Josine Junger-Tas and Ineke Haen Marshall

There is a growing interest in cross-cultural comparisons both among academics and among policy makers, which is related to general trends such as increasing globalization, the advantage of scientific collaboration in terms of building knowledge, and the need for policy makers to be informed about different kinds of solutions to comparable problems. The need for cross-national knowledge on crime is reflected in the United Nations Crime prevention and criminal justice programmes. Major efforts have been made by the United Nations to achieve comparisons between nations on the basis of police and criminal justice statistics (Vetere and Newman 1977; Pease and Hukkula 1990; Newman 1999; Aromaa and Heiskanen 2008). However, interpreting the results has always been difficult, because countries differ widely in the organization of their police and criminal justice system, the definition of legal categories, the counting rules, and the way they collect and present their statistics. Efforts have also been made by the Council of Europe to improve the accuracy and usefulness of international crime statistics and to confront the drawbacks of underreporting and non-standard indicators (*European Sourcebook of Crime and Criminal Justice Statistics* 1995, 2003, 2006, 2010). Many improvements have also been made with the International Crime Victimization Survey (ICVS) collecting victimization data from a large number of countries (van Dijk et al. 2008). A total of five “sweeps” of the ICVS (1989, 1992, 1996, 2000, 2005) have been conducted so far. Because of the multiplication of data sources both nationally and internationally, together with a growing understanding of the strengths and limitations of different measures of crime, we are now better capable of recognizing international diverging and converging trends (e.g. Junger-Tas 1996; Marshall 1996).

However, most of the international crime measures refer mainly to *adult* criminal behaviour, suggesting that juvenile criminal acts are not of particular interest. This is puzzling since youth crime is perceived as a major problem in many countries.

I.H. Marshall (✉)
Northeastern University, Boston, MA, USA
e-mail: i.marshall@neu.edu

It is therefore no surprise that the need for more comparative knowledge on juvenile anti-social behaviour, as well as on juvenile crime, is increasingly felt.

Over the last several decades, a large number of self-report studies of offending and victimization have been conducted, mostly in the US, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, UK, and other European countries, but also in Japan, India, China, and South Africa. Indeed, the self-report method has long outgrown its infancy and by now appears a powerful and reliable research tool for criminologists. These self-report surveys of delinquency appear to have three different but often overlapping purposes: (1) *To measure the prevalence and incidence of offending*; (2) *To test theories about the correlates of offending*; and (3) *To describe the dimensions and trajectories of delinquent careers* (e.g. age of onset, seriousness, and versatility). Some of these are very sophisticated, extensive longitudinal surveys, while others are cross-sectional one-time small-scale studies. No matter their primary purpose or particular research design, self-report studies have proved to be a true treasure trove of insights into delinquency and victimization. They also have contributed to an extensive body of knowledge about the methodological challenges and requirements of survey research [i.e. sampling, validity and reliability issues, and psychometric properties of scales (see, e.g. Junger-Tas and Marshall 1999; Thornberry and Krohn 2000)]. It is one of the purposes of the International Self-Report Study of Delinquency (ISRD) to further contribute to the methodological development of self-report survey methodology, in particular the large-scale, cross-national variant which presents a number of additional challenges to the basic survey method. (See Chap. 2 on the methodological challenges of the ISRD-2).

Although self-report surveys of delinquency have been a mainstay of delinquency research for over half a century, these studies typically have been limited to one, or at the most, a handful of countries (e.g. Pauwels and Svensson 2008, 2010; Svensson et al. 2010; Vazsonyi et al. 2001; Wikstrom and Svensson 2008). The bulk of analyses that draw upon survey data from multiple countries is not explicitly comparative by design (Kohn 1987). For example, Thornberry and Krohn (2003) in *Taking Stock of Delinquency: An Overview of Findings from Contemporary Longitudinal Studies* discuss seven longitudinal studies of delinquency in the UK, USA, and Canada. These panel studies share a core set of design features, including repeated measurements and interviews with the focal group. There is no, however, explicit standardization of either the measurement instruments used or the sample selection. Another example is the International Dating Violence Study (Straus et al. 2004) which uses a standardized (translated) self-report instrument, but sampling is not standardized (convenience samples of college students in different countries). Thus, studies that use an explicitly comparative (cross-national) design are rather rare.¹ The ISRD-2

¹ At the European level, there are few comparative studies focusing on youth; one example is the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD) (see Hibell et al. 2004 <http://www.espad.org/espad-reports>). Another example is the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), an internationally standardized assessment of 15-year olds in schools, implemented in 62 countries worldwide in 2009. The WHO report on the Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (HBSC) contains international self-report data on cannabis use, fighting, and bullying (Currie et al. 2008). Data on self-reported delinquency and victimization in six countries (Germany, Poland, Lithuania, Estonia, Finland, and Sweden) are reported in Dunkel et al. (2007).

study is one of the first large-scale cross-national studies of juvenile delinquency with an *explicitly* comparative design and methodology. A total of 31 countries participated in the ISRD-2.² ISRD-2's explicit comparative design intends to minimize the confounding impact of possible cross-national differences in study design and implementation on noted cross-national differences and similarities, through standardization: of survey instruments, sampling plan, and standardized data entry method. Such explicitly comparative design, we have argued from its inception some 20 years ago, is by far the strongest approach and has many advantages over other designs. The history and background of the ISRD-2 study has been discussed elsewhere (Enzmann et al. 2010; Junger-Tas et al. 2010), but below we want to highlight a few main points to provide the main methodological and theoretical contours of the ISRD-2.

1.1 The First International Self-Report Study (ISRD-1)

The International Self-report Delinquency study (ISRD) was launched in 1992 by the Dutch Research and Documentation Centre (WODC). The study was based on self-report delinquency data collected in 13 countries, most of which are Member States of the European Union. The objectives of the ISRD-1 project were as follows:

1. To examine cross-national variability in patterns of self-reported delinquent behaviour.
2. To measure the relative rank-ordering of prevalence of different types of juvenile delinquency in industrialized countries.
3. To study cross-national variability in the correlates of self-reported behaviour.
4. To contribute to the methodological development of the self-report method.

Participant researchers reached an agreement on a basic core instrument as well as on basic methodological requirements for achieving comparability. The validity and reliability of the ISRD-1 core questionnaire has been examined and found to be satisfactory (Killias 2001; Zhang et al. 2000; Marshall and Webb 1994).

Data collection took place in 1991 and 1992 in three Anglo-Saxon countries (Northern Ireland, England and Wales, and the USA, Nebraska), five countries from North-West Europe (The Netherlands, Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, Finland), and three countries from Southern Europe (Italy, Spain, Portugal). The first report, which consisted mainly of descriptive findings concerning the participating countries, was published in Junger-Tas. More advanced multivariate analyses and theoretical interpretations, based on the merged dataset of 11 countries, were presented in the second volume and published in November 2003 (Junger-Tas et al. 2003). The main comparative outcomes were presented at a conference held by the *European Society of Criminology* in Toledo (Spain), September 2002.

² Armenia, Aruba, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia, Canada, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Ireland, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Netherlands Antilles, N. Ireland, Norway, Poland, Russia, Scotland, Slovenia, Spain, Surinam, Sweden, Switzerland, United States, Venezuela.

1.2 The Second International Self-Report Delinquency Study (ISRD-2)

After ISRD-1 was completed, a number of reasons encouraged us to consider the possibility of repeating the study and even to start a series of such surveys.

- The interesting outcomes of the first comparative study, as well as the lessons learned with respect to the methodology of international comparative self-report measurement.
- Repeat studies would enable us to measure *trends* in youth delinquent behaviour over time.
- The relative lack of reliable data on youth crime in the new EU member states (from Central and Eastern Europe).
- Many countries now regularly collect self-report information on (types of) juvenile delinquent behaviour, so that the methodology of self-report surveys has been greatly improved.
- New insights in juvenile crime may be gained from comparisons with other countries.
- Cross-cultural comparison is an invaluable tool to develop our knowledge on stable correlates of crime and to test different criminological theories.
- Last but not least: the findings will allow policy makers to maintain, improve, or change their national youth policies.

One might consider ISRD-1 as a kind of pilot study, since it was the first time a standardized self-report delinquency survey was conducted with more than ten participants all over Europe and the US. Of all lessons learned from this first endeavour, the most important one was that we had to maximize standardization. Although, in the case of ISRD-1, we had achieved a valid and reliable questionnaire, and issued a number of clear instructions, some researchers introduced individual modifications, such as not asking all of the questions, changing some of them, or using different response categories. In addition, coding instructions were not strictly followed. Unfortunately, many researchers just did not realize the great importance of standardization for comparative purposes: the absence of exact similarity in the questionnaires made comparison extremely difficult, if not impossible.

So in order to avoid any future problems in future surveys, we took great pains to maximize collaboration among the participating countries. The ISRD-2 is not centrally funded, and was thus not able to provide financial support and/or incentives to its research partners. The ISRD project basically consists of a loosely coupled set of researchers from a number of countries who agreed to adhere to the ISRD protocol, and who were successful in securing local or national funding for doing the ISRD study. The ISRD protocol included the basic comparative design and methodology (i.e. survey instruments and sampling design, rules for data coding and data entry, and agreement to provide national data set for merging into international data set). The basic design and methodology were produced by the ISRD Steering Committee (SC), but a number of the specifics only were finalized after extensive discussions and consultations with

participating researchers. An example is the decision to use seventh, eighth, and ninth graders as the target population (rather than the 14–21-year-old age group which was the focus of ISRD-1). The SC had settled on a school-based survey in principle, but it took a lengthy, often heated discussion during a workshop in Brigels, Switzerland with a large number of the ISRD partners to finally decide that these three grades offered the best opportunity to capture the 12–15-year-olds in most of the participating countries (because of compulsory education). In comparable fashion, it took several meetings and extensive internet discussions to finalize the ISRD-2 questionnaire (about 1 year and a half). Even an apparently simple issue, such as which response categories to provide for the question on family composition, turned out to be a rather complex question, that elicited several different suggested solutions. After the instrument was finalized, we required from participants – of which there now were 30 instead of the initial 13 – that from that point on absolutely nothing would be changed in the pre-coded questionnaire. There are many more examples of how we managed to make the project a truly collaborative and participatory experience, such as the decision to broaden the initial city-based sampling design to allow a handful of national samples for those research partners whose funding favoured such approach, on the condition that they oversample at least one large city in order to maintain comparability or the lengthy debates – and pilot data collection efforts in different countries – about which local and national structural indicators to collect. Needless to say, there was a continuous tension between the need for standardization (of questions, of sampling methods, of survey administration, of data coding and data entry) and the desire to make the project genuinely collaborative and participatory for all researchers involved, no matter in which country they lived. It should be remembered that adherence to the basic ISRD protocol was, basically, completely voluntary; it was therefore essential that all partners felt truly invested in the importance of maintaining the integrity of the ISRD comparative design. In the end, we feel confident that this is the case. And we are satisfied with the “flexible standardization” which most accurately describes the final outcome of our approach.

We depended on three tools to manage the project so as to maximize the adherence to research protocol in a standardized manner: (1) regular workshops; (2) electronic procedures to facilitate sampling and survey administration, and data coding and data entry (Lauritsen 2006); and (3) national technical reports.

1.2.1 Workshops

Starting in 2004, the SC has organized ISRD workshops twice a year.³ These workshops had multiple functions. One function was to familiarize our partners with the basic ISRD methodology and design, and to explain the rationale behind some of its features. Not all partners had a comparable level of training or familiarity with survey

³ Although usually well attended, not all partners were able to attend all meetings; some partners never physically were present. However, workshop papers and minutes were made available to all ISRD partners through the ISRD website and mailing list.

methodology, and these workshops provided the opportunity to field questions and suggest ways of dealing with problems. Throughout all meetings, the SC continued to emphasize the importance of maintaining a truly comparative design, even when local realities and time pressures threatened to overshadow this important ISRD objective. Perhaps of more importance was that these meetings also provided a forum for input and feedback from all partners: about problems faced in the field, or with sampling strategies, translation of questionnaire items, cooperation from schools, or data management. Partly because of these workshops, the study remained “a work in progress” throughout, since a number of unanticipated methodological and logistic problems were resolved as the project was already underway. The ISRD-2 project, from beginning to end, took about 6 years, and several national research teams changed composition during that time. The workshops helped to train and socialize researchers who joined the project when it was already underway. The workshops, in a sense, functioned as a form of “continuing education” for all involved. Last but not least, many new international collaborative relationships among groups of researchers were formed as a result of participation in these meetings.

1.2.2 Electronic Tools for Standardization

The ISRD has as its core a standard survey instrument (ISRD-2 questionnaire, see ISRD Workgroup 2005), as well as a standardized sampling plan, accompanied by instructions on administration and implementation in order to minimize national differences. In order to facilitate drawing comparable random samples (see Chap. 2), researcher partners had access to a pre-programmed software package (“Survey manager”). The “Survey manager” is an Excel program especially written for the ISRD-2 study to manage the list of schools and classes, to draw random samples of classes, and to manage survey administration. Standardized data entry was made possible by using the free EpiData software (Lauritsen 2006). This latter program ensured that all survey responses – regardless of the language of the questionnaire – were to be coded in exactly the same manner. Very detailed coding instructions were provided, with particular careful explanation about the differences between missing data, “no” responses, and “not applicable” categories. Keeping these categories distinct is particularly important when dealing with survey questions about offending (“did you ever ...”) and follow-up questions. Although there was some reluctance among some of the partners to utilize these tools, ultimately most of the data were indeed entered through the standardized data entry method.

1.2.3 National Technical Reports

It would have been naïve to expect complete standardization and full adherence to the general ISRD design by all countries. Realizing that no research project, no matter how small or large, succeeds in a perfect implementation of its research

design, the ISRD project asked all participants to document all major methodological and other decisions made. The underlying philosophy was that some deviations from the design and methodology are inevitable, but they do not necessarily have to be fatal to the integrity of the larger project. That is, as long as there is detailed documentation about the kind of decisions that have been made (e.g. with regard to deviations from the sampling plan, or administration of the questionnaire), these deviations can be taken into account when interpreting the data. The partners were asked to write a national technical report, following a standardized outline, with details about sampling, survey administration, data entry, and so on.⁴

1.3 Theoretical Considerations

Comparative researchers have long argued that cross-national research provides a very useful method for generating, testing, and further developing sociological theories. In ISRD-1, where the major emphasis was placed on designing an instrument to measure delinquency, we limited the number of theoretical variables to some questions based on social bonding theory (Hirschi 1969), measuring school performance, school commitment, work commitment, bond with parents, supervision by parents, bond with friends, and organized leisure and sports participation. In the new rounds of ISRD surveys (ISRD-2), we have responded to the call for an expansion of the theoretical perspectives included (see Klein in Junger-Tas et al. 1994).

In considering the various options, we have chosen some of the strongest theoretical orientations regarding the genesis of delinquent behaviour: social control (social bonding) theory, self-control theory, routine activities/opportunity theory, and social disorganization/collective efficacy theory. These, mainly American theories, may now be tested in order to examine to what extent they may be valid in other countries than the Anglo-Saxon ones. Because of limitations to the length of the questionnaire, by necessity we were not able to include all possible measures pertaining to these theoretical perspectives, but we are satisfied that we have sufficiently relevant data to test the cross-national generalize-ability of these different perspectives.

1.3.1 *Social Bonding/Social Control Theory*

One of the most tested theories in criminology is social control – or social bonding – theory. It has been developed in the 1950s and has been systematized by Travis Hirschi (1969). In later years the theory has been considerably expanded (Laub and Sampson 2003; Sampson and Laub 1993; Sampson et al. 1997, 1999; Wikstrom 2004). Hirschi argues that delinquent acts are due to weakened or broken individual bonds to society. Social bonding is measured through four major elements:

⁴ These technical reports are available on request.