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The structure and development of juvenile violence in Germany

– A proposition paper based on current research findings –

Christian Pfeiffer and Peter Wetzels

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Introduction

In 1998 the Criminological Institute of Lower Saxony (KFN) carried out three extensive quantitative studies on juvenile violence: (1) A representative survey of the violence experienced and practised by young people of ninth-grade school age (minimum age 14 years and maximum age 18 years, mostly 15-16 years old). Until April 1999 data have been collected and analysed from 12,882 respondents in the towns and cities of Kiel, Hamburg, Hanover, Stuttgart, Schwäbisch Gmünd, Leipzig, Wunstorf and Lilienthal. (2) An analysis of all files from 1990, 1993 and 1996 of the Department of Public Prosecution (DPP) in Hanover involving young persons under the age of 21 who were registered by the police as suspects for violent crimes. (3) A study of the development of crime in the same age group based on statistics kept by the police, DPPs and courts at federal and regional levels (in the *Länder*). This article presents and reviews the main findings of the three projects by putting forward eight certain key propositions.¹

In reality the increase in juvenile violence is less pronounced than police data give reason to believe.

According to police crime statistics there has been a massive increase throughout Germany in the involvement of juveniles and young adults in violent delinquency, both as offenders and as victims. The same trend is not found in the over-30 age groups (Pfeiffer 1998). *Figure 1* shows the number of suspects (per 100,000 population) for different age groups since 1984. As can be seen in the following figure, violent juvenile crime registered by the police increased in western Germany² by a factor of 3.3 between 1984 and 1997, with a rise of about 80% among young adults (18-21 years old). This rise seems to go on. As can be seen, recently there was an additional increase from 1997 to 1998.

¹ The findings of these three surveys, though with the school-pupil survey still confined to the cities of Hamburg, Hanover, Leipzig and Stuttgart (a sample of 9,700 young people), were first published in a research report prepared for the 24th Conference of German Juvenile Courts (Pfeiffer, Delzer, Enzmann & Wetzels 1998).

² Longitudinal analyses of police crime statistics were confined to western Germany (old federal states of the FRG) since there are no comparably reliable police data for eastern Germany (new federal states of the FRG, i.e. former DDR) covering the period of 1984 to 1994.

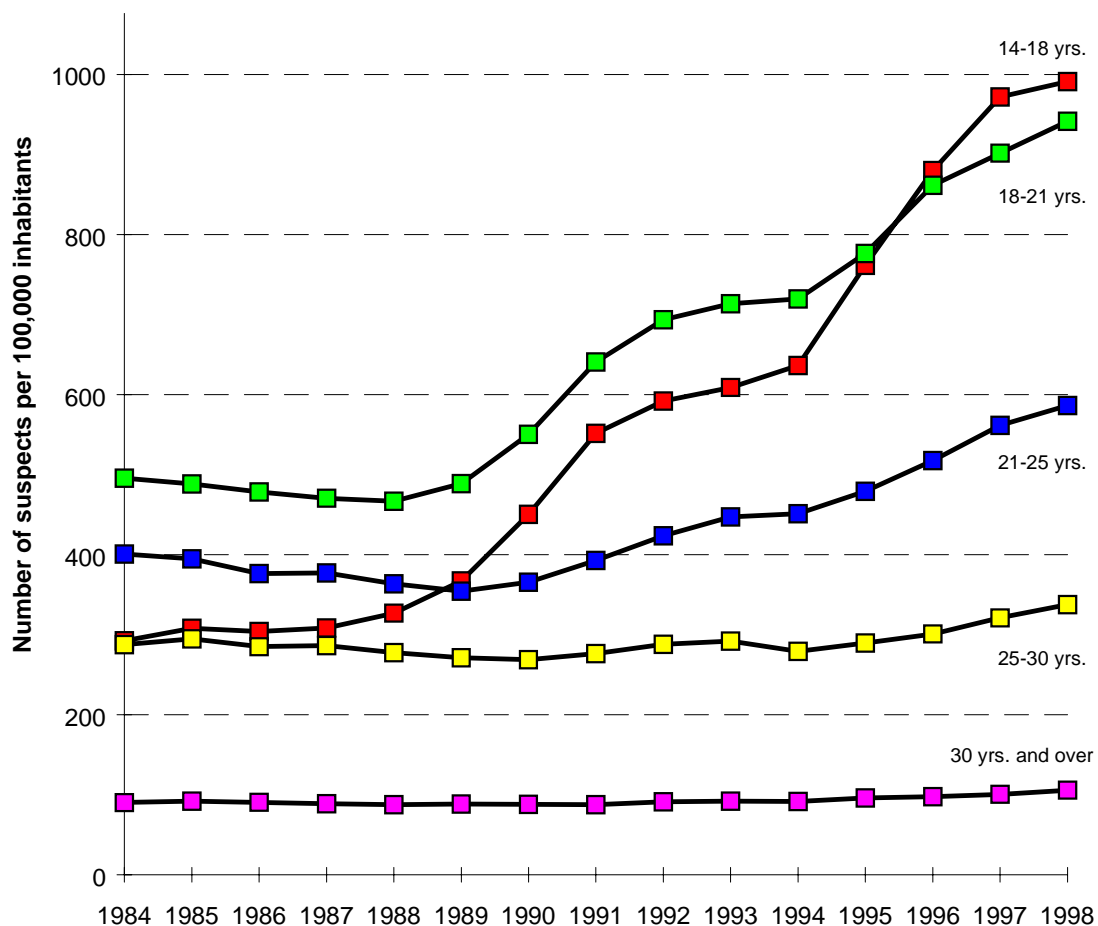


Figure 1: Time series showing suspects of violent crime in different age groups in former West Germany including Berlin

These police figures reflect only reported crimes, so they cannot show us how many offences are committed which do not come to the police's notice. There are no regular, standardised, representative victim surveys available in Germany that might provide empirical evidence of possible changes in reporting behavior. Longitudinal comparisons can only be made by referring to a number of regional investigations and studies carried out at schools (Tillmann 1997; Funk 1995; Lösel, Bliesener & Averbek 1999; Mansel & Hurrelmann 1998; Langner & Sturzbecher 1997). These indicate that juvenile violence has risen, although the increase found in these studies of unreported acts was well below the growth rates in the police statistics. It remains to be asked whether there has been an increase in the willingness to report violent juvenile delinquency, thus making it a more visible phenomenon. Our survey of school pupils offers empirical support for the hypothesis that violent juvenile offences are now more likely to be reported. This conclusion can be drawn from the fact that the proportion of juveniles from immigrant families within their age-group of the total population has increased over the last few years, coupled with a phenomenon of ethnic selectivity in crime reporting.

According to our file analyses, in the early 1990s the most prevalent source of violent crimes among young people in Hanover were *intraethnic* conflict constellations, that is to say cases in which offenders and victims belonged to the same ethnic group (65.1%). In 1996, however, the majority of violent crimes recorded (58.1%) were *interethnic*, i.e. with aggressors and victims from different ethnic groups.

In our survey of school pupils, the young victims of violence were asked to identify the ethnic group to which the aggressor in the most recent attack had belonged. They were also asked whether they had reported the attack to the police.³ Analyses of the victims' answers reveal that acts of violence were not reported to the police as frequently when both aggressor and victim belonged to the same ethnic group (*Figure 2*).

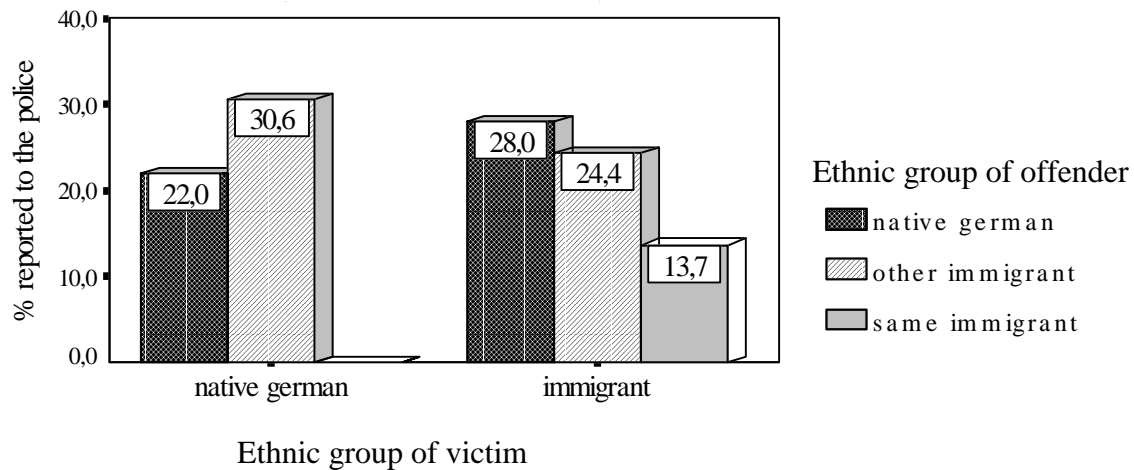


Figure 2: Proportion of crimes reported to police, by ethnic group of offenders and victims

In the “German vs. German” constellation, which used to predominate, only one fifth (22.0%) of the acts of violence are reported. When an “immigrant” attacks or robs a native German, however, almost one third (30.6%) of the acts are reported. The same situation applies when both aggressor and victim belong to the same immigrant ethnic group – only 13.7% of cases are reported. When both are from immigrant families but they belong to different ethnic groups, the reporting rate is rather higher, at 24.4%. And when the victim is from an immigrant family and the aggressor is a native German it increases further, to 28.0%.

We interpret these findings to mean that the willingness and/or the ability to settle the matter informally is lower in the case of interethnic incidents. When juvenile victims and aggressors come from different ethnic groups, communication problems are more likely to occur. These may contribute to a situation in which those directly involved cannot settle the conflict themselves and prefer to take recourse to the police.

Because of the large influx of non-German ethnic groups into western Germany since the late 1980s, the number of interethnic victim-offender combinations in cases of juvenile violence has grown, thus increasing reporting probability. As our analysis confirms, more cases are now being reported of a type that in years gone by would have been settled internally among the parties involved (see Pfeiffer et al. 1998). A further consequence of this selective ethnic reporting behavior is that a disproportionate number of juveniles from immigrant families now appear in the suspect statistics.

Nevertheless, we do have to assume that youth violence really is increasing. The rise in violent juvenile crime registered by the police is much too great for it possibly to be explained solely by an increase in the willingness to report such acts. This can be seen, for example, by comparing the juvenile victimisation rates recorded by the police for the two sexes. The number of male

³ In the accompanying graph, the term “non-German” includes all youths who are immigrants to the country, whatever passport they hold.

robbery victims aged between 14 and 18 increased by a factor of 11.8 between 1985 and 1997, whereas the increase for females was just 5.1. We cannot find any plausible theoretical explanation as to why male victims (and their parents) might now be much more willing to report acts of violence, and not female ones.

Moreover, it is not very realistic to suppose that the willingness of juveniles, for example, to report a robbery offence has changed as drastically since 1985 as the statistics would lead us to believe. According to the school surveys, only 20-25% of the 14 to 16-year-old robbery victims reported the offences against them in 1997. In 1985 the figure would have to have been just 4-5% for the increase in police victim statistics to be explained solely by a change in reporting behavior. We therefore assume that the increase in juvenile robbery offences in the police's crime statistics is due partly to changed reporting behavior but more substantially to a real increase in this type of violent offence. For want of longitudinal data on reporting behavior, it is impossible, however, to express the extent of this increase in precise percentage terms.

Juvenile acts of violence recorded by the police have not become more brutal in recent years; in fact, the average severity of the offences has decreased.

The analysis of all police-registered violent offences by young people in Hanover in 1990, 1993 and 1996 shows that the number of such acts committed by juveniles and young adults practically doubled in this time (Pfeiffer et al. 1998, pp. 33ff). However, the average severity of incidents of youth violence has also fallen considerably since 1990.

More than half (54%) of the rise between 1993 and 1996 in people under 21 charged with robbery offences involved sums of less than DM 25 and a further 28.9% fell into the DM 25-100 category. The proportion of cases involving amounts above DM 500, by contrast, dropped from 29.2% to 14.8%. The number of robberies in which the victim was injured also declined markedly from 41.6% to 32.0%. A similar picture emerges for aggravated or serious assault: between 1993 and 1996 there was a clear rise in the number of attempted offences or of injuries that required no medical treatment (from 34.6% to 43.9%), against a slight decline in cases requiring out-patient treatment and a considerable drop in those leading to hospitalisation (from 14.6% to 7.9%). The use of weapons also declined in acts of violence investigated (from 34.2% to 17.5%). Meanwhile the proportion of offenders with no prior juvenile criminal record increased considerably. In 1990 40.1% were first-time offenders, compared with 61.9% in 1996. At the same time the number of offenders with six or more previous convictions dropped from 9.5% to 4.1%.

Alongside the increase in the proportion of *interethnic* incidents and the associated communication problems, another explanation for the drop in the severity of the offences can be sought in an analysis of the age profile of victims and offenders. Between 1990 and 1996, the percentage of victims under 18 increased from 26% to 51%. The percentage of under-18s accused of robbery offences or of aggravated or serious assault rose from 48% to 62%.

A longitudinal analysis of the DPP's investigation and prosecution statistics gives clear indications that the reduction in the severity of offences observed in Hanover also applied nationwide. The proportion of violent offences leading to prosecutions in the 14 to 21-year age group declined substantially: in 1984 one in two suspects were brought to trial, compared to just under one in three in 1996 (*Figure 3*). This discrepancy between the rate of suspects, identified

by the police, and the rate of juveniles, sentenced by courts, further increased during 1997, as can be seen in the following figure.

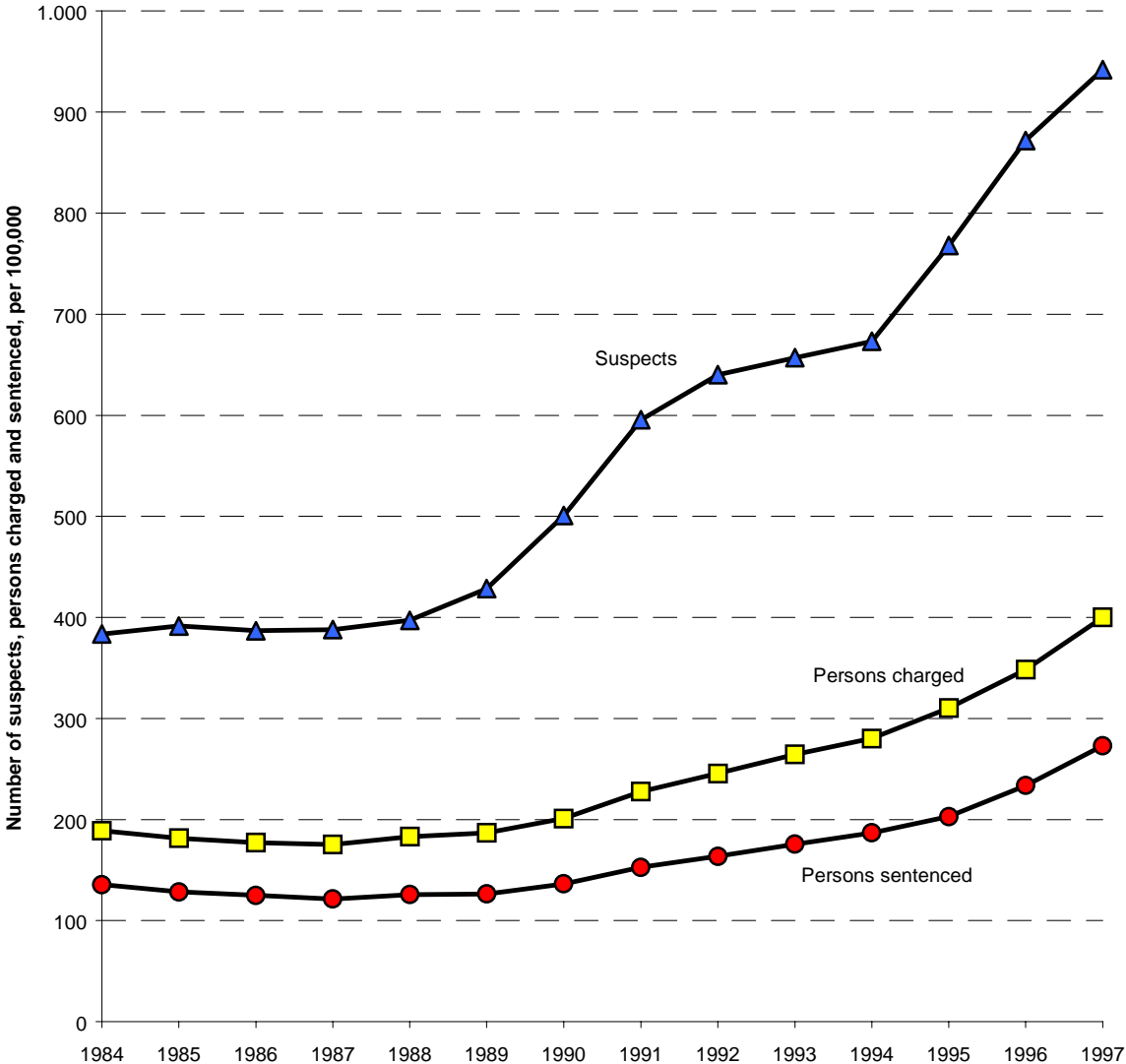


Figure 3: Number of people aged 14-21 years suspected of, charged with and sentenced for committing violent crime in former West Germany, per 100,000 in that age group

A longitudinal comparison of prosecution statistics in 1984, 1990 and 1996 also points up changes in sentencing patterns. Liberty-depriving sentences for offenders in the 14 to 21-year age group for offences involving robbery dropped considerably in the 12 years in question. This can be seen most clearly in non-suspended custodial sentences, which declined from 30% in 1984 to just over half that amount (15.7%) in 1996. Suspended custodial sentences with probation also went down from 33.0% to 26.5%. The proportion of offenders sentenced to short-term juvenile detention remained almost unchanged at around 14.0%. The trend is similar for assault crimes (non-suspended, custodial sentences down from 5.1% to 3.5%; suspended sentences with probation from 10.1% to 8.3%; and juvenile detention from 21.8% to 18.3%). By contrast, the proportion of juveniles and young adults given custodial sentences for theft remained almost at the same level in the 1990s as it had been at in the mid-1980s.

How can this development be explained? Have juvenile judges become more lenient towards young violent offenders? In view of the fact that officially registered juvenile violence has

markedly increased, this interpretation of the data is not very plausible. We believe it more likely that juvenile courts have not fundamentally changed their criteria as to when liberty-depriving sentences are necessary for violent crimes. Rather, our explanation for this development is that the severity of the robbery and assault offences has dropped considerably in the 12 years under review. In support of this proposition, it should be noted that the proportion of young adults among 14 to 21-year-old offenders also went down: from 49.8% in 1984 to just 35.7% in 1996 for robbery offences, and from 56.3% to 45.6% for assault.

Our interpretation is further backed up by the fact that the frequency of custodial sentences for theft was only slightly down. If juvenile judges had become more lenient, this leniency ought to have been reflected in sentences not only for violent offences but also for theft. However, this is not the case. In 1994 non-suspended custodial sentences were pronounced four times as often for robbery as for theft, compared with just 2.3 times as often in 1996.

The increase in juvenile violence is closely related to the fact that our society is becoming more and more of a winner/loser culture. Young immigrants in particular are socially marginalised as a result.

An analysis of the development of juvenile violence in ten member states carried out for the European Union in 1997 showed that the increase in juvenile violence discernible practically throughout Europe was attributable primarily to offenders with a low level of school education and a social position characterised by relative poverty and poor integration prospects (Pfeiffer 1998). This corroborated the conclusions reached by Dubet and Lapeyronnie in France (1994), Eisner in Switzerland (1997) and Oliver James in the United Kingdom (1995).

Our file analysis in Hanover also confirms these findings. Around four fifths of the increase in registered youth violence in the 1990s has been attributable to socially marginalised adolescents. Of those who were still school pupils, the study found that 52.3% attended the lowest grades of secondary school, i.e. special school or *Hauptschule* (see note to Table 1). A further 10.8% who had failed to find a training position after leaving school were in their “work preparation year”. If offenders who left school without any leaving certificate are included (12.0%), the proportion of offenders with a low level of education increases to 75.7%.⁴ In our representative survey of young people in Hanover, however, only 27.5% had this low educational level. Among the accused offenders who had already left school, 38.2% were unemployed at the time of the offence in 1990, compared with 60.4% in 1996.⁵ The data on parents’ occupational status also show a deterioration in the living standards of the families of violent young offenders: in 1990, 16.3% of them came from families in which the principal wage-earners were unemployed, compared with 27.9% by 1996.

The survey of school pupils has also produced evidence of the link between the future prospects and social situation of juveniles on the one hand and their attitude to violence on the other. This can be seen from the data on self-reported violent delinquency as a function of educational level

⁴ Moreover, when offenders charged are divided up into native Germans and other ethnic groups, 68.3% of the former turn out to have this low level of education, but 84.9% of the latter.

⁵ The deterioration in socioeconomic background was least manifest for native Germans (increase in unemployment from 42.9% to 53.8%), but for offenders from immigrant families the unemployment rate rose from 31.0% to 67.3% during this period.

(Table 1). The percentage of violent offenders in ninth-grade special school, *Hauptschule* or the “work preparation year” was almost three times as high as that for *Gymnasium* pupils. If the number of violent acts reported by the offenders is weighted by the mean frequency of offences, this difference increases to a factor of over four. Moreover, the difference in the level of violence between young “native” Germans (i.e., nationals resident since birth) and repatriates (see below) or foreign nationals is demonstrable even if educational level is held as a constant. The offending rate among native Germans attending *Gymnasium* was found to be 11.5%, only about half the rate applicable to the “immigrants” of that educational level.

Table 1: Offending rates for self-reported active violent delinquency in 1997, by educational level and ethnic origins

(offending rates weighted by mean offence frequency are shown in parentheses)

	Native germans	Naturalised or repatriated	Foreign nationals	Total offending rate	Total sample (N)
Special School, <i>Hauptschule</i> ⁶ work preparation year (<i>BVJ</i>) ⁷	30.1% (220.9)	31.7% (196.22)	34.5 (368.8)	31.6% (255.0)	2876
Integrated <i>Haupt-</i> and <i>Realschule</i> , or integrated comprehensive school	20.8% (114.8)	32.9% (119.4)	31.8% (286.2)	23.4% (142.9)	1456
<i>Realschule</i> ⁸	22.1% (131.9)	25.6% (155.9)	29.9% (362.7)	23.5% (189.6)	2822
<i>Gymnasium</i> ⁹	11.5% (51.75)	15.5% (79.67)	21.1% (102.54)	12.4% (60.1)	4536
other schools	21.0% (54.6)	(n<50)	(n<50)	20.6% (141.3)	306
Total offending rate	18.8% (98.1)	25.0 % (174.5)	30.7% (250.8)	21.2% (142.3)	
Sample size (N)	9024	1273	1699		11996

⁶ The "*Hauptschule*" provides basic secondary education, regularly up to age 15 or 16. Successful leavers may move on to basic apprenticeships.

⁷ The "work preparation year" (*BVJ*) is designed for young people who leave "*Hauptschule*" or a special school without an apprentice/traineeship to go to.

⁸ This intermediate class of school, to age 16 (sometimes up to age 18), opens up more avenues to enter vocational training programs or to take later academic examinations. In addition the integrated comprehensive school offers for the best of its pupils the possibility to take the "*Abitur*" leaving examination after 13 years of school, which qualifies for university entry.

⁹ The *Gymnasium* offers the most sophisticated education in the humanities and sciences, to age 19 or 20. The "*Abitur*" leaving examination qualifies for university entry.

The increase in juvenile violence is attributable for the most part to youths from immigrant families who have not been socially integrated. A particular problem in this respect are those that have grown up in Germany for many years in socially underprivileged circumstances.

According to police crime records, two thirds of the increase in the number of 14 to 21-year-olds suspected of violent offences in western Germany between 1984 and 1997¹⁰ can be accounted for by the substantial rise in the number of non-German suspects in that age group.¹¹ Another point to note is that the increase in German-nationality suspects was accompanied by a large wave of immigration from Eastern Europe; since 1988 a total of 2.4 million ethnic Germans – for the most part citizens of Romania, Poland and states formerly belonging to the Soviet Union – have come to Germany and taken German nationality on arrival (as “repatriates”).

As a result, Germans resident at birth are now in the minority among persons accused of juvenile violence in the major cities of western Germany. In Hanover, for example, they accounted for 61% of 14 to 21-year-olds accused of robbery and assault offences in 1990, but only 38% in 1996. Of the increase in the number of juveniles and young adults accused of such crimes in Hanover during this time, 95.1% was attributable to young people from immigrant families, whether foreign nationals, repatriates or naturalised Germans (Pfeiffer, Delzer, Enzmann & Wetzels 1998, p. 41).

The number of inmates in German juvenile prisons also shows the impact of immigration on the development of youth crime. A nationwide survey carried out by the KFN in 1998 showed that on May 31, 1998 the percentage of non-Germans was 35.0%, marking a substantial increase during the 1990s. Juveniles from repatriate families made up 10% while Germans who were resident at birth accounted for just 54.9% (Pfeiffer et al. 1998, p. 24).

The KFN also compared crime trends in districts of Lower Saxony with very high or very low immigration rates. Registered violent and robbery offences committed by young German nationals were found to have increased most since 1990 in the districts with the greatest number of repatriates. In districts with the lowest immigration rates the rise in crimes committed by 14 to 21-year-olds was much below the average for the state as a whole (Pfeiffer, Brettfeld & Delzer 1997, pp. 33ff).

As shown earlier, the dominant role played by immigrants in the increase in registered juvenile violence is partly attributable to an increase in the willingness of victims to report attacks by aggressors belonging to other ethnic groups. However, the level of violence actually practised by young people from immigrant families is indeed higher. They continue to be represented in disproportionately large numbers in statistics based on self-reporting of their own acts of violence rather than on the officially recorded crimes influenced by selective reporting behavior.

¹⁰ From 27,605 to 46,580.

¹¹ From 4,762 to 17,444.

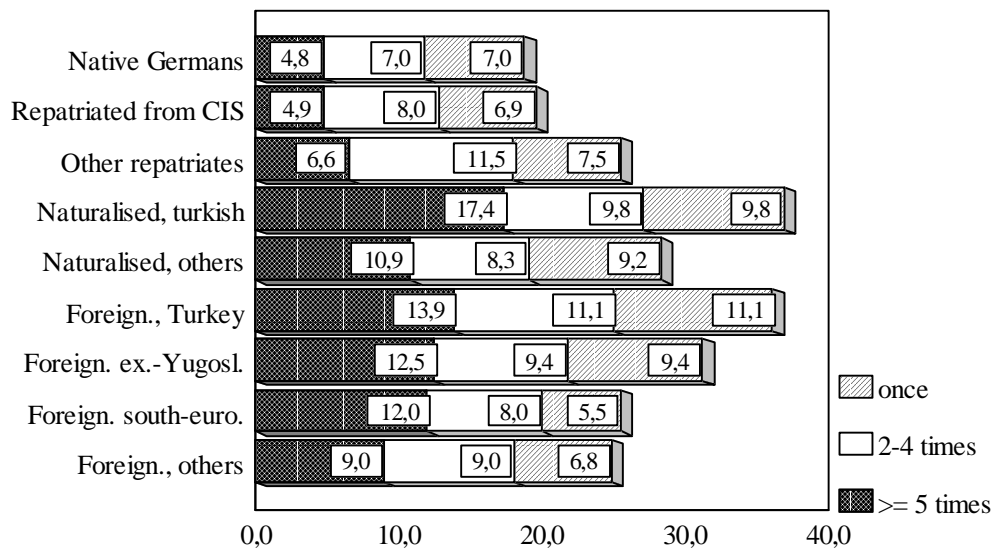


Figure 4: Rates of self-reported violent delinquency during the last year (1997), by ethnic origin

The considerable differences between the various ethnic groups are substantially due to differentials in the incidence of multiple offending (respondents saying they have committed five or more offences). This proportion, which was 13.9% for Turkish juveniles¹², was almost three times as high as the rate for native Germans. By contrast, the multiple offending rate for young members of repatriate families from the former CIS countries was comparable with that of native Germans.

We went on to ask young victims of violent acts about the ethnic group to which the offender(s) of the most recent attack had belonged.¹³ The responses obtained confirmed the above picture: Turkish youths were most frequently mentioned as attackers by victims of all ethnic groups (32.2%). In relation to their numbers in the survey group they were over-represented as aggressors by a factor of around four. The degree to which foreign nationals in general were cited as aggressors was twice as high as their proportionate number in the survey group.

As far as we have ascertained, the higher offending rates among young foreign nationals result to a very large extent from the problems associated with the social integration of children from immigrant families. The survey of school pupils has provided further evidence of this link. An important indicator of social integration is the level of education young people attain. School-leaving qualifications have a decisive effect on career opportunities and hence on the ability to participate fully in society. The different types of school attended serve as an indicator of future prospects. A comparison of the types of school attended by different ethnic groups clearly shows that these opportunities are very unequally distributed.

¹² This refers to those pupils, who still are turkish nationals; the rate for actually naturalised, former turkish juveniles was even higher [17,4%].

¹³ The Leipzig sample was not included in this comparison, as 99% of the youths surveyed there are native Germans (resident since birth), so victim-offender relationships involving different ethnic groups are virtually ruled out *a priori*.

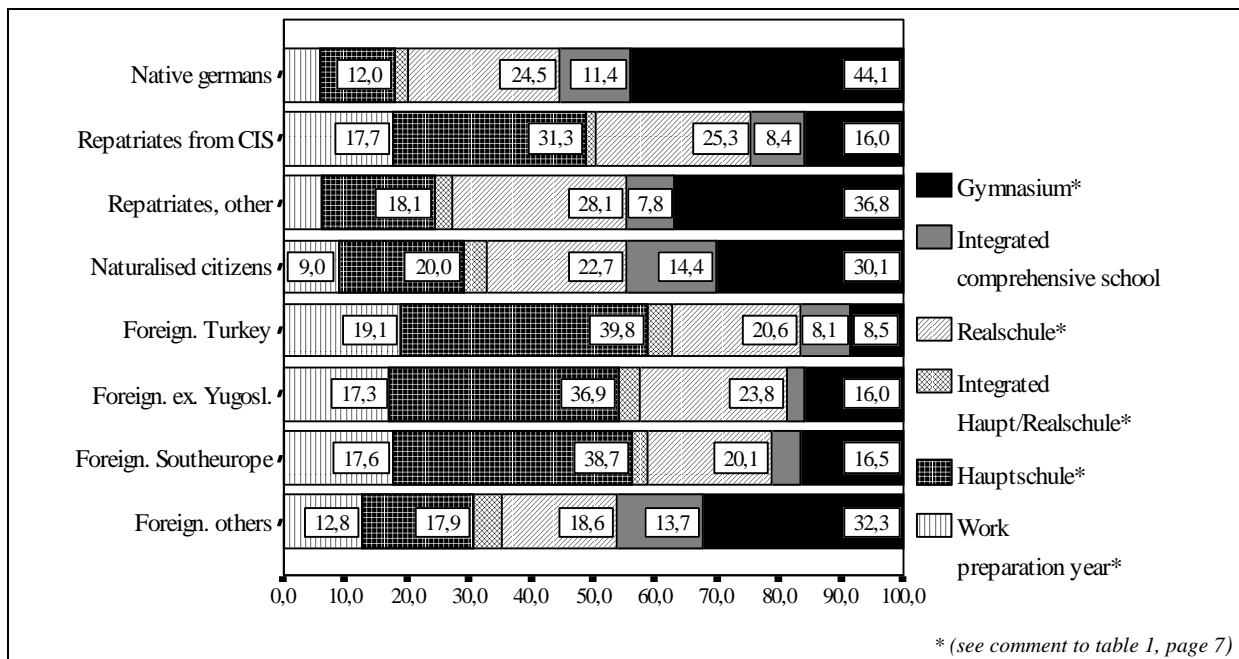


Figure 5: Comparison of educational level of different ethnic groups

The comparison shows that the native German group (44.1%) is much more strongly represented in *Gymnasium* schools than any of the “immigrant” groups. The proportion of Germans resident at birth attending *Hauptschule* is just 12.0%. The proportions for youths from Turkish families go to the other extreme: only 8.5% attend a *Gymnasium*, compared with 39.8% at *Hauptschule*. Young people from immigrant families are twice as likely to have parents out of work or drawing local welfare support (*Sozialhilfe*) than young native Germans. Finally, young immigrants are much less often members of sports clubs, youth clubs or youth groups (Pfeiffer et al. 1998, pp. 56ff) – all indications of lower social integration.

The files analysis also shows that almost 90% of the considerable increase in immigrants among the accused was attributable to foreign nationals who were born in Germany or whose families had immigrated more than five years previously. *Figure 6* shows a breakdown of self-reported violent delinquency by youths from immigrant families, in terms of the duration of residence in Germany.

A distinction can be drawn between three groups of juveniles in immigrant families. (1) Young immigrants who have been in Germany for less than two years. Most of these are repatriate Germans. The violent offending rate is by far the lowest in this group, and indeed is lower than the rate found among native Germans. (2) Young immigrants who have been in Germany for three to eight years. The offending rate in this category is significantly higher than the rate among native Germans. However, the rate is still lower than that of group (3), of immigrants arriving nine or more years ago, or young people born in Germany, belonging to immigrant families. So the “immigrants” with the longest period of residence also have the highest offending rates.¹⁴

¹⁴ Accordingly, youths from repatriate German families do not exhibit higher rates of self-reported delinquency than native Germans, as most of them have only lived in Germany for a short time.

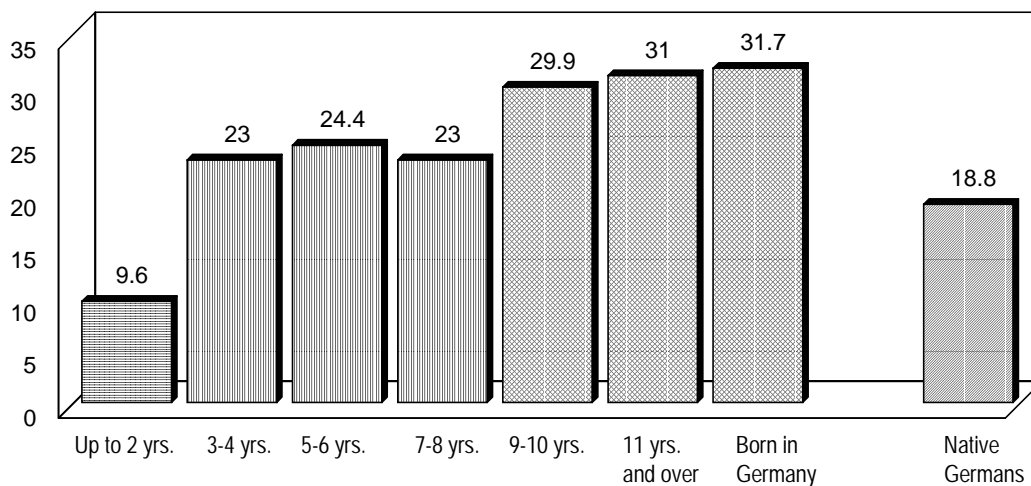


Figure 6: Active violent offender rates among immigrants, by length of residence
(Prevalence rates of selfreported violent offending during the last year)

We assume according to these results that young immigrants are willing to accept integration problems for a certain amount of time. Once these social disadvantages become long-term features of their lives, however, their commitment to the norms of the host society drops away. The experience of exclusion presumably fuels a growing tendency to form delinquent groups. The longer they experience social injustice, the greater is the probability that they will commit violent acts. They have, so to speak, acquired “German expectations” which they subjectively feel are justified, but they lack the “German opportunities” to match. A danger and an evident need for action can be inferred from these findings: if youths from newly immigrated families cannot be integrated, an eminent potential risk builds up for the future.

Juveniles who have been severely beaten or abused by their parents as children or in their youth are much more likely to be violent than others who have not been beaten.

Our school survey also correlated data on victimisation through physical violence by parents with the experience of victims of juvenile violence and with the self-reported data on active violence. Only 44.4% of the juveniles said that they had not been beaten by their parents during childhood (up to the age of 12); 29.4% had received mild corporal punishment, 16.5% had been severely punished, and 9.8% had been physically abused by their parents.

A considerable proportion of those surveyed (42.0%) had been beaten by their parents when at a juvenile age in the previous year, 1997 (they had been hit with objects, frequently beaten, or abused). Outside of the family, “only” 12.0% had been assaulted by juvenile offenders with or without a weapon during this time. Violence by parents within the family was thus more widespread than victimisation of juveniles by aggressors of the same age or younger, using the same types of violence. These two forms of violence differ considerably in the incidence of unreported cases. While about one sixth of serious acts of violence against juveniles by non-adults (mostly of around the same age) are reported to the police, the reporting rate for parental physical abuse is approx. 2.2%, i.e. one case in 40.

Intrafamilial violence against children and juveniles also correlates closely with the family’s socioeconomic situation. We found that juveniles from families in which the parents were out of work or drawing local welfare support were abused twice as often as those from families that did not have to face these hardships (Pfeiffer et al. 1998, pp. 87ff).

7.2% of juveniles were abused by their parents in 1997 and 8.0% subjected to severe corporal punishment. A breakdown by ethnic group (Figure 7) showed Turkish juveniles, practically one in five of whom had been a victim of physical abuse by their parents, occupying one extreme in the spectrum. The rates for juveniles from the former Yugoslavia and elsewhere in southern Europe were also high. At the other end of the scale, 5.5% of native Germans were victims of parental abuse and 7.5% had suffered severe punishment.

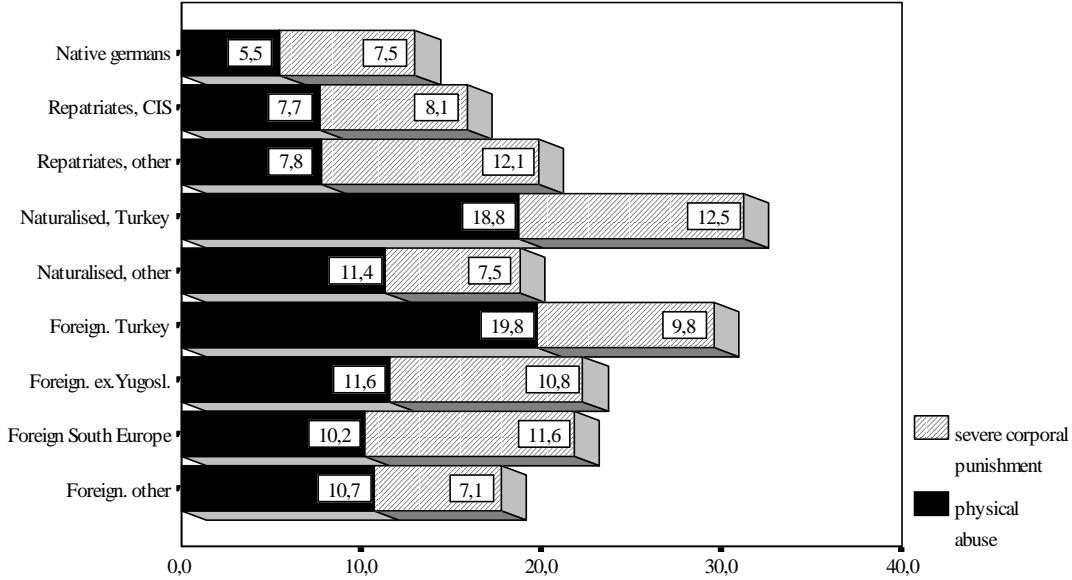


Figure 7: Victims of serious parental violence during the last year (1997) by ethnic origin

Violent experiences of this sort occurring during childhood or adolescence, or possibly throughout a young person’s subjectively recallable lifetime, considerably increase the likelihood of that person committing his/her own acts of violence. This link is especially evident among multiple offenders. Whereas only 4.5% of juveniles who had not themselves been the victims of severe parental violence committed multiple acts of violent delinquency in 1997, the corresponding figure among those who had suffered from severe parental violence both in childhood and in adolescence was found to be more than three times as high, at 14.8% (Figure 8).

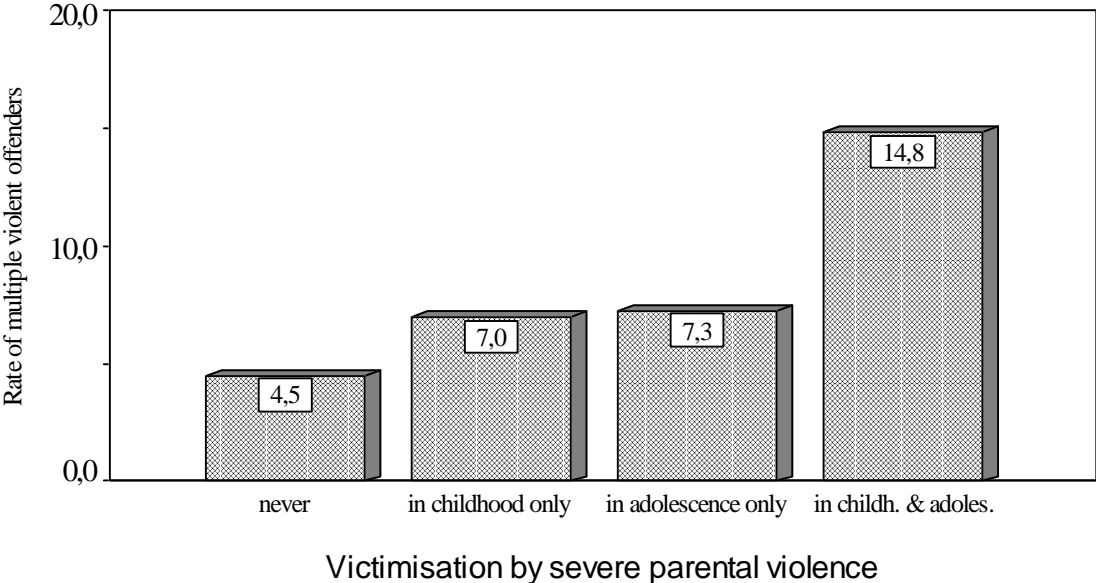


Figure 8: Rates of multiple violent offenders (self-reports for 1997) viewed against their experience of severe parental violence in childhood and/or in adolescence

The corollary is that an end to intrafamilial violence and the prevention of its continuation into adolescence will also considerably reduce the risk of active violence. Effective intervention thus appears to offer a chance of preventing some juvenile violence.

Juvenile violence is a male phenomenon; the predominance of young male offenders has increased markedly since the mid-1980s.

Is the increase in observed offending rates in violent youth crime attributable particularly to one gender or another? During the last few years the number of officially recorded suspect girls and young women per 100,000 population has risen more steeply than for boys and young men, by 354.1% compared with 219.5%. On the other hand, the gap between the sexes in absolute terms has widened considerably. Between 1984 and 1997, the proportion of male juveniles registered as suspects of violent crime by the police increased by 1.13 percentage points, from 0.52% to 1.65%. For females the rise was just 0.2 points from 0.06% to 0.26%. Put another way, 84.6% of the rise in juvenile violence was attributable to males and just 15.4% to females. This is to be registered in 1998 too (see Figure 9).

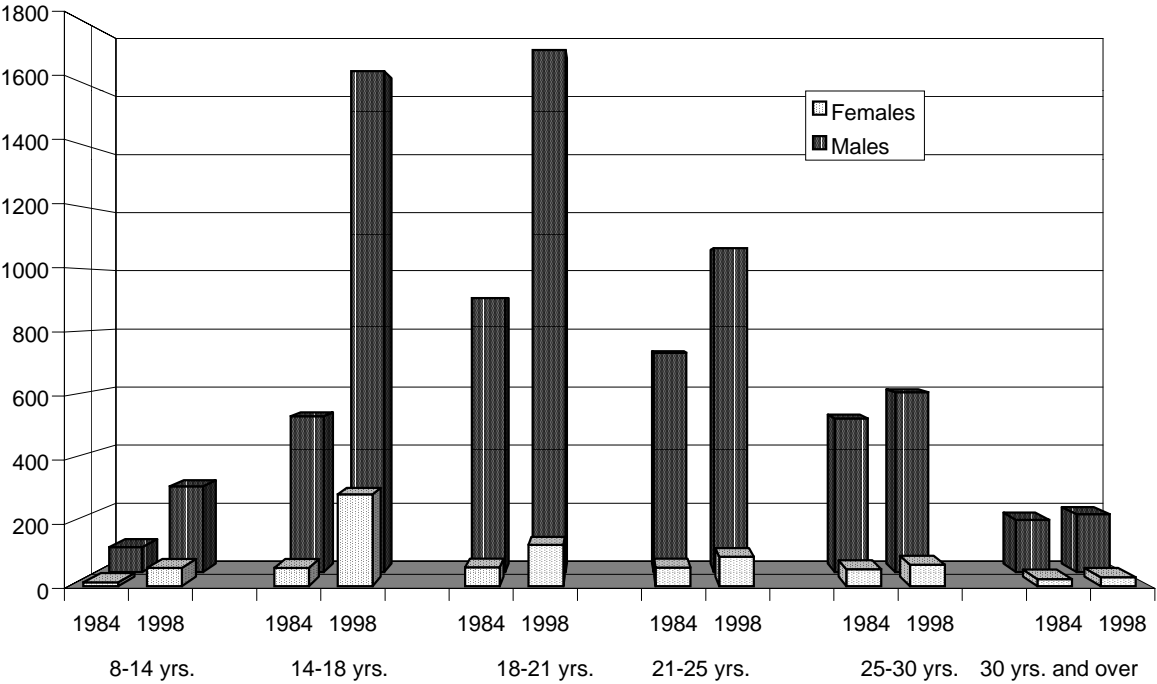


Figure 9: Violent crime suspects by age and gender, former West Germany, 1984 and 1998

The same applies to the percentages for victims of violence. Not counting sexual offences, male juveniles were by far the most frequent victims. Their risk of becoming the victim of an act of violence recorded by the police has quadrupled since the mid-1980s, whereas the risk for female victims has risen by a factor of 2.5 (Pfeiffer et al. 1998, p. 6). Following this development there were 3.7 times as many male victims in 1997 as female victims.

This dominance found in official records is also substantiated by our survey of violence not reported to the police, in which young males again predominated, particularly among multiple offenders having committed more than five acts of violence in 1997 (Figure 10).

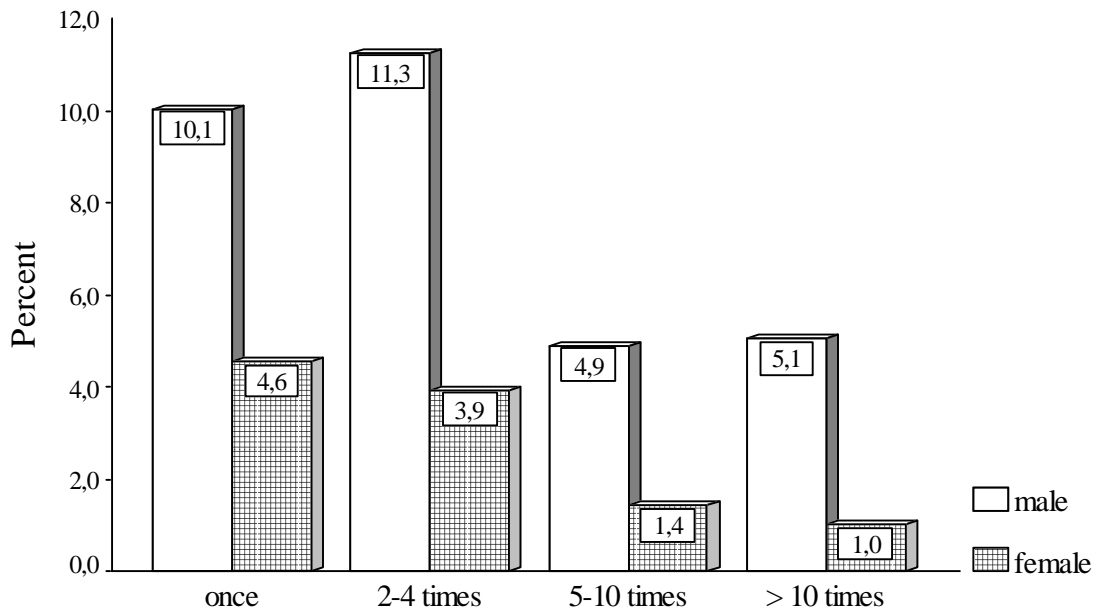


Figure 10: Offending rate for self-reported violence in 1997 by frequency and gender

The school survey also provided evidence that their parental upbringing was crucial to these differences between the sexes. Violent acts by girls were much more strongly condemned by parents than male violence (Pfeiffer et al. 1998, p. 78). A multivariate, logistic regression analysis also showed that, among female juveniles, variations in the incidence of violent crime among different ethnic groups were no longer significant once other factors had been controlled for, namely the level of violence in the family environment, educational level and the family's socioeconomic situation. By way of contrast, among the young males there remained a significantly higher incidence among foreign nationals even after these statistical controls. The result indicates that a young person's ethnic background brings with it certain ideas of masculinity that favour violence: ideas that are significant explanatory factors in acts of violence (Wetzels, Enzmann & Pfeiffer 1999).

The risk of juvenile violence increases considerably when at least two of the following three factors coincide:

- a) experience of intrafamilial violence**
- b) the family is severely underprivileged**
- c) the young person him/herself has poor prospects due to a low educational level**

In addition to the methods of upbringing used by parents, other factors that obviously play an important part in the development of juveniles in general and in their attitude to violence in particular are their family's material resources and whether or not they personally have good prospects. To analyse these factors, we divided the young people into the following three categories depending on the quality of the social environment in which they have been growing up: (A) socially underprivileged young people, who count among society's "losers", (B) a medium category, and (C) a privileged group of "winners".

The privileged group was defined to consist of those who (1) have a high level of education (*Realschule* or *Gymnasium*), who also (2) live in families without any problem of unemployment or need to draw welfare benefits and (3) have not suffered from severe parental violence (severe

punishment or physical abuse) either as children or juveniles. The underprivileged group was defined as including any juveniles who satisfy at least two of the three following criteria: (1) attendance at a school with unfavourable prospects (*Hauptschule* or “work preparation year”); (2) the family is affected by unemployment and/or drawing welfare benefits; and (3) they have been victims of serious parental violence as children and/or adolescents. All of the young people who do not satisfy the criteria for either the privileged or underprivileged group fall into the central, “medium” category.

The first aspect we examined was the distribution of privileged and underprivileged young people among the different ethnic groups. The flagrant social inequality in our society associated with ethnicity is well brought out here (*Figure 11*). Turkish juveniles are at the greatest social disadvantage: 36.8% of this ethnic group are underprivileged, and only 14.4% are privileged. However, young people from immigrant families of all ethnicities are at a disadvantage relative to native Germans. The proportion of the latter falling into the privileged category is 48.3%.

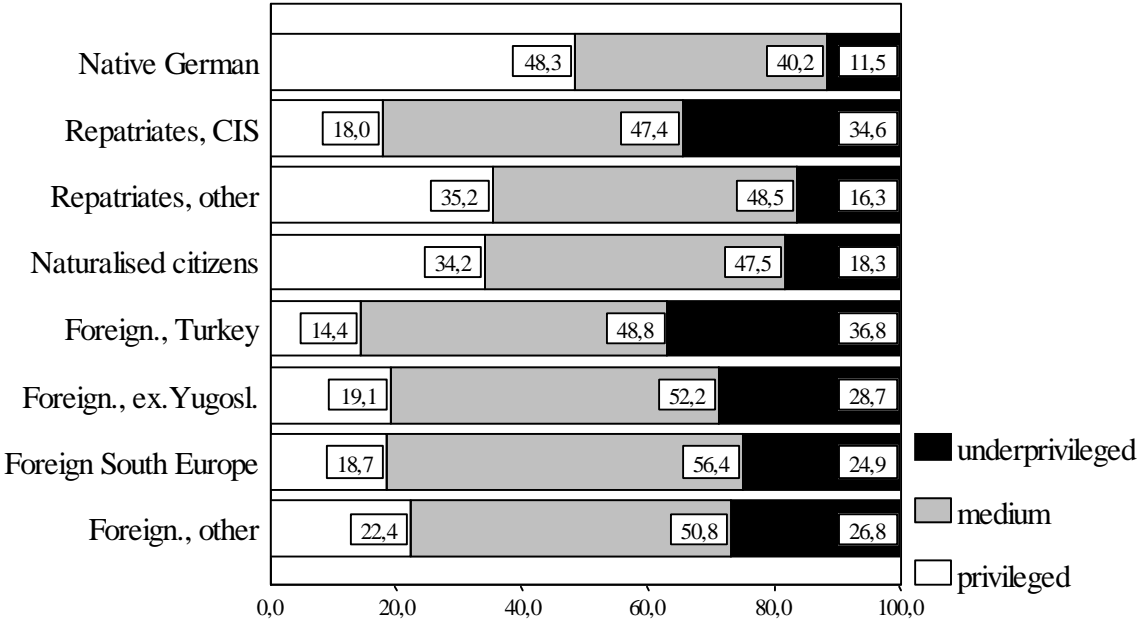


Figure 11: Social background in which young people grow up, by ethnic group

This unequal starting environment is also relevant to criminality and violence. *Figure 12* shows the degree to which this accumulation of risks impacts upon criminal behavior as measured by self-reported violent delinquency during the last 12 months.

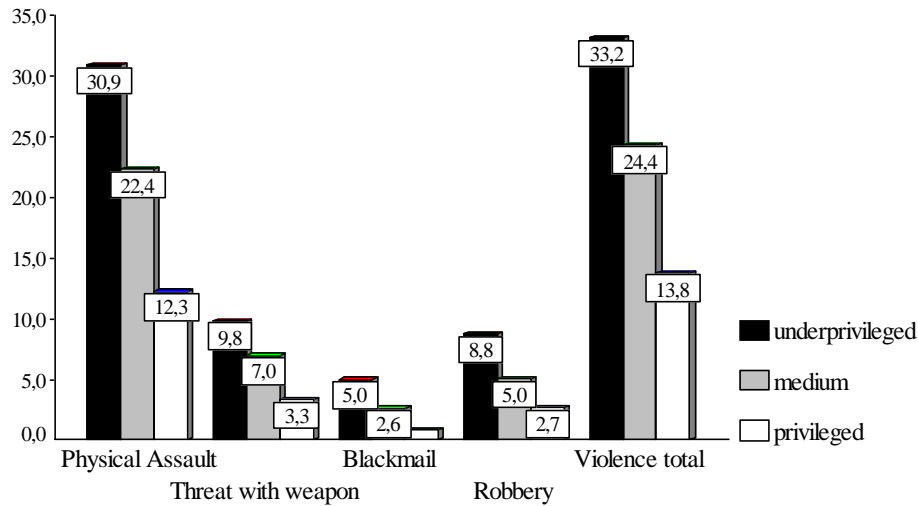


Figure 12: Prevalence of active violent offenders in 1997 by social background

Underprivileged youths as defined above had much higher rates of self-reported violent delinquency. According to their own statements they were three to four times as likely to rob, blackmail or threaten another person with a weapon than their privileged counterparts. They were also much more likely to be multiple offenders (*Figure 13*).

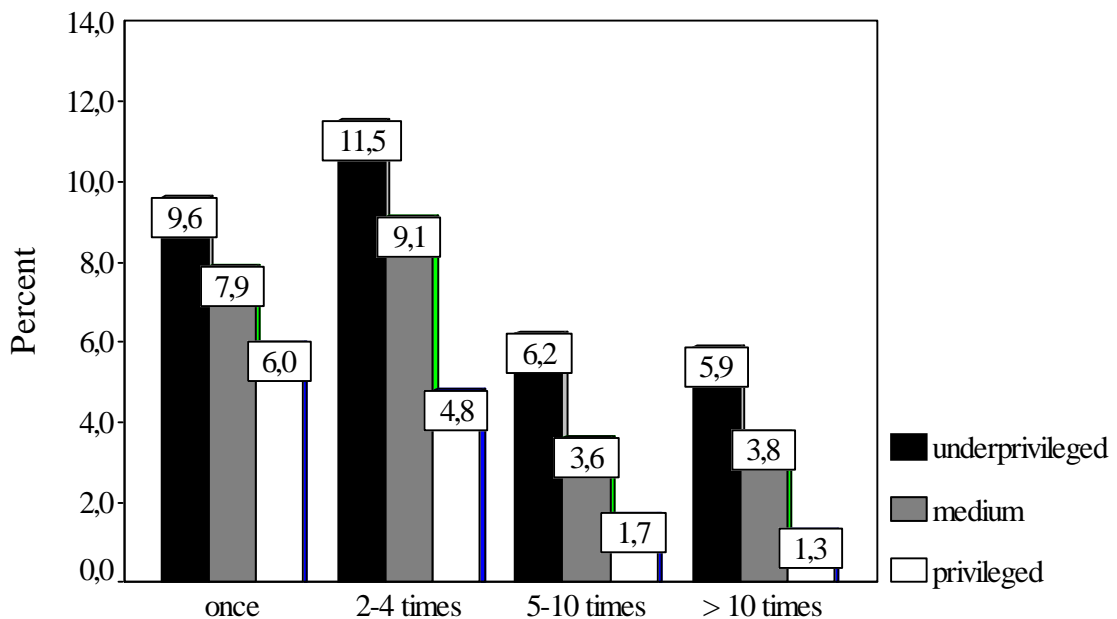


Figure 13: Self-reported violence in 1997, by frequency and social background

The rate of offenders who had committed ten or more offences was more than four times as high for the underprivileged group (5.9%) as for the privileged one (1.3%). These findings further corroborate the hypothesis that juvenile violence is also a reflection of a winner/loser culture.

Young people who have been victims of intrafamilial violence are significantly more likely to join in groups of others their age who favour violence. The bulk of youth violence is in turn attributable to such deviant groups. Membership in a social set with a propensity to act violently is a further factor acting alongside the experience of intra-familial violence to raise the risk of a youth being actively violent.

As children grow older, their peer groups play an increasingly important part in the development and establishment of their attitudes and social norms. This applies both in a positive way, as a supportive network of social relationships, and in a negative one, as an environment which encourages delinquency (Fuchs, Lamnek & Luedtke 1996; Tillmann, Holler-Nowitzki, Holtappels, Meier & Popp 1999). In our representative survey, we also asked the juveniles surveyed to tell us whether they had a firm group of friends (a social set).

50.9% of the young respondents said they belonged to an established social set. The further information provided on these peer groups was as follows: 15.1% of the groups were all-male, 12.1% all female, and 72.8% were of mixed gender. One in two (51%) of the young people belonging to a social set said their group was ethnically homogeneous.¹⁵ Most of the groups are based on friendships formed at school (70.2%). The other social sets named have been formed from neighbourhood acquaintances (21.4%), at sports clubs (21.4%), youth clubs or centres (16.2%), outside meeting-places (football ground, park, station) (16.9%), and other places (18.1%).¹⁶ 78.7% of the respondents said that they met their groups daily or several times each week, 16.5% meet up once a week, and just 4.8% meet up on a monthly basis.

To classify these social sets, we asked the survey participants nine questions about their groups' activities. A cluster analysis allowed us to identify the following three types of group: (1) "*Non-deviant*" social sets included 16.3% of the youths surveyed. The main features of these sets is that they hardly ever go into bars, breach social norms or the break the law, that their members normally work hard for school, they do not get into fights, do not arouse anxiety in other people, and do not have feuds with other social sets. The middle, "*normal*" group (2) takes in 24% of the youths surveyed. They occasionally breach social norms, visit bars or discos more than their "non-deviant" counterparts, and are also more frequently involved in creative activities (e.g. making their own music). However, they rarely fight others, they do not really count other groups as their enemies, and their behavior as a group does not make others feel threatened. These latter two aspects are the main features of the "*deviant*" group (3), accounting for 10.6% of the survey respondents. They frequently fight others, have feuds with other groups, and are often frightening to others. They tend to violate both social norms and the law very often, either for the fun of it or to assert their group's interests against those of competitors. 49.1% of the respondents said they did not belong to any social set.

The members of these three types of set differ substantially in their attitudes to violence, thus underlining the validity of the classification. Youths in deviant social sets have by far the greatest prevalence of attitudes favouring violence. The "normal" social sets and youngsters not

¹⁵ A mixture of people from immigrant families and native Germans occurred in 45.7% of the examples cited, and 3.3% of the young people said they belonged to a group consisting entirely of "immigrants", but of mixed ethnic origin.

¹⁶ Because respondents were able to name more than one alternative, the percentages do not add up to 100.

belonging to a set take up the centre ground, while the lowest tolerance of violence is found in the “non-deviant” social sets.

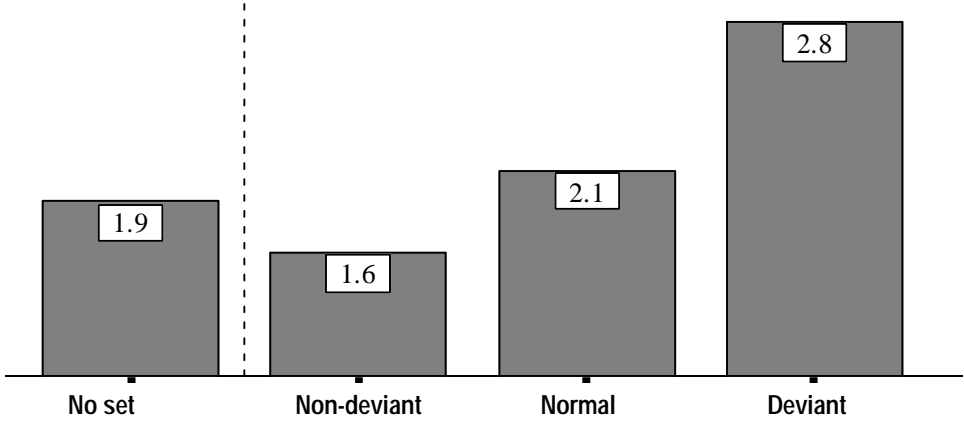
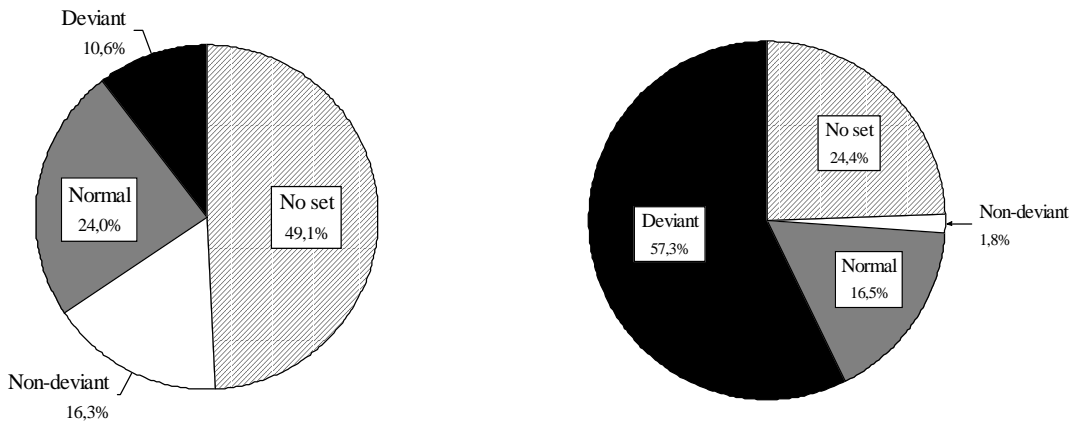


Figure 14: Mean acceptance of the use of violence (attitudes towards violence), by type of social set

When the distribution of respondents according to their social set (if any) is viewed against the proportion of self-reported violent offences attributable to each group, the majority of violent offences can be clearly shown to be committed by the young people whose peer groups have been identified as “deviant”. Although the youths in such social sets made up just 10.6% of the total sample surveyed, they were responsible for 57.3% of all the acts of violent delinquency in 1997 reported by the school pupils. Youths not belonging to any social set made up 49.1% of the respondents, but they accounted for only 24.4% of the violent acts. The “normal” group, responsible for 16.5% of the active violent delinquency reported, were also less delinquent than their share in the total sample (24.0%) might otherwise lead one to expect. So these results in themselves are enough to stress the importance of keeping a close eye on young people whose peer groups are inclined towards deviant behavior.



Distribution of young people by type of social set

Share of total self-reported violent delinquency during the last year (1997) attributable to each type of social set

Figure 15: Distribution of young people by type of social set, and the share of total self-reported violent delinquency accounted for by different types of set

Members of deviant groups that are prone to use violence are mainly boys. 14.5% of the boys surveyed were members of deviant social sets, but only 6.6% of the girls. Most of these girls are

members of mixed-gender groups, in which they probably do not normally play a dominant role. There are also differences among ethnic groups as regards membership in social sets. To begin with, young people from immigrant families are slightly more likely not to belong to any set at all. Membership of deviant sets is highest among naturalised youths, at 23.6%; they also have the longest mean period of residence in Germany. After them, in second place, come the young foreign nationals (20.3%), then repatriate Germans (15.1%) and native Germans (12.9%).

The proportion of juveniles belonging to a deviant social set increases with the frequency of exposure to intrafamilial violence, and with its intensity (*Figure 16*).

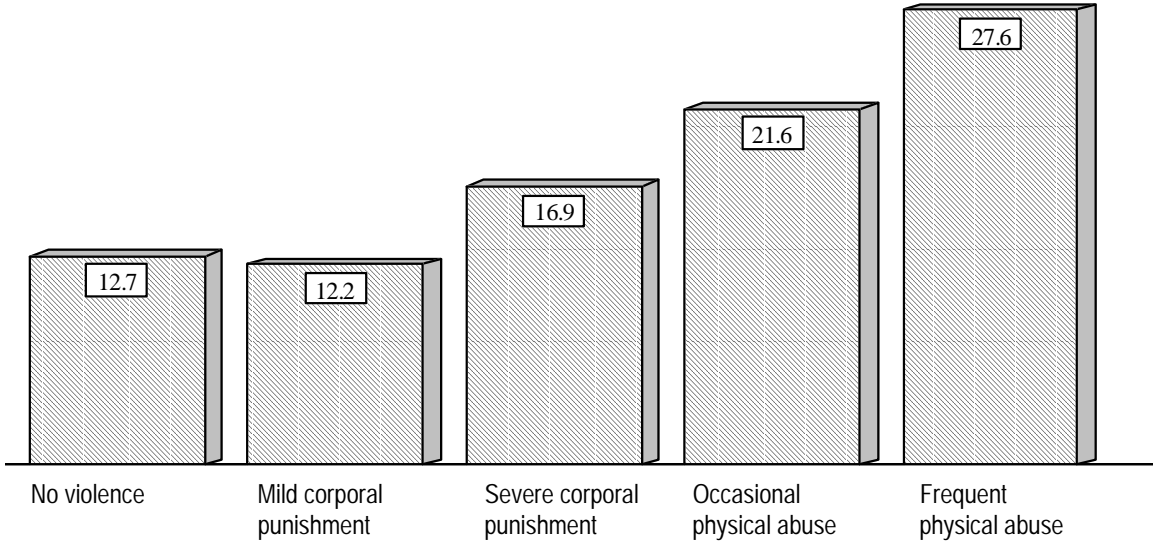


Figure 16: Percentage of male youth in deviant sets, by level of parental violence experienced in childhood

Another factor influencing the relative frequencies of membership in different social sets is the current socioeconomic situation of young people. If their educational and training prospects are poor, they are more likely to join deviant social sets. When the three-way classification of privileged, moderately privileged and underprivileged is again applied, the young people with underprivileged backgrounds are most likely to be in deviant sets (*Figure 17*).

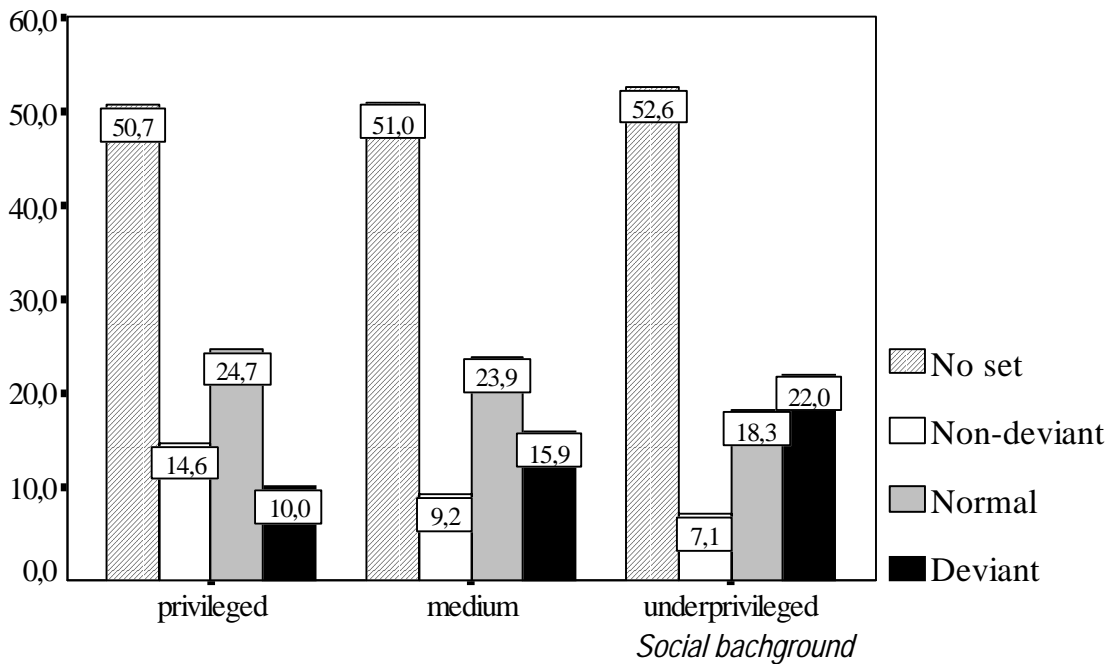


Figure 17: Type of social set, by social background (male juveniles only)

An important aspect for preventive work, which ought systematically to address the area of social sets in view of their importance for teenagers, is to have some knowledge of the places where these groups are formed. The next diagram shows the distribution of the three classes of social set broken down by the place of formation.

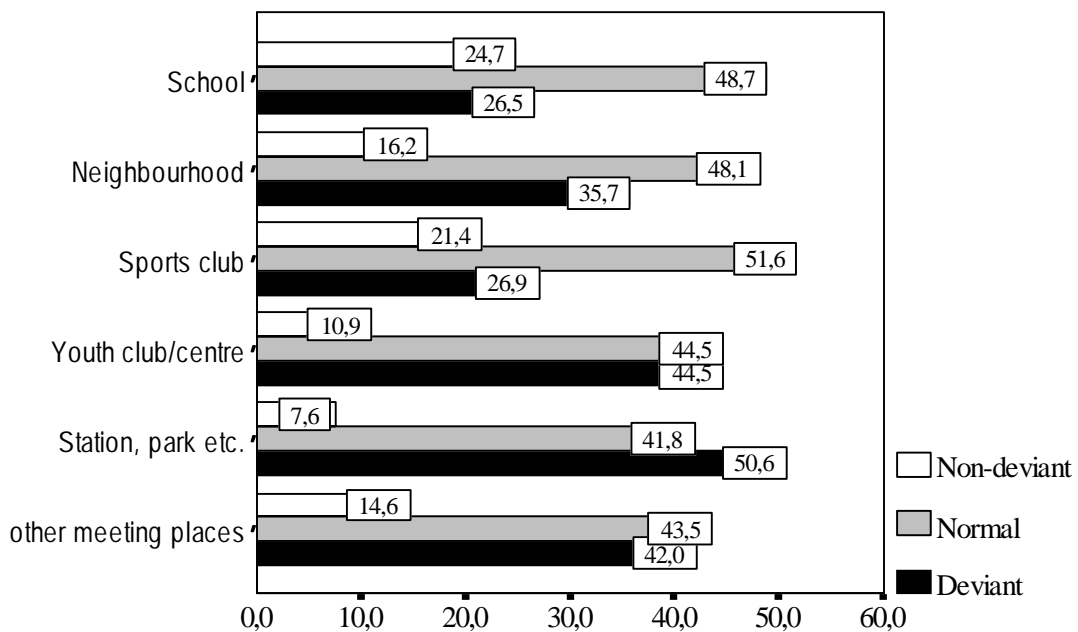


Figure 18: Types of set depending on where their members meet (male juveniles)

Their peer group falls into the deviant category for 26.5% of the male juveniles who say their social set met at school. By way of contrast, the corresponding proportion of deviant-set membership for those whose group was established at a youth centre is 44.5%. Evidently, outside meeting-places (the cases surveyed were stations, football stadiums and parks) and youth centres are the places where deviant social sets are most likely to develop. In sports clubs, on the other hand, the incidence is much lower at 26.9%, and “non-deviant” or “normal” social sets are more prevalent.

Our next step in the analysis was to bring together the experience of intrafamilial violence, parental norms on youth violence and those of the peer group to set up a multivariate structural equation model, to test the relative importance of young people's family situation and of the social set(s) they form with people of their own age as factors influencing violent delinquency. The model showed that both the presence of violence within the family and the norms of the peer group exerted highly significant effects in parallel on the level of active violence practised by young people (*Figure 19*).¹⁷

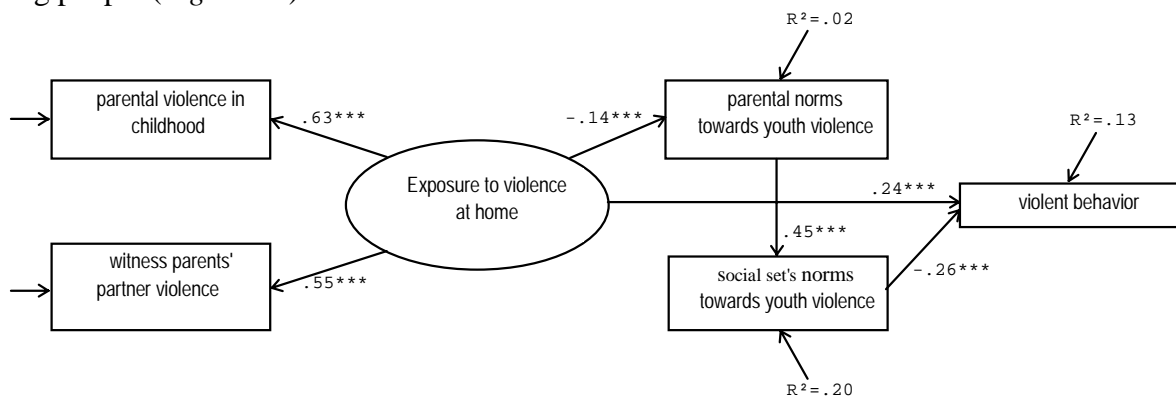


Figure 19: Violence in the family, parental norms toward's juvenile violence, the social set's norms and violent action: Multivariate structural equation model (males only)

Youths from families in which they experience violence are more likely to seek ways out of their family situation, spending more of their time in their social sets, which very often will be groups that themselves favour the use of violence. Thus both the social set's norms and exposure to violence within the family are significant explanatory factors in violent youth delinquency. There is also a strong connection between parental norms on violence and those of the social set. That is, the young people in their social sets exhibit the norms and modes of behavior that match their biographical experience with their parents. So social sets constitute an important component in a recurring cycle of violence that transcends generational boundaries. Attention must be paid to these groups by anyone seeking to break such recurring cycles.

One of the implications of these findings for intervention and preventive work is that whatever measures are taken need not only to gain access to young people's family situation (principally their parents) and endeavour to bring about positive changes, but also to bring influence to bear on the people of their own age that they mix with. Certainly, these findings suggest that preventive work which fails to address juvenile social sets is likely to be difficult, as these groups are of crucial importance to about half the population of juveniles. Since the bulk of young people who practise violence on a massive scale are members of such groups, it is surely necessary to aim preventive work directly at them.

¹⁷ The links were found to exist for both male and female juveniles, the differences between them being confined to the actual level of their willingness to use violence. Similarly, the structural links follow the same pattern within all ethnic groups.

First tentative Conclusions

The research findings presented here clearly demonstrate that crime-policy strategies focusing solely on intensified repression are neither farsighted nor likely to bring positive results. For young people who themselves face the risk of violence, repression in the majority of cases will merely be a continuation of the life they have always had to put up with. Instead of recognition, attention and encouragement, they have frequently already experienced ostracism, rejection and even violence in their families.

Our society must help young people to grow up in such a way that they develop self-esteem and social competence, feel integrated and can thus evolve into responsible and socially aware citizens. The present environment for many children and juveniles is unfavourable to say the least. The abolition of the parental right of corporal punishment is long overdue. A state that indicates to its citizens that it could be legitimate to strike children also encourages the misconception that what is legally permissible is also right. Thus the state itself shares the blame for intrafamilial violence against children and juveniles. All the professionals in social fields are called upon to coordinate and if necessary to enhance the potential of children's day centres, schools, advice centres and youth welfare offices to ensure that problems are spotted early and that effective assistance can be provided.

Given the situation of young people in immigrant families, increased efforts are required to foster their social integration at school, in occupational training, family advice services, sports and leisure activities. If nothing is done, the longer they stay the more we shall push away this group of young immigrants, who have been coming to Germany in increasing numbers in recent years, into a problem-laden existence as a socially marginalised group, with all the risks of violence that entails.

Apart from that, the young people from immigrant families offer an accentuated example of the factors that apply universally with regard to youth violence: they show that it is largely a male phenomenon. It would be highly advisable for both preventive measures and interventions to constructively take issue with problematic conceptions of manhood.

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