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## **Recidivism among juvenile delinquents: Self-reported sociodemographic characteristics, behavioural features and perceptions of delinquency**

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### **ABSTRACT**

While certain background factors have been repeatedly associated with juvenile delinquency, the perceptions that this group develops with regard to their own offending behaviour has not been given enough attention, neither has the influence of these background factors on the development of these cognitions. The present article attempts to describe several sociodemographic, legal and institutional characteristics of young offenders held in custody in the largest institution of young offenders in Scotland and reports certain behavioural, normative and control beliefs of the young offenders with reference to their offending behaviour in the future. The first aim was to describe those issues and then to assess their relationships. In addition, it explores how their beliefs of future offending are related to their characteristics. The main interest was to discover the relative incidence, distribution and interrelations of certain variables of interest in a representative sample of 152 young offenders of the largest Scottish Young Offenders' Institution. The inmates took part in a scheduled interview and filled in a questionnaire assessing their perceptions of offending. Despite the exploratory and descriptive nature of the article, the results are however informative about the relations of social factors in the development of individual perceptions of offending which could be of interest to the staff of the prison service responsible for the rehabilitation of the individual offender.

*Key words:* Juvenile delinquency, Young offenders, Inmates.

Certain studies have been conducted to identify possible correlates of persistent offenders that are not dissimilar from the main correlates of delinquency. Dysfunctional family characteristics (Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1998; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Loeber & Dishion, 1983; Ganzer & Sarason, 1973), social instability (McLoyd, 1998), poor educational and employment attainment (Farrington & West, 1993; Myner et al., 1998), substance abuse (Myner et al., 1998) are among the most important. The main feature of the lit-

erature about recidivism is that the theoretical framework mainly employed is that of social criminology.

The main correlates searched and actually identified are mainly social factors (Binder, 1988), which are regarded as criminogenic and reflect the trend for issues of delinquency being examined through the sociological perspective and with the subsequent suggestion that, unless crucial changes are put forward by society for a change in societal structures, the problem of delinquency

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## Values and family: A cross-cultural study

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### ABSTRACT

The present study investigates the existence of resemblances and differences concerning the values and the family values in four countries with different cultural structure: Greece, Holland, Chile and Pakistan. The sample was consisted of 1.187 students, age of 18-25 years. The measure of values and family values was based on *Schwartz' Values Scale* and on *Georga's Family Values Scale*. We used the method of *Structural Equivalence*. The purpose of the Structural Equivalence is to determine to what extent the construct of variables is similar across cultures. The results demonstrate universal family values concerning the obligations between the members of the family system. In Greece there are some resemblances to the family in Chile, Pakistan and Holland independently of the cultural context (collectivism-individualism).

**Key words:** Family, Family values, Cross-cultural psychology.

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will always be there as a side effect of modern, institutionalised, political-economic societal functions.

Similar statements, whether subject to debate or not, may be useful to governments and policy makers who are responsible for finding ways and initiating policies for reduction, prevention and rehabilitation of social instability which appears to be criminogenic. They are of limited help to those institutions and the staff employed there, such as prison services, who have to deal with the individual offender and his rehabilitation. In addition, little research has examined these issues in young offenders' correctional institutions despite the fact that their population, at any given point in time, is highly likely to recidivate (Rutter et al., 1997). They also represent a high risk population that significantly contributes to the level and the extent of overall criminal activity upon release from the correctional settings. Similarly, Rutter, Giller and Hagell (1998) argued that targeting high risks groups, highly likely to commit delinquent acts, with the aim of preventing further criminal involvement has been proposed as a cost effective approach.

The individual is target of challenge by the prison's staff, and how and what he perceives, interprets, thinks, feels, expects and plans. Knowing what and how a juvenile offender thinks will enable the parties involved in his rehabilitation to have a better idea of his cognitive representations of his own offending and deal with that appropriately (Dodge, 1993).

Although prison's primary aim is to deprive individuals of their liberty, Coyle (1994) also argued that it should provide positive environments where the prisoners could address their offending behaviour, although the exact ways that this might happen are not specified. From the point of view of Coyle (1994) the primary aim of the prison service is to provide secure custody and deprivation of liberty. However, he proposed that the possibilities of providing them with opportunities to challenge their offending behaviour, as well as educational and vocational as-

sistance in combination with practical assistance upon release in the community, should not be overlooked.

Focusing solely on social factors that facilitate offending, to the exclusion of individual characteristics, provides only a partial view of the puzzle of offending (Short & Meier, 1981). They argued that delinquency in general can be conceptualised and examined at different levels of explanation. They identify the individual level, where the focus is on the individual characteristics, the macro-sociological level, focusing on the role of social systems and cultural variation in explaining delinquency, and the microsociological level, which focuses on situational determinants of delinquency in terms of role and reference groups and the processes of ongoing interaction. Short and Meier (1981) argued that further understanding of delinquency should consider interdisciplinary research at every level of analysis with the aim to «recognise different levels of explanation and to seek conceptual bridges between them» (Short & Meier, 1981, p. 468). Possible interactions of the individual's way of thinking and the social environment he belongs to may be fruitfully identified and the picture become more complete, thereby providing a clearer idea of the possible causes of offending.

Although there appears to be a host of correlates of recidivism in juvenile delinquents, reflecting mainly sociological propositions of delinquency, the psychological correlates at the individual level have not been extensively researched (Binder, 1988). In addition, little research has concentrated on the social-cognitive factors of juvenile delinquency and persistent offending (Farrington, 1993).

A reason for that reluctance is, as Nisbett and Wilson (1977) argued, that introspective data is not very useful since people are not able to accurately report inner cognitive events and mental processes. In addition, generally, people account for a phenomenon in terms of previously held theories. The reasons juvenile delinquents provide for their offences might be incorrect as

they are unaware of the «true» causes of their delinquency e.g., biological or social factors (Agnew, 1990). When and under which conditions introspective data can be regarded as valid has been examined (Ericsson & Simon, 1980; Smith & Miller, 1978; Lieberman, 1979). While the matter seems unresolved, Baumeister (1998) argued that people might not be able to accurately report on their mental processes, especially on well learned tasks that have become relatively automatic, yet verbal reports of the content of their thinking seem desirable. «Introspection may be quite valid and accurate when people are asked to report what they are thinking and feeling. It may, however, be quite inaccurate when people seek to analyse how they arrived at these thoughts and feelings» (Baumeister, 1998, p. 693).

Similarly, Lieberman (1979) argued that verbal reports are useful data to the extent that they predict and can control actual behaviour. Rutter et al. (1997) argued that the examination of juvenile delinquency could be pursued on many levels, similar to the point made by (Short & Meier, 1981). Similarly, Agnew (1990) and Farrington (1993) noted that verbal reports such as attitudes and beliefs regarding offending behaviour might not be adequate techniques when the focus of research is the differences between individuals. That is, those who engage in crime and those who do not. When the focus of a study is delinquent events, an approach of examining the reasons the individuals themselves provide for committing a crime is a fruitful way of examining the most immediate and situational factors that lead to commitment of any delinquent event.

Moreover, Rutter et al. (1997) argued that for any case of delinquent act to be examined it has to take into account the subjective evaluations of the costs and benefits of the delinquent act, and, from this perspective, it is the subjective perceptions that matter, no matter how inaccurate and misleading.

Similarly, Loucks et al. (2000) argued that the application of social cognition models to recidivism may be useful in identifying the proximal

cognitive antecedents of offending behaviour. A social cognition model that has been highly predictive of diverse behavioural domains (Ajzen, 1991) is the Theory of Planned Behaviour, which derives from the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA). The original TRA (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1970) postulated that intentions are the most immediate antecedents of any behaviour that is under voluntary control and are assumed to capture the motivational influences on behaviour. Intentions are in turn determined by attitudes towards the behaviour, a personal factor, and a social factor, subjective norms, perceived social pressures from significant referents to perform the behaviour and the actors' motivation to comply with the referents. Attitudes and subjective norms are in turn determined by the salient beliefs people hold about the behaviour.

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB, Ajzen, 1991, 1985) extends the TRA by including a third determinant of intentions and behaviour, perceived behavioural control (PBC), which is assumed to reflect past experience with the performance of the behaviour and anticipated obstacles that could inhibit behaviour. Ajzen (1985) argued that any behaviour is rarely under complete volitional control and identifies, in relation to the individual, many external and internal factors that can potentially inhibit the intended execution of any behaviour. He continued that the predictive role of PBC would depend on the degree to which the behaviour is under volitional control and the potential role of external and internal factors to interfere with the behaviour. The greater the behaviour depends on these factors being enacted, the greater the predictive and explanatory role of the PBC.

The TPB is a dispositional approach to cognitive self-regulation and provides a conceptual and methodological advance in the prediction of behaviour and the attitudes behaviour consistency (Liska, 1984). According to Ajzen (1991), the TPB, which deals with the information processing of the individual whose behaviour is guided by rational decisions, provides a parsimonious way

of predicting intentions, which are regarded as the immediate antecedent of behaviour, by selecting attitudes, subjective norms and, recently, PBC as the mediators between several biological and environmental factors and intentions of executing the behaviour. Any other variable could have an indirect effect on intentions only by influencing attitudes, subjective norms or PBC.

The TPB provides a parsimonious framework for identifying the immediate antecedents of any behaviour with many practical advantages in terms of prediction and potential intervention. In addition, it allows for detailed and in-depth analysis of the specific beliefs that are influencing intentions and behaviour. Given that any of the determinants of intentions are found related with behavioural intentions, the beliefs underlying the related global factors can be analysed for a more detailed analysis of the beliefs underlying them. In that way, a greater insight is gained regarding the possible determinants of behaviour at a more basic level. Any distal factors related to the behaviour of interest are supposed to have an indirect effect on the behaviour. This is done by formulating the attitudes, the perceived social norms and the PBC individuals have towards the behaviour or their weights (Ajzen, 1991).

It can be argued that the TPB identifies the most proximal cognitive antecedents of behaviour, as it was argued by Petraitis, Flay and Miller (1995), who reviewed the literature of the theories of adolescent substance abuse. They argued that the TRA and the TPB, by assessing behaviour specific beliefs, are able to identify very potent predictors of adolescent substance abuse. However, they do not explain the long-term causes of the behaviour, they «focus on the effects of substance-specific cognitions but not on their causes» (Petraitis et al., 1995, p. 70). The authors concluded that those two theories have been developed as general models of behaviour that concentrate on the immediate causes of behaviour. While identifying those constructs, which proximally influence behaviour, they provide a

fruitful way of integrating the more distal variables specifically related to any behavioural domain of interest emphasised by other theories.

The present study will focus on a group of incarcerated young offenders, since young offenders in custody, at any given point in time, are highly likely to reoffend (Rutter et al., 1998), and it will aim to examine the factors that will be associated with increased risk of re-offending, as evident from the young offenders' intentions of re-offending in the future. At the same time, it will assess and describe the perceived young offenders' beliefs of their future offending and will explore the relations of these beliefs with certain background characteristics that have been associated with recidivism and chronic offending in the literature. Previous studies that examined the reasons juvenile delinquents perceived as criminogenic, relied on retrospective accounts of the motives for past offending, relied on general population samples likely to under-represent groups of juveniles engaged in frequent offending and used small samples of individuals not processed by the legal system for crimes. In addition, these issues have not been examined in detail in the Scottish correctional institutions for young offenders, as research in Scottish Young Offenders' Institutions focused mainly on issues of the extent and the nature of bullying (Power, Dyson, & Wozniak, 1997; Biggam & Power, 1999a) psychological well-being and suicidal propensity of young offenders in custody (Biggam & Power, 1999b; Power & Spencer, 1987), and characteristics and perceptions of Scottish Young Offenders (Loucks, Power, Swanson, & Chambers, 2000).

### **Objectives of the study**

1. To describe background characteristics of a sample of young offenders, drawn from the largest young offenders' institution in Scotland.
2. To describe young offenders' beliefs about their future offending.

3. To explore the differences of young offenders' beliefs about future offending as a function of their background characteristics.

## **Methodology**

### **Procedure**

At the time the study was carried out the total population of young offenders held in Scotland was about 750 inmates, of which 451 were kept in Polmont. Polmont is a correctional institution in Scotland for young people, aged from sixteen to twenty one years old, serving a range of sentences, are kept there. The Polmont sample consists of young offenders having committed various offences, mainly those offences that create the most serious problems in terms of recidivism rates, property offences, violent offences, drug related offences and, more often than not, a combination of all of them.

From the largest institution in Scotland, approximately 33% of the young offenders from each Hall was selected and interviewed. This simple stratification was employed since offenders with different features are kept in each Hall. The interviewees were selected from every Hall in Polmont so that the final sample could be spread over and be representative of Polmont Institution.

The actual number of the interviewees from each Hall was selected in order to reflect the size of the young offenders population in each Hall, and the number of young offenders interviewed in each Hall are: Spey = 32, Argyle = 31, Lomond = 27, Nevis = 26, Cramond = 18, Rannoch = 12, Beechwood = 4, and Dunedin = 2.

The young offenders were placed in each Hall according to the following criteria: in Rannoch, if low risk offenders serving long sentences, in Cramond, if at risk of being bullied or likely to harm themselves in any way, in Dunedin, if they were bullies or exhibiting violent behaviour, in Beechwood, if well adjusted and transferred to the low security Hall at the end of their sentence,

in Nevis, if serving long-term sentences, in Lomond, if under 18 years old, and Spey and Argyle Halls, hosting the majority of the offenders, usually sentenced for a relatively short period.

The total number of inmates in the institution was 451 and the sample size 152, so approximately one-third of the inmates were interviewed. Every third inmate in each Hall was interviewed starting from the second cell each time.

Despite the above selection procedure, any generalisation to the whole population of young offenders held in Scottish Institutions must be made with caution, although the Institution, where the research took place, is the largest one in Scotland. Any generalisations do not apply to female young offenders and to male young offenders convicted and sentenced for homicide and those on remand. Two inmates refused to take part in the interview and three did not complete the interview because it was felt that they did not approach it honestly. Any information they had given was not included in the analysis. The final sample consisted of 152 offenders. The size of the sample was determined in order to achieve a 95 percent probability of a range of error around thirteen percent of the sample mean for the variables of the study.

The research design was cross-sectional introducing a correlational level of analysis and not a causal one (Crano & Brewer, 1973). Yet, relationships between background variables and cognitive representations of future offending can be studied, as well as the free variation of variables as they occur in their natural environment. Ethical permission for this research has been given by the University of Stirling and the Central Research Unit of Scottish Prison Service.

### **Data gathering instrument**

Background characteristics were recorded regarding education, employment, previous offences, drug and alcohol abuse, family features, as well as their beliefs and attitudes towards their offending behaviour. The first aim was to describe those

issues and then to assess their relationships.

Structured interviews were employed as the main data gathering technique, in spite of the high cost associated with this method in terms of time, effort and resources. Besides, response rates are usually higher in interviews than in self-report questionnaires, ensuring that the major source of error in survey designs (Schofield, 1996) can be minimised, especially in populations with literacy problems, as the young offenders in this research. At the same time, the researcher, who is present in the interview, can evaluate, to a considerable degree, whether the subjects approach the interview in a serious manner and are willing to provide information which improves the quality of the data (Robson, 1993).

They were told that the interviews were part of a research project based at Stirling University and that the prison service would not have access to the individual information confided by the subjects.

For the assessment of the above issues, a modified version of the interview schedule employed by Loucks et al. (2000) was used. This was made available to the researcher by the Anxiety and Stress Research Centre at the University of Stirling.

*Questionnaire.* The questionnaire assessed the cognitive representations of the young offenders regarding their future offending behaviour, that is their attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control both directly and belief-based.

*Direct attitudes.* Direct attitude measures were obtained by asking the subjects to evaluate, with reference to them, their offending behaviour in the future on a set of 8 seven-point semantic differential items according to Osgood, Suci and Tannenbaum (1957). In half of the items the positive pole was presented first and in the other half the negative pole, so as to control response bias, at least the tendency to prefer the negative or the positive side of items (e.g. rewarding-punishing, boring-interesting, safe-unsafe). The average over all 8 scales served as a general measure of direct attitude towards offending.

*Direct subjective norm.* Three seven-point

items were used to assess direct perceived subjective norms towards offending behaviour as has been operationalised in the literature (Parker et al., 1995). (1) Most people who are important to me think I should stop offending in the future (Unlikely – Likely). (2) Most people who are important to me approve of my offending in the future (Disapprove – Approve). (3) Most people I know would like me to stop offending in the future (Unlikely – Likely). Summating responses to the three scales gave a direct measure of subjective norms.

*Direct perceived behavioural control.* Three seven-point items were used to obtain a direct measure of PBC according to operationalisations in the literature (Terry & O'Leary, 1995). (1) How much control do you have whether you stop offending in the future? (Very little control – Complete control). (2) For me to stop offending in the future is (Easy – Difficult). (3) If I wanted to, I could easily stop offending in the future (Extremely unlikely – Extremely likely). Average responses to the three scales provided a direct measure of PBC to stop offending in the future.

*Intentions.* Two seven-point semantic-differential items elicited intentions to offend in the future. The items were formulated for offending behaviour in the future without precise specification of target and context. (1) I intend to offend in the future (Extremely likely – Extremely unlikely). (2) Will you offend in the future (Definitely plan not to – Definitely plan to). This approach is recommended by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980), who argue that if specific actions at specific time, context and target is of interest to be predicted, then the wording of the constructs of the theory should correspond to all these features of the behaviour attaining a degree of specificity. The theory can be applied equally well to prediction of behaviour in more general terms, yet the wording of the constructs of the theory should then be consistent with the general definition of the behaviour of interest.

The construction of the belief-based measures of attitudes, subjective norms and perceived



behavioural control were based on an initial pilot study in the same institution, with the aim of eliciting modal behavioural, normative and control beliefs. From the potential interviewees approached, one refused to take part in the interview and finally 36 inmates were interviewed.

The pilot consisted of structured scheduled interviews employing six open-ended questions. What are the advantages of your offending? What are the disadvantages of your offending? Who approves of you continuing offending? Who disapproves of you continuing offending? What will stop you from offending in the future? What will make you offend in the future?

This approach was chosen both because it is suggested by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) and because of its appropriateness at this phase of the research. The subjects identified crucial factors regarding their offending behaviour, in the form of modal beliefs, with the advantage of eliciting the subjects' own personal beliefs.

**Belief-based attitude.** The belief-based attitude measure was developed according to the eleven salient beliefs elicited by thirty-six randomly selected subjects in the pilot study. These salient beliefs reflected the subjects' perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages that result from the engagement in delinquent acts in general. The strength of these beliefs was assessed by means of seven-point scales, e.g. My offending will result in my going to jail in the future (Unlikely – Likely), My offending will be an exciting experience in the future (Unlikely – Likely), and the subjective evaluations of these outcomes by seven-point scales as well, e.g. Staying out of jail in the future is (Completely unimportant to me – Very important to me), Having excitement in my life in the future is (Completely unimportant to me – Very important to me). Each scale was scored from 1 (Unlikely, completely unimportant to me) to 7 (Likely, very important to me). The indications of the belief strength and the subjective evaluation for each outcome were multiplied and then summated to provide an overall score of the belief-based attitude for each subject.

**Belief-based subjective norms.** The belief-based measures of subjective norms involved the five salient referents elicited in the pilot study with respect to the offending behaviour (mother, father, partner/girlfriend, friends who offend and friends who do not offend). With respect to each referent, the respondents indicated the strength of their normative beliefs on the following seven-point scale: How much do the following people (mother, father, girlfriend, close friends who offend, close friends who do not offend) agree with your offending in the future? (Strongly disagree – Strongly agree). Motivation to comply with each referent was measured by a seven-point scale to the following questions: How important to you generally are the views of the following people (mother, father, girlfriend, close friends who offend, close friends who do not offend)? (Very unimportant – Very important). According to Ajzen and Fishbein (1980), the normative beliefs scales were scored in a bipolar fashion, from -3 (Strongly disagree) to 3 (Strongly agree). Subjects' responses to motivation to comply with each referent were scored in a unipolar fashion, from 1 (Very unimportant) to 7 (Very important). Each normative belief score was multiplied by each motivation to comply score, and the resulting products were summed across the five normative referents to give a total score of the belief based measure of the subjective norms of the sample.

**Belief-based control:** Based on the factors, from the pilot study, believed to facilitate re-offending the subjects were asked whether they could attain the following: e.g. Getting a job in the future is (Out of my control – Under my control), Keeping calm when I am provoked in the future is (Difficult – Easy). Because the beliefs identified from the pilot study reflected both external and internal factors that could make the subjects re-offend, the scales for the external factors had poles in terms of control (Out of my control – Under my control) whereas the scales for the internal factors had poles in terms of difficulty (Difficult – Easy) according to Sparks, Guthrie and Shepherd (1997), and Terry and O'Leary (1995).

Subsequently, they were asked about their perceived effect that this factor could have in their stopping offending, e.g. Getting a job will help me to stop offending in the future (False – True), Keeping calm when I am provoked will help me to stop offending in the future (False – True). All the scales were scored from 1 to 7 and the scores to the perceived effect of each factor were multiplied with the perceived ease of accomplishment, and the sum of these products resulted in a belief based measure of behavioural control.

### Reliability of measures

The internal consistency of the measures in the present study by means of Cronbach's *alpha* reliability are reported next. Intention = .79, direct attitude = .75, direct subjective norm = .46, direct perceived behavioural control = .82, belief-based attitude = .59, belief-based subjective norm = .54, and belief-based perceived behavioural control = .77.

## Results

### Legal, institutional and sociodemographic background characteristics of the young offenders (*N* = 152)

The age of the sample ranged from 16 to 21,  $m = 18.9$  ( $s.d. = 1.3$ ) and 29% were in custody mainly for property offences, 53% for violent offences, 9% for drug dealing and 9% for other offences. The length of their sentences ranged from 2 to 96 months ( $m = 26.4$ ,  $s.d. = 20.3$ ). They had been in custody  $m = 2.5$  ( $s.d. = 2.2$ ) and had been remanded  $m = 4.8$  ( $s.d. = 5.4$ ) times. They had 11.1 ( $s.d. = 13.8$ ) previous sentences and stayed in custody for an average of 6.9 months ( $s.d. = 7.1$ ) at the time of the interview. The mean total time they had spent in custody was 19.6 months ( $s.d. = 16.4$ ). The self reported age of their first offence was 12.3 years ( $s.d. = 2.6$ ), first arrest 14 years ( $s.d. = 2.4$ ) and first time in cus-

tody 16.8 years ( $s.d. = 1.5$ ). They had tried alcohol at 12.7 ( $s.d. = 1.9$ ) and drugs at 12.8 ( $s.d. = 1.7$ ).

Forty six percent had been in residential care and (50%) had attended a special school. Seventy six percent reported poor school behaviour and 91% had played truant in the past. Ninety percent had been suspended from school and 21.7% reported poor peer relations at school. Eighty one percent had been employed in the past, 43.8% had been dismissed from a job and 52% were not employed when they had committed the offence, while 59.9% did not have a stable employment. A third of their families had the support of a social worker and nearly two-thirds (67.8%) of their families relied on state benefits.

Seventy three percent reported being in touch with their families while in custody. Ninety four (61.8%) had someone, usually father or brother, in their immediate family having served a custodial sentence. Fifty five (36.2%) came from a family experiencing drug misuse and 71 (46.7%) alcohol abuse, while 40 (26.3%) reported that someone in their immediate family had received psychiatric or psychological treatment. The vast majority (147, 96.7%) had a close friend involved in criminal activity.

«Drug misuse is any taking of a drug which harms, or threatens to harm, the physical or mental health or social well-being of an individual, of other individuals, or of society at large, or which is illegal» (Royal College of Psychiatrists, 1987, p. 30). The above definition of drug misuse was proposed as a working definition by the Royal College of Psychiatrists in Drug Scenes (1987), a report about Drugs and Drug Dependence, and was employed for the current thesis.

Ninety three percent had taken drugs and 80.9% started with «soft» drugs such as cannabis. Overall the young offenders reported using the following drugs in the past: heroin = 45, cannabis = 61, methadone = 2, tamazepam = 8, speed = 16, acid = 4, crack = 3, cocaine = 16, ecstasy = 21, valium = 11, diazepam = 2, jellies = 5, LSD = 1, glue = 1, amphetamines = 2 and 23 young

offenders reported that they did not use any kind of drugs in the past.

The drug use patterns of the young offenders were categorised as «no drug use», use of «soft drugs» and use of «hard drugs». The Drug Abuse Briefing by the Institute for the Study of Drug Dependence (1999) noted that «[o]bviously there is an element of truth in the distinction, ...[although] the terms "hard" and "soft" when applied to drugs have no legal or pharmacological validity» (p. 3). For ease of analysing drug misuse patterns with the rest of the variables, drugs such as cannabis, glue, jellies, valium, tamazepam and diazepam were categorised as «soft», while drugs such as heroin, cocaine, methadone, crack, LSD, acid, speed, ecstasy and amphetamines were categorised as «hard».

From the drug users ( $N = 129$ ), one third (36.8%) admitted that drug taking was a problem for them and 66.4% admitted that they had committed a crime to get drugs, while an equal percentage (65.8%) reported that they had committed a crime under the influence of drugs. Most of the drug users (52%) believed that they would continue taking drugs after custody and another 29.6% were uncertain. Eighty eight percent had tried alcohol ( $N = 134$ ) and from them 28.3% believed that alcohol use was a problem for them, while 45.4% admitted that drinking contributed to their current offence and 75% reported that they had ever committed a crime because they had been drunk.

In general, 44.1% said that they had been under psychiatric or psychological treatment in the community, while a lower 20.4% had seen a psychologist or psychiatrist while in custody. Finally, 14.5% (22 young offenders) admitted to have attempted committing suicide. From the 22 young offenders who have attempted suicide, 11 attempted suicide in the community, 9 in custody and 2 attempted suicide both in custody and the community.

An almost equal percentage (13.8%) reported that someone in their families had attempted suicide or self-injury.

Overall, 47 (30.9%) expected that their living situation would be unstable after custody.

### **Young offenders' cognitive representations of future offending behaviour**

Table 1 illustrates the participants' perceived likelihood about their offending behaviour consequences. Most of the young offenders recognised that future offending is likely to result in custodial sentence, loss of freedom, and it will make their families feel embarrassed. Two thirds recognised that future offending is likely to create problems for them in terms of employment, and almost half of them accepted that future offending is likely to provide financial means for getting drugs. About a third recognised that future offending is likely to support their lifestyle, it is likely to be exciting and it will result in losing contact with their families.

The young offenders' evaluations of the perceived consequences of offending behaviour are presented in Table 2. The vast majority of the young offenders agreed that staying out of jail, having their freedom, being able to find a job, having contact with their families, being able to cope with life and trying not to embarrass their families were very important for them in the future. At the same time, two-thirds agreed that it was also very important to have excitement in their lives and have money for the lifestyle they wanted. Twenty two percent accepted that it was also very important to have money to buy drugs in the future.

The young offenders' perceptions of important others' agreement with their offending behaviour and their motivation to comply with these referents are presented in Tables 3 and 4 respectively. In Table 3 it could be seen that the majority of the young offenders perceived their mothers as disagreeing with their future offending, as well as their girlfriends and their fathers. It has to be noted that the percentage of the young offenders perceiving their fathers as disagreeing with their future offending, although high, was lower in comparison to their mothers. Friends were mostly

**Table 1****Young offenders agreement with perceived consequences of future offending (N = 152)**

	Likely (Score 1,2)	Neither likely nor unlikely (Score 3,4,5)	Unlikely (Score 6,7)
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
My offending in the future will result in my going to jail	128 (84.2)	21 (13.9)	3 (2)
My offending in the future will result in losing my freedom	136 (89.5)	13 (8.5)	3 (2)
My offending in the future will result in losing contact with my family	55 (36.2)	40 (26.4)	57 (37.5)
My offending in the future will result in losing contact with my friends	62 (42.2)	58 (38.1)	27 (17.7)
who do not offend	62 (42.2)	58 (38.1)	27 (17.7)
My offending in the future will result in difficulties to find a job	94 (61.8)	41 (27)	17 (11.2)
My offending in the future will result in my family being embarrassed	119 (78.3)	26 (17.1)	7 (4.6)
My offending in the future will result in losing contact with my friends who offend	26 (17.1)	47 (30.9)	79 (51.9)
My offending in the future will be an exciting experience	46 (30.3)	71 (46.7)	35 (23)
My offending in the future will enable me to cope with life	30 (19.8)	57 (37.5)	65 (42.8)
My offending in the future will provide me with money for drinking	37 (24.4)	44 (28.9)	71 (46.7)
My offending in the future will provide me with money for the lifestyle I want	56 (36.9)	50 (32.8)	46 (30.3)
My offending in the future will provide me with money			

Table 2

Young offenders' perceived evaluations of consequences resulting from future offending (*N* = 152)

	Completely unimportant for me (Score 1,2)	Neither important nor unim- portant for me (Score 3,4,5)	Very important for me (Score 6,7)
	<i>N</i> (%)	<i>N</i> (%)	<i>N</i> (%)
Having money to buy drugs in the future is	65 (43.3)	51 (33.5)	34 (22.3)
Having money for the life- style I want in the future is	6 (7.2)	46 (30.3)	100 (65.8)
Having money for drinking in the future is	85 (55.9)	46 (30.3)	21 (13.8)
Having excitement in my life in the future is	7 (4.6)	50 (33)	95 (62.5)
Staying out of jail in the future is	4 (2.6)	12 (7.9)	136 (89.5)
Having my freedom in the future is	4 (2.7)	9 (5.9)	139 (91.5)
Being able to find a job in the future is	7 (4.6)	34 (22.4)	111 (86.8)
Having contact with my family in the future is	6 (4)	13 (8.6)	133 (87.5)
Being able to cope with life in the future is	1 (.7)	35 (23)	116 (76.3)
Trying not to embarrass my family in the future is	7 (4.6)	28 (18.4)	117 (77)
Having contact with my friends who offend in the future is	54 (35.5)	76 (50.1)	22 (14.4)
Having contact with my friends who do not offend in the future is	10 (6.5)	50 (32.9)	87 (57.2)

perceived as neither agreeing nor disagreeing. In Table 4 it can be seen that the majority of the young offenders found their mothers and girlfriends' views very important, while less than half found their fathers' views as important. Friends' views were for most of the young offenders rather neutral.

Table 5 illustrates the young offenders' perceptions of control over certain factors that could inhibit future offending and Table 6 illustrates their perceptions that these factors can potentially help them to stop offending in the future. About two-thirds of the young offenders perceived themselves as able to find a job in the

**Table 3****Young offenders' perceptions of important referents' agreement with their future offending**

	Strongly disagree (Score 1,2)	Neither agree nor disagree (Score 3,4,5)	Strongly agree (Score 6,7)
	<i>N</i> (%)	<i>N</i> (%)	<i>N</i> (%)
Mother agrees with offending	121 (82.3)	25 (16.5)	1 (.7)
Father agrees with offending	96 (69.1)	41 (27)	2 (1.3)
Girlfriend agrees with offending	98 (71.5)	35 (23)	4 (2.6)
Friends who offend agree with offending	3 (2)	88 (57.8)	61 (40.2)
Friends who <i>do not offend</i> agree with offending	58 (40)	80 (52.6)	7 (4.6)

**Table 4****Young offenders' motivation to comply with important referents' views**

	Very unimportant (Score 1,2)	Neither important nor unimportant (Score 3,4,5)	Very important (Score 6,7)
	<i>N</i> (%)	<i>N</i> (%)	<i>N</i> (%)
Mother's view important	9 (5.9)	32 (21.1)	106 (69.8)
Father's view important	24 (15.8)	50 (32.9)	65 (42.7)
Girlfriend's view important	3 (2)	40 (26.3)	94 (61.8)
Friends' who offend view important	35 (23)	107 (70.4)	10 (6.6)
Friends' who <i>do not offend</i> view important	6 (4)	103 (67.8)	36 (23.7)

future and getting support from their families. About half of them were able or thought it easy to have money, moving away and making a new start, being away from their peer group, keep calm when provoked and stop taking drugs. Around a third found it easy to stop drinking in the future, while a comparable percentage found it difficult.

About two-thirds of the young offenders believed that having support from their families, stopping drinking and having a house and money will stop them from offending in the future. Overall most of the factors that have been identified by the original interviews with open-ended questions were perceived by the majority of the young offenders as helpful in desisting from offending in

Table 5

Young offenders' perceived control over certain factors that inhibit future offending (*N* = 152)

	Out of my control (Score 1,2)	Neither out nor under my control (Score 3,4,5)	Under my control (Score 6,7)
	<i>N</i> (%)	<i>N</i> (%)	<i>N</i> (%)
Getting a job in the future is	16 (10.5)	34 (22.3)	102 (67.1)
Having support from my family in the future is	20 (13.2)	37 (24.3)	95 (62.5)
Having a house in the future is	39 (25.7)	51 (33.5)	62 (40.8)
Having money in the future is	28 (18.4)	40 (26.3)	84 (55.2)
Moving away and making a new start in the future is	31 (20.4)	41 (26.9)	80 (52.6)

  

	Difficult (Score 1,2)	Neither difficult nor easy (Score 3,4,5)	Easy (Score 6,7)
	<i>N</i> (%)	<i>N</i> (%)	<i>N</i> (%)
Being away from the same old delinquent friends in the future is	24 (15.8)	52 (34.2)	76 (50)
Keeping calm when I am provoked in the future is	13 (8.6)	64 (42.1)	75 (49.4)
Stopping drinking in the future is	45 (30)	49 (32.3)	56 (36.8)
Being off drugs in the future is	34 (24.1)	33 (21.7)	74 (48.7)

the future. A third believed that stopping taking drugs would help them stop offending in the future, a third believed it would not, and an equal percentage was not sure. About the influence of the their peer group, most of the young offenders were not sure whether being away from them would help or not.

#### **Legal, institutional and sociodemographic features of young offenders and their relations with cognitive representations of offending behaviour in the future**

A further objective of the study was to explore any differences in the way young offenders cognitively represent their future offending according to several features that have been associated with juvenile delinquency in general and chronic of-

**Table 6****Young offenders' perceptions that certain factors will inhibit future offending (N = 152)**

	False (Score 1,2)	Neither false nor true (Score 3,4,5)	True (Score 6,7)
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
Getting a job will help me to stop offending in the future	12 (7.9)	55 (36.2)	85 (55.9)
Having a house will help me to stop offending in the future	5 (3.3)	52 (34.1)	95 (62.5)
My stopping drinking will help me to stop offending in the future	20 (13.3)	34 (22.3)	96 (63.2)
Keeping calm when I am provoked will help me to stop offending in the future	46 (30.3)	74 (48.7)	32 (21)
Having money will help me to stop offending in the future	5 (3.3)	55 (36.2)	92 (60.6)
Moving away and making a new start will help me to stop offending in the future	5 (3.3)	57 (37.5)	90 (59.2)
Being away from the same old delinquent friends will help me to stop offending in the future	30 (19.7)	77 (50.6)	45 (29.6)
Having support from my family will help me to stop offending in the future	10 (6.6)	39 (25.6)	103 (67.8)
Being off drugs will help me to stop offending in the future	45 (31.9)	48 (31.6)	48 (31.6)

fending in particular. This aim was mainly approached in an exploratory way since no theoretical propositions have been advanced about the particular social factors influencing perceptions of offending, nor which factors could be solely associated with perceived evaluations or beliefs of self-efficacy to stop offending in the future.

This procedure led to a large number of comparisons with the accompanying risk of Type I errors, reporting statistical significant differences

when in fact they are not. However, the demographic characteristics that were selected were found related to juvenile delinquency and chronic offending in the literature, both empirically and theoretically, and it was expected that high risk factors would be associated with favourable representations towards future offending. Yet, as there is not really anything in the literature to guide the identification of the factors that would facilitate favourable thinking of future offending



and the possible differential relations of some factors with either attitudes, perceived control or subjective norms, these issues were explored in the present study.

A number of *t*-tests were performed to test any differences between those young offenders who have been sentenced to custody for property offences and those who have been sentenced for violent offences. Violent offenders had a more prolonged incarceration in custody for their present offence [ $t(123) = 3.7, p < .001$ ], while property offenders had a higher rate of past recidivism, defined as the sum of the number of their past incarcerations, past arrests and past non-custodial sentences, divided by their age to obtain an index of the offenders past recidivism rate [ $t(69.01) = 2.7, p = .007$ ]. It has to be noted that the operationalisation of recidivism in the present study led to a slight caveat of double counting, e.g. a past arrest could lead to imprisonment or non-custodial sentence or even neither of the two. However, the operationalisation of recidivism, in this way, allowed for more spread of offending to be measured and as Thorton (1985) has argued, no one measure of recidivism is likely to tap all the dimensions of the construct, and for this reason multiple indices of frequency of offending were used and combined.

Property offenders had a more favourable attitude towards their offending [ $t(109.7) = 3.2, p = .002$ ] and perceived themselves as less able to control their offending in the future [ $t(98.3) = 4.3, p < .001$ ] than violent offenders. The same pattern of differences between property and violent offenders was found for the indirect, belief based measure of attitude, with property offenders expressing a more positive evaluation of their offending [ $t(99.9) = 3.7, p < .001$ ], while the difference between property and violent offenders in their ability to control their offending in the future did not reach significance for the indirect measure of behavioural control.

Those young offenders who have been in residential care have spent more time in total in young offenders' institutions [ $t(150) = 3.5, p <$

$.001$ ] and started earlier their criminal career, as is evident from differences in the age at which they started showing antisocial behaviour, in comparison to those who have not been in residential care; those in residential care committed their first offence at an earlier age [ $t(150) = 3.6, p < .001$ ], were arrested earlier [ $t(150) = 4.2, p < .001$ ] and were in a young offenders' institution at an earlier age than those that have not been in residential care [ $t(150) = 4.7, p < .001$ ]. In addition, the young offenders who had an experience of residential care were more likely to have started taking drugs [ $t(139) = 2.6, p < .01$ ] and drinking alcohol at an earlier age [ $t(134) = 2.3, p < .02$ ], in comparison to those who did not. They were also less likely to perceive themselves as able to stop their offending in the future, a result that was evident for both the direct [ $t(150) = 3.1, p = .002$ ] and the indirect [ $t(136) = 2.1, p < .05$ ] measures of behavioural control, and they were more likely to hold a positive attitude towards their offending, as is evident from differences in the scores in the indirect measure of attitude [ $t(144) = 3.3, p < .001$ ], in comparison to those who had not been in residential care.

Regarding peer relationships at school, those young offenders who had overall good relationships with their classmates at school were sentenced to custody [ $t(150) = 2.5, p = .013$ ] and had started taking drugs [ $t(139) = 2.2, p < .05$ ] at an older age, had a less favourable attitude to their offending, as is evident from the indirect measure of attitude towards offending [ $t(144) = 3.1, p < .01$ ], and perceived significant others as more supportive of their offending, as is evident from the indirect subjective norm of offending [ $t(117) = 1.9, p < .05$ ], in comparison to those who did not report satisfactory peer relationships at school. Finally, the young offenders who reported to have been behaving badly at school committed their first offence [ $t(150) = 2.3, p = .018$ ] and were arrested for the first time [ $t(150) = 2.4, p = .014$ ] at an earlier age and they perceived themselves as less able to stop their offending in the future, as is evident from the

direct measure of behavioural control of stopping future offending [ $t(150) = 2.2, p < .05$ ], in comparison to those young offenders who reported good behaviour at school.

The young offenders with stable employment have spent less time, in total, in young offenders' institutions [ $t(99.63) = 2.1, p < .05$ ] than those with a more unstable employment history, committed their first offence at an older age [ $t(126) = 2.1, p < .05$ ], started taking drugs at an older age [ $t(115) = 2.3, p < .05$ ] and reported less intention to reoffend in the future [ $t(126) = 22.2, p < .05$ ]. In addition, they perceived themselves as more able to stop their offending in the future, evident from differences in both direct [ $t(126) = 2.8, p < .01$ ] and indirect [ $t(114) = 2.1, p < .05$ ] measures of PBC. Finally, those with an unstable employment history reported more favourable attitude toward their offending, as measured by the belief based attitude [ $t(121) = 2.1, p < .05$ ].

Regarding certain family characteristics of the young offenders, those whose families relied on the support of a social worker had a more positive evaluation of their offending, as measured by either a direct [ $t(149) = 2.7, p < .01$ ] or an indirect [ $t(143) = 3.6, p < .001$ ] measure of attitude, were more likely to intend to re-offend in the future [ $t(149) = 1.9, p = .052$ ], although not statistically significant, in comparison to those young offenders whose families did not have support from a social worker, while those young offenders whose families relied on the financial support of the State received social benefits, started drug misuse at an earlier age [ $t(138) = 2.3, p < .05$ ], in comparison to those young offenders whose families of origin did not receive social benefits. Those young offenders who came from a family of which someone had served a custodial sentence, mainly the father or an older brother, started taking drugs [ $t(138) = 2.7, p < .01$ ], committed their first offence [ $t(149) = 4.1, p < .001$ ], were arrested for the first time [ $t(149) = 3.9, p < .001$ ] and served a custodial sentence [ $t(149) = 3.7, p < .001$ ] at an earlier age than those

whose family members did not serve a custodial sentence. Age of starting drug misuse was significantly earlier for those young offenders who came from a family who used drugs [ $t(138) = 3.1, p < .01$ ] and they perceived themselves as less able to stop future re-offending [ $t(149) = 2.1, p < .05$ ], in comparison to those participants who did not report drug misuse in their families. The same pattern was also observed for the incidence of alcohol abuse in the family. They felt less able to stop their future offending behaviour [ $t(149) = 2.4, p < .05$ ] and were more likely to have started taking drugs at an earlier age [ $t(138) = 3.1, p < .01$ ], in comparison to those youngsters whose families did not experience alcohol use problems. In addition, those young offenders that came from an alcohol using family were more likely to evaluate their offending in a positive way [ $t(143) = 2.3, p < .05$ ], in comparison to those who did not report alcohol use in the family.

Certain features of the young offenders were examined, which are of relevance to their post incarceration way of living. Their living situation after custody appears to be of high salience, as those who expect to experience an unstable living situation after custody report higher intention to reoffend in the future [ $t(149) = 2.9, p < .01$ ], perceive their offending as resulting in positive consequences, consistently evident from higher, direct [ $t(149) = 2.3, p < .05$ ] and indirect [ $t(143) = 3.1, p < .01$ ] measures of attitude, and they perceive themselves as less able to stop offending in the future, also consistently evident from both direct [ $t(149) = 4.1, p < .001$ ] and indirect [ $t(135) = 3.3, p < .001$ ] behavioural control, in comparison to those who expected a stable living situation after their custodial sentence. Finally, they perceived that significant others were more likely to support their offending [ $t(149) = 2.1, p < .05$ ]. For the young offenders who have been using drugs, those who have being using «hard» drugs were more likely to intend to re-offend in the future [ $t(125) = 2.1, p < .05$ ] and were less able to stop offending in the future [ $t(125) = 2.1, p < .05$ ] than those who have being using «soft»

drugs. Those who responded that their drug misuse was a problem for them have spent more time in young offenders' institutions [ $t(139) = 2.3$ ,  $p < .05$ ], had committed their first offence [ $t(139) = 2.5$ ,  $p < .05$ ] and started taking drugs [ $t(139) = 3.2$ ,  $p < .01$ ] at an earlier age, in comparison to those who did not think that their drug misuse was a problem for them. They also hold a more positive attitude towards their offending [ $t(139) = 2.1$ ,  $p < .05$ ], as evident from both the direct measure of attitude and [ $t(136) = 3.2$ ,  $p < .001$ ] the indirect measure of attitude. In addition, those who thought their drug usage was not a problem for them were more able to stop their future re-offending as evident from differences in the scores of the two measures of direct [ $t(139) = 4.1$ ,  $p < .001$ ] and indirect [ $t(132.6) = 2.1$ ,  $p < .05$ ] behavioural control of future offending, in comparison to those who believed it was not.

Those who had committed a crime to get drugs had spent more time in young offenders' institutions [ $t(139) = 3.1$ ,  $p < .01$ ], committed their first offence [ $t(139) = 2.4$ ,  $p < .05$ ] and used drugs [ $t(139) = 4.8$ ,  $p < .001$ ] at an earlier age, viewed their offending more positively, as is evident from both direct [ $t(139) = 2.9$ ,  $p < .01$ ] and indirect measures of attitude [ $t(136) = 4.4$ ,  $p < .001$ ], thought they were less able to discontinue their offending in the future, as is evident from the direct measure of behaviour control of stopping future offending [ $t(139) = 2.6$ ,  $p < .01$ ], and were more likely to admit that they will intend to continue re-offending in the future [ $t(139) = 2.5$ ,  $p = .012$ ], in comparison to those young offenders that had not committed a crime to get drugs. A quite similar pattern of responses emerged for commitment of offending under the influence of drugs. Those young offenders who admitted having committed a crime under the influence of drugs had spent more time in young offenders' institutions [ $t(139) = 2.7$ ,  $p < .01$ ], they committed their first offence [ $t(139) = 3.1$ ,  $p < .01$ ], were arrested [ $t(139) = 2.4$ ,  $p = .015$ ] and started taking drugs [ $t(139) = 2.9$ ,  $p < .01$ ] at an earlier age, in comparison to those young of-

fenders who had never committed a crime under the influence of drugs. In addition, they held more positive attitude towards their offending, as is evident from differences in the scores of direct [ $t(139) = 2.6$ ,  $p < .01$ ] and indirect [ $t(136) = 3.3$ ,  $p < .001$ ] measures of attitude, and felt less able to stop their offending in the future, as is evident for differences in the scores of direct behavioural control of future discontinuation of offending [ $t(139) = 2.8$ ,  $p < .01$ ], in comparison to those who did not commit a crime under the influence of drugs.

The young offenders who admitted that they would continue taking drugs after custody intended to continue their offending behaviour in the future [ $t(122) = 3.8$ ,  $p < .001$ ], evaluated their offending in a more positive way, as is evident from differences in the scores of the direct [ $t(122) = 2.4$ ,  $p = .015$ ] and indirect [ $t(120) = 2.5$ ,  $p = .012$ ] measures of attitude, and were less able to stop offending in the future, as measured by direct behavioural control [ $t(122) = 3.2$ ,  $p < .01$ ] and indirect behavioural control [ $t(116) = 4.2$ ,  $p < .001$ ], in comparison to those young offenders who reported that they would discontinue their drug usage in the future.

Regarding the young offenders' patterns of alcohol use, the young offenders who admitted that their alcohol use was a problem for them reported higher intention to continue their offending behaviour in the future [ $t(134) = 2.1$ ,  $p < .05$ ] and perceived significant others as more supportive of their offending behaviour, as is evident from differences in the scores of the indirect measure of subjective norm towards their offending [ $t(108) = 2.5$ ,  $p = .013$ ], in comparison to those who said that their alcohol usage was not problematic for them. Those who have committed a crime because they have been drunk committed their first offence [ $t(134) = 3.4$ ,  $p < .001$ ], they were arrested for the first time [ $t(134) = 2.4$ ,  $p = .014$ ] and started drinking alcohol [ $t(134) = 3.4$ ,  $p < .001$ ] at an earlier age than those young offenders who have never committed a crime due to drinking alcohol.

Regarding indices of the young offenders' mental health, those who had been seen by either a psychiatrist or a psychologist in the community perceived themselves as less able to stop their offending behaviour in the future, as is evident from differences in the scores of both the direct [ $t(150) = 2.1, p < .05$ ] and the indirect [ $t(136) = 2.5, p < .01$ ] measures of behavioural control of discontinuation of future re-offending. In addition, they perceived significant others to be more supportive of their offending behaviour, as is evident from direct subjective norm towards offending [ $t(150) = 2.1, p < .05$ ], in comparison to those who did not see either a psychiatrist or a psychologist in the community. Those young offenders who saw a psychiatrist or a psychologist in custody had spent more time in young offenders' institutions [ $t(150) = 2.8, p < .01$ ], had been in a young offenders' institution at an earlier age [ $t(150) = 3.1, p < .01$ ], had a more positive attitude towards offending, as is evident from indirect measure of attitude towards offending [ $t(144) = 2.2, p < .05$ ], and perceived significant others as less supportive of their offending behaviour, as is evident from indirect measure of subjective norm towards offending [ $t(117) = 2.1, p < .05$ ], in comparison to those who did not see either a psychologist or psychiatrist in custody. Finally, those young offenders who had attempted to commit suicide or to injure themselves perceived significant others to be less supportive of their offending behaviour, as is evident from indirect subjective norm towards offending [ $t(117) = 2.4, p = .016$ ], in comparison to those young offenders who did not attempt suicide.

Regarding the young offenders' rate of past re-offending, defined as the sum of the number of times they had been held in custody, number of times they had been arrested and number of non-custodial sentences they had received in the past divided by their age, it was higher in the those young offenders who had been, at the time of the data collection, sentenced to custody for property offences [ $t(69.1) = 2.7, p < .01$ ], in comparison

to those who had been sentenced for violent offences, those who have been in residential care [ $t(125.8) = 3.1, p = .01$ ], in comparison to those who had not, those who had bad relations with their peers at school [ $t(150) = 2.1, p < .05$ ], in comparison to those who reported satisfactory peer relationships at school, those who came from a family with alcohol abuse problems [ $t(125.5) = 2.5, p = .012$ ], in comparison to those whose families did not have such a problem, those who admitted to have committed a crime in order to get drugs [ $t(139) = 2.5, p = .011$ ], in comparison to those who did not commit a crime to get drugs, and those who have committed a crime because they were under the influence of drugs [ $t(139) = 2.3, p = .02$ ], in comparison to those who have not.

## Discussion

It is interesting to note which characteristics are directly related with expressed intentions on behalf of the young offenders to continue their offending behaviour in the future.

Those young offenders who have been using «hard» drugs were more likely to intend to re-offend in the future, those who had committed a crime to get drugs were more likely to admit that they will intend to continue re-offending in the future, and the young offenders who admitted that they would continue taking drugs after custody intended to continue their offending behaviour in the future. The results are in accord with studies showing that substance abuse is related with increased delinquency (Myer et al., 1998).

Their living situation after custody appears to be of high salience, as those who expect to experience an unstable living situation after custody report higher intention to re-offend in the future. The young offenders with stable employment reported less intention to re-offend in the future. Young offenders whose families relied on the support of a social worker were more likely to intend to re-offend in the future (McLoyd, 1998).

It is evident that drug use is a prominent problem among the population of young offenders, which creates criminogenic needs in the future which could be foreseen by the youngsters. At the same time, they perceive that offending could be a way of satisfying these needs, as almost half of the sample (48%) believe that their future offending behaviour will enable them to get money for drugs, and from this point of view it is not surprising that they report higher intentions to re-offend in the future.

In addition, several indices of social instability likely to be present in their future appear to be criminogenic as well. That is, an unstable living situation after custody, unstable employment and family's reliance on support from a social worker, all create a rather pressing situation highly likely to be criminogenic. The results are in accordance with a host of studies reporting similar results (Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1998; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Loeber & Dishion, 1983; Ganzer & Sarason, 1973; Farrington & West, 1993; Myner et al., 1998). The implications from these results are that both drug addiction should be targeted by the prison service, and that the young offenders could be further supported upon release so as to be able to deal with many practical problems likely to face after custody.

From the results section it is also evident that certain characteristics of the young offenders were consistently related with different forms of operationalisations of their cognitive representations of future offending.

Property offenders, those whose families relied on the support of a social worker, those who expected to experience an unstable living situation after custody, those who responded that their drug misuse was a problem for them, those who had committed a crime to get drugs and the young offenders who admitted that they would continue taking drugs after custody evaluated their future offending behaviour in a more positive way, as is evident from consistent endorsement of more positive attitudes to both direct and belief-based operationalisations of the construct,

in comparison to the inmates to whom the aforementioned characteristics did not apply.

The young offenders who have been in residential care, those with unstable employment, those who expect to experience an unstable living situation after custody, those who thought their drug usage was a problem for them, those young offenders who admitted that they would continue taking drugs after custody, and those who had been seen by either a psychiatrist or a psychologist in the community, they all perceived themselves as less able to stop their offending behaviour in the future, consistently from both direct and belief-based measures of perceived behavioural control over future offending behaviour, in comparison to the inmates to whom the relevant characteristics did not apply.

Regarding the young offenders' rate of past re-offending, defined as the sum of the number of times they had been held in custody, number of times they had been arrested and number of non-custodial sentences they had received in the past divided by their age, it was higher in the young offenders who had been, at the time of the data collection, sentenced to custody for property offences, in comparison to those who had been sentenced for violent offences, which is in accord with the results of Farrington and Lambert (1994), those who have been in residential care in comparison to those who had not, those who had bad relations with their peers at school in comparison to those who reported satisfactory peer relationships at school, those who came from a family with alcohol abuse problems in comparison to those whose families did not have such a problem, those who admitted to have committed a crime in order to get drugs in comparison to those who did not commit a crime to get drugs, and those who have committed a crime because they were under the influence of drugs in comparison to those who have not. It has to be noted that alcohol abuse and group home placement were found significantly related with an index of past recidivism in a study by Myner et al. (1998), who examined certain variables related to recidivism.

However, it is of interest to note that those who either had committed a crime to get drugs or because they were under the influence of drugs reported a higher rate of past recidivism in comparison to those who had not. This pattern does not only points to the problem of drug use as a criminogenic need, but allows for some speculation in the possible ways drug use could be related to persistent criminal behaviour (Myer et al., 1998). That is, criminal activity could be induced either when the youngsters have used drugs, which lessens their self-regulation and self-control, or as a way to get drugs.

It has to be noted that the main aim of the study is a descriptive analysis of the sample of young offenders and an initial exploration of the relations of certain background characteristics of the young offenders and their cognitive representations of their future offending behaviour, and this is the main reason that multivariate techniques to reduce and summarise the data and examine the relative importance of variables were not used.

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