

Non-state crime prevention methods

Preventing youth crime

Hampus Forss Norstedt and Jasmine Effie Malmqvist

Kriminologi GR (C), KR041G

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Supervisor: Sara Kalucza

Examiner: Jerzy Sarnecki

Abstract

The purpose for this qualitative study is to examine the crime prevention strategies against youth crime within non-state actors' work. As well as obtaining views of successes and challenges of this work in practice. Youth crime is a major area of interest within criminology, and in recent years much interest has been directed at problems that arise in the so-called *vulnerable areas* of Sweden, where young people are at risk of being drawn into crime. Information has been gathered through semi-structured interviews with nine people representing seven different organizations / associations. The actors work with young people in one way or another through sports activities, mentor programs or independent youth centers; and most actors are active in vulnerable areas. The results show that it seems important to have committed adults in order to engage and gain trust from the young people. Further strategies for activating the young people in prosocial activities is revealed, as well as to spread good attitudes among the youths. The findings are put within the framework of criminological theories in order to discuss their potentials.

Key words: Non-state actors, crime prevention, youth crime, vulnerable areas

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

To prevent youth crime, one might think of the police authorities, who have the power to deter crime and maintain the state law. At the same time, this power should not be overestimated, depending on factors such as the risk of detection, individual motivations, alternative norms in society, etc (Andersson, 2013). Further Andersson (2013) notes that the police can hardly influence societal changes such as poverty or socialization processes for young people. The work of the police, but also the social services, primarily brings reactive measures, because they act when something has already happened. Perhaps preventive work against youth crime is more motivated elsewhere, such as within families or at schools. Bad relationships with parents or that they do not provide children with norms and good values, may influence a young person in the wrong direction (Sarnecki, 1981). Furthermore, a lax upbringing can in turn affect one's school results. The link between "crime and school problems are both the result of a generally poor social adjustment", according to Sarnecki (1981, p.184), something that is confirmed in later research by Ring (2017) which shows that weak ties to both parents and school are crime-increasing factors. Poor social structures thus favors regrowth of delinquency.

In 2015, the National Operations Department (NOA, 2015) started categorizing problem areas across the country, in order to assess where resources are needed the most. NOA divides these areas into three different levels as; *particularly vulnerable*-, *risk*- and *vulnerable areas*. The former is the most exposed and one criterion that follows is that it's "difficult or almost impossible for the police to carry out their mission" (NOA, 2019, p.4). A *risk area* is on the verge of meeting the criteria for the former, but which meets all the criteria for a *vulnerable area* characterized by "low socio-economic status and where the criminals have an impact on the local community" (2019, p.4). According to the latest report from NOA (2019), Sweden has 60 areas, of which 22 are particularly vulnerable. These areas should of course be considered as places where most people never end up in crime, and young people who commit crimes occur in other parts of society as well. Although the depth of problems in these areas is more severe. NOA (2017) describes older criminals as an employment service, and exemplifies young people with incomplete grades from primary school as a major risk group for being drawn into crime and drug use.

The government's program *Together against crime* points out that "The activities carried out by the actors of civil society are of large importance for strengthening social skills and counteracting exclusion and thus also to prevent crime." (Justitiedepartementet, 2017, p.23).

They exemplify the sports movement and other associations, whose activities are often directed to children and adolescents. Furthermore, organizations that work more purposefully with crime prevention are mentioned, such as those who support individuals who want to leave criminality (Justitiedepartementet, 2017).

1.2 Aim of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the phenomenon of non-state actors who carry out activities that can be considered as prevention measures against youth criminality. These measures may be both direct or indirect, depending on how pronounced the crime prevention aspects are within each actor's activities.

The intention is not to measure the effectiveness of any crime prevention work, but rather to obtain the individuals' subjective thoughts about the activities; to put what is said within the framework of criminological theories and to discuss the potential of these strategies. Thus the concrete research questions are;

- What forms of strategies/activities do the representatives of non-state actors describe as a part of their prevention work?
- What are the successes and challenges mentioned in the practical work of non-state actors exercising prevention against youth crime?

1.3 Youth crime

Theorists confide that through social interaction and communication, adolescents do not only get influenced by peers in their own age, but by older offenders. It is therefore suggested that youth crime can proceed in younger generations due to social forms (Shaw & Mckay, 1942:175). It is also suggested that juvenile delinquency derives to a greater extent from socio economic difficulties and resource-poor homes rather than households with better economical conditions (Estrada & Nilsson, 2009:4). A study from the National Council for Crime Prevention (BRÅ, 2016) shows that 9th grade students who have participated in robberies, mainly do so with others, and possess such factors as weaker bonds to parents. Sarnecki (1981) expresses the plausibility that the learning of criminal techniques comes from peers, since it should be unusual

for parents to teach such things. But when it comes to norms and values, it can probably affect children if the parents do not explicitly mark against criminal behavior (Sarnecki, 1981). BRÅ annually conducts surveys and statistics over criminal activity in Sweden. The school survey from 2019 presents the amount of vulnerability and participation of crime among young people. Both girls and boys report equal exposure to crime, while the participation of crime varies between genders. Whereby the survey indicates that boys participate in criminal activity to a greater extent than girls (BRÅ, 2020, p. 11). It is also indicated that individuals with separated parents or low economic resources participate in crime to a higher extent than individuals with better economic resources (BRÅ, 2020). Statistics show that youth crime has increased since the 1950s, but when research was done on this matter it was indicated that there may be other factors involved; and that youth crime has not increased, but decreased between the 70s and 90s. It has been indicated that the propensity to report has increased, which in turn reflects youth crime rates in the statistics (Estrada, 1999).

1.3.1 Boys and crime

Since boys are overrepresented in crime statistics, the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society Affairs (MUFC, 2013) has taken an interest in the link between gender roles and violence. In 2011-12, they conducted a study of boys' and young men's attitudes and values around gender equality, masculinity and violence. The results showed a connection between stereotypical notions of masculinity and having committed violence (MUFC, 2013). BRÅ (2019) also addresses how the image of tough masculinities, designer clothes and jewelry may have a desirable appeal according to the young criminals from vulnerable areas in their study. Pettersson (2020), who has researched gender and crime, points out that figures and statistics on this over-representation may look discouraging; but consider that “because it is about views and expectations of boys; then these views and expectations can be changed, in order to change their actions” (Pettersson, 2020, p.268).

1.4 Previous research on Non-state actor engagement

Some research has been conducted of leisure activities that involve young people.

In a Swedish context Sarnecki and du Rées (2020) points to research by both Sarnecki (1978) himself and Mahoney, Stattin & Lord (2004); where ‘hanging out’ at the leisure center per se has

no crime prevention effect. Involvement in school work, and to some extent association-driven activities which often cost money have a greater preventive effect according to Sarnecki and du Rées (2020). Mahoney, Stattin & Lords (2004) longitudinal study of adolescents in the town of Örebro; showed a difference in antisocial behavior between the young people who only participated in unstructured activities at youth recreation centers, compared with young people who also participated in sports teams, music groups etc. Whereby the first group showed more antisocial behavior, had more antisocial peers and poorer relationships with their parents (Mahoney, Stattin & Lord, 2004). A research project of afterschool programs in the U.S. also “considers decreases in delinquency , but only for programs with certain characteristics such as appropriate structure, adult support, thoughtfully sequenced activities, and the use of empirically-supported practices” (Caldwell, Hynes, Osgood, Perkins, Smith, 2013, p.12). A study from England also indicates that structured sports clubs and teams can reduce crime (Brosnan, 2019). Since the author finds the connection that regions with higher sports participation are associated with less violent crimes and to some extent, property crimes as well. But not everyone can afford to engage their children, especially in areas with socio-economic problems according to Sarnecki and Du Rées (2020). Then there are options like midnight basketball that have been tried out in the U.S. (Barcan and Rocque, 2020), or night football in Sweden, which often is affiliated with a sports club but whose activities are for free (Höglund, 2020).

Leadership is also of importance to spread prosocial attitudes since Mahoney, Stattin & Lord concluded that: "the *youth recreation center* attendees reported receiving low levels of support from these activity leaders compared to youth involved in the alternative organized community activities" such as sports clubs (2004, p.2). According to another research project of 331 adolescent football players in the Netherlands (Rutten, Decovic, Stams, Schuengel, Hoeksma, Biesta, 2008), a good relationship with a supportive coach, to some extent, could influence antisocial behaviors even outside the sports context. According to Höglunds evaluative study of night football, the researcher finds crime prevention potential when leadership is structured, prosocial attitudes are encouraged; and can be spread among the participants. Höglund also explains that night football can create a social and strengthening togetherness, around a positive activity where positive friendships are formed as well. But a difficulty is also noticed in dealing

with a large number of young people in a drop-in activity, where the balance of dual roles are revealed between the authoritarian guardian role and the trusting relationship-building role (Höglund, 2020).

A role model can be considered a kind of mentorship, and there are more pronounced mentoring programs for young people as well. A meta-analysis of 55 evaluations in the U.S. concludes that strong predictors for successful mentor programs are “ongoing training for mentors, structured activities for mentors and mentees, expectations for frequency of contact and mechanisms for support” (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, Cooper, 2002, p.187). The *Big Sister / Big Brother* program, which is one of the more well known non-profit programs, was evaluated by researchers in the U.S. who looked at the academic achievements of at-risk boys who were assigned a mentorship (Thompson & Kelly-Vance, 2001). The sample and control groups were small (twelve and thirteen), but nevertheless showed that those with mentors had succeeded in overcoming certain academic obstacles as opposed to those without a mentor. There are also programs where the identification between mentor and mentee is reinforced by similarities in criminal backgrounds. An interview study in the UK of a program with ex-offenders as mentors examines such identifications (Kavanagh & Borrill, 2013). The mentor respondents in the study “believed that their clients can relate to them due to the similarity of backgrounds and lifestyles and feel more at ease to discuss their problems and be honest” (2013, p.411). At the same time, the respondents also expressed frustration when mentees continued to commit crimes, of which it is pointed out that it can be a long process to change behaviors. Another aspect according to the researchers was that: "mentors tended to believe that they had a special relationship with clients because it was voluntary rather than statutory" (2013, p.412). The researchers therefore demand more research in the field because it seems to be a good idea to employ ex-offenders in supportive institutions, if the identification actually contributes to engage young criminals on a voluntary basis.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 The Social Bond Theory

Travel Hirschi's Social bond theory, published in 1969, asks the question: "Why don't people break the law?", instead of questioning; Why do people break the law? (Ball, Cullen & Lilly, 2011, p. 111). Hirschi's theory is a tough critique of (at the time) popular theories such as Merton's strain theory, which he considered was too narrowly focused on lower class crime and financial frustration (2002). Hirschi means that more affluent people also commit crimes, but that the theory falls short of explaining their motivations for doing so. Whereby Hirschi takes a step back and, as mentioned, asks why people do not commit crimes? What is missing for those who commit crimes? The theory argues that the individual's ties to conventional relationships and social contexts should prevent the person from wanting to commit crimes. As a control theory, it is thus a matter of social control to include and integrate the person into the conventional society. A society whose norms, as the theory assumes, will reject crime. The theoretical foundation is based on the four elements of *attachment*, *commitment*, *involvement* and *belief*, the strength of which affects the likelihood that a person will be indulged to conformity (Hirschi, 2002). *Attachment* explains to the extent that a person adopts the common norms of society. Which the person does through attachment to others, such as family members and friends at school. However, if the person does not care about the opinions of others, there is a greater risk that the person will be able to violate the common norms of society. *Commitment* explains the person's investment in conventional engagements such as education, work, etc. The assumption is that a person will choose conformity, not to risk the aspired goals of any conventional path. *Involvement* means participating in the activities just mentioned in connection with school / work, or sports activities, book clubs or any other leisure activity. Here the assumption is that a life filled with conventional activities simply takes away thoughts from any criminal deviations. *Belief* refers to a person's trust in the society's legal system and its maintenance. Moral attitudes about what is right and wrong are therefore of relevance. If a person has too little belief or shortcomings in any other of the bonds, thus the control for deviant behavior decreases.

Hirschi strengthens his theory by quoting sociologist Emile Durkheim; “The more weakened the groups to which [the individual] belongs, the less he depends on them, the more he consequently depends only on himself” (Hirschi, 2002, p.16), which is a fitting overlap to the differential association theory which describes that different groups may represent different rules of conduct.

2.2 Differential Association Theory

Differential association theory proposed by Edwin H. Sutherland can be described in nine principles. These propositions would explain the motive and behavioural manners of criminality. Criminal behaviour is learned and through interaction with people, which is the basic assumption of the theory. Behavioural manners of crime are therefore inherited or taught through another individual. Sutherland exemplifies his assumption as such; “a person who is not already trained in crime does not invent criminal behaviour, just as a person does not make mechanical inventions unless he has training in mechanics.” (Sutherland, 1947, p. 6). The learning of criminal behaviour is taught by intimate groups, therefore only interpersonal groups can be the teachers of criminal behaviour. It can also be divided into two propositions - firstly, techniques of committing a crime are taught, which can either be simple or difficult. Secondly, the learning also includes specific motives, drives and attitudes that conclude a criminal behaviour. The specific direction of motive and attitude is learned by how you perceive the law as favorable or unfavorable. The principle suggests that if an individual does not see the law as favorable, then the motive is to violate the legal codes - which most people see as “rules”. According to the term differential association, a person becomes a criminal due to interaction with criminal patterns and isolations from anti-criminal associations. This also suggests that associations from criminal patterns become neutral to a person who interacts with criminal associations, unlike people who do not interact with criminal associations (Sutherland, 1947, p. 6). Differential associations can differ depending on its frequency, duration, priority and intensity. Sutherland explains that these modalities are dependent on quantitative research to say exactly how frequent and consistent(duration) an individual is associated to criminal patterns, what priorities a child has in early childhood for he/she to not fall into delinquents manners and what kind of intensity the criminal association has on the individual (Sutherland, 1947, p. 7). The process of learning criminal behaviour does not necessarily mean that the process of imitation is left out. This means that criminal behaviour can also be learned through imitation, both through association with

criminal and anti-criminal patterns. Since Sutherland believes that criminals and non-criminals possess the same general needs and values, the general needs and values cannot differentiate criminal behavior from noncriminal behaviour (Sutherland, 1947, p.7).

Sutherland's differential association theory describes the common criminal as a student of criminal association, who is later a teacher to others in interaction. The behavioural manners of a criminal is neutral to those who associate with criminality, but even through non-association, crime learning can not exclude the process of imitation. Hirschi's critique of the differential association theory is that motivation by learning from others with criminal attributes is a fact that does not need to be explained, as he sees a loose bond to society as a more fundamental explanation (Hirschi, 2002). Hence, both theories are complementary in order to explain social activities where young people interact with both peers and adults, which serves the purpose of this study.

3. Methods

3.1 Qualitative Research

A deductive approach has been used in this essay, which is common in qualitative methods according to Bryman (2016). An idea of suitable theories has existed before gathering the data for this thesis, but the theoretical framework has been more specified through gathering and coding the data. The following sections describe the method in more detail.

3.2 Sampling Procedures

The selection of participants was goal-oriented (Bryman, 2016), since the criteria for the participants was to answer the specific research questions (see item 1.2 above). Therefore, the main purpose was to reach non-state actors, whose activities are aimed at young people. At the same time, there was a desire to reach different kinds of actors with different backgrounds, which made the procedure somewhat "sequential"; and it means that the selection is seen as a development process (2016, p.498). For instance, the intention was not just to get in touch with sports associations which are often part of community involvement.

Since one of the authors resides in Stockholm, an initial focus was also directed at reaching actors from a specific “particularly vulnerable area” (see item 1.1 above) of the capital. But when the response rate turned out to be low, the search was broadened to other locations as well.

For the sampling procedure, the researcher who resides outside of the capital started searching for relevant organizations/associations online. Initial searches on the google search engine were written in the style of; “föreningar för unga i stockholm” or “organisationer för unga”, expanded with keywords such as "brottsförebyggande" or "kriminalitet". In the end 22 actors were contacted by email, which contained brief information about the study, as well as why they were considered interesting for its purpose. Whereby five actors were reached for an interview within the timeframe. The second researcher residing in Stockholm reached out to a stakeholder which in turn found two organisations that were willing to be a part of the study. However, 3 interviews were conducted since 2 people working at the same organisation could provide different information.

3.3 Sampling Limitations and Discussion

Since the response rate was low to reach actors in the first proposed area in Stockholm, the search was extended, mainly to actors who are active in "vulnerable areas". As a result, the limitation to examining conditions among different actors in a single specific area also disappeared.

However, just one of the actors has no connection to vulnerable areas according to NOAs definition (2017), but the actor did reach young people from what can be claimed to be resource-poor areas. Generalizability is nevertheless limited given that these areas differ from each other, and that the actors themselves have their differences.

Thus contact was initiated with five actors based in Stockholm, another that is active in all the cities of Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö; and finally an actor from a medium-sized municipality. The "sequential" procedure (item 3.2) also failed somewhat, even if only one of the actors is a pronounced sports association, as mentioned in the example. But several of the actors have their activities in, what can be seen as youth centers, although its content varies. Still, the purpose for this thesis can be accomplished, i.e. capturing information about these non-state actors' preventive activities.

One last aspect concerns that the actors have slightly different target groups; ranging from 9 years old to 25 years. Which, of course, is not entirely desirable. Although the respondents usually seem to talk about their underaged participants during the interviews.

3.4 Interview Method

The study was conducted through semi-structured interviews, with some topics as a basis. Using an interview guide (see 6.2 in the appendix) with a wide range of questions was helpful in moving the conversations forward or if deviating too far from the topics. The purpose of semi-structured interviews is to retain flexibility, so that the interviewee is encouraged to interpret and present what they may recognize as important aspects of their work, (Bryman, 2016). A method that raises more follow-up questions when the interviewer acts on what is said. Four interviews were recorded and conducted in person, while the other four were conducted via zoom and telephone. In addition, each interview was conducted by the researchers individually.

3.5 Ethical Concerns

The research ethics principles have been followed according to the Swedish research council. (Vetenskapsrådet, 2020). All interviewees have been informed about the general purpose of the thesis, and have participated through an informed consent. Whereby they got to know that participation is fully voluntary, and that they may end their participation both during the interview and until the thesis is published. Confidentiality and securing data such as recordings has also been assured that no one but the researchers will handle it for the sake of privacy. A few of the interviewees wanted to be anonymous, whereby all were anonymized by consistent simplicity.

Citations have also been translated from Swedish to English, which required accuracy to maintain its true meaning. However, respect, honesty and accuracy are kept in mind when interpreting the entire material collected. As Bryman puts it; "the researcher always works with representations and constructions of social reality. The plausibility and credibility of the 'truth requirements' formulated by the researcher thus become the most important factors in an assessment / evaluation " (Bryman, 2016, p.474).

3.6 Analysis Methods

Since Braun & Clarke (2013) refer to Thematic Analysis as an easy-to-understand method, the choice fell on this method. According to their system, the analysis goes through *six steps* in order

to shape and define relevant themes; whereby these steps have been followed to a certain extent (2013, p.202).

While working the first step of transcription of one's own interviews, both familiarisation and a first hand overview got integrated; since each interview only involved one person (except for one) which made it rather easy and understandable. Before the next step of 'complete coding across the entire dataset', the researchers coded one of each other's transcripts, in order to see what type of mindset is revealed. After a review of a certain consensus, the researchers coded the rest of their own interviews separately. By now, a number of themes and categories have been revealed. Making sense of those themes thus required to work more with the theoretical framework and previously relevant research, before choosing and interpreting the most prominent themes.

3.7 Participant Characteristics

| Interviewees and their organizations / associations | The target group |
|---|---|
| Interviewee 1 represents a larger organization that partly has activities aimed at vulnerable areas in Stockholm. | The organisation has different subgroups depending on the individuals' needs and background. Ages varies from 11 to 18. |
| Interviewee 2 represents an independent youth center in closeness of a particularly vulnerable area of Stockholm. They offer, among other things, structural activities that involve dance or art. A stated purpose is to develop young people's own creativity. | The actor engages young people between ages 10-16. According to the respondent, they have about 200-250 young people connected to the center. |
| Interviewee 3 represents an organization in Stockholm. Through an individual coaching program, they carry out preventive efforts and positive / supportive activities for young people. Their services are in demand from schools, city districts and the prison services, among others. | They reach underaged youth and young adults who are at risk of falling deeper, or who have already ended up in risky behaviours. |
| Interviewee 4 represents an independent youth center in Stockholm, and has various projects and activities in different vulnerable areas of the capital. Among other things, they conduct sports activities and homework help. A stated purpose is to strengthen young individuals' self-confidence. | They reach young people between the ages of 15-25 at the youth center. But have some flexibility regarding age limits on their activities. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Interviewee 5 represents a youth center located in a vulnerable area in Stockholm. They arrange recurring and varied activities. | The actor engages young people between ages 13-17. |
| Interviewee 6 and 7 represents a community initiative, with a stated preventional purpose, by a football club in a medium-sized municipality. "Night football" is one of their most popular activities. | They reach young people between age 9-25 who are divided into three different age groups during their activities. |
| Interviewee 8 represents the same youth center as Interviewee 5 located in a vulnerable area in Stockholm. | The actor engages young people between ages 13-17. |
| Interviewee 9 represents a mentor organization active in Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö. A stated aim is to reach young people in schools where study results are lower than average (on a national level), which are often linked to vulnerable areas. | They mediate adult mentors to young people between age 13-17. |

4. Results

4.1 Disposition

Looking back on the research motives (item 1.2 above) the questions were; What forms of strategies/activities do the representatives of non-state actors describe as a part of their prevention work? and; What are the successes and challenges mentioned in the practical work of non- state actors exercising crime prevention against youth delinquency?

Both questions are answered through the themes revealed from the analysis, and those questions may overlap one another. The results contain three main themes around the adult leaders, young people's attitudes and the existing activities. Each of which has a number of sub-categories. After the results section, the key findings are summarized in the discussion (item 5.1).

4.2 The leaders, personal staff and mentors

4.2.1 Background and identification

In general much emphasis is placed on suitability for working with young people. When hiring people, emphasis is put on a genuine commitment and that the adult shares his or her personal

qualities and attributes according to some interviewees. *Interviewee 2* talks about having a staff, who can inspire the young people within their own special interests such as music or art.

Interviewee 4 also favors a staff that inspires and exemplifies how commitment comes in to play:

We have a music studio where we can do without a studio technician, because you have learned it together with the young people, which is important. It is more important what the staff can do together with the young people, rather than academic background.

Since all actors' activities are about building relationships with young people, which can take time; it is desirable to have a more sustainable and dedicated staff according to most interviewees. Within the night football activity, there is a basic idea to identify participants who want to become leaders themselves; where those who have shown good qualities can be employed according to *Interviewee 6*. But a dedicated staff member is not always the case, and *Interviewee 2* is happy to help colleagues move on, in case they have lost the desire and enthusiasm to work with their young people.

Sometimes it seems desirable that the staff has a completely different background, from not having grown up in a vulnerable area e.g., in order to be able to come in with other knowledge and values. At the same time, it is expressed that the staff should be able to listen in and identify with the youths; and such a thing as being a man, or having a foreign origin can facilitate relationship building in some cases according to some of the interviewees. Within the mentor organization, it is pointed out that the mentees repeatedly require a mentor who is fun, resourceful or just easy to talk to, which can be quite easily met among many volunteer mentors according to *Interview 9*. Furthermore, *Interviewee 9* explains that they do a thorough background check on their mentors, so that the values match the organization's; and since many mentors never have worked with adolescents before, they also receive some training and continuous mentoring guidance. Within another of the actors activities, identification is fundamental; whereby *Interviewee 3* explains that the “demands” on their employees are an earlier abuse and / or criminal behaviour, in order for them to be able to handle young people with similar problems. Something that *Interviewee 3* finds beneficial when the “recognition” is there, to get the young people into the activity that is fully voluntary. In addition, all employees have undergone education to work with problem youth according to *Interviewee 3*.

4.2.2 That "little extra"

In close relation to the section before, commitment is illustrated even more since it emerged how commitments sometimes go beyond their professional roles. The following quotes are about young people who have become “too old” or who are no longer part of the actors' activities.

(...) they may not always have had so many sensible adults in their world. And then they may have had a very close relationship with us, as professional adults. So we have to continue to help them, even when they have passed 16. There are people who are 20-25 that we still help, but they are not part of the youth center. It's nothing we get paid for.
(Interviewee 2)

I can say "call if there is anything", because we have built up this relationship. And it costs me nothing if he calls, and I can always help them further if that is the case.
(Interviewee 3)

All actors have their different age limits and *Interviewee 4* explains that he lets overaged people in as long as they have a good behavior towards the younger ones. The same flexibility applies in the night football activity, according to *Interviewee 6*, where the participants are supposed to be divided into three different age groups, but the rules are not always that strict:

We usually say that they should be honest with us, and some are not. But we think it's about them loving football, and then we do not want to ruin it for them.

The fact that everyone gives their time for activities that often take place on evenings or weekends can in itself be pointed out as something extra. For example, the mentor program has no problem finding volunteers whose time is taken up two times each month for 6-12 months (*Interviewee 9*), and during night football activities, leaders show up on their off days because it's just fun to be there according to *Interviewee 6*. The following quote summarizes what an interviewee thinks is needed within their activities:

We are not interested in having staff who do nothing. Who only enters the role of being "just staff". We need MORE here, because we're trying to do something. (Interviewee 2)

4.3 Listening in on the attitudes

4.3.1 Macho norms

Macho norms are something that is brought up by several of the interviewees, and some actors work consciously around these norms to question and discuss it among the boys. By macho norms is meant, for example, inappropriate behavior towards girls, as well as swearing that goes over the border according to the interviewees. *Interview 3* sees this discussion as important, for having limited himself earlier in life as a criminal with a tough masculinity. *Interviewee 3* who works with young people who have already fallen into crime; discusses the aspect that those he meets have a "criminal facade" and must not prove weak in front of others. And further, he means that many must prove strong even though they suffer from something such as mental health issues or addiction. The actor for the night football activity also works consciously around macho norms and has brought in external learning material, to be able to discuss with the young people in a directed and thoughtful way. But *Interviewee 6*, who leads the activity, wonders if it really has an effect, even though they often raise awareness and discuss these norms. Since they have difficulty getting girls into the activities, which has led to a parallel basketball activity only for girls. According to *Interview 2*, they work with the boys attitudes in general. He is especially grateful to have one in the staff who practices MMA sports, and he means that none of the adolescents can "measure up to this tough" staff member. Which he thinks facilitates getting the young boys to listen when the staff member talks about attitudes and how one should behave towards each other, girls and adults. At the same time, *Interviewee 2* assures that his employee never would teach martial arts to any youth, as they have zero tolerance for violence. The following quote illustrates why *Interviewee 2* thinks it is important to work with the boys' macho norms:

In case the guys are stupid and do not understand how they should behave (.) our girls will also get shit for it, when they for example go to the subway and feel insecure and all that.

4.3.2 Popular culture norms

Just as the interviewees talked about macho norms, it is possible to link to how some of the adults find how young people may adopt norms from rap music, which in turn can be macho. Much (but not all) of the rap music that's popular among the youths glorifies violence, drugs, and has derogatory views of women. Another aspect to why this is addressed, is because some of the more famous rappers come from the same neighborhoods as where the actors are active; and therefore seem to be local role models which personifies success to many of the youths. According to some interviewees, this has a certain effect on how they behave, dress and express certain things. *Interviewee 4* says that it's cool to be a criminal, because that's the norm right now; and means that there is nothing he could say to the young people that would change their perception of gangster rap. Another interviewee mentions that it of course should be seen as a kind of cultural expression; but nevertheless it seems to be a source of discussions with the young people.

(.) there are songs that describe the backside of that kind of life, but 12-13-year-olds do not always understand the meaning and rather see these music videos with cross motorcycles, nice cars and girls. It's partying, drugs and weapons. And it may look sweet to them. (Interviewee 3)

(.) we notice that the 9-11 year olds should be in a certain way and should be "gangsters", but I do not think they understand. But the older ones who deal with such things, unfortunately, it is a different level. (Interviewee 6)

Interviewee 2 says that things that the rappers express about violence and drugs are already normalized among the adolescents at his center; of which he emphasizes that this music is in fact a cultural reflection of the context in which they live. *Interviewee 2*, who himself has a background in hip hop and graffiti culture, therefore is happy to work with the parts of hip hop culture that are more of a unifying, fun and creative force. *Interviewee 5* describes how they distance themselves from the rap and drugs culture and educates their youths on drug addiction.

(.) We have a lot of adolescents that does smoke weed and sometimes they have red eyes when they come here. Since it is non-tolerated, they can't be here while being high so we kick them out and let them come back tomorrow. That is not something we support, so to get them to understand, we tell them we'll call their parents if they show up here high again. (Interviewee 5)

Interviewee 5 explains a sort of tough love for their young adults to prevent them from making the wrong choices. It is also clarified that making them feel bad for disrespecting their property does prevent them from showing up intoxicated.

It does work though, we have never gone so far to call parents because they listen to us. They know not to disrespect our work. Even if it might be the case that they probably smoke weed after they leave, but as long as they aren't high here. You can't work with someone who is high. (Interviewee 5)

4.3.3 To listen, discuss and to evoke thoughts

Relating to both macho norms and norms around music, virtually all interviewees see the importance of listening to the young people to be able to discuss such things. Two interviewees say more precisely that no fingers should be pointed at anyone; for what is also pointed out is that most of the youths know deep down what is right or wrong. Thus part of the relationship building is to listen and understand, in order to discuss and initiate thought processes in the young people themselves. But to evoke thoughts seems to be based on an established trust. A trust that is to be processed, which can be referred back to section 4.2.1 that its desirable to have a long term staff for that purpose. *Interviewee 3* who works with young people who already ended up in crime, says that it is often required that he shares experiences from his own life as an ex-criminal; in order to evoke thought processes beyond the young person's facade. *Interviewee 2* says that they encourage the young people to "try their thoughts out loud"; thoughts that they may not really believe in, whereby those thoughts will be open for discussion according to the interviewee. *Interview 4* exemplifies how he talked with a youth about why one should pay taxes:

*(.) for example, someone thinks it's unnecessary to pay taxes, and we can discuss and explain that "you are here because people pay taxes". I mean, this youth center in Lithuania would not have worked, because, I mean "where should I find grant money!?"
(.) that's how we have to meet them.*

The same interviewee talks about how his staff can influence the young people a little at a time, once the youths start to feel safe among the adults. Further he expresses that he wants to build a good culture at his youth center, so that the young people can "question" and not be influenced by those with criminal values. *Interviewee 6* and *7* says something similar, that dialogue is important when young people for example expresses something "racist or glorifies violence":

..we try to initiate it as a suspicion process in them, to think for themselves "what is this?"

Attachment style described in social bonds theory can be applied since staff are prone to become figures for adolescents. Staff might provide a sense of attachment since they do their best to listen and relate. An attachment style between an adolescent and a staff member, such as safety or trust, could help encourage the adolescent to follow a legitimate way. Staff communicate with young adults in similar manners to gain trust and understand them better. In this way they would introduce young adults to other perspectives in life.

(..) some of the kids enjoyed coming here after a while, they did not even want to hang out with kids at their block. Everything is about stimulating, engaging and making them feel good about themselves.. (Interviewee 1)

Developing attachment may derive from the staff's ability to share their own private experiences and not pointing fingers at anyone's faults. Participants describe similar concepts when being asked about how to connect with adolescents. Many describe it as all about listening and giving them the opportunity to discuss what they are thinking. Being able to respond to their thoughts in a way that they would understand by referring to similar experiences is what could provide trust between staff and adolescents.

4.4 Activities and engagement

4.4.1 Engaging young people in prosocial activities

The strategies for engaging the youths are described similarly by many participants. *Interviewee 3* expresses the importance of introducing new leisure activities for the young people he meets, who intend to leave the criminal life behind. Whereupon he says that "simple things can be a challenge for these guys", such as "cooking dinner". Football however, seems to be the activity that engages the most among the actors, whereby *Interviewee 3* appreciates the togetherness and cooperation that arises. *Interview 1* also describes how football attracts other young people in the neighborhood than those for whom he is actually responsible. While *Interviewee 4*, who has a background in basketball, thinks that it's practical to arrange sports activities outdoors; since it attracts many young people in the area, who actually sees that something is happening. The night football activity attracts approximately 70-100 young people per night according to *Interviewee 6*. But the competition element is not primary, as a huge purpose is to promote new acquaintances. Therefore, the leaders try to keep existing friends apart when they split the teams for the evening. *Interview 6* has also seen many new friendships emerging, which he considers to be one of the best outcomes from the activity. Sports activities seem to attract many, and according to some interviewees, it may be because the young people do not have as many other leisure activities.

What I notice is that those who have problems come themselves, because they may already have friends who are involved in night football. (Interviewee 6)

Homework studies is another conventional activity that is offered by several actors, as well as "CV" and summer job application workshops. The mentor program especially includes the aspect of encouraging studies, as some adolescents understand the extent of this when they get a mentor who may have the young person's dream job for example. *Interviewee 4* managed to get more girls to the youth center by offering homework studies, and in the next step he began to think about how he could attract those "who really don't care about school":

So we offer pizza, coffee and so on to get them here. And some come here and study and eat a little before they go to sports practise and such. (Interviewee 4)

According to *Interviewee 2*, they have a lot of music, various dance and graffiti art activities at the youth center. Where activities are led more or less by an adult, although a definite purpose is to strengthen the adolescents' own initiatives. A theme addressed in the next section.

4.4.2 Engaging young people to “get engaged”

Related to the part before, many interviewees talk about empowering young people to take their own initiatives, and create activities on their own. Through encouragement and "friendly pushes" as *Interviewee 2* puts it, there is a purpose among all actors to strengthen the self-confidence and self-esteem of the youths. But several express that it is difficult to get ideas from the young peoples at first, as the following quote shows:

(.) if I ask them "what are we going to do"? "It's completely empty. (.)

But if I say that "we are going to play a basketball tournament and you are going to organize it", all eyes light up. (Interviewee 4)

We want to "force" processes out of the young people. I think it's good to get people, especially in areas like this, to do things; like building, fixing and arranging things.

(Interviewee 2)

Both of the above mentioned actors talk about how "circles" have been created in connection to their youth centers. It's everything from art to video game circles, and the main thing is that they are run by the young people themselves. *Interviewee 4* says that such a thing “that you have run a group or circle and have activated other young people; may look very good on their CVs for job applications”. One stated purpose is also to teach "Swedish bureaucracy" in how circles can become associations. Whereby *Interviewee 2* explains that it can take them a bit closer to society, since many of the troubled youths never belonged to any association or organization.

The organisation represented in interview 1 there are leaders coordinating personnel and the structure of their work. Within the organisation there are different subgroups depending on purpose. *Interviewee 1* explains his position as a coach mentoring adolescents;

(.) as a coach in a subgroup of the organization, my role is to motivate youths to apply for jobs and work for their money. Many of the youths in our group were convicted of small crimes such as shoplifting, narcotics or illegal driving. We would engage them through helping them with job applications or finish high school...(Interviewee 1)

Their attempt to engage adolescents for work is similar to *commitment* in Hirschi's social bonds. By getting youths committed and engaged for education and work may provide the effect of not wanting to lose something you've committed yourself to. It is also explained that by helping youths follow a legitimate path, it may distract them from doing anything illegitimate;

(.) We would make them do simple chores in other subgroups, such as cleaning or planning an activity for all groups. We had football and ping-pong tournaments with other subgroups which made them feel good about themselves and competition-oriented. When they all invest time in us, we invest in them. And we become the perfect distraction for doing anything else, like smoking weed or stealing a bike... (Interviewee 1)

Their method of providing assignments or chores to their adolescents for encouragement to work is described with bright results. *Interviewee 1* explains how this is a form of discipline for them to appreciate hard work and what work is about. *Interviewee 8* talks about how projects that make the adolescents feel creative makes them encouraged. The organisation's accessibility to creative tools such as movie equipment, editing programs and a music studio could help induce commitment and involvement in adolescents. Involvement according to Hirschi may discourage youths from engaging in other activities than those conventional activities that fill up their time. Providing young adults with different activities such as sports tournaments or creative making may keep them from falling into criminal patterns.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the prevention strategies against youth criminality within non-state actors' work. As well as obtaining views of successes and challenges of this work in practice. It is difficult to draw any broader generalizations about the actors who, after all, work according to different financial conditions, as well as different degrees of professionalism. However, given that these actors have different structures, similar patterns are still revealed among the respondents' answers. Nine people have been interviewed, representing seven different organizations / associations, whereby a couple of important results are addressed in the following discussion.

The actors may work through different organizations with the young persons, but regardless, it is described that the leaders in the activities should act as role models and have a certain commitment. The leaders, personal staff and mentors generally seem to give a lot of themselves, which also could be an indication that they recognize this kind of work as rewarding and important. Hirschi explains the bond of *commitment* in his social bonds theory (item 2.2) as a person's investment in conventional engagements, such as working with these youths, as a reason for choosing conformity instead of crime. Since a person who works or studies does not want to risk the aspired goals on a conventional path. Although the commitment is on behalf of the leaders, the young people are still exposed to this commitment.

Through interactions between the leaders and young people, one strategy is to arouse thoughts in the young people about what is right or wrong. Something that happens when the leaders actually listen to the young people before initiating discussions. It is also expressed that a measure of trust is necessary for this to happen. The building of trust should be differently successful considering the different actors' structure and staff resources. For instance, both *Interviewee 3* and *9* represent actors whose contacts with the young people are more individual, which possibly could make their relations more qualitative. While qualitative relations within *Interviewee 3's* activity might be especially important, since their staff of ex-criminals work with youths that already become problematic. As *Interviewee 3* sees this recognition in criminal behavior as

beneficial, Kavanagh & Borrill (2013) who investigated ex-offenders as mentors, also believe that it can be beneficial to bring in problem youth on a voluntary basis when such mentorship is offered (item 1.4). Building relationships relates to the social bonds of *attachment* and *belief*. *Attachment* related to if the adults who stand for these norms, succeed in building a trustful relation towards the youth. *Belief* relates to whether the attachment succeeds in strengthening or evoking such thoughts in the young people about what is considered right and wrong in conventional society. An aspect that relates to the Differential association theory (item 2.3) in such a way that learning processes for both criminal and non-criminal behavior are the same, and take place through both exposure and interactions. Of which this exposure to adults with conventional values and norms; may strengthen the attachment for such values / norms towards the youth.

It's questionable if most young people get attached to the good values from these moral role models, and if those who do, only do so within the activity itself? Looking back at the example of sports teams and the importance of leadership (item 1.4), Rutten et al., (2008) presents research that supportive coaching could influence football players' prosocial attitudes both during activities and, to some extent, off the field as well. Related to a couple of principles of differential association theory it's described that a person's connections to others can vary in frequency, duration, priorities and intensity. These connections can affect whether procriminal or anti-criminal values prevail depending on the type of connections you are exposed to. Whereby the young people within these examined activities are exposed to anti-criminal values, because such an explicit commitment exists among the actors' personnel. It is also expressed by some interviewees that adults who are not engaged, are not desirable either. An aspect that can be related to what Sarnecki (1981) points out: that parents who do not explicitly mark against criminal behaviors, in a way, support such behaviors.

Norms that the actors want to raise thoughts about are certain behaviors influenced by macho and popular culture. The fact that adults are tormented by popular culture of new generations is nothing new, and it may therefore be easy to dismiss its significance and influence. But since rap music sometimes may stand in contrast to the norms of conventional society, it is not surprising that discussions arise around this. It is easier to refer to unhealthy macho norms as something

they really want to counter; referring to Pettersson (2020) about changing views and expectations of masculinity and the fact that men account for a disproportionate share of all crime (item 1.3). Whereby changing views and expectations at an early stage could be good primary prevention to prevent criminogenic factors from unhealthy attitudes and behaviors (item 2.1).

All actors thus believe that it is important to understand and influence the young people; whereby a clear strategy is emphasized in encouraging prosocial attitudes and counteracting deviant behavior when needed. Mahoney, Stattin & Lord's (2004) research on *Unstructured youth recreation centre participation*, shows that a certain structure is required for a crime prevention effect. Which is to the benefit of the studied actors, based on what is said about both committed adults and prosocial activities. The affect of popular culture norms, such as gangster rap, is perceived by many of interviewees as influential to adolescents. *Interviewee 4* does express how gangster rap is portrayed as "cool" and everyone wants to be a gangster nowadays. Relating to differential association theory as criminal acts being learned through communication, the portrayal of a gangster exhibited by rappers may influence young adults to act a certain way. It is not definite that an adolescent conforms to criminal activities due to popular culture, however it may have an affect on behaviour and choices in life since being a gangster is the new trend. Some of the organisations in our study were located in areas connected to famous rappers, which can be regarded as role models. *Interviewee 4* does state that it influences the way young people think, dress and express themselves. Therefore, their behaviour is learned through social forms such as music, videos and popular norms. Even though it might not be a motivator for criminal acts; it can be a foundation for interacting further with similar people under the same influence. The staff of the organisations does clarify how they have open discussions about these matters, not only to understand adolescents but also to educate them. Whereby these non-state actors are able to provide a different sort of influence to the adolescents by offering other perspectives.

Prosocial activities are something all actors offer through leadership, and / or intend to encourage young people to do on their own. According to the social bond theory, *involvement* (item 2.2) means that one's time is filled with so many conventional commitments and activities, that there's simply no time for engaging in any deviations. However, Hirschi points out that a criminal act does not have to take much time, and he wants to "avoid the idea that something-anything is

better than, that is, inhibition of, the commission of delinquent acts" (Hirschi, 2002, p.191).

Therefore Hirschi proclaims that it's *what* you do that matters. Which could be related back to Mahoney, Stattin & Lord's (2004) research and Caldwell et al., (2013) study of afterschool programs in the U.S.; where decreases in delinquency etc. failed without proper structure, adult support and thoughtfully sequenced activities (item 1.4).

Some interviewees believe the sports activities to be attractive because some youths have no other leisure activities, which may have to do with socio-economic aspects (Sarnecki and du Rées, 2020). But from a crime prevention point of view the social aspects seem to be more important here; since young people usually commit crimes together (item 1.3), young people also do non-criminal things together. Whereby many of the activities mentioned seem to be positive, strengthening and enjoyable, which can be traced back to Hirschi's notion that it's *what* you do that matters. Because Hirschi's own research has shown that young people who drive around in cars together, have no crime prevention effect (Hirschi, 2002).

Interviewee 6 is especially pleased with all the friendships created within the night football activity, which Höglund (2020) recognized as well in her study of night football. Through working with the young people's self-confidence and self-esteem; it is also described how the young people are strengthened to, perhaps not at first, but with some helpful encouragement to take on positive activities on their own. Which can be linked to learning processes according to the differential association theory (section 2.3) when prosocial interaction gives prosocial ideas and definitions more space, as opposed to socializing and definitions that support criminal behaviors. Or rather that the bonds of *commitment* and *involvement* are given more space within the minds of the young people. Two social bonds, which Hirschi links together, to explain the likelihood that one will be tempted to commit crimes, or even face such temptations (Hirschi, 2002). While there is a link between poor school results and an increased risk of criminality as well (item 1.1), the actors homework help and CV writing workshops are thus good preventive measures for promoting both commitment and involvement. Something that Thompson & Kelly-Vance (2001) also noticed in their study of at-risk boys who improved their study results through an initiated mentorship with an adult (item 1.4).

In conclusion, promoting *prosocial attitudes* and offering *organized activities* for young people are the prominent strategies for preventing youth criminality; which answers the first research

question for this study. Challenges described, seem to be dealing with attitudinal macho norms and engaging young people on their own. At the same time, the interviewees describe how a committed and sustainable personal staff may have successful influences within these aspects. Which answers the second research question.

5.2 Limitations of the Study

The interviews that were implemented may have differences dependent on the interviewer. It may also have an impact on the data since the interviews were divided between the researchers. The researchers also used the interview guide to varying degrees, which caused differences in how information was retrieved.

When it comes to credibility, both researchers have a responsibility to select the information that is considered credible.

5.3 Recommendations for Future Research

Crime preventive work should be recognized in every aspect of its practice. If these sorts of actors, especially in vulnerable areas, actually have an impact, it may be important to investigate it more deeply. In order to motivate the state to support such activities financially more often. Areas that can be researched in more detail may be whether organizations such as those that have been studied actually work with more continuity and commitment in their relationship building. And whether the relationship between this kind of adult (besides parents and teachers) and young people actually has a crime prevention effect. There is some previous research (section 1.4), but it may be important to conduct more frequent research in a Swedish context, as young people's behavior and environment change. More research around this matter can provide a theoretical framework on how to work with young adults to prevent criminal behaviour.

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6.2 Interview guide

- Vilken aktör jobbar du för/har jobbat för?
- Var nånstans är aktören aktiv/har varit aktiv?

(Frågor om själva aktören, dvs organisationen, föreningen etc)

- Kan du beskriva aktören?
- Aktörens huvudsakliga syfte eller uppdrag? (indirekt/direkt förebyggande arbete?)
- Ideellt arbete?
- Finansiering?
- Hur länge har ni varit aktiva?
- Aktörens storlek, nationellt omfång, mängd medlemmar osv?

(Frågor om det brottsförebyggande arbetet)

- Arbetar ni brottsförebyggande på något vis?
- Hur arbetar ni brottsförebyggande?
- Vilka är målen och syftet, vad vill ni förebygga?
- Vilka riktar ni er mot, och hur når ni målgruppen?
- Hur gör ni er kända för folk?
- Har ni några tydliga riktlinjer eller stadgar på hur ni ska jobba?

- Vad anser du är det viktigaste aspekterna i arbetet?
- Vad tror du verksamheten har för betydelse i lokalområdet?
- Hur tror du verksamheten uppfattas av människor i lokalområdet?
- Vad innebär verksamheten för ungdomar/barn i relation till kriminalitet?
- Vad innebär verksamheten i relation till sammanhållning i området?
- Vad innebär verksamheten i relation till samhällsintegration?
- Finns några resultat, uppföljningar eller redovisningar från verksamheten?

- Upplever du att förutsättningarna har förändrats för brottsförebyggande arbete, isf hur?
- Har upplägget förändrats rent konkret under din tid i verksamheten?
- Vilken/vilka faktorer är mest försvårande i ert arbete?
- Vilken/vilka faktorer är mest framgångsrika i ert arbete?
- Finns det något du önskar skulle vara annorlunda med verksamheten?
- Vad tror du är viktigast att jobba med inför framtiden?

- Finns det något annat av relevans som du skulle vilja lyfta?
- Är det okej att vi kontaktar er igen, utifall vi har uppföljande frågor?