Youth in criminal justice processes
Taking development and children’s rights into consideration

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Central findings (FRA 2022)

• Information is often not given in an accessible manner
• Lacks in interpretation
• Interviews are often not recorded
• Children do not always get a legal defence lawyer and there are reports of maltreatment by the police
• Individual assessments of the child’s situation may be lacking
• Training for professionals is urgently needed
• Children frequently expressed negative experiences with the encounters in the legal processes
Aggressive behaviour increases in adolescence

Risk taking in adolescence typically fades over time

"For the majority of adolescents, maladaptive risk taking declines from childhood on"

Romer, Reyna & Satterthwaite (2017). Beyond stereotypes of adolescent risk taking: Placing the adolescent brain in developmental context
People need to understand that juvenile suspects are especially vulnerable in the interrogation room. The ways in which we question youth can have potentially devastating consequences in some cases.

Lindsay Malloy

https://innocenceproject.org/new-study-finds-false-confessions-more-likely-among-juveniles/
The quality of question types in Swedish police interviews with young suspects of serious crimes

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Abstract
This study explores how juvenile offenders in Sweden between the age of 15 and 17 are interviewed by police officers when suspected of homicide crimes. The quality of question types was assessed in 47 authentic interviews. The findings show that the police officers used option-posing and suggestive questions most frequently and social pressure was used in three predominating ways: to confront, to challenge and to appeal for a confession. The conclusion is that the police officers’ question style to a large extent
• Children and youth in vulnerable situations may be encountered as perpetrators in cases where they are in fact victims (e.g., human trafficking)

• Psychological coercion likely to be underrecognised by the criminal justice system
Key points

• Children must be treated as children – also when suspects
• Youth have developmental vulnerabilities that must be taken into consideration both when investigating suspected offenses and when deciding on consequences
• Every interaction is a possible intervention!
• There is ample possibility to change the course for a young person
• Harsh punitive policies are highly unlikely to have beneficial consequences
Next?

• Investigating youth offences: use the same methodology and expertise as for young victims and witnesses

• Prevention & interventions: Collect good practises – and put them into practise
Thank you!

Also see the portal of the legal psych research group at Åbo Akademi University (LePÅ):

www.legalpsy.fi