

Trends in Juvenile Delinquency from a Criminal Psychology and Criminology Perspective

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Juvenile crime has been showing a downward trend for years both in Hungary and internationally. Despite this, many young people are still caught by the authorities. In the study, we use the analysis of Hungarian and international statistical data to see what structural changes have occurred in the structure of crime in the past period. We assume that the – temporarily – punishable deviant behaviour of the child and juvenile population, in the absence of a suitable treatment system, turns from episodic perpetration into a series of acts. We will examine how the social, economic, demographic and legislative background influences juvenile delinquency and which psychological explanations help to understand and manage the path leading to the development of the situation.

It is also important to keep technological changes in mind, since there are an increasing number of juveniles among the perpetrators of cybercrimes. Data quality and statistical diversity also present challenges to researchers, we also try to synthesise these data in the article, which can provide an explanation for why other data can be found in some databases that are not in line with each other. The study partially covers the explanation of the criminological and criminal psychological reasons behind the commission of crime. The performed analysis can contribute to the more efficient functioning of the investigative authority and the welfare system dealing with juveniles, by providing a prismatic overview of the changing trends in this paper.

Keywords: *juvenile delinquency, criminology, criminal statistic data, interpretation*

Introduction

The level of crime shows a decreasing trend worldwide, a trend that is also true for Hungary. How is it possible that whereas crime rates are decreasing, there is an increasing number of inmates in prisons, what structural and formal changes emerge based on the statistical data? In the study, we examine domestic trends, focusing on juvenile offenders. It uses the time-series analysis of national and international

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statistics to determine the probability whether this favourable downward trend in crime will continue in Hungary.

Kerezi (2020) states that developed countries are characterised by a decrease in crime, but there is no real/accepted explanation for this. Furthermore, she also emphasises that socio-economic changes should also be taken into account (decrease in unemployment, economic recovery, demographic changes, increased length of prison sentences and the application of the principle of selective neutralisation in the justice system). Among the explanations for the decrease are the spread of security devices and the reduction of opportunities to commit crimes. Emigration, as a crime-reducing factor, is also a determining phenomenon, which, according to Kerezi (2020), can be explained by the fact that there are no men in the country who are in full force and can use their work skills abroad. Policy responses can also be examined, in the case of this study, we will narrow it down to the examination of child protection measures. According to Sherman (2013), targeting a limited number of neuralgic places with policing proves effective in reducing crime, or at least certain types of crime.

In order to understand the evolution of crime, we need to take a step back to get to know juvenile offenders better. And even though statistics are descriptive, we still need to look at how families have changed. Children who do not grow up in a family are more likely to become offenders than their peers who are raised in the family. And even among those, who are lucky enough to have families we can find circumstances that are insufficient for upbringing a child and parents often rely on the help of the state. The study does not examine the impact of the Covid epidemic on juvenile delinquency.²

In the following pages we will discuss the legislative background and the main stakeholders of the child protection system in order to gain a clearer view on juvenile crime statistics.

System for the protection of children

Act XXXI of 1997 on the Protection of Children and Guardianship Administration and Government Decree 149/1997 (IX.10.) on guardianship authorities and child protection and guardianship proceedings is the defining rule. The protection of children is an activity aimed at facilitating the upbringing of a child in the family, preventing and eliminating his or her vulnerability, and ensuring the substitution protection of a child who has left parental or other relatives' care.

² BUCHANAN et al. 2020.

The protection of children

- cash, in kind (regular child protection allowance; child catering; prevention of child support; home-building allowance)
- basic child welfare services in the framework of personal care (child welfare services; day care for children; temporary care for children; chance-enhancing services for children)
- specialist child protection services within the framework of personal care (home care; aftercare care; regional child protection services)
- as well as by official measures provided for in this Act

The operation of the child protection system is a state and municipal task.

Below I will briefly describe the official measures within the framework of child protection care, specifically pointing out what each measure covers.

Disadvantageous and cumulatively disadvantaged situation

Disadvantaged persons under the Child Protection Act: a child who is entitled to a regular child protection allowance and a child who has reached the age of majority and who has one of the following circumstances when applying for a regular child protection allowance:

- the parent or adoptive guardian has a low level of education, which means no higher than primary education
- the parent or adoptive guardian is in low employment (entitled to benefits for persons of working age or has been registered as a jobseeker for at least 12 months within 16 months prior to application)
- insufficient living environment or housing conditions of the child: if he or she lives in a segregated residential environment or in a semi-comfortable, comfortless or emergency dwelling

Cumulatively disadvantaged

A child entitled to a regular child protection allowance and a child who has reached the age of majority:

- who is in the case of at least two of the circumstances defined above
- the child in foster care
- a young adult receiving aftercare and having a student or student enrolment

The determination of a disadvantageous/cumulatively disadvantaged situation falls within the competence of the clerk of the municipality.

Protection revenue

The guardianship authority protects a child when the child is at risk: a condition resulting from an act, omission or circumstance by the child or another person that hinders the child's physical, mental, emotional or moral development. If the parent or other legal representative is unable or unwilling to eliminate the child's vulnerability by voluntarily using primary care, but there is a reasonable suspicion that with help the child's development in the family environment can still be ensured, the guardianship authority decides to include the child in child protection.

The most common problems that can lead to protection are: serious milieu conflicts within the family, life problems of parents, neglect, abuse, child deviating behaviour, truancy, etc.

During the protection, in order to continuously assist and organise the care of the child, to support parental education, the case manager of the child welfare centre and the family helper take care of the family in order to eliminate the risk on the basis of the individual care education plan. In this plan, they define the tasks, rules of conduct, use of necessary services and benefits that family members and children must use and comply with in order to diminish vulnerability. E.g. regular school attendance, termination of unjustified absences, use of dormitory care, mediation, psychological care, health services, use of life coaching, lifestyle changes, etc. In certain cases, e.g. neglect: the guardianship authority may decide to grant child benefit in kind, at the same time as appointing an ad hoc guardian.

The guardianship authority shall, at any time upon request, at least annually, ex officio, review the justification for protection. If vulnerability cannot be eliminated, it shall immediately take the necessary measures, e.g. family reception, temporary placement.

Family acceptance

The guardianship authority may consent to the temporary reception, care and upbringing of the child for as long as necessary by another family named by the parent because of the child's state of health, justified absence or other family reasons, provided that it is in the child's interest.

In the case of a parent exercising sole parental authority, the separated other parent shall also be heard during the proceedings. The adoptive parent(s) are appointed by the guardianship authority as adoptive guardians. During admission to the family, the parent's parental authority is suspended, but the maintenance obligation exists. Admission to the family is terminated by the guardianship authority if it is requested by the parent or adoptive parent or if its maintenance endangers the child's development.

Temporary placement

If the child is left unattended or his or her physical, mental, emotional and moral development is seriously endangered by his or her family environment or by himself/herself, and therefore immediate placement is required, the guardianship authority and the police, by a decision that can be immediately enforced, are temporarily suitable for his or her upbringing, it is placed with a separated parent, other relative or person or, if this is not possible, with a foster parent or child protection institution.

The following authorities can also decide on temporary placement: the aliens and asylum authority, the prosecutor's office, the court, the command of the penitentiary. The serious risk underlying this decision is the abuse or neglect of a child that puts his or her life in imminent danger, or cause significant and irreparable damage to its physical, mental, emotional or moral development. The referral body takes care of the child's transfer to the temporary care place. From the temporary placement, the parent's right to care and upbringing is suspended.

As a result of the review, the guardianship authority will terminate the temporary placement within 30 days if the conditions for it are not met. Within 45 days, he orders the child's upbringing and determines the place of care of the child. You can also file a lawsuit to change your child's placement, to remove parental controls, or to have them placed with a third party.

Upbringing (foster care)

The purpose of the upbringing is to provide the child's home-based care and legal representation until:

- the child's family will be able to readmit the child
- may be assigned a family guardian
- is adopted
- or reaches the age of majority

The guardianship authority will take the child into care if the child's development is endangered by his or her family environment and his or her vulnerability could not be eliminated by the services provided in primary care and by taking him or her into protection, or if no result can be expected from him. Foster care may take place if the guardianship authority has filed a lawsuit for the termination of the parental authority of the parent(s), or the parental authority of the parent(s) has been terminated by the court, or if there is no parent exercising parental authority for the child for any other reason. At the same time as ordering foster care, the guardianship authority designates a foster parent, a children's home, a home for the disabled or psychiatric patients as the place of care for the child. Since the parent's parental authority is suspended during the period of foster care, he or she assigns the

child a child protection guardian and a surrogate child protection guardian, decides on the regulation of contact with the parent or other relative. The guardianship authority shall review the need to maintain foster care every six months for the first two years after the decision has been taken, and annually from the third year onwards. In some cases, the review is different. The guardianship authority shall terminate the child's upbringing if the reasons for it no longer exist.

The institution of diversion

Vári (2019) draws attention to the fact that the Hungarian legislator correctly recognised the need to include expeditious elements in criminal proceedings already at the investigative stage. On 1 July 2018, the Code of Criminal Procedure (Be) entered into force. This means that diversion can be used during the investigative phase and thus speed up the procedure, reduce costs and better compensation for damages. This is a kind of diversion, the purpose of which is that the state renounces the conduct of criminal proceedings, after which the violation of the norm is officially admitted. In case of juveniles, the use of these diversionary devices is very important.

Criminal psychology aspect

Research has shown that it affects juvenile offenders at a much higher rate than the general population, also in Hungary.³ Disruptive, impulse control and behaviour disorders, substance use disorders, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, mood disorders, certain psychotic symptoms, and certain disorders of personality development are the most important of these. Among the mood disorders, major depression and bipolar affective disorder are the most typical for juvenile offenders.⁴ Conduct disorder affects 80% of juvenile offenders.⁵ Four types of behaviour can be identified in case of such persons: 1. use of aggression, threats, physical abuse; 2. lack of respect for other people's property, committing vandalism and burglary; 3. distortion of reality, with the purpose of manipulation, tendency to commit theft; 4. rules and people characterised by ignoring boundaries, neglecting school duties.

In addition, oppositional disorder can also be observed in many juvenile offenders. According to this, the persons concerned are opposed to the adult or authority figure. This can be interpreted as a rejection behaviour towards teachers, adult persons

³ HALLER et al. 2020: 119–135.

⁴ BELLAVICS 2021: 97–109.

⁵ HARZKE et al. 2012: 143–157.

and parents in the school situation, but it is still a widespread behaviour disorder subtype.⁶

Intermittent explosive disorder is neglected in the literature on crime in our country. Someone with this behaviour disorder is typically violent and impulsive, which is a disproportionate response to the stress it causes. A provoking stimulus is usually a psychosocial impulse, which the patient over-sensitively reacts to. “The disorder manifests itself only in outbursts of anger, there are no noticeable symptoms between two tantrums. The disorder may manifest itself in verbal or physical aggression directed at other people’s property, animals or people. Aggression involves damaging, destroying objects or causing physical injury. It should be emphasized that the outbursts of anger are spontaneous, that is, the patient does not plan them, they do not occur premeditated for a specific purpose. Repeated outbursts of anger cause significant suffering and distress for the person and the environment, and often prevent them from performing some important function”, sums up Bellavics.⁷ 14% of American juvenile offenders were able to demonstrate this.⁸

Another very characteristic difference is the proportion of young people affected by ADHD among criminals.⁹ Juvenile delinquents with ADHD are one of the most important movement disorders in around 30% of the age group examined.¹⁰ A symptom of a lack of attention can be inattention, frequent carelessness. The child cannot concentrate on details, he/she keeps making mistakes, for example, while writing his/her homework. She/he often has difficulty maintaining focus during tasks or play, and does not seem to pay attention when spoken to. She/he does not follow through on instructions and does not finish schoolwork. It makes it difficult for him/her to organise his tasks; has difficulty doing tasks that require thinking, often loses important things, is easily distracted by external stimuli, is forgetful. Hyperactivity and impulsivity exist when, for example, the child frequently moves his hands and feet, walks up and down or taps, or leaves his place in situations where this is not allowed.¹¹

Drug and alcohol use disorders are particularly common among juvenile offenders. Among juvenile offenders, substance use disorder is one of the most common symptoms, in some studies the disorder existed in up to 75% of the sample. A correlation between drug abuse and a high crime rate was shown.¹² This type of crime can lead individuals, especially adolescents, to commit crimes to obtain drugs. Furthermore, drug abuse and the commission of economic crimes can also go hand in hand. According to the international literature, there is an identifiable association

⁶ ELLIS et al. 2019.

⁷ BELLAVICS 2021: 97–109.

⁸ COKER et al. 2014: 888–898.

⁹ RETZ et al. 2021: 236–248.

¹⁰ SÓFI 2014; YOUNG et al. 2015: 247–258; VON POLIER et al. 2012: 121–139.

¹¹ REIMHERR et al. 2020; RETZ et al. 2012; SKIRROW–ASHERSON 2013: 80–86.

¹² KAROFI 2012.

between robberies and especially heroin users.¹³ Due to the limitations of the scope of the analysis of this topic from the point of view of juvenile offenders, I cannot engage in deeper analyses.

Method

We examine the evolution of crime descriptively by comparing criminal statistics and statistical data over time. Among the Hungarian statistics are the Central Statistical Office (KSH), the police Criminal Statistics System (BSR) and the Prosecution Service of Hungary (MÜ). We analysed the international data based on the information on the Eurocrime website.

During the collection of the data, we reviewed almost ten years of data from 2013. The choice of time interval can be explained by the fact that it is a time interval that shows how crime developed longitudinally. We paid attention to the trends appearing in the time series in order to reveal what kind of correlation there might be between the individual data examined and, based on this, what kind of future vision is emerging.

Among the Hungarian data series, the Police Statistical Data Service (BSR) is one of the main bases of our data. We collected the number of registered crimes, including the number of crimes committed in the capital, supplemented by how the number of perpetrators increased and the proportion of juveniles within it. We also looked at the age group distribution of victims and the evolution of the justice responses. The Hungarian justice service has five options for a criminal case: dismisses the prosecution, terminates the investigation, prosecutes, uses diversion, or otherwise closes the case with another type of conclusion.

Among the data of the KSH we can see the data of early school leavers, those entering specialist child protection care, children in protection, offenders collected along criminological variables, the number of long-term unemployed, the number of finally convicted persons, the disadvantaged and those placed in correctional facilities.

Discussion

Hungarian statistics clearly show that the number of registered crimes (Table 1) has decreased significantly since 2013. A continuous decrease was observed until 2021, and then a slight increase began in 2022. This trend can also be identified in the number of crimes committed in the capital. However, the number of offenders is inversely proportional to the number of registered crimes, that is, the number

¹³ GREEN et al. 2016: 155–160.

of offenders has increased by nearly 50% in the last ten years. This can also be interpreted by the fact that the perpetrators are committing crimes in groups, so the police and the penal system are also working with an increasing workload. However, the number of juveniles within the population of offenders decreased.

Table 1: Development of registered crimes and perpetrators in Hungary

Year	Number of registered crimes	Number of registered crimes committed in Budapest	Number of offenders	Number of juvenile offenders
2013	377,829	109,562	109,797	10,471
2014	329,575	97,018	108,474	8,806
2015	280,113	76,035	101,429	7,872
2016	290,779	66,364	100,933	7,675
2017	226,452	65,081	92,896	6,492
2018	199,830	60,094	53,460 + 58,130	3,697 + 3,045
2019	165,648	45,293	136,669	7,863
2020	162,416	36,807	138,950	8,064
2021	154,012	36,280	146,688	7,666
2022	167,774	42,344	143,979	7,942

Source: bsr.hu.

The number of victims of crimes has shown a changing picture in recent years. The victimisation of children ranges between 2–3 thousand people, juveniles became victims of crime at a rate one third higher than children. Becoming a victim of crime can be a critical life event.¹⁴ The impact of the severity of crime is important, for example, between sexual assault and theft.¹⁵ The victims have different coping strategies¹⁶ and if the individual skills are not the best the victim can become offender.¹⁷ And the state’s response to crimes is also decisive as it is important from the perspective of the victim. In the following, we will present the evolution of the responses of the justice service.

The answers of the Hungarian justice system also gives a shade itself to the processes behind the criminal statistics. Table 2 examines over a period of ten years how the rejection of reports, the termination of the investigation, the indictment, other terminations and the use of diversions developed. In the event that the report was rejected or the investigation was terminated, it means the strong use of the investigative authority, the indictment is made in the case of a well-founded suspicion and crime. Diversion can be called a progressive, alternative method in the Hungarian justice system.

¹⁴ EJRNÆS–SCHERG 2022.

¹⁵ SHAPLAND–HALL 2007.

¹⁶ AGNEW 1985.

¹⁷ CUEVAS et al. 2007.

Table 2: Changes in the processes of the administration of justice

Year	Prosecution rejection	Investigation rejection	Accusation	Other type of closing	Diversion	Drug abuse
2013	32,527	101,908	163,035	182,609	16,384	1,787
2014	37,456	101,286	152,439	142,729	16,760	1,147
2015	36,718	97,868	135,250	113,510	16,018	311
2016	34,897	87,672	162,922	97,073	15,961	74
2017	32,887	80,527	114,628	83,969	15,437	28
2018	18,815	47,422	65,285	37,421	9,777	31

Source: *bsr.hu*.

As it can be seen, the coverage of prosecution rejections decreased significantly in the last (known) year, i.e. the investigating authority worked on the detection of more and more complaints. Investigative terminations also nearly halved after 2017. And the number of indictments and diversions has also halved. The decrease in the number of crimes may raise the idea that the number of offences may have increased. However, there has been a downward trend in recent years (Table 3). Every two years, the number of offenders spikes and then recedes. If we accept the established trend, we should expect growth again in 2023. However, it is certainly positive for society that there are 5 times more offenders among citizens than offenders.

Table 3: Number of people who actually committed a misconduct

Year	Number of offenders
2017	604,607
2018	593,439
2019	548,418
2020	615,263
2021	606,607
2022	508,421

Source: *bsr.hu*.

Men are also overrepresented among the perpetrators, (Table 4). In 2022, 80 thousand fewer people were violators. And the number of underage youth has halved since 2017. There has been no significant change in the number of female offenders, in fact, their proportion has increased among juveniles. Overall, the reduction in the number of offences, including the criminal danger of teenage girls, should be borne in mind!

Table 4: Misconduct trends

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Male	496,687	492,228	453,859	506,740	494,891	410,897
Juvenile	10,176	8,731	7,778	9,324	9,883	5,086
Female	106,968	100,277	93,435	107,212	110,495	95,885
Juvenile	2,117	1,837	1,598	2,051	2,836	1,309
Unknown	1,052	934	1,124	1,311	1,221	1,639
Total	604,607	593,439	548,418	615,263	606,607	508,421

Source: *bsr.hu*.

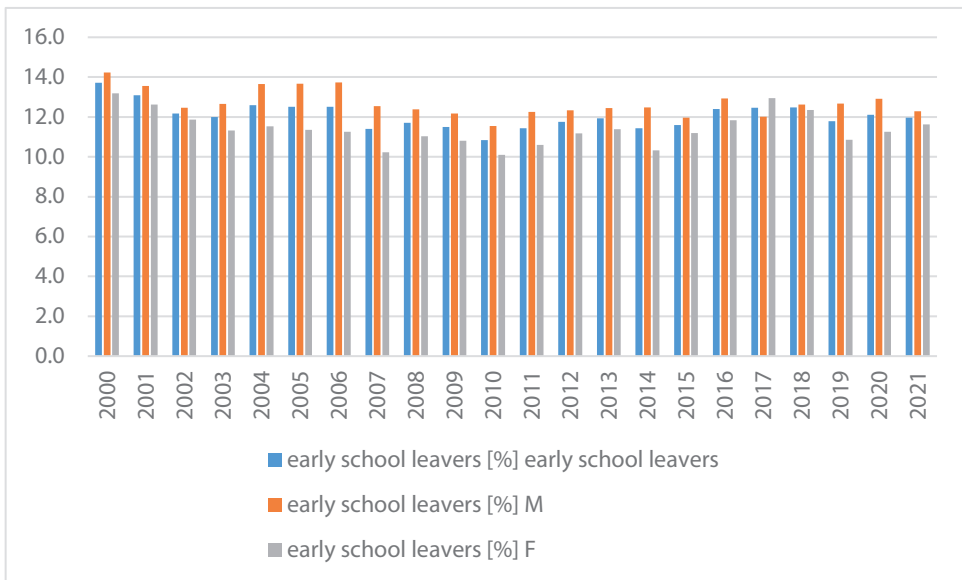


Figure 1: Early school leavers

Source: *ksh.hu*.

In Hungary, the upper age limit for compulsory education is 16 years. Those who do not meet this privilege before this age are considered early school leavers. In the recent period, 12–13% of school-age students have decided not to sit in the school bench. This, in turn, poses an increased risk in terms of becoming a criminal, as it also affects their situation on the labour market, they are more exposed to economic effects, as the school safety net disappears, the family no longer receives support from the state and does not make progress in the minors' studies. It is typical of these children to ring the bell, drink alcohol and drugs and even commit crimes in order to sustain themselves. School leavers are still being helped and protected by the system. Since 2008, the number of children who have been placed in protection has been over 20,000. Among the reasons, it is because of the behaviour of a parent

or child that the state interferes in the life of the family. Due to child abuse, fewer and fewer people (300–400 people) are taken into protection every year, and ten times as many for environmental reasons (KSH).

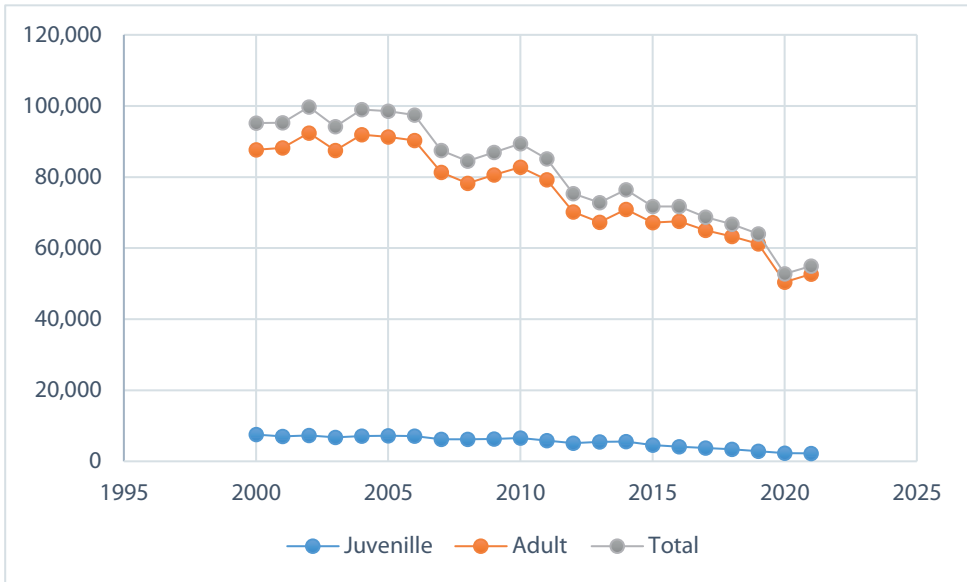


Figure 2: Sentenced Hungarian population

Source: ksh.hu.

Offender numbers among juvenile offenders in Hungary (Figure 2) and in the U.S. (Figure 3) are also steadily declining, as shown in the chart below. Statistical summaries also reported a decrease in crime.¹⁸

In addition to the characteristics discussed, in the absence of data, we have not included in the data one very important aspect, which is trust in the criminal justice system, which can also have an impact on crime statistics. The social support can be defined as a risk according to Bonoli (2007). The investment in the education system can enhance cognitive and social skills.¹⁹

Due to low self-control, the number of offenders will increase in the future. The inner and outer containment counteract pull the juveniles toward delinquency.²⁰

¹⁸ HOCKENBERRY–PUZZANCHERA 2020.

¹⁹ HUMMELSHEIM et al. 2011.

²⁰ JANSSEN et al. 2022.

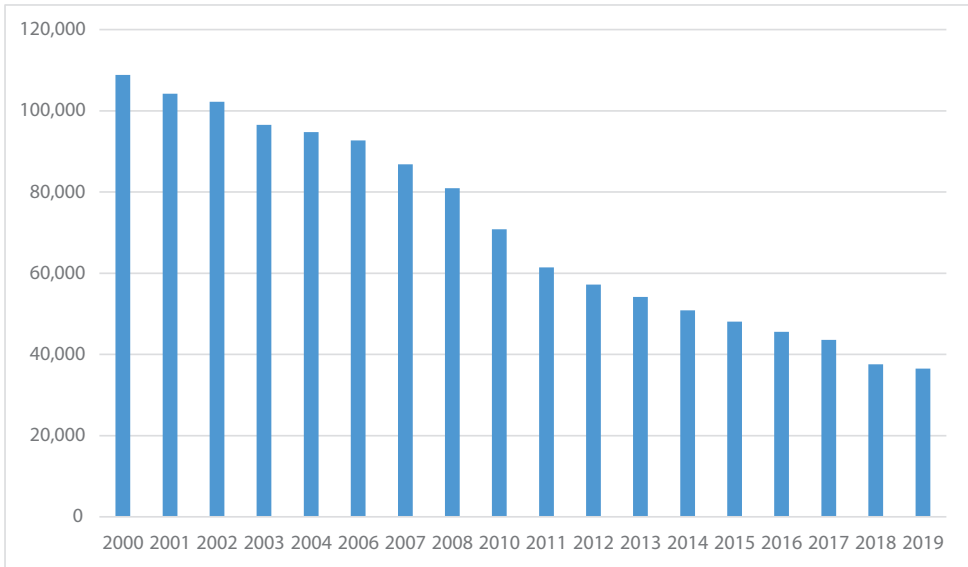


Figure 3: U.S. juvenile offenders

Source: ojjdp.gov.

“The role of the family as a primary socializing environment is imperative in fighting against juvenile delinquency. Parents are mostly a social model that has a decisive influence on children as regards shaping their life conception, how they behave and how they relate to social values and norms. The family climate is crucial regarding children personality development, so, the child needs a general framework at home for feeling safe. His parents must be calm, understanding, affectionate and flexible. At the same time, they should be interested in the problems the child faces, showing real empathy” summarises Delcea et al.²¹

Summary

When analysing the Hungarian data, we looked at a number of homeland statistics and revealed a crime rate with a rather downward trend, which is starting to rise. The criminal justice system is very busy, despite the fact that the number of offenders is less, it is carried out with the involvement of more offenders. Based on the criminal psychology approach of juvenile offenders, we could see that the mental health of those involved needs support, and this is experienced by those working in the school and child protection system, but they are still unable to provide a truly supportive environment and help to a young person who may struggle with anger

²¹ DELCEA et al. 2019:370.

management difficulties and substance use disorders. However, the results indicate that there is a risk of increasing involvement in the criminal procedure for young girls. It is important that the education system keeps children in the system as long as possible, so that they can obtain a profession and a high school diploma so that they can find a place in the labour market and thus their earnings will be secured. It is also important that young people coming out of families receive professional help and pay close attention to them from a crime prevention point of view. Although the figures show that crime is falling, the current economic recession foreshadows a deterioration in the indicators.

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