

Juvenile Violence Prevention: The Gap between Ideals and Practices

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Purpose:

When speaking about juvenile violence and delinquency, most experts believe that the best solution is the development of preventive programs and, specifically, primary and early intervention through more comprehensive social policies.

The purpose of this article is to present some Spanish findings of a European research on prevention of the juvenile delinquency, *YouPrev*. Mainly the gap between the ideal of the prevention as a means to avoid troubles and the little ideas to implement these ideals. At the same time it shows the main reasons why Spain has not got a real policy prevention of juvenile delinquency.

Design/Methods/Approach:

This work compares some of the theoretical key factors in the prevention of juvenile delinquency by using a sample of experts and soliciting their views in all areas of intervention with juvenile delinquents: formal and non-formal education, juvenile justice, police, child protection, health, etc., within the framework of the European project *YouPrev*. Two workshops (of 14 or 15 participants) and 20 semi-structured interviews were conducted in which, among others, the subject of the prevention of juvenile delinquency was addressed, both from an analytical and a purposive point of view.

Findings:

In both interviews and discussion groups, experts in juvenile violence demonstrate clearly that their proposals do not manage to go beyond the idealistic level. They find structural obstacles to the improvement of the effects of preventive interventions on young people. This is the case for all the experts both in coordination and networking and even in the evaluation of programs with no clear goals.

Research Limitations/Implications:

The research results have implications for policy making in the fields of juvenile delinquency prevention.

Practical Implications:

The article is also useful for social and judicial operators dealing with the young people in different areas (health, education, justice).

Originality/Value:

The research presented in this article is showing the main obstacles to a effective prevention policy of juvenile crime and violence.

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Keywords: violence, juvenile delinquency, prevention, implementation, children's rights

Preprečevanje mladoletniškega nasilja: razkorak med ideali in praksami

Namen prispevka:

Ko govorimo o mladoletniškem nasilju in prestopništvu, večina strokovnjakov meni, da je najboljša rešitev razvoj preventivnih programov ter predvsem primarno in zgodnje posredovanje preko obsežnejših socialnih politik.

Namen članka je predstaviti nekatere španske izsledke evropske raziskave o preprečevanju mladoletniškega prestopništva, tj. *YouPrev*. Obstaja razkorak med idealom o preventivi kot metodi za izogibanje težavam in pomanjkanjem idej za implementacijo teh idealov. Hkrati se pokažejo tudi glavni razlogi, zakaj Španija nima prave politike preprečevanja mladoletniškega prestopništva.

Metode:

V članku je predstavljena primerjava nekaterih ključnih teoretičnih dejavnikov pri preprečevanju mladoletniškega prestopništva na vzorcu strokovnjakov in zbiranjem njihovih stališč o vseh področjih ukrepanja pri mladoletnih prestopnikih: formalno in neformalno izobraževanje; sodišče za mladoletnike; policija; varstvo otrok; zdravstvo itd. v okviru evropskega projekta *YouPrev*. Izvedeni sta bili dve delavnici (od 14 do 15 udeležencev) in 20 pol-strukturiranih intervjujev, pri čemer je bila (med drugim) obravnavana tema o preprečevanju mladoletniškega prestopništva z analitičnega in ciljno usmerjenega vidika.

Ugotovitve:

Tako pri strukturiranih intervjujih kot tudi debatnih skupinah se kaže dejstvo, da predlogi strokovnjakov s področja mladoletniškega nasilja ne uspejo preseči ravni idealističnega. Odkrivajo strukturne ovire v postopku izboljševanja učinkov preventivnih ukrepov v zvezi z mladimi. To velja za vse strokovnjake, tako na področju usklajevanja kot tudi mrežnega povezovanja ter celo pri vrednotenju programov brez jasnih ciljev.

Omejitve/uporabnost raziskave:

Rezultati raziskave imajo lahko vpliv na oblikovanje politik na področju preprečevanja mladoletniškega prestopništva.

Praktična uporabnost:

Članek je koristen za socialne in pravosodne delavce, ki se na različnih področjih (zdravstvo, šolstvo, sodstvo) ukvarjajo z mladimi.

Izvirnost/pomembnost prispevka:

V pričujočem članku predstavljena raziskava prikazuje glavne ovire za učinkovito politiko preprečevanja mladoletniške kriminalitete in nasilja.

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Ključne besede: nasilje, mladoletniško prestopništvo, preprečevanje, implementacija, otrokove pravice

1 PRESENTATION AND METHODOLOGICAL JUSTIFICATION

Political discourse on intervention with minors who have committed a crime often begins with a “nothing works” or “nothing can work” premise, whether referring to the age of the child, the socio-familial background, or paradoxically insisting that the child’s criminal career is well established, despite being underage. It is not easy to find clear solutions to a complex phenomenon involving various theories and explanations. It must be noted that, with the same frequency, this discourse includes the proposal to “invest more and work better” for an effective prevention of criminal behaviour.¹ Furthermore, the opinions about what theoretically does not work or cannot work are very clear, i.e., any measure that comes “when evil has already occurred”. However, concrete proposals for preventive intervention are by no means clear, despite the frequency with which the subject is addressed. Perhaps due to the fact that, as Crawford (1998) said, the concept of prevention is very strict, broad and can include almost any activity or program which aims to reduce crime, or even (we could add) any program to improve, materially and psycho-socially, living conditions and to ideologically keep social profiles away from the concepts of “crime” and “offender”. Evidently, if there is no clear concept of prevention, it implies that prevention plans will not be sharply defined. The concepts that we present in this introduction comprise a symbolic framework which is essential for a proper grounding in the field of policies, programmes and practices. This fragmented, diffuse and uncertain knowledge is directly related to the opinions of legal and social actors regarding the issue of the prevention of juvenile delinquency.

From a methodological perspective, this work compares some of the key theoretical factors in the prevention of juvenile delinquency by using a sample of experts’ views from all areas of intervention with juvenile delinquents: formal and non-formal education, juvenile justice, police, child protection, health, etc., within the framework of the European project *YouPrev*. Two workshops (of 14 or 15 participants) and 20 semi-structured interviews were conducted in which, among others, the subject of the prevention of juvenile delinquency was addressed, both from an analytical and a purposive point of view. From these starting points, the work is divided into two parts. The first (section 2) will address the main reasons established by those who are involved in juvenile violence and delinquency prevention policies. The different preventive resources that have been proposed by experts will be analysed in the second (section 3). Finally, the fourth section presents the main contradictions between ideals and practices at the different levels.

¹ The term “prevention” is accompanied by an ambiguity that makes especially complex to differentiate different partners’ prospects, diagnosis and proposals throughout the study. The mere definition of prevention is often an issue of discussion.

2 REASONS FOR JUVENILE VIOLENCE AND REASONS FOR CRIME PREVENTION

2.1 The Reasons: Prevention and Children's Rights

Crime prevention and the protection of children's rights are closely linked, both in theoretical and budgetary terms, and also in the ideas of professionals in the field. The most obvious reason to advocate the prevention of violence rather than the repression of criminal behaviour is that the preventive option leads directly to a non-retributive intervention and signals indirectly the promotion of an effective realization of basic rights. In other words, it is assumed that the realization of children's rights represents an adequate means of preventing young people from committing offences and behaving anti-socially or violently. In the same vein, there is much literature which considers that better protection and a wider realization of children's rights can lead to an improvement in their development and a moderation of their anti-social and criminal behaviour (Howe, 2008). Howe states that when families and social policies promote the rights of children, protective factors are built up through a more cohesive and healthier environment, either in the family, the school or the community. One could say that protecting the rights of children ensures that in the medium and long term we are all protected.

Allusion to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is inevitable. However, as Abramson (2006), among others, has shown, when the Convention extends these rights to "everyone under 18 years" it actually refers to children more than to teenagers. In addition (or maybe for this same reason), he sidesteps the issue of juvenile delinquency and therefore the rights of those who commit crimes before reaching the age of majority. The reasons that both the reality and the rights of the child are neglected lie in the fact that talking about young offenders is unpopular because it undermines the image of the child as an innocent and vulnerable individual. This seems to support the idea that young offenders lose the confidence they once enjoyed from society and, therefore, the rights that are granted to children by their special status of "citizens in training".

In this way the basic idea of "human rights as a product of the dignity inherent to every human being" is displaced by the idea of "human rights as an individual achievement". In some ways, as Feld (2006) said, two contrasting social and cultural conceptions of childhood lead to policies which pull in opposite directions: an increase in punitive control and a greater focus on social and protective approaches. On one hand, we have the image of children as innocent, vulnerable and fragile beings who depend on their parents and on protective public policies. On the other, young people are seen as vigorous, autonomous, responsible and "almost adult" individuals that society must be protected from. Despite this schizophrenic perception of young offenders, Abramson (2006: 16) insists on the holistic conception: "every single right in the Convention on the Rights of the Child is a right of juvenile justice".

2.2 Prevention through Social Policies

This connection between prevention policies and children's rights leads us to another key idea in the study, which is the close link between social policies and efficient instruments for violence and crime prevention. In the case of Spain, this connection incorporates an increasingly smooth dynamic of life stories and pathways of a large number of children who "jump" from protective to criminal institutions.

As Feld (2006) confirms, the tension between welfare and social control is present in policies designed to manage children's violent attitudes and criminal acts. In this regard, as mentioned above, while some authors and practitioners take a strict perspective of prevention related to criminal policies, others take a broader perspective that leads them to identify the prevention of juvenile delinquency almost solely with the promotion of social policies. The vast majority of our interviewees stress that the best preventive policy is not only a firm commitment to social policy, but also to the promotion of solid educational policy. A general allusion to social policies (which by definition guarantee a preventive environment) implies more objective approaches. They focus on poverty, segregation, exclusion and such problems directly linked to the responsibilities of the public administration, in terms of housing, healthcare, education and minimum wage. On the other hand, most direct allusions to the signifier "education" are also more ambiguous, especially when pointing to the "crisis of values" that is usually attributed to "youth": not infrequently, the analysis of the causes often leads to an idealistic approach that emphasizes the need for "education in values" as a solution itself.

However, this direct identification between social policies and prevention could also be read as confusing the principles supporting the policies. At this point, we encounter the most serious theoretical, methodological, dialectic and political obstacle. If social policies include the aim of building a more egalitarian society, crime and violence prevention policies should be based on principles of security. The meanings of the signifier "security" are definitely distorted here. One could say that while social policies aim to build something (a more equal society), the latter intend to avoid unnecessary and irreparable harm. It could also be said that, even when strong social policies contribute effectively to reduce violence and crime, they should not be promoted with this purpose, since that could determine their content and then generate false expectations. Felson and Clarke (2010: 188) underline that: "if these policies are good, they must be defended for their own sake, without adding any gratuitous promises. In fact, it seems most unethical to use crime prevention as a device to promote public opinion's acceptance of programmes that are designed with other purposes." And, above all, the link between both policies means ignoring the approaches that tend to identify a creation of institutions that aspire to prevent crime among the indicators of the "new culture of control" or of the "risk society" (Medina Ariza, 2011).

In that sense, as Medina Ariza (2011) clearly highlighted the association of preventive and social policies can generate two perverse effects: the first is the criminalization of social policies, and the second is the evidence of their limitations when trying to influence the expected levels of security or crime. From the first

perspective, we must emphasize that the previously mentioned association can lead to the management of social problems through security enforcement." This sidelines attention to basic needs and considerations of social equity, as well as requiring collaboration between professionals with totally different aims and functions, for example between educators and police officers. In that vein, participants in *YouPrev* reject the criminalization of social policy by rejecting the "punishment" policies that restrict social benefits to families in accordance to their children's acts. In reflective terms, however, they do consider that families are partly to blame, together with an educative model that progressed from the "authoritarian" pattern to the "negligent" or "absent" one. Some stress that "bringing the police into school" perverts their educational dynamics. This is why they insist on the idea of considering juvenile delinquency as an issue of social justice, bad family educational models or a lack of rights, which must be prevented by out-of-court means.

Cario (2004) felt that preventive intervention is justified for reasons of criminal justice, since punishment in penal institutions does not comply with the legal functions for which they were designed. It is also justified for reasons of social justice (Cario, 2004), since those who end up before the judge or serve their sentence in a prison for minors are the "excluded among the excluded". However, all the participants in this study speak of a recent "democratisation" of juvenile justice, because the "clientele" no longer comes only from deprived environments. It is also true that institutionalized children are mostly those who have had fewer choices of proper socialization and legal defence. According to the interviewees' descriptions, many of these children suffer mental health problems; almost all of them have significant problems of illiteracy or low educational achievement, addictions to alcohol and/or other drugs, severely dysfunctional families or even a prior history of contact with protective institutions.

Many categories and environments included in our participants' speeches show varying degrees of contradiction but also varying degrees of connection between the state/public administration and the private market/management as agents of intervention. This latent paradox can be summarized as follows: on one hand, we find formal approaches in non-formal settings, while on the other hand, an attempt is made to carry out non-formal approaches in formal institutions. Some formal approaches survive in formal institutions such as formal education. "Last but also least", non-formal approaches in non-formal settings, "out of the State", outside administrative control and also areas "outside the market" outside management, point to the horizon some experts speak of: the necessary disappearance of social intervention as a discipline and prevention as an institutionalized and commoditized commodified object.

3 YOUTH VIOLENCE AND CRIME PREVENTION MECHANISMS

Amongst the many proposals to classify crime prevention mechanisms, Medina Ariza (2011) puts forward one of the most comprehensive and successful, which comprises five preventive models. Firstly, the most traditional (but by no means the least important) aims to prevent crime through criminal sanctions either

legislated or effectively applied. The severity and effectiveness of this model is assumed to discourage the commission of crime. Effective enforcement can prevent delinquents from committing further crime merely by resocializing them or by keeping them away from social opportunities. The second model, which Hastings (1991) considered to be left-wing criminology, speaks of community-based prevention that asserts the importance of social contexts in the source of the crimes and supports the right to prevent delinquency in the “natural environment” of minors. The third model stresses the role of early intervention policies on children, or even during pregnancy, according to the elements that encourage a positive socialization process. A fourth model based on situational prevention, according to Hastings (1991), an example of “right-wing criminology,” regards the offender as a responsible individual who takes free decisions. Its primary objective would be to reduce the opportunities to commit an offence, often focusing on those circumstances that can be provoked by the victims themselves or those factors that imply a reduction in the fear of crime. As Felson and Clarke (2010: 174) note, this is a question of environmental management measures “which intend to make the committing of criminal acts more difficult and dangerous and which also contribute to the fact that offenders’ acts may bring them fewer benefits and may be seen as unpardonable”. These four classic models are supplemented by a fifth, the most specific and reductionist, but consistent in its terms: police prevention as the central duty of the police force in the protection of “public safety”.

Of these five proposed approaches, interviewees highlighted only social and community-based prevention, that is to say, the need to intervene from the earliest age in risk factors such as quality education (which, for example, does not include expulsion from school as a tool for working with minors), healthcare (to cater for the emerging phenomenon of children with mental health problems) or family (which seems to require stronger support in a social context where codes and behaviours have rapidly changed in recent decades). Furthermore, experts clearly favour prevention which is implemented “as early as possible”. Despite that, they made no mention of situational prevention perhaps considering that other actors are responsible for its implementation. In terms of tertiary prevention, they were very keen to highlight the role of police officers in the repression and surveillance of youngsters, their behaviours and risk environments (e.g. street drinking), but they also rule them out as key actors in prevention tasks.²

In the discussion groups however, young people emphasized the preventive interest of establishing harder and longer penalties, as well as the importance of visible police presence.³ It is obvious that situational prevention offers a shorter term solution in both proposals, according to the acceptance among minors of the discourse published by the media. Obviously, the reproduction of these clichés by children does not consider the criticism of this type of prevention (which generates

2 *It is must be noted one of the classic programs highlighted in secondary schools is courses on knowledge and prevention of drug use and dealing, as well as on the prevention of violence and its proper management. These programs are often implemented by police officers. A second program focuses on monitoring the environment of schools or leisure areas.*

3 *The literature on this subject shows that the strengthening of criminal penalties is not enough to prevent crime and there is a need to complement such an approach with other programs (Howe, 2008).*

a displacement of delinquency or avoids addressing the social roots of juvenile delinquency), but it does bring to light an important issue: children demand “control”, requiring contact, communication, relationships, and adults who are ready to act as a point of reference. But they demand in the terms of their own language and the “relational toolbox” that is currently available to them.

Be that as it may, our “*YouPrev* experts” make clear that institutions still envision a more traditional classification of preventive policies depending upon target groups or profiles. Following this criterion, we can distinguish between: a) primary prevention, which targets the general population so as to influence the generic factors of crime; b) secondary prevention, which identifies “at-risk populations”; and c) tertiary prevention, which works with those who have already committed a crime, to avoid them repeating the act and subsequently consolidating a criminal career. Regardless of their training or the work they do with children, the professionals interviewed agreed on the need for a greater commitment to the promotion of primary and secondary prevention policies, while limiting tertiary interventions. They are aware, especially in these times of economic crisis that the main focus is on out-of-court procedures. However, this is being promoted “from and within” the context of juvenile justice institutions, when minors have already committed an offence or misconduct. This trend coexists with the increase in sentences for the most serious crimes (terrorism, recidivism or gang violence). In these cases, it is clear that the function of legal modifications is not so much reintegration as the provision of a threat to potential criminals, consequently legitimising the system to potential voters who are not satisfied with methods of criminal justice. These potential voters want to see the authorities cracking down serious crimes committed by children and isolating those who do not respond to the measures imposed or those who commit crimes that generate social concern.

Regarding the possible options offered by our participants, four different directions could be highlighted according to the area in which every option is developed. Firstly, since families appear as a key element in the proper socialization of children, the need for a better and wider policy of support to families, especially those without the tools required to educate their children, raises questions. The primary concern here is whether to plan universal support or only selective support for families in which problems have already been detected. Secondly, students highlight the crucial importance of peer groups in avoiding or promoting criminal behaviour, and again, many of those minors also call for emotional support and reference points (even mentioning the television show “*Older Brother*” as an influence), in a sort of “listen to us” attitude. Furthermore, better organization of children’s leisure time is demanded by all sectors.

In this same vein, experts stress that one of the educational keys in violence prevention is to help young people be responsible for and get involved in managing their own conflicts and assuming the consequences of their decisions. At school, most of the proposals tend to promote programs for the prevention of violence, drug/alcohol use, bullying, or misuse of new technologies. The striking fact that minors consider teachers to be a less important point of reference than friends, parents, coaches, police or social workers in the prevention of violence and substance abuse, suggests the need for a careful reconsideration of the current role

of schools. In the area of juvenile justice, the programs that were highlighted as more effective in preventing recidivism are linked to out-of-court measures (repair or conciliation), social skills training or education in values (bearing in mind that experts refer to an alleged social regression or the so-called “absence of values and limits” as the main factor behind juvenile delinquency), intervention with minors under age 14 or community services.

In terms of “how to do it”, Medina Ariza (2011) highlights two key elements for the promotion of an effective prevention policy. The first is coordination among the different agents working with the same target population. It is clear that prevention requires monitoring, control and supervision, and these tasks can only be accomplished through collaboration between these agents. The second key is the evaluation of preventive policies to analyse achievement of objectives and to make suggestions for improvement. These two elements, or rather, the absence of them proves that juvenile crime prevention policies in Spain are deficient. The perspective is even worse if we consider the climate of budgetary cutbacks, which are a result of the country’s economic crisis.

All of the experts interviewed are aware of the importance of collaboration among professionals working in health services, education, social work, psychology or social policies, to prevent the “burnout” of families, professionals and children. According to the professionals themselves, this deficient coordination is explained by the concerns for privacy of children, professional secrecy, the need to avoid intrusive interventions and in some cases, personal issues. It also seems clear that coordination is more effective in juvenile justice institutions, which is a more limited field of intervention with more precise objectives, than among professionals working in primary prevention, where there is a greater diversity of perspectives and goals. As for the evaluation of interventions to analyse effectiveness, the expert opinion is unanimous: “evaluation is non-existent”, “there is no assessment”, or in the best of cases, “it is only internally applied”. The reasons are: lack of clear objectives in prevention programs, low budgets, lack of time and staff to develop evaluation reports, lack of conviction and fear of criticism of programmes. Recasens i Brunet (2007) also adds that the uneven distribution of powers between government departments, especially in terms of social policies, has also favoured the creation of different preventive policies (both in quality and quantity) in the different autonomous communities. Considering that experts favour a social and preventive policy defined and implemented at the local level, it is especially clear that intervention in protection and juvenile delinquency risk factors requires the participation of those actors who are aware of the needs and available resources in a given context.

Experts believe that the best way to prevent violence among young people is to make them responsible for their own actions, teaching them to manage conflicts in a collective, equal and non-violent way. This approach takes into consideration the “best interest of children” and the promotion of their independent participation to interact, discuss and take their own decisions. Experts also highlight the need for more effective action in families and schools, which are among the key elements in the socialization of a child.

In terms of what works with minors in socio-educational aspects essentially means, one can say that there is “nothing new” on the horizon. The main developments here are the increased distance between the theoretical and ideological groundings of intervention and the “hostile battlefields” in which such practices must be implemented, especially in the current context of economic crisis, widespread dispossession and reverse redistribution policies. The following is a critical reflection on why and how the most controversial gaps appear in the context of a paradoxical relationship between values and principles and reality and practice.

4 PRACTICAL FAILINGS IN JUVENILE DELINQUENCY PREVENTION

4.1 General Prevention: Primary and Secondary Levels

The framework in which the gap between ideals and practices comes about is much more than cyclical. It is conditioned by an unstoppable trend in the contraction of the resources managed by the “left hand” of the State and the simultaneous reinforcement of the demands for reinforcing the “right hand,” as stated by Wacquant (2009), quoting Bourdieu (1999), some decades ago. A number of sectoral examples shape this basic contradiction.

On one hand we have families: Professionals advocate broader support for families while budget austerity focuses on the substitution of the coverage of social rights by minimal residual and welfare measures for the most deprived situations. The rise in domestic violence (children against parents, especially mothers) is stressed by groups such as juvenile justice or healthcare, pointing directly to a “democratization of violence” caused by a rapid deterioration of the living conditions of a large number of “ex-middle class” families whose relational handicaps were previously compensated by resorting to consumer spending.

On the other hand, we have schools. Key factors such as the peer group, the normalization of relations or the commitment of minors to managing their own conflicts clash with the deterioration of working conditions for teachers, the protocolisation of their tasks, disciplinary rigidity or increased student-teacher ratios. Here the most common projects focus on violence, substance abuse, bullying or the misuse of new technologies, largely in a lecture-workshop format. Many activities feature participants from outside the school system and perhaps the presence of police officers in this aspect is one of the most controversial points in the debate “education *versus* the criminal justice system” (see 4.3 and 5). The assumption by police officers of other actors’ duties and objectives leads sometimes to a confusion that reinforces the feeling of poor coordination and lack of communication. Some teachers feel this problem makes their task more difficult, given that they lose their capacity to reinstate disciplined social interaction in the classroom, which goes way beyond the widespread “new behaviourism”. The fact

that students no longer perceive teachers as a point of reference⁴ in preventing violence and substance abuse suggests the urgency of a deep reflection on the current situation of schools.

Finally, we have work. For years, the close relationship between the development of social and occupational centres, or other mechanisms for “training to work” and the growth of the construction business has been an excellent example of the connection between the needs of the market and state’s responsibilities in the field of social inclusion. The syllogism is clear: “inclusion equals integration and integration equals employment”. *Ergo ...* since 2008, given the massive layoff of young, unskilled workers and the rapid dismantling of productive activities and public resources, it is not surprising that so many professionals point to weak, short-term planning that focuses on the attention of the most urgent cases and ignores the need for direction or long-term pathways. What was celebrated just a few years ago as a successful process of integration has taken a “u-turn”. It does not seem unreasonable to demand, as some participants do, that responsibility is taken for the large number of integrated adolescents who are now unprotected.⁵ What does not seem feasible is to rely on a possible improvement of the model of social protection without linking proposals to a prior change in economic policies, a sharp change in priorities, and strict adherence to the constitutional principles of a self-declared social and democratic state.

4.2 Tertiary Level: Special Prevention, Control Agencies and Penal Response

Regarding the previously mentioned dismantling of the welfare state, the priority of punitive reasons over pro-social arguments implies that tertiary control widens the “theory-practice gap”. A symptomatic result of this change in policy for many professionals from the “social sector” is the so-called “cognitive dissonance”, due to the subjective gap between institutional inertia and the critical diagnostics which survive. It is necessary to ask what role idealism plays in the current restrictive, precarious, formalized and punitive framework of socio-educational intervention. The mere term “socio-educational intervention” evokes the specific paradox of “benefactor aggression” and “humanitarian intervention”.

Well, here [street education centre] we're receiving less money as the years go by. We used to deal with many situations and areas and ... now less and less. We still receive some money from the city to focus on follow-up issues, in both families and children, at three levels: general, group and individual.

Although the most common approach tends to locate the “perfect intervention” in social/family background, the temptation to abandon community interventions (i.e., street education) and deal with individual cases by removing

4 Teachers are the last group in the school survey behind friends, parents, coaches, police officers or social workers.

5 Some of these are now parents who are unemployed, in debt and in a situation of risk, which is worsened by the cutbacks in social protection. These are not isolated examples but paradigmatic cases which sum up the current socio-economic crisis in Spain.

the child from their environment is common. This appears to be the general trend of institutionalization in our protection and justice systems in light of the current cutbacks in “open environment” programs and projects. A considerable proportion of the opinions in the surveys and interviews dismiss the claim for a fundamental right, the guarantee of which refers to the previously mentioned “environment in which the minor has developed” in order to, explicitly or implicitly, impact on a classist treatment of crime and emphasize its selective nature.

In a similar vein, the recurrent argument of “we cannot do more” connects the frustration of control services to populist demands for more severe punishment. There is no shortage of positivist legitimization of racism, usually due to a positivist approach that can be detected in policing functions in certain “racial” profiles. Needless to say, the concept of prevention is harder to define in the criminal field than in the field of social intervention, because it incorporates and mixes certain discursive elements from the management of illegality, positivising offences and considering the eternal contradiction of police action as a preventive function. It could be said, based on the information available, that there is a certain consensus on the self-perception of police forces as competent agencies of prevention. However, police officers also mention the lack of training and resources, as well as a certain criticism of the definition of prevention itself, the extent of their possibilities and their effectiveness or their social function.

There are many interventions on the streets where we have detected serious mistakes, such as finding children outside their care (protection) centre and returning them detained in handcuffs, because they believe that leaving a care centre is a crime. Those children do not come under the juvenile justice system; you can only apply protective measures.

Training can be improved. The street helps a lot. Training is good, but it must be reinforced. More re-training is needed. We receive one training course and this is all.

In the field of juvenile justice, the programs highlighted as most effective in the prevention of recidivism are out-of-court measures (reparation or reconciliation), social skills programs or education in values: Many of our experts referred to the so-called “crisis of values” or the “lack of limits” as two factors in youth violence at present.

The percentage of detentions in the total amount of our interventions is between 10 and 15%. The rest are administrative measures. 50% of the cases are dealt with out-of-court.

An unresolved debate questions the ability of the system to reduce the effects of the treatment of criminals even in the most benign out-of-court or most alternative approaches to the punitive response, focused on minors under 14 (the minimum age of criminal responsibility in Spain) or the need to resort to socio-educational tools such as community services.

We must not look for complements but for substitution. The aim is not to beg a company providing services to the administration. Everything to do with detention must disappear. Alternative practices complement the structural factors that generate the labelling of certain profiles or social categories. If we have a closed system, then we conduct open programmes. And this is a source of income for an army of professionals who legitimize the labelling of subjects in certain categories as the most dangerous criminals.

4.3 Coordination and Supervision: The Cliché of Preventive Schizophrenia

The problem of coordination and its related deficient supervision and funding has been examined above. We would like to stress here that the promotion of communication and coordination between a large number of the so-called “social agents” (administrations, primary care resources, health, education, social institutions, neighbourhood associations, private entities ...) is one of the most highly-valued aspects of the conditions required for good preventive practice. However, according to professionals, the effectiveness of this coordination is as necessary as it is poor and is often reduced to personal initiatives or informal contacts between workers from different areas. As we stated previously, coordination is considered key in improving intervention and avoiding overlapping and burnout among professionals, families and children. However, it is very difficult to make it effective. Some interviewees considered coordination even more important than budgets. But the current state of coordination is only described as “good” or “very good” by a few professionals at very specific levels. Coordination is perceived as being most reliable (at least “more formalized in protocols”) in the field of tertiary prevention, and most unreliable at basic or primary levels, where interventions should be more effective. From a broad perspective, it can be concluded that crime prevention does not include comprehensive planning nor does it take into account the design of medium and long-term pathways. The situation is exacerbated in the case of the security forces, to which many professionals from different sectors are reticent and feel that their respective interventions pursue very different and inconsistent goals. Again, we have education *versus* control.

Evaluation is mainly conducted as “self-assessment” in the case of certain teams and projects. Some professionals acknowledge that there is “much self-assessment but no external control”. When put into practice, this evaluation is always quantitative and never qualitative. According to the interviewees, administrative control (on projects and managing entities) does not exist. One of the reasons put forward is that many programs do not have clear goals. “Protocols do not exist” and evaluation in conditions is extremely difficult.

5 CONCLUSIONS

What is best practice? What about prevention? What is juvenile delinquency?

As the study shows, every area of intervention presents its own version of a cognitive dissonance that, in turn, can be read as a symptom of a problem inherent to the policies, programmes and projects for prevention of violence and juvenile delinquency. This is something that, at this stage, cannot seem strange to a critical observer. The immediate need for a consensual framework for the terms of the analysis is the best example of how difficult it is to unravel this knot, both epistemologically and methodologically. However, the untroubled sustainability of this cognitive dissonance is precisely what leaves this knot “incorrupt” and allows many professionals to continue carrying out their duties in institutions

whose practical outcomes are radically opposed to the theoretical reasoning that at a symbolic level are their “golden rules”.

The mere combination of the signifiers “violence” and “crime” presents an irremovable obstacle to any claim to coherence and effectiveness in the analysis. As a structural phenomenon, “violence” is reproduced at a relational level and most participants perceive its influence on children and adolescents as a real concern that is on the increase. So the analysis must be conducted at different levels. “Crime” is, in any case, a legally defined and conceptualized social problem, and much less relevant in the eyes of the participants. In this sense the “offender”, as a social profile and a term politically identified with the legal concept of crime, is the unequal hypostasis of law in social imagery. In the case of children, the dual status of “offender” and “minor” makes the aim of effectiveness in tertiary prevention more complex, given the difficulty of realizing the “best interest of the child” in the criminal treatment of minors who have committed an offence.

In this world there are two types of delinquents: professionals and losers, who haven't got the mechanisms, strategies or tools to be able to avoid the action of the criminal justice system. There is a selection process in this type of crime.

This first combination is followed by a second element of complexity that sabotages the theoretical consensus on a primary prevention that focuses on basic needs and their attached fundamental rights in a social and democratic state. We use the term “prevention” in a sense that is wide enough to include all its meanings in the same area of discussion, which becomes a sort of “Tower of Babel”. It is a dialogue between experts that aims to optimize the management of conflicts outside the criminal justice system, as well as to prevent the reproduction of violence among children and adolescents.

The trend noticed over recent years in the areas of formal education, socio-educational work, protection and juvenile justice does not coincide at all with this ideal approach. Firstly, in response to the economic crisis the political decisions that decide the resources available for each institution have led to much impoverished conditions in primary and secondary intervention. As noted in the previous section, this is an undisputed fact present in all sectors of society. Secondly, the discursive, political, technical and bureaucratic borders that separate each of these areas are more and more permeable. While by necessity educational discourse has to functionally permeate the field of juvenile justice, the logics of control remain present in child protection policies. The practices and institutions of confinement and/or punishment have a superficially educational discourse, while (not too imaginary) neo-behaviourist imagery colonizes more and more formal and informal spaces of education, all of which are suffering cutbacks in resources and capacities. An idea that occurs throughout this study is that professionals take general prevention to be the best means of intervention as it is a way to avoid further damage. However, their ability to carry out specific proposals on how to act is very restricted. This is sometimes because the existing economic and legal structures seem to close every door to change. Other times it is because the coordination required of institutions seems to be unacceptable, due to their diverse and, at times, incompatible approaches. The fact that best practices will only make sense at a very local level is also important, since it leads to a lack of conclusions

regarding proposals for good practices on a wider and transferable level. Finally, as already stated above, it is generally assumed that the best prevention is good social policy and a correct realization of the rights of all people, without any more exact specifications.

Confusion is rife. The “Community model” is a hegemonic signifier in the discourse of social agents, as is “individualized attention”. The discussion of meritocracy, assistance, punishment and education is frequently part of a discourse which is often difficult to comprehend. Finally, from a socio-legal (and therefore critical) perspective, we cannot avoid the temptation to reproduce an example of what could be considered “the mother of all paradoxes”: a sort of meta-discussion of “self-considered” experts’ opinions *versus* their own professional status and habitus. The following much-appreciated quote on delinquency and new technologies is an example of how some issues in the construction and perception of social profiles become a “positivist mirage” (Venceslao, 2010), which does not refer directly to young people but specifically to “young criminals” as a specific, labelled sector that is not only attributed with the monopoly of current aggressions but also the potential committing of “new” crimes.

The criminal expertise of young people who have been tried and sentenced by juvenile courts in recent years is crude and poor with rare exceptions, which implies that in the next few years this expertise is not likely to reach the level of specialization required to commit cybercrimes.

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