

Signs of psychopathology among juvenile offenders in Greek prisons for minors¹

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Introduction

Juvenile delinquency has increasingly become a concern for researchers and clinicians. Emerging evidence suggests that youth involved in juvenile justice have significant mental health needs. (Pullman et al., 2006).

Method

The aim of this study was to document the spectrum of psychological disorders in 100 male juvenile offenders aged 13-23 (mean age=19.8), recruited from 4 reformatory schools and prisons for minors all over Greece, and to examine the relations between mental health status and socio-demographic variables. Psychological profiles were assessed using the *Youth Self Report* (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001), participants' perceived competence in several domains was assessed using the *Self-Perception Profile for Children* (Harter, 1985), and demographic and family variables were assessed with a questionnaire constructed by the investigators.

Results

Rates of psychopathology were high, particularly for conduct disorder (46%), depression (50%) and anxiety disorder (40%). Overall, 78% of the participants obtained clinical total scores of psychopathology. About half of the participants who scored high on the total scale for psychopathology were coming from families with illiterate mothers and fathers (51,6% and 54,7% respectively) and 43,6% were coming from families with low / very low income.

Discussion

There is clear evidence of a high prevalence of psychological disorders in young offenders in Greece. Results highlight importance of assessing and treating juvenile offenders for difficulties other than externalizing problems in order to decrease psychological distress. Moreover, it is suggested that focusing intervention and prevention early in juveniles, especially those from lower socio-economic classes, is the most promising approach for preventing prolonged socio-psychological problems.

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