

Review

The effect of youth consultations on criminal desistance

Background and objectives:

- The report assesses whether the use of Youth Consultations (YC) in Denmark has had an effect on criminal desistance.
- Since 2012, all Danish police districts have been required to organise YCs. A YC is an interdisciplinary, cooperative body where representatives of relevant authorities discuss what would constitute an appropriate sentence in cases where a minor has been charged with a criminal offence. The YC gives a recommendation to the court, which it usually follows, though it is not required to do so.

Research design:

- Recidivism in minors who have been sentenced after a YC is compared with recidivism in comparable minors whose cases were treated regularly.
- The analysis uses data concerning YCs which is combined with the recorded criminal histories of the minors charged. The treatment groups consist of minors who had their cases treated in a YC that led to a verdict in 2012 or 2013. The control group consists of a comparable group whose cases were not considered by a YC. As these groups are not allocated randomly, comparability is ensured by applying propensity score matching.
- The effect on desistance is measured as recidivism in the treatment and control groups within two years of the verdict or release from prison.

Findings:

- The analysis shows a statistically significant reduction in the frequency of recidivism for minors who were given a verdict that was in accordance with the recommendation made by the YC. The effect is statistically significant for all crimes as well as specifically for violations of the Danish Penal Code.
- It is only possible to show significant effects for the YCs in the individual police districts to a very limited extent.
- The report lends cautious support to the hypothesis that the use of YCs has an effect in preventing crime by reducing recidivism, though only in cases where the courts and the YCs agreed on an appropriate sentence.

