

JUVENILE DELINQUENCY IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC: FIRST RESULTS OF THE ISRD-3 SELF-REPORT SURVEY*

ZUZANA PODANÁ, EVA MORAVCOVÁ

Department of Sociology, Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague

ABSTRACT

The article discusses the actual state of juvenile delinquency in the Czech Republic and its development in the last decade. The main source of data is the International Self-Report Delinquency Study (ISRD) whose second sweep took place in 2006–2007 and its third sweep during the spring of 2013. Firstly, prevalences of delinquency from ISRD-3 are presented. Secondly, the development of delinquency rates between the two sweeps of ISRD is described and compared to the trend based on official police data. Thirdly, the article focuses on shifts in findings between ISRD-2 and ISRD-3. Special attention is paid to the trend of lowering gender differences in certain types of offending that has continued after 2007.

Key words: ISRD, juvenile delinquency, self-report survey, gender

Introduction

Juvenile delinquency has traditionally represented a phenomenon that influences social debate in a significant way. Regardless of the fact that every breach of rules disrupts the established social order and triggers negative reactions of the public, there are several serious reasons for studying the rate and causes of delinquent behavior of young people in particular. As proven by many studies (Gottfredson, Hirschi 1990; Moffitt 1993; Tremblay 2007; Piquero, Farrington, Blumstein 2007), it is possible to observe roots of this behavior already during early childhood, reaching its peak during the adolescence time period. Moreover, a majority of experts support the idea that possibilities of effective prevention and a probability of the individual's correction significantly decrease as people get older. This is why a large part of programs on primary and secondary prevention focuses primarily on juveniles, as there are chances that they might be more easily reintegrated into regular life, and therefore are more likely to be re-socialized.

Currently, there are two important sources of data that inform us about juvenile delinquency: official statistics and research based on the self-report method. Although police statistics represent a well accessible source of long-term data, they have been criticized due to a variety of reasons. One of the main problems of the official statistics is that they do not provide information about all forms of crime, or delinquency, as the case may be.

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We can find there only those illegal acts that were discovered or filed by the police and that are often called “registered crime”. Latent crime remains undisclosed to us. Furthermore, the quality of such data is decreased by the way the committed criminal acts are recorded; among others, it is an underrepresentation (e.g. women) or an overrepresentation (e.g. ethnicity or national minorities) of certain groups of population or variations in definitions of the criminal acts that can be found in the law (Aebi 2006). From the point of view of sociological research, a detailed data analysis is hindered by limited information regarding the offenders we get from the official statistics. Factors such as family background, education or individual features of the offender are not recorded by the police representatives, something which, to a large extent, complicates, for example, the verification of various criminological theories.

The mentioned information can be, nevertheless, obtained using self-report surveys, in which individual respondents testify about the delinquent acts they have committed during a certain time period (Podaná, Buriánek 2007). Even these surveys have, however, limitations of their own. Their disadvantages include, for example: the fact that they are financially and organizationally demanding, they are not suitable for use with age groups other than adolescents, inaccuracies connected with the formulation of questions in the questionnaire or difficulties which the respondents have when arranging life events correctly in terms of time sequence. Especially in the early days of using this type of tool, we sometimes encountered problems caused by using the concepts of problematic and deviant behavior interchangeably, which led to an unrealistically high prevalence of delinquency (Aebi 2006). Despite the above-mentioned problems, self-report surveys are regarded as a fairly reliable method of measuring juvenile delinquency, and that is why its usage has spread all around the world (Junger-Tas, Marshall 1999; Steketee et al. 2008; Thornberry, Krohn 2000).

The article discusses the actual state and development of juvenile delinquency in the Czech Republic. Its goal is to map the prevalence and development of delinquent behavior of juveniles based on two self-report surveys conducted in this country and also to verify the trend of lowering gender differences in committing delinquent forms of behavior.

International Self-Report Delinquency Study (ISRD)

The ISRD research, carried out by the Department of Sociology at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University, is the first nationwide representative self-report survey on juvenile delinquency ever implemented in the Czech Republic. The authors of this article are familiar with only one pre-existing study: the “Research on School Juveniles 1999” conducted in Pilsen. Some partial studies have also been published by the Institute of Criminology and Social Prevention or academic workplaces within the departments of sociology, social work, addictology and pedagogical faculties.

The main goal of the ISRD research is to provide data on the prevalence and incidence of delinquent and problem behavior as well as to capture variables that strongly correlate with such behavior (for example age, gender, an individual’s social status, family background or lifestyle). In the Czech Republic the research has been already conducted twice. The first sweep (ISRD-2), with more than 30 European countries taking part in

it, took place in 2006–2007, and the second one (ISRD-3) in spring 2013. Both of these studies are grounded in the contemporary criminological theories. The ISRD-2 is based mainly on the social control theory of T. Hirschi (1969/2008) and on the Gottfredson and Hirschi’s general theory of crime (1990) while the ISRD-3 also tests the situational action theory of Wikström (2004), the procedural fairness theory of Tyler (2006) and the institutional anomie theory of Messner and Rosenfeld (1994/2007).

In order to secure a maximal possible comparability of data among the countries involved in the study, a unified standardized questionnaire was created. The target population of both sweeps were elementary and secondary (grammar) school students of the seventh, eighth and ninth grades, approximately 12 to 15 years old. The data collection at schools was done during one lesson, and each of the students had a right to refuse to participate in the research. The same right was also granted to the students’ parents who had been informed about the data collection beforehand. The project was supported by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, and in 2013 also by the Municipal Council of Pilsen, which eased the whole process due to a low number of local schools. Carrying out the ISRD-2 research was possible thanks to the European Commission’s Daphne grant, while the subsequent ISRD-3 was backed up by the Charles University’s PRVOUK grant together with a student research project of the Charles University Grant Agency (for the data collection in Pilsen).

Data and methodological issues

The main source of data is the survey called International Self-Report Delinquency Study (ISRD). All countries that participated in the ISRD research could have chosen between a national representative sampling with two oversampled large cities or simply a city-based sample (Steketee, Moll, Kapardis 2008; ISRD3 Steering Committee 2011). As mentioned before, the Czech Republic lacks representative research on juvenile delinquency; therefore, the first option was chosen.

Table 1: Basic characteristics of the ISRD sampling units

	ISRD-2		ISRD-3	
	abs.	%	abs.	%
N (total)	2279		2007	
Sex				
Men	1112	49.0	988	49.4
Women	1159	51.0	1014	50.6
Grade				
7.	713	31.3	680	33.9
8.	770	33.8	705	35.1
9.	795	34.9	623	31.0
School type				
Elementary school	1976	86.7	1715	85.4
Secondary school	303	13.3	292	14.6

Source: ISRD-2 and ISRD-3. Weighted data, valid percentage

As the numbers of respondents in the selected larger cities – Prague and Pilsen – were higher, we shall, for the subsequent analysis, use weighted data that reduce the oversampling and provide representative results for the juvenile population in the given year for the entire Czech Republic. Table 1 shows basic characteristics of the sampling units in both research waves. A total of 3245 respondents participated in ISRD-2 (2279 after weighting); 3462 in ISRD-3 (2007 after weighting). A half of the sample were men (49 percent). The average age of the students was about 14.

Compared to the second sweep, the ISRD-3 questionnaire underwent numerous changes, concerning also the formulation of the questions measuring delinquency. Thus, for the purpose of the comparative analysis, we include only those forms of delinquent behavior that were measured by both sweeps with the same or very similar questions. These delinquent acts are presented in Table 2. The exact wording of all delinquency questions of both research studies is listed in Appendix 1. On top of the delinquency forms listed in Table 2, the ISRD-3 research encompassed three other offenses – graffiti, theft from a person and animal cruelty. We will state their prevalence in the presentation of the basic ISRD-3 findings.

Finally, we will shortly mention the differences in formulations and the format of the delinquency questions in both research studies that might have influenced the collected findings. In several cases, a subtle question reformulation occurred (concerning group fight and drug dealing), at other times broadening or narrowing down of the definition of a certain offense (bicycle theft, carrying a weapon, robbery and assault; see Appendix 1). In most cases the change in the definition resulted in a broader scope of acts regarded as delinquent, and, thus, it led to a possible prevalence increase in ISRD-3.¹ Beside the reformulation of some of the questions, there was also a format change of the entire delinquency section. While in ISRD-2 the basic filter question measuring a lifetime prevalence of a certain act was usually accompanied by six follow-up questions, in ISRD-3 it was complemented by only one question on last year's incidence. This change, which enabled a reduction in the number of pages focused on delinquency from seven to one and a half, could have led, according to the findings of the previous Enzmann's study (2013), to an increase in willingness to answer the given questions and, therefore, to prevalence increase. To summarize the changes between ISRD-2 and ISRD-3, it can be stated that if they influenced the findings somehow, they could lead to higher estimates of the delinquency prevalence in ISRD-3.

¹ It was only the bicycle theft, where the question in ISRD-2 referred to the moped and scooter as well. We believe, nevertheless, that these types of vehicles are not very common in the Czech Republic and, therefore, narrowing the definition cannot practically influence the results.

Table 2: Comparable delinquent acts in ISRD-2 and ISRD-3

	Type	Severity	Offense
Offenses	Property	minor	shoplifting
		serious	car theft, car break-in, bicycle theft, burglary
	Violent	minor	group fight, carrying a weapon
		serious	robbery/extortion, assault
	Other	minor	vandalism
		serious	drug dealing

Source: ISRD-2 and ISRD-3

Results

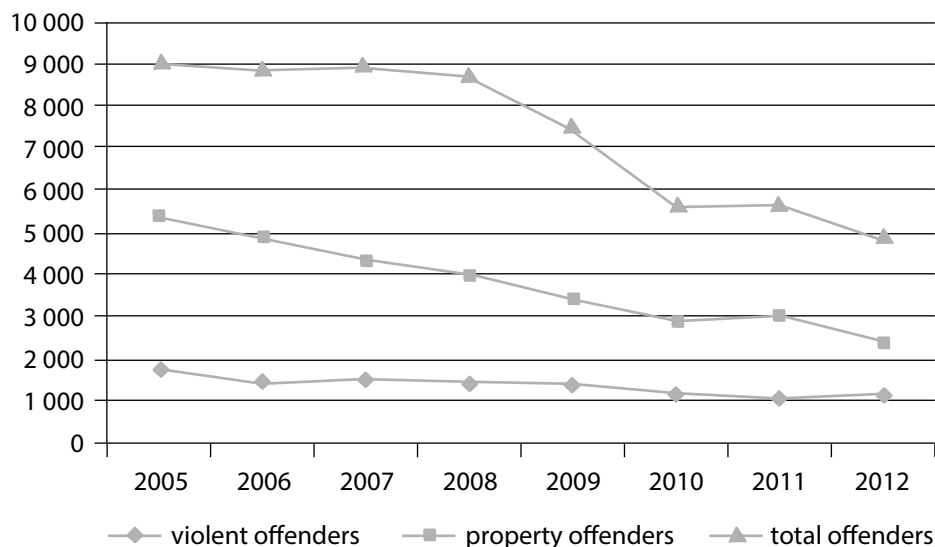
Firstly, we shall focus on prevalence rates for each of the forms of delinquency from the actual ISRD-3 research (Table 3). The highest lifetime prevalence can be found for shoplifting (13 percent) and vandalism (11 percent). The juveniles also frequently admit to carrying a weapon and participation in a group fight (both 10 percent), graffiti (9 percent) and theft from a person (8 percent). Committing other forms of delinquency that are mostly more serious was admitted by less than 4 percent of the children. Last year's delict prevalence reaches a lower level; the biggest decrease can be found in shoplifting (8 percent) while in terms of other common forms of delinquency, the prevalence decreases always by 2 percent points compared to the lifetime prevalence. Four out of 10 children (38 percent) admitted committing at least one of the delicts included in the ISRD-3 research during lifetime while three out of 10 admitted committing at least one form of delinquency last year.

The above-mentioned results are indeed interesting as such; we can, however, obtain a more complex picture when comparing these results with the previous ISRD-2 sweep, which would enable us to assess the development of juvenile delinquency between 2006 and 2013. Before doing so, however, we can look at the juvenile crime trend as registered by the Police in the Czech Republic. Graph 1 shows the number of child offenders under 18 years of age between 2005 and 2012 based on police statistics (CR Police 2012): it clearly shows a significant decrease of total delinquency in this time period, specifically by 38 percent between 2006 and 2012 (during the referential time period of the ISRD research). We can find a significant decrease especially in the property offenses which decreased by 51 percent during this period, but there was a substantial decrease of violent offenses as well (by 45 percent).

Table 3: Prevalence of individual delinquency forms and cumulative index in ISRD-3

	Lifetime prevalence		Last year prevalence	
	%	C.I.	%	C.I.
Property offenses				
shoplifting	13.3	(11.8; 14.9)	8.4	(7.2; 9.7)
theft from a person	8.3	(7.1; 9.6)	5.7	(4.7; 6.9)
burglary	0.9	(0.6; 1.5)	0.7	(0.4; 1.2)
car break	1.1	(0.7; 1.7)	0.6	(0.3; 1.1)
car theft	0.6	(0.4; 1.1)	0.4	(0.2; 0.9)
bike theft	0.7	(0.4; 1.2)	0.4	(0.2; 0.8)
Violent offenses				
group fight	9.5	(8.3; 10.9)	8.1	(7.0; 9.4)
carrying a weapon	10.1	(8.8; 11.5)	7.9	(6.7; 9.2)
assault	1.7	(1.2; 2.3)	1.1	(0.7; 1.7)
robbery	0.8	(0.5; 1.3)	0.4	(0.1; 0.7)
Other offenses				
vandalism	10.9	(9.6; 12.4)	9.2	(8.0; 10.6)
graffiti	9.2	(8.0; 10.6)	6.9	(5.9; 8.2)
drug dealing	3.6	(2.8; 4.5)	3.0	(2.3; 3.9)
animal cruelty	3.9	(3.1; 4.9)	2.7	(2.1; 3.6)
<i>delinquency (any out of 14 offenses)</i>	38.2	(36.1; 40.4)	30.2	(28.2; 32.3)

Source: ISRD-3. Weighted data



Graph 1: Trend of the child offenders' rate (under 18 years of age) prosecuted/investigated by the police
Source: Police of the Czech Republic (own calculations)

The comparison of delinquency based on the ISRD-2 and ISRD-3 surveys is presented by Table 4. Cumulative indexes (property, violent and total delinquency) illustrate that at each of these indexes a significant decline of lifetime delinquency prevalence occurs – as for the property offenses by 41 percent, in terms of the violent delinquency by 31 percent, and the total delinquency decreased by 21 percent. This trend, therefore, very well reflects the decline in crime rates identified by the police statistics.² On the other hand, the same delinquency indicators for last year's figures do not manifest any significant differences between the two sweeps, indicating that in this case the delinquency level remains roughly the same. But, if we take into account the above-mentioned methodological differences in both research studies, which might lead to a delinquency increase in ISRD-3, we can conclude that, based on the ISRD self-report survey, juvenile delinquency in the Czech Republic did not increase between 2006 and 2013: either it stagnated or it could have declined a little – and in case of the lifetime experience with delinquent behavior, a significant decline is apparent.

Table 4: Prevalence of the individual forms of delinquency and cumulative indexes: comparison of ISRD-2 and ISRD-3

	Lifetime prevalence (%)		Last year prevalence (%)	
	ISRD-2	ISRD-3	ISRD-2	ISRD-3
Property offenses				
shoplifting	22.5	13.3	6.5	8.4
burglary	1.1	0.9	0.4	0.7
car break-in	1.9	1.1	0.9	0.6
car theft	0.8	0.6	0.4	0.4
bike theft	1.2	0.7	0.6	0.4
Violent offenses				
group fight	19.8	9.5	11.3	8.1
carrying a weapon	10.3	10.1	6.8	7.9
assault	1.3	1.7	0.6	1.1
robbery	1.4	0.8	0.8	0.4
Other offenses				
vandalism	11.5	10.9	7.2	9.2
drug dealing	3.9	3.6	2.6	3.0
<i>property offenses</i>	24.4	14.5	8.0	9.5
<i>violent offenses</i>	25.0	17.2	16.3	14.1
<i>delinquency</i>	40.3	31.9	23.9	25.5

Source: ISRD-2 and ISRD-3. Weighted data, significant differences ($\alpha = 0.05$) between ISRD-2 and ISRD-3 are in bold

² Of course, the police statistics and the self-report survey are not directly comparable because each source describes a different part of the crime as a whole.

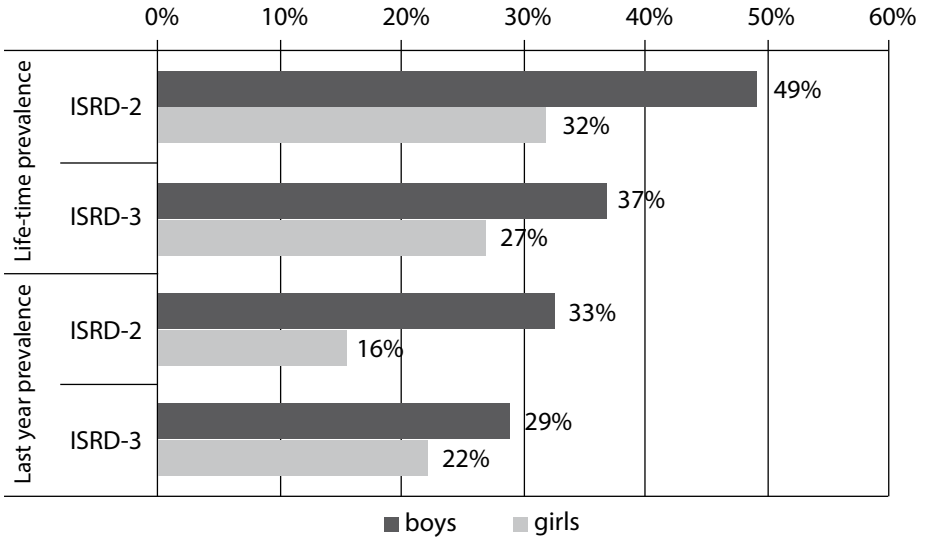
Looking at the differences in the particular forms of delinquency (Table 4), we can find a considerable decline (statistically significant) between the ISRD-2 and ISRD-3 of shoplifting (from 23 percent to 13 percent), group fight (from 20 percent to 10 percent) and theft from a car (from 2 percent to 1 percent). The group fight figures also went through a decline in last year prevalence (from 11 percent to 8 percent). On the contrary, a significant increase can be found in vandalism rates (from 7 percent to 9 percent) and, surprisingly even in case of shoplifting (from 6.5 percent to 8.4 percent). There is, therefore, a certain discrepancy between the lifetime delinquency trend and last year's delinquency.

In general, it can be noted that compared to ISRD-2, ISRD-3 brings more closely together the lifetime prevalence and last year's prevalence rates. A possible interpretation of this would be that the number of children who had committed a delinquent act at a younger age and refrained from delinquency later on is declining. However, we believe that this result might be at least partially influenced by the change in the delinquency questions' design of the sweeps, since the large amount of follow-up questions for each offense in ISRD-2 might have discouraged the respondents from stating truthful answers for each delict's last year prevalence.³ If this hypothesis were right, it would mean that the last year's prevalence estimates are undervalued in ISRD-2 compared to the ISRD-3.

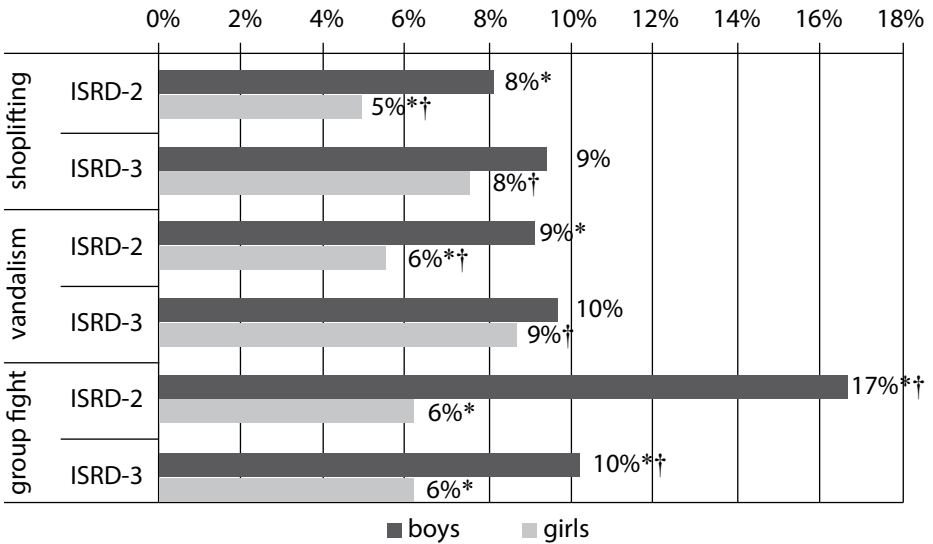
Furthermore, we have focused on comparing the delinquency rates of girls and boys and on a possible shift in their delinquency between the ISRD-2 and ISRD-3 research studies. As we have already suggested, the self-report delinquency survey has only a short tradition in the Czech Republic and prior to the ISRD-2 research, only one local self-report survey was ever held during 1999, and this dealt, among other things, with the delinquency of ninth grade students of elementary schools. A comparison of these two studies – which, however, has considerable methodological constraints – led to a hypothesis that in the Czech Republic there could be a mutual approximation of delinquency prevalence of girls and boys, at least in the common nonviolent offences of shoplifting and vandalism (Podaná 2008). A trend of lowering gender differences in delinquency has been recognized in other European countries as well (Gatti, Rocca 2013). Therefore, it was important for us to verify whether this trend can be found in the Czech Republic also in a later time period, i.e. in the ISRD-2 and ISRD-3 researches.

Graph 2 captures the differences in the cumulative index of delinquency, both lifetime and last year, between girls and boys and both ISRD sweeps. In case of the lifetime prevalence, the trend has been consistent; girls show a lower delinquency rate compared to boys, while between the ISRD-2 and ISRD-3 there has been an apparent decline of delinquent individuals. However, this decline is stronger with boys; the differences between girls and boys dropped from the original 17 to 10 percentage points in ISRD-3. However, the numbers of the last year's delinquency indicator are very different. The decline in prevalence between ISRD-2 and ISRD-3 is not present anymore (in line with the above-presented results, see Table 4) – as regards boys the decline is insignificant, but as regards girls there is a rather distinct increase of prevalence from 16 percent to 22 percent. This fact results in a considerable reduction of differences between girls and boys, where the original half-representation of female offenders, compared to boys, increased to three-fourths.

³ This way the respondents avoided the follow-up question on last year's incidence.



Graph 2: Delinquency based on gender in ISRD-2 and ISRD-3
 Source: ISRD-2 and ISRD-3. Weighted data. The differences between the girls and boys are statistically significant in each sweep ($\alpha = 0.05$). There was a significant change between ISRD-2 and ISRD-3 for both girls and boys, with the exception of last year's delinquency prevalence.



Graph 3: Prevalence of selected offenses for last year in ISRD-2 and ISRD-3 based on gender
 Source: ISRD-2 and ISRD-3. Weighted data

* a significant difference between boys and girls in the respective sweep

† a significant difference between ISRD-2 and ISRD-3 for girls and boys

If we focus on those offenses that show a significant increase or decline in last year's prevalence between ISRD-2 and ISRD-3, regardless of whether we look at the statistics for girls or for boys, we can identify the same acts that have proven significant regardless of gender (see Table 4), i.e. shoplifting, vandalism and group fights (see Graph 3). The first two manifest the same pattern that shows a significant increase between the sweeps only at the girls' rates, the result of which is that the original significant difference between the two genders in ISRD-2 becomes insignificant in ISRD-3. On the other hand, in case of the group fight, the prevalence for boys rapidly decreases from the original 17 percent to 10 percent, while for girls it remains unchanged (6 percent). It can be, therefore, noted that shifts in prevalences of delinquency for last year between ISRD-2 and ISRD-3 are gender specific. However, if we focused on the lifetime prevalences (the results are not presented here), we would not find similar results for shoplifting or for group fight, where the decline in prevalence is the highest; in both of these cases, there is a significant decrease of these delicts visible for both genders.

Conclusion

The aim of this article was to introduce the basic delinquency prevalence rates from the current ISRD-3 research, to evaluate the delinquency development in time by comparing the third sweep, which took place in the Czech Republic during 2013, with the ISRD-2 from 2006–2007, and to verify the hypothesis on a trend of lowering gap between delinquent acts committed by boys and girls. In general, it can be concluded that ISRD-3 research has proven that the delinquency is not uncommon among Czech juveniles – at least one delict from the group of offenses included in the research was committed by at least one-third of children and one-fourth admitted some delinquency during the last 12 months. The most widespread are the less serious misdemeanours, such as vandalism, shoplifting, participation in a group fight or carrying a weapon.

In comparison with the ISRD-2 research, which was held approximately six years ago, there has been a distinct decline in the lifetime delinquency. Nevertheless, last year's delinquency has remained roughly the same. As a consequence of certain methodological changes in the ISRD research design, we can assume to get a higher prevalence of delinquency in the ISRD-3, while, in reality, there might have been even a decrease in prevalence of delinquency during last year between the ISRD-2 and ISRD-3. The results are consistent with the official police statistics that conveniently complement them.

The comparison of boys' and girls' delinquency showed that between the ISRD-2 and ISRD-3 there was a decline in prevalence of offending – this phenomenon was more evident with boys. To summarize, the gap between the girls' and boys' delinquency decreased in the ISRD-3. As regards last year's delinquency indicator, there was a significant increase in the delinquency of girls. These changes are especially apparent at the following three delicts: shoplifting, vandalism and group fights. Thus, the data suggest a gradual lowering of gender gap in delinquency in time.

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APPENDIX

Questions about the life-time delinquency prevalence in ISRD-2

- Did you ever damage something on purpose, such as a bus shelter, a window, a car or a seat on the bus or train?
- Did you ever steal something from a shop or a department store?
- Did you ever break into a building with the purpose to steal something?
- Did you ever steal a bicycle, moped or scooter?
- Did you ever steal a motorbike or car?
- Did you ever use your computer for 'hacking'?
- Did you ever steal something out of or from a car?
- Did you ever snatch a purse, bag or something else from a person?
- Did you ever carry a weapon, such as a stick, knife, or chain (not a pocket-knife)?
- Did you ever threaten somebody with a weapon or to beat them up, just to get money or other things from them?
- Did you ever participate in a group fight on the school playground, a football stadium, the streets or in any public place?
- Did you ever intentionally beat up someone or hurt him with a stick or knife, so badly that he/she had to see a doctor?
- Did you ever sell any (soft or hard) drugs or act as an intermediary?

Questions about the life-time delinquency prevalence in ISRD-3

- Have you ever ...
- ... painted on a wall, train, subway or bus (graffiti)?
- ... damaged something on purpose, such as a bus shelter, a window, a car or a seat on the bus or train ?
- ... stolen something from a shop or department store?
- ... broken into a building to steal something?
- ... stolen a bicycle?
- ... stolen a motorbike or car?
- ... stolen something off or from a car?
- ... used a weapon, force or threat of force to get money or things from someone?
- ... stolen something from a person without force or threat?
- ... carried a weapon, such as a stick, knife, gun, or chain?
- ... taken part in a group fight in a football stadium, on the street or other public place?
- ... beaten someone up or hurt someone with a stick or knife so badly that the person was injured?
- ... sold any drugs or helped someone selling drugs?
- ... hurt an animal on purpose?