

TRENDS OF SELF-REPORTED JUVENILE DELINQUENCY IN FINLAND, 1995–2004

This report draws on a series of nationally representative self-report surveys of juvenile delinquency. The first sweep of the Finnish Self-Report Delinquency Study (FSRD) was conducted in 1995, the 5th and most recent sweep was made in 2004.¹

Sample, administration and questionnaire

The FSRD schools were randomly selected from a register of Finnish-language municipal schools using geographical area and community type (urban, semiurban and rural) as stratification criteria. In each year, all ninth-grade pupils of the selected schools comprised the target population, including those placed in special education classes because of disciplinary or learning problems. To ensure confidentiality, the respondents sealed the anonymously completed questionnaires into envelopes. In the 2004 sweep, 5,142 students in 55 schools participated in the study.

The FSRD questionnaire was originally developed on the basis of the questionnaire used in the International Self-Report Delinquency Study (ISRD, see Junger-Tas et al. 1994). Table 1 shows the 18 offences covered by the present questionnaire, 14 of which have been used in all four sweeps.

¹ The data collection of the 2004 FSRD sweep was financed by the Academy of Finland in the context of the project *Local Community and School as Sources of Trust and Social Support for Adolescents* (grant number 20736).

1 Trends of self-reported juvenile delinquency, 1995–2004 *Janne Kivivuori*

Participation in offences 1995–2004

Participation in the destruction of property in and outside the school has decreased. Participation in various thefts has also decreased, the most marked drop occurring in the prevalence of shoplifting. Participation in violence-related offences has been more stable. The 2004 sweep indicated decreasing levels of participation in fighting in public places and beating up somebody, but there is no consistent trend.

Table 1 The percentage of 15–16 year old adolescents who committed the offence^a, 1995–2004

	1995	1996	1998	2001	2004	p ⁱ
Truancy	[45.8	42.2	43.4] ^b	38.8	37.7	
Running away from home	8.4	7.3	7.1	6.4	6.6	
Driving without a license	[35.9]	24.8	19.9	21.7	24.4	*
Graffiti writing/drawing	18.6	18.2	16.1	13.1	12.0	
Destruction of prop. at school	13.7	12.9	11.3	8.6	8.7	
Destr. of prop. outside school	19.9	15.9	13.5	10.2	10.6	
Shoplifting ^c	15.4	19.0	15.2	11.9	10.4	*
Stealing at school	30.1	27.2	20.5	19.2	17.2	*
Stealing at home	20.2	21.0	20.9	16.7	16.8	
Buying stolen goods	9.0	10.5	7.5	5.9	5.2	
Auto theft ^d	..	1.4	1.1	0.8	1.3	*
Bullying at school	24.9	21.6	20.3	14.6	16.0	
Taking part in a fight ^e	13.3	13.6	12.6	13.8	11.5	***
Beating up somebody	7.5	7.3	5.9	8.0	6.0	***
Use of marih. or hashish	4.4	6.7	7.0	8.5	8.0	
Misuse of legal medicine ^f	8.7	7.8	5.8	7.8	5.3	***
Use of other drugs ^g	1.6	2.0	
Drunken driving ^h	16.2	16.2	16.3	12.6	13.7	
N of respondents	1,195	4,204	4,503	4,347	5,142	

.. = the question was not asked. a) During the last year. b) Brackets indicate that the wording of the question was changed. c) Stealing from shops or kiosks. d) Excludes taking the parents' car without permission. e) Taking part in a fight in a public place. f) Use of legal medicine in order to become intoxicated. g) Includes all other drug types. h) Using a motor vehicle. i) * = p<.05, ** p<.01, *** = p<.001. Statistical significance refers to the difference between the findings of 2001 and 2004.

The use of marihuana or hashish increased, a trend that has been corroborated in other youth surveys. However, the upward trend seems to come to a halt.

Major patterns

There were three major and interrelated trends in the Finnish self-reported delinquency during the ten year period 1995–2004.

First, conformity became more prevalent as those adolescents who refrained from all crime types grew in number (Figure 1). The finding of increasing conformity is based on 14 offences with identical questions in all five FSRD sweeps. The percentage of pupils who had *not* committed any of these 14 offences has been steadily rising during the period 1995–2004 (Figure 1). Of course, it cannot be ascertained that the abstaining respondents abstain from all forms of crime and deviance. The observation is dependent on the repertory of offences included in the questionnaire.

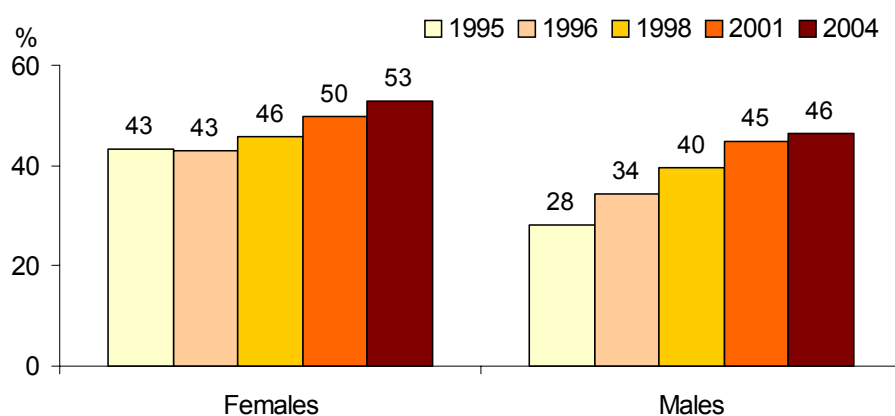


Figure 1 *Increasing conformity.* The percentage of respondents who refrained from delinquency during the preceding year, % of 15–16 year old adolescents in Finland 1995–2004

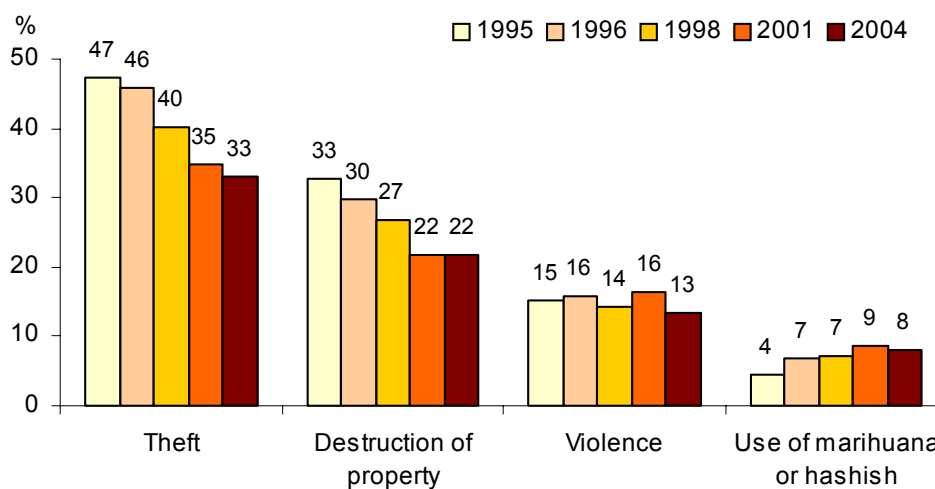


Figure 2 *Fewer adolescents steal or destroy property.* Participation in crimes during the last year, % of 15–16 year old adolescents in Finland 1995–2004

Second, participation in crimes involving property has decreased. These two general trends are interrelated: conformity increased because participation in theft or destruction of property decreased.

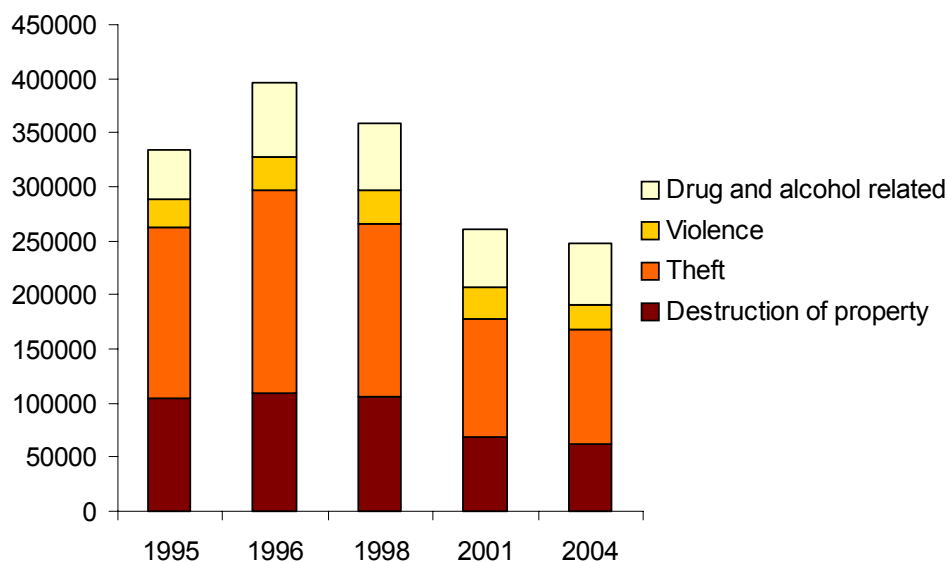


Figure 3 *Steep decline of incidents.* Estimated absolute number of incidents committed by 15–16 year old adolescents in Finland, 1995–2004

Third, the number of property crimes has decreased. In principle, it is possible that a decreasing number of *persons* participate in offences, but at the same time they commit more offences, so that the number of *crimes* remains stable, or is even increasing. It is therefore interesting to note that the decreasing participation of young persons in crime was associated with a corresponding decrease in criminal incidents (Figure 3).² Especially between 1998 and 2001, there was a quite drastic drop in the overall number of crimes committed by 15–16 year old adolescents. The drop was mainly due to a radical decrease in thefts. Incidents of vandalism also decreased. The number of violent and drug related offences was comparatively stable.

² Methodological note: The sum variables were based on incidence reports by the respondents, with a truncated maximum of 25 annual offences in each specific offence item. This procedure eliminates the effect of very high self-reports and may underestimate the true number of offences. When assessing the high number of incidents (nearly 400,000 in 1996), it should be noted that the figures are weighted population estimates based on the sample. The population of the study comprises about 58,000 students in each sweep. It should also be noted that there are different time intervals between the sweeps.

Possible causes of decreasing property crime

The present study did not empirically examine the question, why property crime has decreased quite significantly among Finnish adolescents. However, certain plausible explanations can be suggested. The decrease in theft and destruction of property is probably explained by the co-occurrence of several developments. These trends are interconnected and overlapping, as summarized in table 2. The co-occurrence of these factors may also explain why the decrease in incidents involving property crime was so drastic especially between 1998 and 2001.

Table 2 Possible factors related to the general decrease in property crime among Finnish juveniles 1995–2004

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Improvement of the general economic situation ■ Increasing control in schools (closer contacts between the school and the police, and increasing CCTV use in school areas) ■ Increasing control and surveillance of other public spaces such as shopping areas (CCTV, guards) ■ Changes in opportunity structure: concentration of the retail sector in large malls instead of small shops ■ Changes in routine activities: adolescents spend increasing time using computers, etc. ■ General change of attitude: juveniles increasingly condemn criminal activity ■ Changes in youth culture (eg. decline of graffiti) ■ Local crime prevention projects, boosted by the national crime prevention project of 1998, may have some effect on adolescent property crime ■ More efficient police strategy, such as community policing, may deter offenders |
|--|

At the most general level, the decrease in property crime is likely to reflect the strengthening of both formal and informal social control. As a telling example, half of the FSRD-2004 schools had CCTV surveillance on school premises, a feature that has largely emerged during the observed period 1995–2004. At the same time, the propensity of schools to report offences committed by the students to the police has increased steadily. Such developments are probably connected with the decrease in theft and destruction of school property (Table 1).

Crime-related attitudes

In the FSRD, crime-related attitudes are measured by items based on neutralization theory. In other words, the respondents are asked if they agree with various excuses and justifications of juvenile crime. The acceptance of such excuses and justifications of juvenile crime has steadily decreased from 1995 to 2004. Juveniles have become more punitive and less tolerant of juvenile crime. These changes in attitude may partially reflect increasing media coverage of rare cases of serious juvenile violence.

Likelihood of police contact

Over the period 1995–2004, the likelihood of adolescents becoming known to the police has increased in the context of violent offences, shoplifting and destruction of school property. The most important factor explaining this trend is probably the increasing propensity of bystanders, victims and others to report juvenile misbehaviour to the police. Changing control practices of the police, for example community policing, may also have contributed to this trend. Regarding shoplifting, increased likelihood of police contact probably reflects improving technical surveillance and the rising propensity of storeowners and shopkeepers to report shoplifters to the police. School authorities are also more likely to report student offences to the police. The increase in recorded assault offences by juveniles in official statistics during the late 1990s, may, to some extent, be the result of increasing and more effective, efforts to control adolescent behaviour.

Finland and Sweden

Self-report surveys targeting ninth-grade students have been conducted in Sweden in 1995, 1997, 1999, and 2001 (Ring 2003). The questions are not identical in the Swedish and Finnish surveys, but both have been developed on the basis of the ISRD (see Junger-Tas et al. 1994) and many of the questions are close enough to warrant comparison. Interestingly, the two countries seem to share some basic trends in adolescent delinquency. For example, participation in shoplifting, stealing at school and destroying property seem to have decreased in both countries, while participation in violence has been comparatively stable. The percentage of adolescents refraining from all offences has been increasing in both countries. This

convergent finding is especially interesting because the Swedish studies have used a different selection of offences.

Table 3 Summary of core FSRD findings on Finnish juvenile delinquency and its control, 1995–2004

- Participation in theft or destruction of property has decreased
- Participation in violence has remained relatively stable, although the most recent sweep (2004) suggests a downward turn
- The proportion of youths who refrain from delinquency has steadily increased
- The number of crime incidents has decreased drastically, a trend that reflects the decrease in theft and destruction of property
- Social control has become more efficient: juvenile offenders are increasingly likely to become known the police
- The attitudes of juveniles toward crime have become more condemning

2 Social capital and juvenile crime *Venla Salmi*

Social capital has emerged as a widely used concept both in empirical studies and theoretical debate in social science. In the field of criminology, several studies suggest that there is an association between various forms of social capital and criminal behaviour.

The present study examined the association between social capital and self-reported delinquency in a sample of Finnish adolescents. The FSRD 2004 survey instrument included indicators of social capital, family structure, family economic situation, self-control and cognitive ability.

The results show that, as indicators of social capital, low parental support, low teacher control and low interpersonal trust were associated with delinquent behaviour. Structural variables and individual characteristics such as self-control and cognitive ability were held constant. The inclusion of individual level variables in the analysis eroded but did not eradicate the explanatory power of social capital variables. Compared with social capital and structural indicators, self-control seems to be a very robust predictor of delinquency.

As originally suggested by Coleman (1988), effective norms depend on the closure of social networks. Closure could therefore function as a protecting factor against delinquency. The various benefits of the so called weak ties (Granovetter 1973) to labour market have also been praised in literature concerning social capital. In this study, closure of social networks was measured by a question whether the respondent's parents spend time with the parents of his or her friends. The kinds of weak ties linking people to

labour market were measured by asking if the respondent's parents had ever used their 'connections' to secure a summer job for him or her. These closure variables did not emerge as factors that protect adolescents from delinquency. Indeed, weak ties to labour market may actually be a risk factor for delinquency. Since the family's economy was held constant in the analysis, this finding calls for further study.

When different types of offence were examined separately, low social capital increased the risk of theft and destruction of property. The risk of committing these offences was higher for adolescents with low social capital when compared with more social capital. Low social capital was also a predictor of drug offences and violence.

The chapter concludes by underscoring that social capital, especially social support, protects adolescents from delinquency even when individual-level characteristics are controlled. The kinds of social capital, which are beneficial, seem to depend on the age of the persons under scrutiny: social capital, which helps adults to secure jobs, may place adolescents at an increased risk of delinquency. Moreover, it is recommended that future studies should address the question, how the personal features of adolescents influence the willingness of adults to 'invest' social capital in them.

Literature

- Coleman, James S.(1988). Social capital in the creation of human capital. *American Journal of Sociology* 94, S95–S120.
- Granovetter, Mark. (1973). The strength of weak ties. *American Journal of Sociology* 78, 1360–80.
- Junger-Tas, Josine & Terlouw, Gert-Jan & Klein, Malcolm W. (Ed.) (1994). *Delinquent Behavior Among Young People in the Western World*. RDC/Kugler Publications, Amsterdam.
- Ring, Jonas (2003). *Stöld, våld, och droger bland pojkar och flickor i årskurs nio. Resultat från fyra självdeklarationsundersökningar*. Brå-rapport 2003:5, Stockholm.