

YOUTH SURVEY

- why young people's lawfulness in Denmark is spreading



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by

Flemming Balvig

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The Danish Crime Prevention Council

Odinsvej 19, 2.

DK-2600 Glostrup

Phone: +45 43 44 88 88

Fax: +45 33 43 01 39

dkr@dkr.dk

www.dkr.dk

Author:

Doctor of Law, professor Flemming Balvig

Printed by:

JP Trykservice Køge

Printed number:

500

DKR.nr.: 06-401-0377

ISBN 978-87-88789-78-2

May 2007

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1. Introduction¹

The number of young delinquents has declined in Denmark. This is the most distinctive feature that can be read from the attempts to disclose the trend in crimes actually perpetrated by young people in recent decades. The starting point for these attempts was the so-called Gladsaxe Survey from 1979, where 8th-grade pupils (i.e. 14-15 years old) in the municipality of Gladsaxe described the crimes they had actually committed in a comprehensive anonymous questionnaire.² The Gladsaxe Survey from 1979 was not the first 'self-reporting survey' conducted in Denmark – that had been done already in the early 1960's³ – but it is the only one that has been repeated several times in a manner permitting comparison and which can therefore be used as a forecast for future trends. The most recent survey was conducted in 2005, making total of four surveys to date: 1979, 1989/90,⁴ 1999⁵ and 2005⁶. Since the surveys have also included young people from Allerød and the north of Jutland starting in 1989/90, it seems reasonable to claim that the past

¹ The present report is an extract of Fleming Balvig's book *Den Ungdom! Om den stadigt omsiggribende lovlydighed blandt unge i Danmark (Youth survey - why young people's lawfulness in Denmark is spreading. In Danish)*. Copenhagen: The Danish Crime Prevention Council, 2006. The extract contains a description of the survey's methodology, a summary of the survey itself and selected tables from the book that illuminate some of the central points.

² Flemming Balvig: *Ungdomskriminalitet i en forstads Kommune (Juvenile delinquency in a suburb. In Danish)*. Copenhagen: The Danish Crime Prevention Council, 1982. Nine associated reports elaborating on the subject were published by Gladsaxe local authority in 1979-82. The survey method is examined in the first of these reports: Flemming Balvig: *Ungdomskriminalitet i en forstads Kommune (Juvenile delinquency in a suburb. Report No. 1: Outline and implementation of the interview study. In Danish)*. Gladsaxe local authority, August 1979. This report also includes a copy of the questionnaire used.

³ Vagn Greve: *Kriminalitet som normalitet (Crime as norm. In Danish)* Copenhagen: Juristforbundets Forlag, 1972.

⁴ Flemming Balvig & Britta Kyvsgaard: *Allerødderne og kriminalitet. Ungdomsundersøgelsen i Allerød 1990. (Allerød youth and crime. Youth survey in Allerød 1990. In Danish)* Copenhagen: The Danish Crime Prevention Council, December 1990. Five associated reports elaborating on the subject were published by the University of Copenhagen November-December 1990. Also: Britta Kyvsgaard: *Ny ungdom? Om familie, skole, fritid, lovlydighed og kriminalitet. (New youth? About family, school, spare time, law-abidingness and crime. In Danish)*. Copenhagen: Jurist- og Økonomforbundets Forlag, 1992. Associated report: Britta Kyvsgaard: *Rapport om ungdoms-undersøgelsens materiale og metode (Report on the material and method of the youth survey. In Danish)*. Copenhagen: Institute of Criminology and Criminal Law, University of Copenhagen, 1992.

⁵ Flemming Balvig: *RisikoUngdom. Ungdomsundersøgelse 1999 (Youth at Risk. Youth Survey 1999. In Danish)*. Copenhagen: The Danish Crime Prevention Council, 2000 (English summary: Flemming Balvig: *Youth at Risk. A Youth Survey*, The Danish Crime Prevention Council, 2001).

⁶ Flemming Balvig: *Den ungdom! Om den stadigt omsiggribende lovlydighed blandt unge i Danmark (Youth survey - why young people's lawfulness in Denmark is spreading. In Danish)*. Copenhagen: The Danish Crime Prevention Council, 2006.

three surveys can be seen as a good indicator of the situation for young people in Denmark as a whole.

The overriding view of youth and crime behind these surveys is as follows: Juvenile delinquency is a problem first and foremost because it is often a symptom of other current and serious problems for young people in their everyday lives, and because it often concerns acts that may lead to problems for them later on in their lives.

2. The survey

It is important to understand the basis on which the conclusion about the recent decade's decline in juvenile delinquency is founded. Many facets and aspects of that basis are important.

First, it is important to note that the survey deals with *actual* crime; in other words, as we know from the surveys, not merely the *small* part of the total criminality registered by, say, the Police, or which has come to the parents' knowledge.

Second, it is *self-reported* actual crime, meaning that over-reporting as well as under-reporting may occur. Generally speaking, however, experience with the method applied is extremely good. The anonymous questioning and the circumstances around it seem to have given the answers extremely good credibility, also in the present survey. This is shown by various forms of analysis of the responses (consistency checks, etc.), from comments many of the young people added to the questionnaires, as well as from the participation reports, which were completed by each of the teachers present giving their impressions of the process.

Third, the survey claims to be about *crime*. This is a claim with certain modifications, indeed, many and important ones. In view of the fact that it deals with self-reported crime, it is appropriate to emphasise, first and foremost, that the answers are based on the youngsters' own experience and subjective definitions – rather than judicial/legal analyses or decisions. Furthermore, the 'crimes' discussed and highlighted are far from all *possible* crimes. Thus, there is no discussion of sexual offences, software piracy, or the handling of stolen goods, nor – largely – violations of the Road Traffic Act. The focus is first and foremost on theft and, although to a lesser degree, violence and vandalism; that is, a substantial part of what is normally referred to as 'traditional criminal offences'. Moreover, a large part of the 'crimes' being investigated are possible offences perpetrated by children and

young people under the age of criminal responsibility (which is 15 in Denmark). The propriety of calling these acts 'crimes' is highly debateable, legally as well as ethically. The use of concepts has consequences. Whether we talk about summary offences, crimes, conflicts, boyish pranks, advanced games, troublesome conduct, incidents, accidents, problematic behaviour, etc. is not immaterial to the picture the concepts create – and the consequences this may have. We have chosen to 'solve' this important problem – as in earlier reports on these surveys – by varying the usage along the way and avoiding overly rigid forms of concepts. There is, however, one important exception: the references to the four groups of youngsters according to criminal behaviour, which was established in the 1979 Survey and which we will be using in the 2005 Survey as well as in a large part of the analyses and comparisons. In order to avoid excessive confusion, it has been appropriate here to maintain a consistent usage, and we have chosen to adopt the terminology used in the 1989 Surveys. Accordingly, the four groups of criminal behaviour are defined as follows:

THE LAW-ABIDING are the young people who have never committed theft/robbery and at most have stolen money, cigarettes or liquor from their parents on a single occasion.

THE MAJORITY are the young people who have committed minor theft. All youngsters in this group have violated at least one of the rules of the Criminal Code, but none has committed burglary, car theft or robbery.

THE EXPERIENCED are young people who have once or twice committed relatively serious theft, i.e., burglary, car theft and/or robbery. It is burglary in most cases.

THE RECIDIVISTS are young people who have three times or more committed relatively serious theft, i.e., burglary, car theft and/or robbery. It is burglary in most cases.

We will also occasionally use a more summary grouping that combines the four groups into two:

NON-CRIMINALS = THE LAW-ABIDING + THE MAJORITY.

CRIMINALS = THE EXPERIENCED + THE RECIDIVISTS.

Fourth, not all young people in the age group (i.e. between 14 and 15) and within the geographical areas we set out to illuminate have participated in the survey. This is due to two factors: one concerning the sampling method used and the second concerning non-responses. To take the sampling method first: not all youngsters attend a municipal elementary school, and thus we do not have responses from them, as the surveys are conducted under the auspices of the municipal elementary school forum. It must therefore be emphasised that the survey deals only with *municipal elementary school* pupils. This issue is not only relevant in terms of the groups to which the survey results can be generalised. If there are discrepancies among different surveys, this may also affect the opportunities for comparison. The 1979 Survey contains no information about the number of 8th graders who did not attend ordinary municipal elementary school at the time. The figure was estimated at 3-4 % in 1989, and was probably higher in 1999 and still higher in 2005 - probably about 10 %. The increase is caused, in particular, by the growth in private schools and the rise in the number of 8th graders attending continuation schools. The screening for private schools and continuation schools, etc., can work both ways in terms of criminal behaviour. In order to assess this problem, the 2005 Survey was conducted in a number of the private schools, continuation schools and special schools (county colleges, production schools, etc.) relevant to the geographical areas. The schools in question number 11 with 143 pupils at 8th grade level - and with a response rate of 84%. In the overall material, the inclusion or non-inclusion of these answers typically accounts for only a few decimal points. There is thus no reason to assume that this

type of sampling method significantly affects the results of the 2005 Survey *per se*, but one cannot rule out that it may somehow – and in a direction that cannot be determined – affect the comparisons over time.

The problem with non-responses concerns the elementary school youngsters who attended the selected classes but were absent from school on the day the survey was conducted - or who did not wish to participate, etc. The total number of those who did not participate - mainly because of illness or vacation - is 9%. The proportion of non-responses is somewhat lower than in earlier surveys, cf. Tables 2.1. and 2.2.

Table 2.1. Number of pupils who answered the questionnaire

	1979	1989/90	1999	2005
Gladsaxe (8th)	748	473	302	439
Allerød (8+9th)*		576	366	558
North Jutland (8th)		600	433	521
TOTAL		1,649	1,101	1,518

* 2005: 283 in 8th grade and 275 in 9th grade.

Table 2.2. Response rate

	1979	1989/90	1999	2005
Gladsaxe (8th)	83%	88%	82%	84%
Allerød (8+9th)*		89%	87%	94%
North Jutland (8th)		94%	92%	95%
TOTAL		90%	87%	91%

* 2005: 91% in 8th grade and 96% in 9th grade.

Fifth, the survey is not *prima facie* nationwide. It was conducted in three areas of the country: the ‘big city’ (suburban neighbourhood Gladsaxe), the ‘town’ (Allerød) and the ‘village/countryside’ (North Jutland). It is a predominant feature of the results

– in the earlier as well as the current survey – that differences between the areas are not great, either in terms of crimes or otherwise. If, furthermore, we look at the answers globally, then there is fine consistency with other nationwide studies of 14-to-15-year-olds' circumstances in various parameters - such as recreational habits, housing conditions, family constellations, etc. In that light, it seems safe to say that if we look at the answers globally in 2005 as well as in 1989/90 and 1999 – in Gladsaxe, Allerød and North Jutland – then it is a good indicator of how things were in Denmark as a whole for 8th-grade youngsters in elementary school. Therefore - in our tables, figures and text - we take the liberty of regarding the answers globally as representing “the whole country”.

3. The trend of juvenile delinquency

It appears from Fig. 3.1 that from 1989 to 2005 there has been a rise in the number of young people who have never committed crimes in the form of typical traditional criminal offences. An ever-increasing proportion of the youngsters have become ever more law-abiding. In 1989, 25% of the young people had not committed any crimes: in 1999 the figure was 36% and in 2005, 39%.

Fig. 3.1. Distribution by percentage of young people in the criminal behaviour groups for the whole country: 1989, 1999 and 2005.

	Law-abiding	Majority	Experienc.	Recidivists		
1989						
1999						
2005						
	0%	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
		1989	1999	2005		
Law-abiding		25.1	35.9	39.4		
Majority		66.2	57.5	52.2		
Experienc.		6	4	6.3		
Recidivists		2.7	2.6	2		

In contrast, the proportion of young persons who have committed more serious forms of crimes - such as burglary, car theft, or robbery - has remained virtually unchanged: 9% in 1989, 7% in 1999, and 8% in 2005. The percentage of recidivists is between 2% and 3% in all three surveys.

The trend for boys and girls

During the 1990's there was increasing focus on the crimes committed by women, girls in particular. The reason was a

number of spectacular episodes involving girls and apparently special related problems in certain areas. When comparing the 1999 Survey with the survey from 1989, it was not possible to record major differences between boys and girls in the development of criminal involvement, except that the shift towards law-abidingness was somewhat more pronounced for boys than for girls, narrowing the difference between the two genders' level of criminal behaviour.

Over the past few years from 1999 to 2005, the trend towards a greater number of law-abiding youngsters has continued for boys (19% of the boys were law-abiding in 1989, 32% in 1999, and 39% in 2005). The proportion of boys who have committed relatively serious crimes is fairly constant at 11-13% throughout the period.

The trend for girls differs from the trend for boys in that over the past few years there has been *no* increase in the proportion of law-abiding girls. The proportion of law-abiding girls is the same in 2005 as in 1999 - about 40%. In addition, the proportion of girls who have committed relatively serious crimes has risen from 2% to 5%.

Immigrants

In recent years the debate over the trend of juvenile delinquency has often focused on and revolved around the significance of ethnic differences. This is despite the fact that it is not scientifically obvious why precisely a classification according to ethnic criteria might be interesting, and – in particular – how, if so, it is to be interpreted. On the face of it, there are many other factors which, considering their force, have the same or even greater social significance, but which at this time far more rarely form the starting point for debate on crime policy – such as, for example, socio-economic conditions.

The youth surveys did not directly address the ethnic affiliation, but the 1999 and 2005 Surveys did, among other things, ask

respondents if they were born in Denmark or elsewhere. This is the reason for the heading to this section: 'Immigrants'. The proportion of law-abiding citizens has increased among young people not born in Denmark. Indeed, the increase is far more pronounced than for people born in Denmark, rising from 24% in 1999 to 45% in 2005; almost a doubling in other words. At the same time, there has also been a doubling of the proportion of youngsters born outside Denmark who have committed relatively serious crimes. The proportion of young people who were not born in Denmark and who have been guilty of three or more serious forms of crime (recidivists) has increased from 2% to 7% from 1999 to 2005.

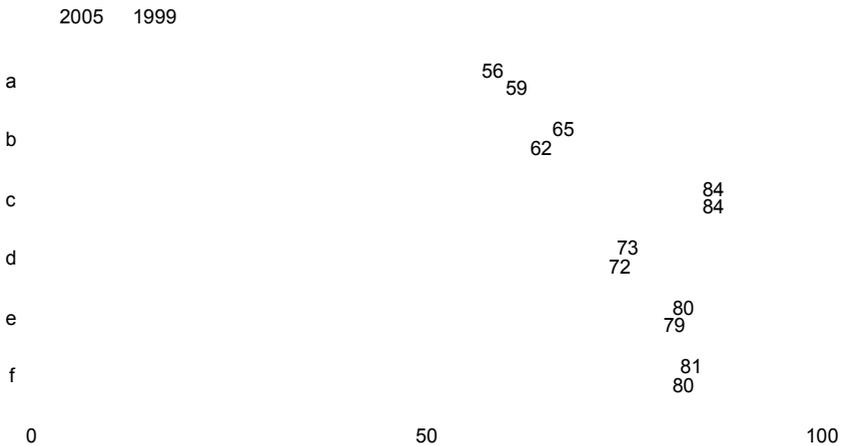
In 1999 the proportion of law-abiding youngsters was higher among those born in Denmark compared with young people not born in Denmark. In 2005 this trend has reversed. In 1999 there was very little difference in the proportion of criminals among young people born in Denmark and those who were not. In 2005 the difference is pronounced. This can also be explained by a polarisation effect (which will be referred to and discussed further later in this section) that has far more strongly affected young people born outside Denmark than those born in Denmark. For the young people not born in Denmark, the polarisation effect has been so strong that 'the Majority' is no longer a majority. In 1999 there were 67% in this group: in 2005 it was 39%. Of course, in evaluating this trend, one must keep in mind that the numbers of young people born outside Denmark participating in the survey are relatively small and thus subject to great uncertainty.

Violence and bullying

It was not until the 2005 Survey that it was possible to say anything about the violence trend nationwide. It appears from Fig. 3.2 that in 1999 as well as in 2005 most youths were not involved in violence, either as victims or as perpetrators. Violence affects and is committed by a minority of those between 14 and 15 years

of age. The differences between 1999 and 2005 are infinitesimal. The small differences actually observed point in different directions. The safest conclusion must be that the proportion of young people who are involved in violence in one way or the other is unchanged during the relevant period.

Fig. 3.2. Percentage of youngsters not involved in violence in the past year, 1999 and 2005



As 'victim':

- A: Percentage who have not witnessed other young people in a brawl or have been violent during the past year
- B: Percentage who have not been threatened with a beating during the past year
- C: Percentage who have not been hit or beaten up during the past year

As 'perpetrator':

- D: Percentage who have not been in a brawl during the past year
- E: Percentage who have not threatened others with a beating during the past year
- F: Percentage who have not hit or beaten up others during the past year

As in the case of 'general crimes' (i.e., notably theft), there seem to be differences between girls' and boys' involvement in violence: There is thus a consistent trend showing that the proportion of boys involved in violence has dropped from 1999

to 2005, whereas it seems that the proportion of girls involved in violence has increased somewhat in recent years.

The levels of violence for boys and girls have approached each other due to the differences in trend, but in 2005 there was still a markedly greater proportion of boys than of girls involved in violence. For example, in 2005 38% of the boys had been in a brawl during the past year – compared to 17% of the girls; more than twice as many, in fact.

Polarisation and exclusion

There is no doubt that juvenile delinquency is still basically best characterised as ‘crime as norm’, and that it is a matter of ‘shades of grey’. However, the present survey and the overall trend seem to indicate that in recent decades there has been polarisation in the sense that there are now relatively fewer in the middle group, in terms of criminal behaviour, where most young people are otherwise found. The proportion of those youngsters who are not quite law-abiding but who have not committed more serious crimes either – the Majority – has become increasingly smaller and is now only a little more than 50% (cf. Fig. 3.1). In other words, the picture has become more black-and-white: Either you have committed many crimes – including relatively serious crimes – or else you have been and are extremely law-abiding, at least in terms of the forms of criminal behaviour covered in the self-reporting surveys.

A particularly unpleasant aspect of the polarisation process is the increase in the *number* of criminal acts committed by the young criminals, as well as the *more serious nature* of these acts in the form of a greater degree of violence. The extent of ‘violence’ carried out by law-abiding youngsters has not increased, while the opposite is the case among the Criminals, especially among the Recidivists. In 2005, 82% of the Recidivists have hit or beaten up others at least twice within the past year prior to the time of questioning. Six years earlier in 1999, it was ‘only’ 50%.

The polarisation process also seems to be accompanied by marginalisation, and not 'merely' in the sense that the law-abiding become more law-abiding and the criminals more criminal. Marginalisation continues in the sense that the law-abiding remain 'untouched' in respects other than with regard to criminal behaviour, whereas the criminals become more 'marked' or disadvantaged. One example is the use of euphoriant: There were far more daily smokers among criminals than among non-criminals in 2005, and - now as before - almost none of the law-abiding youth had smoked hash three or more times in their lifetime (1-2%). Among the criminals, the figures for who had tried to smoke hash three or more times in their lifetime were 11% in 1989, 28% in 1999 and 36% in 2005.

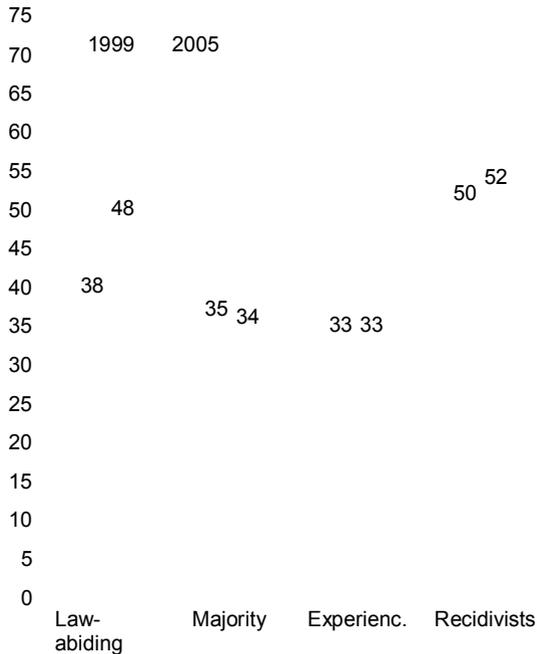
Thus, the use of euphoriant (tobacco, alcohol and hash) is closely interrelated and connected with the polarisation process that has been going on. One of the consequences of the significantly higher and more comprehensive use of alcohol, tobacco and hash must be that it has become more expensive to belong to the 'criminal' group of young people in 2005 than it used to be, both in absolute terms and in relation to the 'non-criminal' youngsters. Perhaps it is therefore also reasonable to talk about a concomitant economic or cost-wise polarisation of the young people.

When the contrast between persons or groups becomes greater, it is typically also accompanied by less acceptance. The line between the groups becomes more difficult to cross because the relative acceptance becomes greater among those who are like you, rather than among those who are different. Almost invariably, polarisation is therefore typically also accompanied by exclusion, which in turn emphasises or increases the polarisation. It becomes a vicious circle. The presumption is that a drop in the number of young people who are, so to speak, bridge-builders between the law-abiding and the criminals (i.e., a drop in the number of young persons who belong to the Majority) can act as a safeguard against criminal activity by the law-abiding.

That is the positive side. It can, however, also be an obstacle to preventing the criminals from stopping their criminal conduct so that, instead, they continue or augment their illegal activities.

We can gain an impression of how rigidly the young people of 2005 see their situation with regard to crime, and how the trend looks in that respect, by asking whether they agree or disagree with the statement: "Once a criminal, always a criminal" (Fig. 3.3).

Fig. 3.3. Percentage of youngsters in 1999 and 2005 who agree with the statement: "Once a criminal – always a criminal", in relation to how 'criminal' they are (whole country).



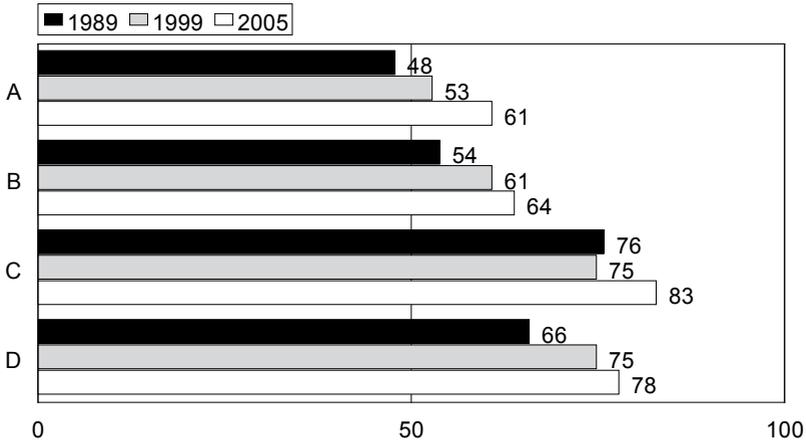
It is interesting to note that acceptance of the statement “Once a criminal, always a criminal” is most pronounced among the Recidivists – the most criminal of the young people. More than half of the Recidivists accept the statement. Thus to the extent that they see or regard themselves as ‘criminals’, they consider that this status cannot or will not change. Next in line is the group of law-abiding youngsters, where almost as many – 48% – express an equally categorical attitude. The most widespread view that having committed a crime does not necessarily mean that you will be a criminal forever is found among the young people who have committed petty crimes, and among those who have committed only one or two relatively serious criminal offences.

It is also noteworthy that the perceptions of exclusion have been intensified from 1999 until 2005. To a greater extent than previously, the most law-abiding as well as the most criminal believe that: “Once a criminal, always a criminal”.

Is there an explanation for this trend?

The most convincing explanation of why there is an increasing proportion of law-abiding youngsters is augmented ‘future awareness’. This awareness is a result of the fact that today’s youngsters have become more ‘liberated’ and ‘future-conscious’, as well as more selective about their education and job preferences. One result of future awareness is that the young people will not let themselves be guided primarily by their immediate desires and what is ‘fun’ here and now, but more consciously weigh the possible gains and risks of various risk-oriented forms of behaviour. Fig. 3.4 shows the young people’s attitude toward the future and the importance of school attendance; viewed overall, it clearly documents that they have become more future-oriented.

Fig. 3.4. Young people’s attitude towards the future, 1989, 1999 and 2005 (whole country).



- A: Percentage who believe that young people think too little about the future
- B: Percentage who believe that school and education are the most important things when you are young
- C: Percentage who believe that whoever fails to do his best at school will regret it later on in life
- D: Percentage who disagree that if you don't like it, there's no reason to stay at school

By way of example, gradually more and more disagree with the statement: “If you don’t like it, there’s no reason to stay at school”. This is almost a direct ‘translation’ of what is meant by ‘future awareness’, namely that one does not simply allow oneself to be guided by one’s desires, interest in what one feels is fun and exciting here and now, but sticks to one’s course of schooling, which is the bridge to the future and one’s own adult world. In the same vein, crime, at least large segments of the traditional crimes such as theft, is simply no longer considered worth the trouble among those in the 14- to-15-year age group.

The combination of an increasingly liberated, adult-oriented and future-conscious youth living in an increasingly controlled and

monitored situation is assumed to be the principal explanation for why an increasing number of young people have 'refrained' from committing typical petty crimes in the form of e.g., shoplifting and bicycle theft. However, these factors have not reduced the number of young people who commit relatively serious crimes.

When the number of rather heavily crime-oriented youngsters has not dropped and has perhaps even increased, the reason is probably that we have not managed to reduce the proportion of young people who are not happy at school. School is the most significant catapult to a lifestyle that is risk-oriented, also in terms of crime. The number of those who are indifferent about or do not like to go to school has increased (the proportion of youngsters who like to go to school has dropped from 79% in 1999 to 74% in 2005), and so has the number who not have serious problems coping academically in the Danish elementary school (the proportion of young people who are not receiving or have never received remedial instruction has thus dropped from 80% in 1999 to 74% in 2005). Thus in certain respects there has been an increase in the number of those who have a problematic relationship to school. Changing this situation must be seen as one of the biggest and most difficult challenges ahead, if the aim is to do something about the hard-core part of juvenile delinquency, namely that part of juvenile delinquency practised by only a few per cent, but which weighs heavily in the overall picture because it involves a group that commits the most serious forms of crime and commits them frequently.

4. Other youngsters and social exaggerations

Directly as well as indirectly, young people's relationships with and within the school have great influence on their lives, and the importance of life in the peer group is especially crucial. There are, however, certain processes and relationships in peer life that are indeed reinforced and weakened by relationships with and within family and school, but which also have an independent impact on the occurrence of law-abidingness.

A project carried out among young people in Ringsted (Denmark) has highlighted the more or less well-known fact that the notions young people harbour about other youngsters' risky behaviour are often characterised by social exaggerations⁷. A social exaggeration is in existence when one believes that there are more who think or do certain things than is actually the case. In some cases it may amount to a 'majority misunderstanding', where one believes that most of the others think or do certain things, while in fact it is only a small minority who think or do so. When a social misunderstanding exists, it means that one tries to live up to a *fictitious* pressure.

The survey at hand demonstrates that there are considerable social exaggerations among 14-to-15-year-olds throughout the country about their friends' consumption of tobacco and alcohol. In contrast, the same young people have a fairly realistic picture of their friends' use of drugs and their sexual experience. And when it comes to their friends' criminal conduct and exposure to crime as well bullying, their notions are characterised by social understatement rather than exaggeration.

⁷ Flemming Balvig, Lars Holmberg and Anne-Stina Sørensen: Ringstedforsøget. Livsstil og forebyggelse i lokalsamfundet [The Ringsted Study. Lifestyle and Prevention in the Local Community. In Danish]. Copenhagen: Jurist- og Økonomiforbundets Forlag, 2005.

Because young people generally adapt their behaviour to notions about that of their peers, it is particularly in connection with the use of alcohol and euphoricants that there is a need to reduce social exaggerations.

However, the opposite seems to be the case regarding exposure to teasing, bullying and criminal behaviour from other young people. Apparently they have no knowledge of or to some extent find it difficult to see their friends as criminals or as victims. This might suggest that a major portion of 14-to-15-year-olds actually feel so bad about committing or being exposed to these forms of criminal behaviour that they keep it to themselves in relation to their friends. Not only would it be a relief for many of them to find out that they are not the only ones who have been exposed; in addition, a more realistic picture of their friends' criminality would also be a basis for understanding how one can avoid doing the things that are difficult to square with one's conscience.

14-to-15-year-olds spend a good deal of their time at school, where they socialise with their peers and form many of their friendships. On that background, it is easy to imagine that the social integration or *social capital* existing in a school class could influence 1) the notions they have of each other – and, especially, how correct or incorrect these notions are – and 2) directly or consequently, the extent and nature of the young people's risk behaviour.

Social capital is not a feature of each pupil in the class but of the class as such. A high level of social capital implies that many are mutual friends, that they like to be together, that they are good at helping each other and indeed do help each other when there is a need for it, and that they can trust each other and do not cheat or speak ill of each other. The social capital in a school class is something that can be influenced by external circumstances and clearly is influenced, for example by the

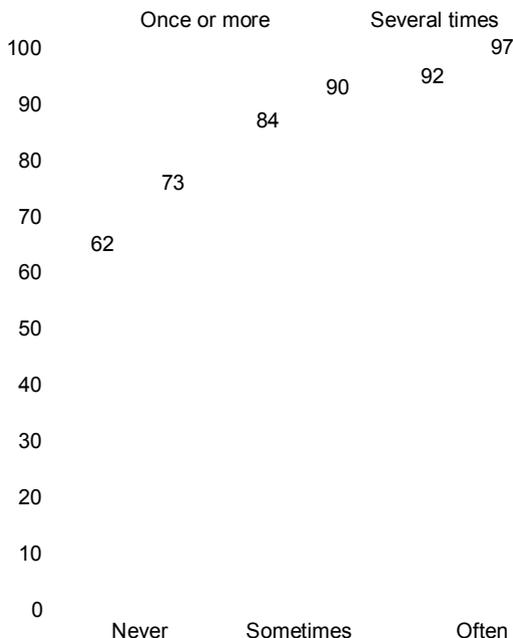
teaching methods used, and what a school or teacher initiates or carries out in the form of social initiatives. Of special significance one would imagine would be the extent to which any conflicts, problems and bullying in a class are addressed and solved – and how. The social capital is, of course, also influenced by circumstances such as class composition, etc., just as coincidence can set off a good or bad process.

The level of social capital in those classes where 14-to-15-year-olds spend a good deal of their time seems to be a matter of great importance for their notions of other young people's risk behaviour and exposure to criminality. Although the direction of the correlation is not unambiguous, results to date seem to indicate that the total involvement in risk behaviour in classes with low social capital is higher on average (24% who are currently or have within the past year been involved in or exposed to risk behaviour) than in classes with high social capital (14%).

5. Juvenile delinquency year 2005

The predominant law-abidingness is to a great extent anchored in and explained by most of the young people's good relations with family and school. This is more or less elementary criminology and documented in an endless number of studies worldwide. As already suggested, in the present survey the correlation is seen particularly for the relatively serious crimes, that is, for the risk of ending in the Experienced or Recidivist groups in terms of criminal behaviour, and is seen notably in conjunction with relations to family and school. Thus, Fig. 5.1. shows a clear correlation between the most widespread form of theft – shoplifting – and the degree of satisfaction at home.

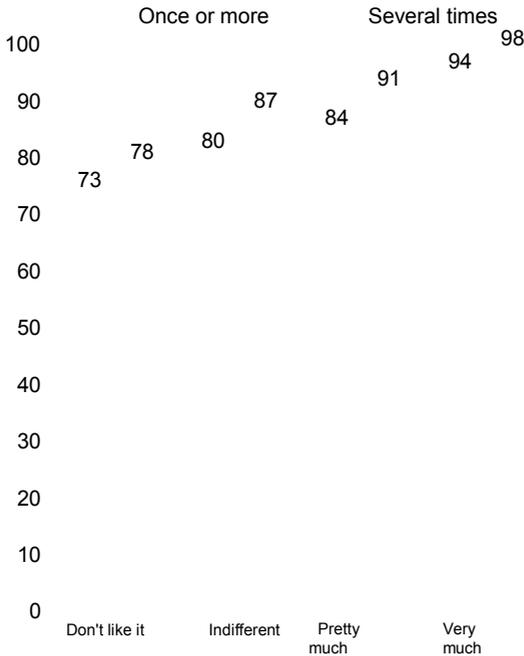
Fig. 5.1. Percentage of youngsters who have not shoplifted during the past year - against how often they enjoyed being with their parents at the weekend, 2005 (whole country).



It should be noted that the risk of having shoplifted is increased from 3% to 27% when the level of satisfaction at home is reduced from 'often' to 'never'.

Fig. 5.2 exemplifies the completely parallel relationship that exists regarding the correlation between the youngsters' degree of law-abidingness in respect of shoplifting and their relationship to school.

Fig. 5.2. Percentage of youngsters who have not shoplifted during the past year - against how much they like to go to school, 2005 (whole country)



6. Conclusion

An ever-increasing percentage of young people in Denmark follow the straight and narrow path. Almost 40% of those aged 14 and 15 have never committed anything criminal – this figure was 25% in 1989 and 36% in 1999. The survey also shows that the image of law-abiding and criminal youngsters has become more black-and-white. The law-abiding young people have become more law-abiding, and the criminals have become more criminal. However, the vast majority of the young people thrive and get along fine with their parents, their friends, at school and during their spare time. The bad news is that there has been no decline in the proportion of young people who have committed serious crimes. This percentage has been largely the same for 15 years, namely 9% in 1989, 7% in 1999, and 8% in 2005.

Concurrently with the increase in young persons' law-abidingness, the contrast between the law-abiding and the criminal youth has become more pronounced, which typically means less acceptance of each other. Both groups believe more than previously that the statement "once a criminal, always a criminal" holds water. This may be instrumental in reinforcing a trend where most criminals cannot find a way out of crime, nor are offered much help from outside to re-enter society.

The young people's (lack of) affiliation with the school is an essential risk factor for criminal conduct, because their relationship to the school is the one element in their lives that shows the greatest correlation with the volume of crimes they commit. Young people who do not thrive at school and who have major academic problems more often choose crime as an alternative route than those who enjoy going to school.

The environment in the school class also affects the young persons' well-being. A high level of 'social capital' in a school class – where the pupils like to be together, have many mutual friends

and help each other when needed – has a favourable influence on the pupils' behaviour.

Finally, we can conclude that even when considering all forms of theft, 69% have not once during the past year taken or stolen anything from others. 85% have not committed any form of vandalism, 89% have not hit or beaten up others, 90% have not threatened others with a beating, 93% have not engaged in graffiti activities, 94% have not carried a knife in unauthorised places, 98% have not individually or jointly with others threatened anyone or forcefully tried to take something not belonging to them, and more than 99% have not snatched or tried to snatch bags.

So generally, young people in Denmark are all right. They thrive and perform well at school, at home and in their spare time. Young people are comfortable with themselves, with their friends, and with adults.

