

Cyprus Juvenile Delinquency: Lessons learned from the programme's evaluation

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Over the last two decades a rapid increase of minor and young adult delinquency in Europe has raised concerns among experts, the society and the State. The interest lies on the one hand in preventing violation of established rules for probation, and on the other hand in setting up effective mechanisms to deter both offenders and others from committing offending acts. Cyprus established a policy framework of dealing with young offenders; the probation order. It is an alternative method to imprisonment, by placing the offender under the supervision of a probation officer of the Social Welfare Office. An evaluation study was carried out in 2012 to assess the level of operational success and focused on the Cypriot probation system including the case of community sentencing as an effort of developing a rehabilitative behaviour. It took into consideration the views of all actors (offenders and their families, professionals and agencies) and critically assessed the quality of service provision, administration, the level of collaboration among the public service and the other involved organisations and local authorities. Finally it also assessed the offenders' rehabilitative behaviour regarding the frequency of repeated of similar illegal acts, as well as the Programme's influence to prevent other more severe anti-social and/or criminal behaviours. The study adopted a view that juvenile delinquency is a complex phenomenon with many facets: it is an individual or group interactive phenomenon, as well as social. The empirical part used both quantitative and qualitative research methods to gather reliable and valid data. Qualitative research (semi-structured interviews) to collect data regarding the views of professionals and representatives of organizations involved in the implementations and monitoring of the probation Programmes well as a sample of offenders and their families – 39 Thirty nine interviewees responded. Questionnaires were constructed to collect the views of juvenile and adult offenders, to assess their own point of view, the degree of reformation, the criminality reduction level, as well as the level of success for the prevention of more serious offences – 667 persons responded to this stage; a systematic random sampling approach was followed. Interviews' analysis showed that the system of restorative justice is being organized around the prevention of repeating offending behavior with particular concentration on young people and their families. They also stressed the importance of professionals and agencies collaboration with the offender. They mentioned specific social and organisational challenges which hinder its further development such as the lack of flexibility and places for fulfilling the community sentencing. Responders from the second phase expressed their relevant satisfaction for both the system and for the professionals they implement it. However, it was noticed a difference in understanding the value of programme. The results indicated ($p < .001$) that the degree of offenders' understanding with convictions without community sentence (Average = 3.32, standard deviation = 1.21) was lower than the proportion of offenders with community sentence