

# Juvenile Delinquency School Failure and Dropout in Portugal: Drafting a Picture in Different Voices

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## **Purpose:**

The purpose of this article is to address and discuss the relationship between different school paths and self-reported young students' behaviours and perceptions regarding violence and delinquency. Their views on prevention deserve particular attention. This is though a picture drafted in different voices, since young students' opinions contrast with those of several other actors in the domain of juvenile delinquency.

## **Design/Methods/Approach:**

This analysis is based on the YouPrev project findings in Portugal, generated by the different empirical data collection instruments employed, thus combining a quantitative and a qualitative approach. Gender differences as well as differences between urban and rural regions are highlighted whenever relevant.

## **Findings:**

School failure and dropout is a structural problem in Portugal and some expert views anticipate a reversal in recent trends and a new rise of these phenomena as a result of the current crisis. The YouPrev school survey outcomes in Portugal confirm that young people with negative school integration have a higher life-time prevalence of self-reported delinquency.

Among the 1,755 young students surveyed, 29.4% reported they had committed, over their life-time, at least one of the offences listed in the questionnaire. 156 of these students reported that they had committed a violent offence during the last twelve months. Among these, 46 may be described as frequent violent offenders. The concentration of risk factors among the frequent violent offenders shows that these are also victims of other forms of violence in the context where they live in.

Young people share the idea that "what works" best in the prevention of juvenile delinquency is to improve their prospects to get a job and to provide them a good general education.

Both in the rural and in the urban regions the relationship between young people and the family is seen as crucial either by experts or by the young boys and girls.

**Research Limitations/Implications:**

Self-reported delinquency surveys attempt to overcome insufficiencies of the official statistics – these surveys open the possibility to obtain more diverse information and to identify delinquent practices that are not registered. But one of the possible criticisms is that, in these kinds of studies, chronic and persistent delinquents are not represented. In this particular analysis, information is missing for those students who skip school and those whose parents, for different reasons, did not give consent to their participation in the survey.

The conduction of expert face-to-face interviews complemented the prospective information collected by the Delphi study, compensating and enriching the relative low number of responses to the survey.

**Practical Implications:**

The outcomes promote the awareness-raising on juvenile delinquency and prevention strategies among different actors: experts, schools, and young students. These can also be used as training material for professionals, working in social services and police forces, in particular.

**Originality/Value:**

This study contributes to the body of knowledge on the practices and views within the domain of juvenile delinquency and violence. This is a research topic insufficiently explored in Portugal, at least in a comprehensive way, either in terms of subjects or territorial coverage. It also adds to existing research with crossed views, based on a multi-method approach, on the interplay between school failure and dropout and juvenile delinquency and prevention.

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**Keywords:** juvenile delinquency, violence, school failure, dropout, prevention, Portugal

**Mladoletniško prestopništvo, neuspeh v šoli in opustitev šolanja na Portugalskem: skiciranje slike iz različnih mnenj**

**Namen prispevka:**

Namen članka je obravnavati in razpravljati o razmerju med različnimi smermi šolanja in samonaznanjenim vedenjem učencev ter dojetanja mladoletniškega nasilja in prestopništva. Njihova stališča o preprečevanju zaslužijo posebno pozornost. To pomeni, da je slika sestavljena iz različnih mnenj, saj se mnenja učencev razlikujejo od mnenj drugih akterjev na področju mladoletniškega prestopništva.

**Metode:**

Analiza temelji na ugotovitvah projekta YouPrev na Portugalskem. Sestavljena je iz različnih empiričnih instrumentov za zbiranje podatkov, s čimer sta kvantitativni in kvalitativni pristop združena. Razlike med spoloma in med mestnimi ter podeželskimi regijami so poudarjene, ko je to relevantno.

**Ugotovitve:**

Šolski neuspeh in opustitev šolanja je strukturni problem na Portugalskem, pri čemer nekateri strokovnjaki pričakujejo preobrat v zadnjih trendih in nov porast

omenjenih pojavov kot posledice trenutne krize. Rezultati raziskave YouPrev v šolah na Portugalskem so potrdili, da so v samonaznanitvenih primerih mladi z negativno integracijo v šoli v dotedanjem življenju storili več prestopkov kot ostali.

Med 1.755 anketiranimi učenci jih je 29,4 % poročalo, da so v svojem življenju že storili vsaj eno kaznivo dejanje s seznama v vprašalniku. 156 teh učencev je poročalo, da so v zadnjih dvanajstih mesecih storili nasilno kaznivo dejanje. Med njimi jih lahko 46 opišemo kot pogoste nasilne storilce kaznivih dejanj. Koncentracija dejavnikov tveganja med pogosto nasilnimi storilci kaže, da so le-ti tudi žrtve drugih oblik nasilja v povezavi z okoljem, v katerem živijo.

Mladi ljudje menijo, da sta izboljšanje njihovih možnosti za zaposlitev in zagotavljanje dobre splošne izobrazbe ukrepa, ki najbolje 'delujeta' pri preprečevanju mladoletniškega prestopništva. Strokovnjaki in mladi fantje ter dekleta se strinjajo v tem, da je razmerje med mladimi in družino ključni dejavnik tako v podeželskih kot mestnih regijah.

### **Omejitve/uporabnost raziskave:**

Študije samonaznanitve prestopništva poskušajo preseči pomanjkljivosti uradnih statistik – te raziskave nudijo možnost pridobivanja več različnih informacij in identifikacije praks prestopništva, ki niso registrirane. Toda ena od možnih kritik je, da v tovrstnih raziskavah kronični oz. trdovratni prestopniki niso zastopani. V pričujoči analizi manjkajo podatki o učencih, ki so opustili šolanje, in o tistih, katerih starši zaradi različnih razlogov niso dali soglasja za njihovo sodelovanje v raziskavi.

S strokovnjaki izvedeni osebni intervjuji so dopolnili predvidene informacije, ki so bile zbrane v okviru študije Delphi, jih nadomestili in bogato dopolnili relativno nizko število odgovorjenih anket.

### **Praktična uporabnost:**

Rezultati spodbujajo ozaveščanje o mladoletniškem prestopništvu in preventivnih strategijah med različnimi akterji: strokovnjaki, šolami in učenci. Lahko so uporabni tudi kot učno gradivo za strokovnjake, ki delajo na področju socialnih storitev, še posebej za policiste.

### **Izvirnost/pomembnost prispevka:**

Ta raziskava prispeva k bazi znanja o praksah in stališčih na področju mladoletniškega prestopništva in nasilja. Na Portugalskem je to premalo raziskana tema, vsaj kar zadeva splošno razumljiv način, bodisi v smislu subjektov ali teritorialne pokritosti. Raziskava je prispevek k že obstoječim raziskavam z različnimi mnenji. Temelji na multi-metodološkem pristopu, na medsebojnem vplivu šolskega neuspeha in opustitve šolanja ter mladoletniškega prestopništva in preprečevanja.

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**Ključne besede:** mladoletniško prestopništvo, nasilje, neuspeh v šoli, opustitev šolanja, preprečevanje, Portugalska

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In spite of the rapid population ageing and diminishing numbers of children and adolescents all over Europe, including in Portugal, youth deviance, violence and delinquency remain highly important social problems mainly because of its impact on the perceptions about safety. And feelings of fear and insecurity are exacerbated in times of crisis. Juvenile delinquency has thus been a topic in public debate and policy agenda.

The social construction of “childhood” and of “youth” is influenced the concept of “juvenile delinquency”, seen as a deviation of the ideal-type of child, protected and submissive to authority (namely to family authority). Therefore, the behaviours perceived as “delinquent” also vary in time-space (Gomes et al., 2010).

The dominant perspective today is that delinquency emerges when the process of – either physical or social – growth and identity-building is interrupted, particularly when the family, the school and the community fail in their education role. The concept of juvenile delinquency thus corresponds to a social and institutional construct, around which definitions and ideas on situations and behaviours that contrast with the ideal concept of childhood and youth assemble (Ferreira, 1997).

Youth delinquency has been defined as a sub-category of deviant behaviour that concerns the conduct of young people which breach or violate the rules and standards defined by law (Carvalho, 2003).

Some studies (Agra, 1998; Catalano & Hawkins, 1996; Genovés, 1984; Morin, 1994; Negreiros, 2008) reveal that there is relatively widespread deviant behaviour during youth, only part of this assuming a criminal form. This happens due to the specificities of juvenile psychological and social development; it is also related to the position of young people in societies and their relation to youth cultures in which values, rules and standards are not necessarily coincident with the adult world.

For the large majority of young people, delinquency is a temporary experience during their transition to adulthood, and not a way of life (Ferreira, 1997).

The purpose of this article is to explore the relationship between different school paths and self-reported behaviours and perceptions of young students regarding violence and delinquency. Their views on prevention deserve particular attention. This is though a picture drafted in different voices, since young students’ opinions are cross-checked with those of several other actors in the field of juvenile delinquency.<sup>1</sup>

The article is structured into five main sections. First, a brief discussion on the concept of youth and what does it mean to be young in Portugal today is presented. The next section describes the research design and methodological approach. A short description of the school system in Portugal and some school performance-related indicators and future trends are included in section four. The fifth section presents and discusses the empirical finding, from the youth perspective. The views

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<sup>1</sup> This article draws on the findings of the YouPrev study in Portugal, namely on Perista, Cardoso, Silva, and Carrilho (2012).

of other actors are shortly addressed in the next section. Finally, some concluding remarks are outlined.

## **2 YOUTH AND BEING YOUNG IN PORTUGAL**

Youth is normally associated with a group bound by age limits, and sociological studies usually define youth as the 15–24 years old persons. But looking into the legal framework of juvenile justice, the law applies to all youngsters between 12 and 16 years of age who engage in behaviour qualified as a criminal by law in Portugal. However, the execution of the educational guardianship measures may be extended up to 21 years old.

These ambiguities illustrate well that if youth may be defined by age, youth is much more than an age group or a biological reality; youth is a social condition built in a historical and social process.

In fact, the emergence of youth as a life period with its own characteristics, different from adults, begins in the late eighteenth century with the increasing of an industrial, urban and complex society which leads to a separation between private and public life and gives way to a new social representation of family where love and affection have its place.

This does not mean that age is not important; it rather urges us to also consider age boundaries as fluid and something that can be changed as society changes; it also leads to the conclusion that more than a homogeneous youth, there are different youths and different conditions and ways of experiencing youth.

It is however undeniable that youth corresponds to a life stage where physical, psychological and emotional changes occur; a time where childhood is already gone but adulthood has not arrived yet, and a time to search for a place and new experiences. In this sense youth is also seen as a period of life where different deviant behaviours begin to appear (Agra, 1998).

The transition into adulthood has always been a great challenge in every society, in every time. Today, however, this is a multidimensional process which involves the transition from school to work; from the family of origin to the own family; from parents' home to own home (Galland, 1999).

Given all the transformation occurring in our societies, in particular due to the economic and social crisis, young people are increasingly a group at risk. In Portugal, the current crisis impacts on a dramatic rise in youth unemployment; in the first quarter of 2013 the unemployment rate for people aged under 25 years was 42.1%; in 2000 that figure was 8.6%, and in 2010 22.4% (Instituto Nacional de Estatística, 2013). The difficulties in accessing a job and the related vulnerability and precariousness in young people's lives feeds on feelings of frustration, anger, and lack of future prospects.

On the other hand, youth unemployment is often a highly qualified one, due to the consistently rising education levels among the younger population. This means that there is an increasingly wider gap between the investment on education and the youngster's expectations, and the possibilities of labour market integration, and therefore of independence and success in the other transitions.

In Portuguese society today, youth is no longer a “soft age” but rather a life-course stage lived with instability and pressure. These feelings stood out in our study, either among young people themselves – *“There is the fear of not having school success; of making the wrong choice”* – or among professionals – *“There are huge contradictions in our society: young people have to be stable in an unstable society; we expect them to draw projects for the future in a society with no future; we expect them not to be rebels in a violent and hostile world”*.

### 3 METHODS

The *YouPrev* study developed a research using a range of methods and instruments that allowed to listening different actors and to contact with different experiences and perspectives from various fields of expertise: researchers; police officers; practitioners; young people.

On the other hand, data collection was conducted both at a national and at a local level.

Quantitative and qualitative data included in this article thus draw on a range of methods and instruments:

#### **Nationwide Institutional and Expert Survey on Existing Approaches**

This survey was conducted between May and October, 2011. Questionnaires were sent to 355 potential respondents, who were selected through a detailed search for experts and relevant institutions; in this process the advice and contacts of the *YouPrev* Portuguese National Advisory Board members were of great use. The sample included professionals from different services and areas: researchers; professionals of local projects addressed to young people and crime prevention organisations; social services; correctional facilities; and probationary services. The overall response rate was 22.5%, i.e., 80 experts participated in the survey.

Some characteristics of the respondents:

- 47.4% are male and 52.6% female.
- 48.7% are aged less than 40 years old; the average age is 39.21 years ( $SD = 9.12$ , Range 22–61).
- Most are highly educated – over 80% have a university degree.
- Practitioners are the majority of the respondents; among these practitioners there is a balance between those who work under a control and correctional approach and those who work in a preventive perspective.

#### **Delphi Survey Addressed to Experts**

This was a two-wave national Delphi survey. In terms of time frame, the first wave was conducted from September until November, 2011, and the second between January and March, 2012. In both waves, 150 questionnaires were sent out: 31 responses (response rate of 20.7%) were obtained in the first wave; in the second wave, we got a response rate of 22.7%, which represents 34 respondents.

The experts included in the Portuguese sample for the Delphi survey have a broad range of professional backgrounds: police officers, social workers working in different fields and organisations, scientists from different universities and research units, and experts in the fields of justice and crime prevention.

In order to complement the information from Delphi (first wave), six face-to-face interviews were conducted and the topics of the interviews were the same used in the questionnaire. The interviews were addressed to: two researchers; one person working in the Social Security System; the responsible person for the Observatory on Safety, Organised Crime and Terrorism; one person from Casa Pia de Lisboa – one of the oldest foster homes in Lisbon; one person from the probation system.

### **School Survey – Local Self-Report Study**

The survey was addressed to young students aged 12–18, and was implemented at schools in two different regions: one urban and one rural municipality.

The urban region is located in the Metropolitan Area of Lisbon. It is a municipality with 175,135 inhabitants very close to Lisbon-capital, where about 26% of the population is aged less than 24 years old. In the last decades, it has hosted a large migrant population, mainly from the former Portuguese colonies in Africa. In 2011, 7.1% of the total population in that municipality was born out of the country. This immigration flow contributed to a decrease in the ageing of the local population (Instituto Nacional de Estatística, 2012b).

The rural area is located in the Centre Region on the littoral coast. It is a municipality that combines a still strong agricultural activity with fishing and tourism activities. In 2011, the total population was 56,676 inhabitants. Contrary to most rural areas in Portugal, this is a municipality with a relatively high presence of a young population: 25% has less than 25 years old (Instituto Nacional de Estatística, 2012b).

In Portugal, the implementation of a survey addressed to young students at schools requires previous authorisation from the Ministry of Education. After this consent and in order to involve local organisations in the process and to facilitate contact with experts, as well as in order to get the schools' acceptance and cooperation, the following procedures were adopted: meeting with the municipalities, project presentation in a CLA's meeting<sup>2</sup>, and face-to-face meetings in all schools with school principals / representatives. The main objective was to get the schools' agreement regarding the questionnaire's application and to organise the all process, namely taking into consideration the need for the parents' previous authorization in a written form.

The time frame for the questionnaires' application was from February to June 2012. The survey was conducted in the class room by three elements of the Portuguese *YouPrev* team.

In total, in the urban municipality, 984 questionnaires were completed and validated. In the rural area the 593 completed questionnaires were collected.

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2 CLA is a local coordination structure where different local organisations (social services, schools, health services, etc.) take part.

In the sample, there is a relative balance between the number of boys and girls surveyed: 52.9% are girls. This is in line with the higher percentage of female among students, namely in basic education. The gender balance is more evident in the rural region than in the urban one.

| Sex   | Rural | Urban | Total |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Boys  | 49.1  | 45.9  | 47.1  |
| Girls | 50.9  | 54.1  | 52.9  |
| Total | 100   | 100   | 100   |

**Table 1:**  
Young students  
by sex and  
region (%)

Over 60% of the respondents are 15 years old or less. The rural sample is a bit younger than the urban one: 61.7% are less than 16 years old, compared with 60.4% in the urban region.

### **Interviews with Local Experts and Focus-Group Discussions with Young People**

In each municipality (rural and urban), experts from different educational and professional backgrounds and people with different expertise and experiences concerning youth delinquency and prevention were selected.

Following these criteria the interviews were conducted with:

- Urban area: Social worker at a parish council; Person in charge for youth policies at the municipal Council; Leader of a local youth association; Member of the local probation services; Coordinator of a local project addressed to young people; School principal; Police officer (PSP); Persons (two) in charge of the local commission for children and young people at risk; Person in charge of the Municipality programme for prevention of domestic violence.
- Rural area: Person in charge for youth policies at the Municipal Council; Leader of a local youth association; Member of the local probation services; Coordinator of a local project addressed to young people; School psychologists (four in total from different schools); Police officer (PSP); Person in charge of the local commission for children and young people at risk.

In both municipalities, focus-group discussions with young people were conducted. The collaboration of local projects was asked for in the recruiting of participants. In the urban area, we 15 young people (aged 13–18 years) participated, the majority of them living in poor degraded neighbourhoods. In the rural region 18 young people, from different schools and with diverse social origins, participated.



#### 4 SETTING THE SCENE: SCHOOL SYSTEM AND STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE

In Portugal, every student who entered the school system since the school year 2009/2010 are covered by the 12 years requirement of compulsory schooling, which means that they should stay in school until they are 18 years old.

The school system in Portugal is organised as follows:

- Pre-school education is optional for children aged 3–4 years old but it is compulsory for those who have 5 years old. Pre-school education may be delivered by the private sector, private non-profit organisations or public institutions. In the school year 2010/2011 the pre-schools attendance rate was 87.4%.
- Basic education is divided into five levels:

**Table 2:**  
School system  
in Portugal –  
Basic Education

| Levels                | School years  | Ages               |
|-----------------------|---------------|--------------------|
| 1st level             | 4 (1st–4th)   | 6 to 10 years old  |
| 2nd level             | 2 (5th–6th)   | 10 to 12 years old |
| 3rd level             | 3 (7th–9th)   | 13–15 years old    |
| Secondary             | 2 (10th–11th) | 16–17 years old    |
| 12 <sup>o</sup> grade | 1 (12th)      | 18 years old       |

In 2010/2011, there were 1206716 students enrolled in basic education in Portugal. This number has been decreasing due to the ageing of the Portuguese society and the respective decrease in the number of children and young people. About 86% of those students were attending state schools, and this percentage tends to increase with the economic crisis due to the families' financial problems (Instituto Nacional de Estatística, 2012a).

Education is one of the fields where, following the 1974 Revolution, a more expressive and positive evolution is noticeable in Portugal. The illiteracy rate was, at that time, 33% while in 2011 it had dropped to 5.2% (Instituto Nacional de Estatística, 2012b). On the other hand, compulsory schooling was increased (from 4 to 12 years) and the school system is now more democratic, being seen as a vehicle to social mobility.

However, many problems still persist such as the still high (but decreasing) early dropout rate from education and training: this rate was 28.7% in 2010; 23.2% in 2011 and 20.8% in 2012 (Instituto Nacional de Estatística, 2013).

Additionally, the retention and dropout rate for basic education<sup>3</sup> is also still significant (although also tending to reduce): 7.9% in 2009–2010 and 7.5% in 2010–2011 (Ministério da Educação, GEPE, 2012).

School dropout in Portugal is an indicator of the unfulfilled democratization of the education system mainly regarding school success. As a matter of fact,

<sup>3</sup> This rate is the percentage relation between the number of students who may not be carried forward to the next schooling level and the number of students enrolled in that school year.

school failure in Portugal is socially selective; it is higher among the unprivileged children/youngsters, and it tends to be cumulative – those who failed once have a high probability to fail again. Furthermore school failure often leads to school dropout.

Some authors feel that the building of a mass schooling in Portugal has some adverse effects since there has been a reinforcement of social exclusion mechanisms, while although aiming at the “school for every one”, school is not really prepared for dealing with so many differences (age, ethnical, cultural and social differences); therefore it tends to lose those who already are on the marginalization fringes (Carvalho, 2003; Ferreira, 1997).

Looking at the future, some of the experts in the Delphi study anticipated developments where school is becoming more and more a factor of social cleavage, associated to a risk of increasing delinquency:

*“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 come 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 feel good 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 of adaptation still.”* (Delphi respondent 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 some young people at school for so long.”* (Delphi respondent 5)

In the Delphi second wave, respondents were again invited to express their views on this topic. Eighteen out of 34 responses reinforced the view that the anticipated increase in social inequalities will be fed by the inequalities in the educational system. These inequalities do not only have to do with the crisis and with school demotivation, as pointed out in the first wave, but also with other factors that are (re)gaining importance in the Portuguese society mainly due to the current crisis:

- More selective and exclusionary educational system;
- Lack of resources at schools to prevent school failure and early dropout;
- Difficulties of the school system with respect to a greater heterogeneity of students;
- Cut backs in resources for local prevention projects.

According to some experts’ comments included in the second wave Delphi survey:

*“With the decrease of public investment in social policies, namely those addressed to families; and given the increasing of economic precariousness and the financial difficulties which are already felt in schools, the trend should be towards higher rates of school dropout.”*

*“The general trend is to an increasing educational level; however among young people in disadvantaged areas there will be an increase of early dropout from school. Equally fundamental will be the existence of local institutions capable to support these youngsters.”*

## 5 YOUTH DELINQUENCIES

In Portugal, as in most other countries, youth delinquency tends to be statistically measured on the basis of the juvenile crimes reported to the security forces, which obviously represents only a small part of the reality.

According to the 2009 Annual Report of Internal Safety, a total of 3,479 juvenile crimes were reported to the security forces – National Republican Guard (*Guarda Nacional Republicana*, GNR), Public Safety Police (*Polícia de Segurança Pública*, PSP) and Portuguese Criminal Police (*Polícia Judiciária*). In 2010, that figure increased to 3,880 but in 2011 a strong decrease was registered: the number of participations regarding juvenile crimes was 1,978. On the other hand, the figures of the *Annual Reports of Internal Safety* show that juvenile crimes correspond to 0.8% of the total number of crimes registered during 2009 and 0.5% in 2011, which means that youth delinquency has a low and decreasing importance among the reported crimes (Sistema de Segurança Interna, 2010, 2011, 2012).

### 5.1 Delinquencies – Young People's Self-Reported Practices

Among the 1755 young students surveyed, 29.4% reported they had committed, over their life-time, at least one of the offences listed in the questionnaire. Only in 15.2% of the cases was the offence repeated in the last year.

The most prevalent types of offence are: vandalism, group fights, shoplifting and personal theft.

Boys and girls reported different practices regarding the various forms of offending. Among girls, there is a higher prevalence of two offence types: shoplifting (12.5% in the urban region and 8.6% in the rural) and vandalism (12.5% in the urban region and 6.2% in the rural). Among boys, there is a greater heterogeneity in terms of offence types: the most prevalent offence is also vandalism (24.9% in the urban region and 21.4% in the rural); group fights (22.1% in the rural region and 14.9% in the urban); personal theft (10.7% in the rural region and 12% in the urban), and shoplifting (11.8% in the urban region and 8% in the rural). Carrying a knife was reported by 5.8% of boys.

Differences are therefore evident according to the region where they live. In general terms, young people in the urban region reported a higher life-time prevalence of delinquency. However, group fights are more prevalent among boys in the rural region (22.1% of the rural boys reported that they had been involved in these type of situation). Also hate crimes are more prevalent among boys in the rural region; however this type of offence has a low relative weight: 2.8% among boys in the rural region compared with 2.2% among urban boys.

A primary concern in this analysis is the consideration of the relationship between different school paths, or different levels of school integration, and the self-reported delinquency. Out of the questions included in the school survey, it was considered as indicator of negative school integration: having school failure (estimation based on the relation between the age of the student and the school

year he/she attended); the statement by the young student that she/he does not like school; the self-appraisal as a student below average.

| Offence type            | Region | Boys | Girls | Total |
|-------------------------|--------|------|-------|-------|
| Vandalism               | Rural  | 21.4 | 6.2   | 13.7  |
|                         | Urban  | 24.9 | 12.5  | 18.2  |
| Personal theft          | Rural  | 10.7 | 1.3   | 5.9   |
|                         | Urban  | 12.0 | 6.6   | 9.1   |
| Shoplifting             | Rural  | 8.0  | 8.6   | 8.3   |
|                         | Urban  | 11.8 | 12.5  | 12.2  |
| Bike theft              | Rural  | 2.8  | 0.7   | 1.7   |
|                         | Urban  | 3.6  | 0.6   | 1.9   |
| Robbery / Extortion     | Rural  | 7.2  | 0.6   | 3.9   |
|                         | Urban  | 7.1  | 1.9   | 4.2   |
| Carrying a gun          | Rural  | 2.4  | 0     | 1.2   |
|                         | Urban  | 3.1  | 0.6   | 1.7   |
| Carrying another weapon | Rural  | 9.0  | 1.3   | 5.1   |
|                         | Urban  | 9.8  | 4.0   | 6.6   |
| Assault                 | Rural  | 3.8  | 0.7   | 2.2   |
|                         | Urban  | 6.0  | 1.4   | 3.4   |
| Group fights            | Rural  | 22.1 | 5.6   | 13.7  |
|                         | Urban  | 14.9 | 7.2   | 10.7  |
| Hate crime              | Rural  | 2.8  | 0.3   | 1.5   |
|                         | Urban  | 2.2  | 1.1   | 1.6   |
| Dealing with drugs      | Rural  | 3.1  | 1.7   | 2.4   |
|                         | Urban  | 5.8  | 2.7   | 4.1   |

**Table 3:**  
Life-time prevalence of self-reported delinquency by region and sex (%)

The results reveal that the young people who show at least one of those indicators of negative school integration have a higher life-time prevalence of self-reported delinquency. The young people who see themselves as below-average students, in both regions and for most of the offence types, are the ones showing higher prevalence rates.

This data thus seem to reveal that juvenile delinquency cannot be taken as an isolated phenomenon; it must be analysed taking in consideration other problems and difficulties in the young people's life trajectories, including those related to their school path.

When turning a space poorly appropriated by young people (Body-Gendrot, 1995), the school, or negative school integration, may re-enforce youngsters' delinquent behaviours and practices, in a life stage where the co-ordinates for the entry into adult life are being built. This does not mean that any causal relationship is being proposed here; it is rather an issue of underlining the fact that the young boys and girls who reported having committed an offence often feel excluded at school and have low school performance (and vice versa). These will certainly constitute relevant factors in their transition to adulthood. Dubet (1991) would say

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that these young people share a school history, a history of failure and exclusion, which influences their attitudes and behaviours.

**Table 4:**  
Life-time prevalence of self-reported delinquency among young people with negative school integration by region (%)

| Offence type            | Region | School failure | Do not like school | School performance below average | Total |
|-------------------------|--------|----------------|--------------------|----------------------------------|-------|
| Vandalism               | Rural  | 11.9           | 10.5               | 17.1                             | 13.7  |
|                         | Urban  | 22.0           | 27.5               | 25.7                             | 18.2  |
| Personal theft          | Rural  | 4.8            | 5.7                | 12.0                             | 5.9   |
|                         | Urban  | 11.0           | 14.8               | 13.8                             | 9.1   |
| Shoplifting             | Rural  | 7.1            | 6.7                | 10.5                             | 8.3   |
|                         | Urban  | 17.3           | 19.0               | 19.7                             | 12.2  |
| Bike theft              | Rural  | 2.4            | 1.9                | 3.9                              | 1.7   |
|                         | Urban  | 3.1            | 4.2                | 4.6                              | 1.9   |
| Robbery / Extortion     | Rural  | 2.4            | 3.9                | 9.2                              | 3.9   |
|                         | Urban  | 6.4            | 8.4                | 8.6                              | 4.2   |
| Carrying a gun          | Rural  | 0              | 2.9                | 2.6                              | 1.2   |
|                         | Urban  | 2.4            | 2.1                | 2.6                              | 1.7   |
| Carrying another weapon | Rural  | 7.1            | 4.8                | 7.9                              | 5.1   |
|                         | Urban  | 9.0            | 12.7               | 8.6                              | 6.6   |
| Assault                 | Rural  | 2.4            | 1.0                | 5.2                              | 2.2   |
|                         | Urban  | 6.6            | 7.0                | 5.3                              | 3.4   |
| Group fights            | Rural  | 28.6           | 12.4               | 18.4                             | 13.7  |
|                         | Urban  | 12.6           | 13.5               | 11.9                             | 10.7  |
| Hate crime              | Rural  | 4.8            | 0                  | 3.9                              | 1.5   |
|                         | Urban  | 2.4            | 2.1                | 2.0                              | 1.6   |
| Dealing with drugs      | Rural  | 2.4            | 1.9                | 6.6                              | 2.4   |
|                         | Urban  | 4.7            | 3.5                | 7.2                              | 4.1   |

Considering the distinction proposed by Kazdin (1996) between two types of behaviour, the aggressive/violent and the delinquent, an attempt was made to know better who the young people who practice violent acts are.

According to the school survey data, only a small part of the young people has frequent behaviours that may encompass violent acts. More boys than girls have this kind of behaviour.

The more prevalent potentially violent behaviour is annoying other people just for fun; in any case the prevalence rate is below 8%. However, this does not alter the seriousness of this behaviour, or the need of an adequate supervision of these young people.

| Violent behaviour                  | Boys | Girls | Total |
|------------------------------------|------|-------|-------|
| Fights with others                 | 3.5  | 1.1   | 2.2   |
| Do something forbidden to have fun | 6.6  | 3.0   | 4.7   |
| Annoy other people just for fun    | 8.9  | 6.6   | 7.7   |

**Table 5:**  
Frequent self-reported violent behaviours by sex (%)

On the other hand, the offence types that more clearly make use of violence are: robbery and extortion, group fights, aggressions, and hate crimes.

156 of the students surveyed reported that they had committed any of these offences during the last twelve months. Among these, 46 revealed a strong persistence of these behaviours, since they reported having committed five or more violent offences during the last twelve months.

According to some scholars (e.g. Farrington, 1987, 2008), these frequent young violent offenders are a group characterised by the presence of several risk factors. The next table gives an overview of these characteristics and risk factors, comparing three sub-groups of students.

| Characteristic / Risk factor                | No offence<br>( <i>n</i> = 1,375) | All offenders<br>( <i>n</i> = 156) | Frequent violent offenders<br>( <i>n</i> = 46) |
|---|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| Boy   | 44.0                              | 34.6                               | 78.3   |
| Aged between 16–17 years old                | 33.3                              | 33.6                               | 52.2   |
| Father unemployed or with a precarious job  | 10.3                              | 11.5                               | 17.7   |
| Mother unemployed or with a precarious job  | 10.4                              | 9.7                                | 8.8  |
| Mother unable to work                       | 3.0                               | 7.1                                | 6.7  |
| Father not living at home                   | 23.3                              | 25.0                               | 26.1   |
| Drug use, last 30 days                      | 4.3                               | 12.5                               | 32.6   |
| Deviant peers                               | 68.6                              | 89.7                               | 89.1   |
| Violent peers                               | 14.8                              | 37.8                               | 60.9   |
| Do not like school                          | 21.0                              | 24.4                               | 32.6   |
| School performance below average            | 14.2                              | 8.6                                | 17.4   |
| Social disorganisation of the neighbourhood | 45.1                              | 66.5                               | 78.3   |
| School failure                              | 19.5                              | 23.2                               | 30.2   |

**Table 6:**  
Characteristics and risk factors of self-reported non-offenders, offenders, and frequent violent offenders (%)

Note: Frequent violent offenders – 5 or more offences

Differences are clear. The frequent violent offenders are more strained than the other groups. The concentration of facets among the frequent violent offenders shows that these are also victims of other forms of violence in the context where they live in: they are more affected by financial distress since their mother and/or father are more vulnerable to unemployment, job precariousness, or even by health problems that prevent them from work; they live in socially disorganised

neighbourhoods, they have deviant or violent peers, they do not like school, and see themselves as poor students and have experienced school failure.

These results on the importance of deviant or violent peers or of living in a socially disorganised neighbourhood, as risk factors, emphasize the sociological socio-cultural model of analysis of youth deviance, which presupposes the sub-cultural contextualisation of the youngsters' behaviours, namely in terms of the adherence to the norms of groups whose social representations differ from the dominant ones (Gomes et al., 2010.)

On the other hand, the importance of characteristics identified with negative integration at school as risk factors among the self-reported young offenders underlines the assumption that the rejection of authority and social normativity, embedded in school, which dictates the process of building-up a deviant identity. Additionally, it is at school that the young boy or girl finds groups that serve him/her as a reference to deviance (Dubet, 1991; Ferreira, 1997). The rupture with school is seen as the beginning of the deviant process, but also as the "motivation" that stimulates and leads the process of search of non-conformist group associations (Gomes et al., 2010).

## 5.2 Youngsters as Experts

Young people have their own views on juvenile delinquency prevention, and most of them have previous experiences with prevention measures. The experience with substance abuse prevention measures is more frequent than that with preventing violence measures. The experience with substance abuse prevention measures is more prevalent among rural young people. On the other hand, the experience with violence prevention measures is referred to, particularly, by urban young people.

**Table 7:**  
Existence of experiences with prevention measures by region (%)

|  |       |      |
|--|-------|------|
| Experiences with substance abuse prevention measures | Urban | 79.8 |
|  | Rural | 82.3 |
| Experiences with violence prevention measures        | Urban | 36.2 |
|  | Rural | 29.7 |

Although prevention experiences are more oriented to substance abuse, young people believe that school influence is more positive concerning violence than drug.

**Table 8:**  
School's perceived influence on drug and violence prevention by region and sex (Mean values)

| School's perceived influence on ... | Region | Boys | Girls |
|-------------------------------------|--------|------|-------|
| Drug prevention                     | Urban  | 2.88 | 2.93  |
|                                     | Rural  | 2.86 | 2.84  |
| Violence prevention                 | Urban  | 3.15 | 3.13  |
|                                     | Rural  | 3.11 | 3.03  |

Note: Mean value: 1 = "no influence at all", 2 = "some influence", 3 = "medium influence", 4 = "strong influence", 5 = "very strong influence"

Repressive measures, as well as information, are in the youngsters' opinion, less positive approaches to juvenile delinquency. The general idea is that "what works" best is the improvement of the young people's prospects to get a job and to provide them a good general education. The first one requires an investment on future prospects and on the creation of opportunities for young people having their place in the adult society; the second one certainly refers to the importance of school and especially of family.

| Approach   | Total |
|--|-------|
| Provide a good general education                       | 3.36  |
| Improve their prospects to get a job                   | 3.31  |
| Listen to their sorrows and problems                   | 3.18  |
| Provide good opportunities for leisure time activities | 3.16  |
| Provide counselling to their parents                   | 3.12  |
| Provide training for a better social behaviour         | 3.10  |
| Punish them severely when caught                       | 2.98  |
| Give information on possible consequences              | 2.98  |

**Table 9:**  
Students' perceived efficacy of preventive approaches to juvenile delinquency (Mean values)

Note: Mean values: 1 = "works very good", 2 = "works", 3 = "doesn't work", 4 = "is rather harmful"

Family importance is, moreover, referred by the youngsters when asked about the main actors in prevention of juvenile delinquency. Parents, followed by friends, are the most important actors in young people's perceptions.

| Actor          | Total |
|----------------|-------|
| Parents        | 1.28  |
| Friends        | 1.56  |
| Police         | 2.12  |
| Teachers       | 2.29  |
| Sports coaches | 2.34  |
| Social workers | 2.51  |

**Table 10:**  
Students' views on the importance of actors in prevention of juvenile delinquency (Mean values)

Note: Mean values: 1 = "very important", 2 = "important", 3 = "little important", 4 = "not important"

A question in an open format asked students for their ideas on how to prevent alcohol / substance abuse if they were teachers themselves. The suggested measures were diverse and heterogeneous:

- Providing information on substances;
- Focus on clarification of consequences (in terms of health, social development);
- Deterrence by negative examples (e.g. inviting former substance abusers);



- Talking to substance abusing students; understanding underlying causes / problems and providing support;
- Drug / alcohol controls in schools and sanctions if rules are broken;
- Involving parents;
- Leisure time and sports activities offered by schools;
- Non-intervention from school;
- Inefficiency of school measures;
- Right to self-harm;
- Drug abuse prevention not being teachers' business.

The same type of question concerned their views on violence prevention. Again, the students proposed a wide range of possible measures:

- Sanctions;
- Involving parents;
- Talks with those students who were involved in violent incidents aiming at achieving a better understanding of the underlying causes and providing the necessary support;
- Improving the classroom atmosphere, by improving the trust relationship between teacher and student;
- Sports and leisure activities outside school;
- Non-intervention;
- Information;
- Consequences for both victims and aggressors;
- Alternative dispute resolution mechanisms;
- Encouraging dialogue, communication and mediation between people involved in violent acts;
- Clarifying rules and sanctions;
- Improving skills (anger control, self-defense for potential victims; workshops on dispute mediation).

## **6 CROSSED VIEWS**

As stated before, one of the purposes of this article is to contrast students' self-reported delinquency and their views and perceptions on prevention with a brief synthesis of the results of empirical work conducted with experts.

According to the experts' opinions, in the rural region juvenile violence and delinquency are quantitatively not relevant, although its visibility is increasing due to a greater awareness on these issues among local professionals.

In the urban area opinions differ: some say that *"it is not an alarming phenomenon"* (interviewee 3, urban); other refer that *"this is a municipality where juvenile delinquency is very high even compared to other urban areas"* (interviewee 7, urban).

The deep social cleavages and the existence of "pockets of poverty" in the urban municipality are strongly associated, according to the experts interviewed: *"there are areas with great economic needs and this leads to certain behaviours among*

young people" (interviewee 2, urban); *"there is a socio-economic context that encourages delinquency"* (interviewee 1, urban).

This association between precariousness/poverty/delinquency is not clear in the interviewees' statements in the rural area. Here there is a notion that *"it is a transversal phenomenon to every social group"* (interviewee 5, rural). However, there is also awareness that the consequences are not the same to everyone: *"The cases of the most needed families end up in the probation services. In other cases, when people have money to pay the fine, these do not reach the services"* (interviewee 5, rural).

Also in the urban area a reference to this aspect is made. Families with higher incomes *"are those who can better protect themselves from the probation services intervention"* (interviewee 7, urban). On the other hand, *"vulnerable populations are more available for that intervention which is regarded as a support"* (interviewee 7, urban).

Both in the rural and in the urban regions, the relationship between young people and the family is seen as crucial.

A parental super-protection is mentioned, which in some occasions prevents the youngsters' possibility of a full emotional development: *"Not knowing how to manage things that didn't go well, not having emotional autonomy may even lead to suicide; to violence among peers"* (interviewee 1, rural).

On the other hand, some expert interviewed spoke about a lack of parental skills: lack of responsibility; lack of family dialogue; lack of supervision; lack of rules: *"these are young people who are left on their own with neither limits nor rules"* (interviewee 2, urban).

These issues, among the urban expert interviewed, are again linked to the families' economic precariousness which leads to long working hours, as well as to the existence of many lone-parent families in which the male figure is absent.

The importance of the family, the need for dialogue in the family, inclusive of young people; the need for parental supervision, and even the need for rules, are aspects underlined also by young people both in the rural and urban focus-group discussions: *"the family is the start"*, *"parents should listen to young people"*, *"there are young people who never speak with their parents"*, and, *"my parents never ask me where I'm going (they trust me) but they should want to know more"*. These are some of the young people's statements voiced.

The experts interviewed in the urban region referred to the existence of robbery, theft and bullying among young people: *"They are young people, more boys than girls, who are not adapted to school, don't have success and the acts they carry out are robbery, theft and bullying and other uncivil behaviours that are not crimes but bother people and originate a feeling of insecurity, becoming associated to juvenile delinquency"* (interviewee 3, urban).

In the rural region, acts of violence and alcohol and drugs consumption are evidenced. The increased trivialization of this consumption is a matter of concern: *"the consumptions are so trivialized that they don't reach the probation services, so trivialized that the health services also devalue them and do not do the screening of these consumptions"* (interviewee 5, rural).

The trivialization of the problem of alcohol and drug consumption was also expressed by the young participants in the focus-group discussion in the rural

region. They were equally open about the extent of their knowledge as to the places where to get drugs as well as on frequent local private parties where the consumption of drugs and alcohol is seen as a normal behaviour and a strategy to become part of a peer group.

## **7 CONCLUDING REMARKS IN TIMES OF CRISIS**

If it is certain that poverty and social exclusion cannot be seen, *per se*, as causes for rise of delinquency and violence; those may contribute to a lower efficacy of the social regulation mechanisms, leading to deviant behaviours (Gomes et al., 2010). In the current situation of financial, social and political crisis in Portugal, it is therefore even more crucial the importance of a structural and integrated intervention acting on the contextual factors of young people's lives, if the aim is prevention.

Equally fundamental is the need to ensure that the crisis and the ensuing budget restrictions do not jeopardise the progress achieved in the field of education, namely by policies fighting school failure and dropout, nor serve as a pretext for reducing efforts in this respect. The importance of generating knowledge regarding the true dimension and characteristics of juvenile delinquency, in terms of victims, perpetrators, contexts, offence types, among others, is key for the design and implementation of adequate policy measures, namely focusing on prevention of youth violence and delinquency.

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