

Juvenile crime trends in postwar Europe¹

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Introduction

Comparative analyses of crime trends show that the level of crime has increased in practically all West European countries during the postwar period (Gurr, 1978; Wilson & Herrnstein, 1985; Smith, 1995; Westfelt, 1998). It is also well established that the number of juveniles committing offences and being registered in the official crime statistics is much larger in the 1990's than it was in the 1950's. One of the most common explanations for this crime trend is the change in *routine activities* (Cohen & Felson, 1979). It is Cohen's and Felson's contention that the availability of suitable targets and the opportunities for crime has increased during the postwar period. This development is seen as the result of changes in the structure of legitimate activities, brought about by the modernization of the Western World. Another major explanation stems from *control theory*. As we know, control theory seeks to explain variations between individuals in the propensity to commit crime and can thus perhaps complement the routine activities model, which has been criticised for taking the motivated offender for granted. Although control theory is primarily concerned with conditions at the individual level, when societal crime trends are to be explained, it is not uncommon to operationalize as structural variables those factors which are assumed to affect the delinquency of individuals. Family variables, such as the percentage of the population that is divorced and the percentage of households headed by women, are seen as powerful predictors of crime rates (for examples of this kind of aggregated use of control theory's 'child rearing' variables see Wilson & Herrnstein, 1985; Friday, 1992; Smith, 1995). In the literature, the two models mentioned above are most often used in attempts to account for a *continuous upward trend* in the number of juvenile offenders during the postwar period (eg. Friday, 1992; Smith, 1995). In Sweden, contrary to what we might expect given these models, the number of juvenile offenders has been stable, and may even have decreased, over the last twenty-five years (Estrada 1995;

Ward 1998, this point is discussed in more detail below). If the situation is not unique to Sweden, it would have important consequences both for the kind of explanations applied to juvenile crime trends in postwar Europe and for the formulation of criminal justice policies (where attempts to combat juvenile crime are a central concern).

This article will therefore present an analysis of juvenile crime trends in West European countries during the postwar period (1950-1995). Two models can be formulated to describe these trends.

1. The linear upward trend model (the usual description, e.g. Smith 1995).
2. An initial increase followed by a levelling-off (as in Sweden).

Since these models differ only in respect of the second half of the period under study, the following analysis focuses chiefly on those trends that have characterised the last three decades. The question to be answered is which of these two models best describes the trends in juvenile crime from a West European perspective.

On the whole, crime trends among juveniles are dominated by theft and criminal damage. In more recent years, however, violence among young people has increasingly become a focus for the interest of the public, the media and criminologists alike (Estrada, 1997). Since violent crime makes up a very small part of the sum total of juvenile offences, changes in the level of violent offending are easily lost in descriptions of underlying crime trends. A more specific analysis of the trends in juvenile violence will therefore be conducted. This analysis is limited to the period after 1980.

Method and Material

There are a number of problems associated with the study of juvenile crime over a period of several decades. The task is not made easier by the additional cross-national comparative element. Official crime statistics are the most accessible source of data, but as we know their use is problematical. Our knowledge of longitudinal changes in reporting behaviour, as well as judicial and policing practises, is all too often unsystematic and incomplete (for a more extensive discussion see for example Maguire, 1994; Coleman & Moynihan, 1996). It is therefore wise to nourish a healthy scepticism in the face of claims that crime statistics actually describe 'real' crime trends. In order to use official statistics as a means of interpreting crime trends, one must be in a position to control for the other factors which, *together with criminal activity*, affect their content.

A sensible way to begin a comparative study is to take advantage of the analyses already carried out by researchers in the relevant countries. It is after all reasonable to assume that these people know a good deal about the factors which affect their domestic crime statistics. Besides these analyses this study will also be making use of *alternative* statistics, i.e. *self-report studies* and *victim surveys*. An obvious advantage with these surveys is that they are independent of the relevant country's judicial system and official statistics. Such surveys are few in number however and comparisons over time present problems.

This study covers the following countries: Austria, Denmark, England & Wales (hereafter referred to simply as 'England') Finland, (West) Germany², Holland, Norway, Scotland, Sweden and Switzerland. The availability of data played an important part in the choice of

² The description of Germany for the years 1950-1995 refers exclusively to that part of the country which was known as West Germany up until 1989.

countries to be included. A search for relevant literature was carried out in a number of databases and there were countries, such as those in southern Europe, for which insufficient material could be found³. In addition contact was established with researchers and research centres in most of the countries covered by the study. Data achieved this way will below be referred as PI (personal information).⁴

The validity of the present study depends upon whether its conclusions are grounded in adequate descriptions of crime trends in the various countries. It is vital that these descriptions are both sufficiently representative and sufficiently reliable.

With regard to *representativeness*, the issue is the degree to which the studies here referred to contain all the relevant information available in the countries in question. Researchers often have differing opinions. How are we to know that the researchers whose studies form the basis for the present project are those whose work best represents the available research in these countries? The honest answer is that we can't be certain. Insofar as researchers have similar chances of getting their analyses published in scientific journals however, the review of databases ought to produce a reasonably undistorted sample. One might still object that analyses of national crime trends are often not intended for an international audience, and that they are therefore rarely published in international scientific journals. The collection of data from specific experts in the various countries can in this sense be seen as complementary. The

³ The following electronic databases were used: *Sociofile*, *Criminal Justice Abstracts* and *National Criminal Justice Reference Service*. These databases were trawled using the following keywords: “((Youth or Juvenile) and (trends or crime trends) or crime rates)),” for the years 1980-1996.

Abstracts on Criminology and Penology was available only in book-format and here the search was limited to the sections Juvenile Delinquency, Comparative Analysis, Crime Measurement, Crime Pattern and Time Series Research for the years 1980-1996.

⁴ The following researchers have been consulted. In *Austria*: Christian Grafl, University of Vienna. *Denmark*: Britta Kyvsgaard, Copenhagen University. *England*: David Smith, University of Edinburgh. *Finland*: Kauka Aromaa and Janne Kivivouri National Research Institute of Legal Policy. *Germany*: Christian Pfeiffer,

contacts with experts from the Nordic countries, Germany, England and Scotland were fairly extensive, and the material from these countries can be regarded as reasonably representative. In the case of Holland, material was collected from a wide variety of sources which ought to contribute to a high level of representativeness. The representativeness of the material collected for Austria and Switzerland is more doubtful.

The question of *reliability* has to do with the quality of the studies used; not an easy thing to estimate. One approach is to examine the data on which the studies are based. The literature concerning crime trends has taught us that analyses based on a single statistical indicator are often fairly unreliable, particularly if the statistics used relate to *convicted* offenders. In short, any attempt to produce an ideal description of international trends in juvenile crime should take the following factors into account.

1. The analysis should be based not only on official crime statistics, but should also utilize other statistics that are less affected by changes in the criminal justice system or in the methods used to produce the official statistics. Repeated self-report studies would constitute the best alternative but sadly such studies exist only in Denmark, Holland and Sweden. There are victim surveys available for a larger number of countries but these present problems partly because they don't always include a separate presentation of juvenile victimization, and partly because their relevance for juvenile crime trends lies primarily in the field of violent crime.

2. Official crime statistics should be used to complement these alternative statistical sources.

Statistics should be used which lie 'nearer' to the actual crime event than court convictions.

Kriminologisches Forschungsinstitut, Hannover. *Holland*: Josine Junger-Tas, University of Leiden. *Norway*: Sturla Fack, NOVA, Oslo. *Scotland*: Joe Curran, Scottish Office.

One example would be to use crimes reported to the police to study trends in those specific types of crime for which juveniles constitute the majority of offenders.

3. Statistics relating to identified offenders should also be analysed. Once again it is better to use those statistics that lie 'closer' to the crime, i.e. statistics relating to suspected rather than convicted offenders.

4. In the literature, the reduction in the clear-up rate for property offences is seen to indicate a reduced risk of detection (eg. Schneider 1991, Ahlberg 1992). It is therefore wise to analyse this type of crime separately, thus producing a control for changes in the detection rate.

Presenting trends for more than just one category of offenders (e.g. juveniles and adults) allows for a further control for such changes. Individual differences in detection risk are often small, and thus trend similarities over different offender categories offer more support to the idea of a diminishing detection rate than do trends which are dissimilar.

5. Where possible, a presentation of the domestic debate regarding juvenile crime trends and the reliability of the data contributes to the analysis by making it possible to judge the relative worth of the various indicators.

Validity should thus be seen as less satisfactory for those countries where descriptions are based on the analysis of a very few indicators such as 'persons convicted for all offence types' (Table 1). In those cases where the description is based on a number of sources including alternative statistics, and where a discussion of juvenile crime trends is included, validity is much improved. On the basis of these criteria, I estimate the validity to be *good* for Denmark, England, Germany, Holland, Norway and Sweden. For Finland and Scotland the level of

validity is judged to be *acceptable*, and for Austria and Switzerland the validity is rather *less satisfactory*.

This study is based on data that was produced for other purposes. For this reason the indicators used, the periods studied and the age range for the juveniles included vary to a certain extent between the different countries. Since my primary interest is in general trends and not precise comparisons of crime levels, this is not a significant problem. The differences between countries are acceptable. The official statistics for most of the countries cover the age group 14-20 and the period 1970-1994.

Results

Juvenile crime trends in postwar Europe

Trends for the separate countries are presented below (those who don't want to read this detailed description can go direct to the summary). In brief, the results indicate that the postwar upward trend is broken in Denmark, Holland, Norway, Scotland and Sweden. Austria and Switzerland shows a similar pattern but here the data is considered weaker. In Finland, England and Germany the upward trend has continued.

Juvenile violence appears to have increased in almost every country during the 1990s.

Western and Central Europe

The material from **Austria** is insubstantial. There is no data concerning crime trends prior to the 1970's and likewise no alternative statistics. Since the beginning of the 1970's the number of *convicted* juveniles has fallen by more than half (Grafl, 1989; Bogensberger, 1992). This is assumed to be primarily the result of changes in working practice within the criminal justice

system. Statistics in respect of juvenile *suspects* show that their number has been more or less stable since the beginning of the 1970's (Bogensberger, 1992). One fact which lends added credibility to the official crime statistics is that the proportion of juveniles suspected of more serious offences has showed a continuous decline during this period (Grafl, 1989). If it were simply that the Austrian police were giving informal, non-registered cautions more and more often, then the proportion of individuals registered as suspects in connection with more serious crimes would be expected to rise rather than fall.

Registered juvenile crime in (West) **Germany** rises from the beginning of the 1950's (Kaiser, 1992; Walter, 1996). During the first half of the 1980's however, the number of *convicted* juveniles starts to fall sharply (Kaiser, 1992; Jehle, 1996) whilst for the most part, statistics relating to juvenile *suspects* show an increase for the whole of the period 1954-1994 (Walter, 1996). The point is often made that the reduction in German clear-up rates may indicate a drop in the detection rate, a situation that leads to an underestimation of juvenile crime trends where official crime statistics form the basis for conjecture (Schneider, 1991). Statistics relating to suspects portray *violent juvenile crime* as having been stable in (West) Germany during the period 1980-1988 (Pfeiffer et al, 1996). The level of registered violent juvenile crime rises sharply from 1989 onwards. The extent to which this increase might be explained by changes in reporting behaviour is difficult to determine in the absence of German victim surveys.

Between 1955 and 1980 there is a sharp increase in the number of juveniles *convicted* in **Holland** (Junger-Tas, 1988; 1992), a trend which is broken at the start of the 1980's. The number of juvenile *suspects* is stable during the period 1980-1992 whilst the number of adult suspects increases by about 80 per cent (Junger-Tas, 1992; PI; SCP, 1995). Juvenile *self-*

report studies also suggest a stable pattern in the crime trend at this time. These studies reveal a stable level of self-reported crime for the period 1986-1994 (Junger-Tas, 1992; PI). In the same way, *victim surveys* suggest that the level of crime increased between 1976 and 1979 but then remained more or less stable during the period 1980-1992 (Franke, 1994; Kester & Junger-Tas, 1994). Violent juvenile crime on the other hand has increased dramatically in Holland from the end of the 1980's (Junger-Tas, 1996, PI). A part of this increase is assumed to be due to changes in reporting behaviour since the levels of both fatal violence and the violence reported in victim surveys have remained more or less stable since 1980, whilst complaints to the police regarding serious violence and attempted murder have increased sharply (Franke, 1994). *Self-report studies* indicate nonetheless that the level of violent crime committed by Dutch juveniles has increased (Kester & Junger-Tas, 1994; Junger-Tas, 1996; PI).

The data from **Switzerland** is insubstantial. No statistical data relating to suspects, nor any alternative statistics have been found. The number of *convicted* juveniles doubled during the period 1955-1970 (Niggli & Pfister, 1997). This trend is broken at the beginning of the 1970's, and there are no increases in the level of juvenile crime thereafter (Reber, 1993; Eisner, 1993; Niggli & Pfister, 1997). The level of *reported crime*, and specifically theft, has not increased since 1982 (Niggli & Pfister, 1997). Swiss trends in *juvenile violence* have been a matter for debate. Reber (1993) suggests that levels did not increase between 1984 and 1990. Eisner (1993) agrees that the 1980's were a period of stability but feels this trend was broken at the start of the 1990's. This position is supported by the findings of Niggli and Pfister (1997), who show that aggregate levels of violent crime have increased in Switzerland during the 1990's.

Great Britain

A description of juvenile crime trends in **England** is made more complicated by the fact that the procedures whereby crime is recorded have changed during the period under study (Rutter & Giller, 1983; Farrington, 1992). At the end of the 1960's the police registration procedures changed so that a larger proportion of police cautions were registered than had previously been the case (Rutter & Giller, 1983). In the mid 1980's the police once again altered their procedures, this time in the opposite direction (Farrington, 1992). Comparability over the whole of the period under study is therefore less than satisfactory. It ought however to be possible to describe crime trends within the following periods: 1950-1968, 1970-1985 and 1989-1995.

The number of juveniles in England either *convicted or cautioned* rises sharply from the mid 1950's (Rutter & Giller, 1983). This strong upward trend is broken in the mid 1970's (ibid). According to the official crime statistics there is no increase during the period 1974-1979. Between 1979 and 1985 however the level of registered juvenile crime climbs once again (Home Office, 1980-1996). During the period 1985-1995, the statistics indicate a substantial reduction in juvenile crime. In contrast, the levels of crime committed by adults display an upward trend that is on the whole unbroken throughout this period (Rutter & Giller, 1983; Home Office, 1980-1996).

Farrington (1992) is sceptical about the reduction in juvenile crime. He suggests that the apparent decrease is a result of the procedural changes concerning the registration of crime by the police. During the period 1981-1995, the level of crime increases according to both statistics for *crimes reported to the police* (+ 90%), and *victim surveys* (+80%) (Mirrlees-Black et al, 1996). Both Farrington (1992) and Smith (1995) feel that this is indicative of a

continued increase in juvenile crime. If we accept this interpretation, then juvenile crime in England, with the exception of a few years during the 1970's, has risen more or less continuously throughout the post war period.⁵

The number of juveniles convicted and cautioned for violent offences is stable during the 1980's, and falls during the 1990's. However the level of violent crime as evidenced by both victim surveys and statistics relating to crimes reported to the police increases conspicuously (Mirrlees-Black et al, 1996). Violent crimes against young people (aged 16-29) increase by about 70 per cent between 1981 and 1995 (Mirrlees-Black, PI). If we accept Farrington's criticism of the statistics concerning persons convicted or cautioned, it is reasonable to assume that violent juvenile crime in England has increased continuously since 1980.

As in most other West European countries, the level of registered crime in **Scotland** rises sharply from the mid 1950's (Young, 1997). The number of *convicted* juveniles increases throughout the 1970's. There is a levelling off however at the beginning of the 1980's (Scottish Office, 1979-95). This trend is confirmed by alternative statistical sources. Victim surveys show no increases in the level of crime between 1981 and 1992 (Anderson & Leitch, 1996). Neither victim surveys nor statistics relating to convicted offenders indicate an increase in the level of violent crime in Scotland (Scottish Office, 1979-1995, Anderson & Leitch, 1996).⁶

⁵ It is nevertheless possible to find indicators which suggest that the 'levelling off' that certain researchers identify in the mid 1970's (Rutter & Giller, 1983) has continued. It is interesting for example that reported crime only increased by 7 per cent during the years 1985-1989, which Farrington identifies as the period where the statistics relating to juvenile crime are most unreliable (Farrington 1992; Home Office 1980-1996). Nor is there an upward trend during the 1990's. Between 1991 and 1995 reported crime falls by 3 per cent and the number of registered juveniles (aged 14-17) by 4 per cent (Home Office 1980-1996). The exception to this stabilizing trend is the sharp rise in reported theft during the period 1989-1991 (an increase of 40 per cent in just two years). The portrayal of an unbroken upward trend in juvenile crime can thus be called into question.

⁶ It is interesting that England and Scotland should display such contrasting crime trends. This phenomenon has only recently become a focus for attention within British criminology (Anderson & Leitch, 1996; Young, 1997).

The Nordic countries

In **Denmark** the postwar upward trend in the number of *convicted* juveniles is broken in the mid 1970's (Kysvgaard, 1992:23,30). This finding is supported by a study of juveniles' *self-reported criminality* for the years 1979 and 1989 (Kysvgaard, 1992). The number of convicted adults has continued to rise during this period (ibid). In Denmark the trend in juvenile violence shifts from relative stability during the 1980's to an upward trend in the 1990's (Balvig, 1995). Danish victim surveys show that juveniles are being exposed to more violence (ibid). However a study that compares hospital data with police data indicates that the violence among juveniles has not increased. Nor has there been an increase in the level of fatal violence (Brink et al 1997). What has increased is the willingness, especially among the youngest (15-19) to report the case to the police (ibid).

In **Finland** crime statistics portray the upward trend in juvenile crime as more or less continuous from 1950-1990 (Törnudd, 1984; Kivivouri, PI). During the 1990's this trend is broken and the number of juvenile suspects instead begins to decline. The registered crime of adults follows the same pattern. However, *victim surveys* covering the period 1980-1996 show no increase (Aromaa, 1991; Heiskanen & Aromaa, 1996). In the matter of *juvenile violence*, assault statistics shows a increase from 1980. At the same time victim surveys reveal a reduction in victimization of juveniles for the period 1980-1988 (Aromaa, 1991).

In **Norway** the sharp upward trend in juvenile crime is broken at the beginning of the 1970's (Christie, 1982; Falck, 1994). Clausen (1996) has demonstrated that it is primarily adults who

At the beginning of the 1980's the differences were felt to be smaller (Smith, 1983; Mayhew and Smith 1985). No explanations for the contrasting trends have as yet been presented.

lie behind the increase in reported crime for the period 1980-1992. However, crime statistics reveal a strong increase in the level of *violent crime* committed by juveniles since the mid 1980's (Falck, 1994; Clausen, 1996). The proportion of young Norwegian males (aged 16-24) who according to *victim surveys* have been the victims of a violent crime remained at a fairly stable level between 1983 and 1991 (Olaussen 1995; PI). The figures for 1995, however, represent an increase.

Between 1950 and 1972, the number of juveniles *convicted* of theft in **Sweden** increases. From 1972 juvenile crime as measured by these same statistics falls. This has been the subject of much debate (Estrada, 1995). Several analyses of the various components of the official crime statistics show it to be unlikely that the dramatic postwar increase in theft by juveniles should have continued into the 1970's (Estrada, 1995; von Hofer, 1997). Self-report studies confirm that the number of juvenile offenders has not increased since the beginning of the 1970's (Ward, 1998). The rise in crime since the beginning of the 1970's is instead due to an increase in the amount of crime committed by adults. The trends in *violent crime* committed by juveniles since 1980 are more difficult to interpret. Distinct increases in assaults by juveniles can be seen in the official statistics from about 1987 (von Hofer, 1995; Olsson & Lindström 1995). At the same time juvenile violence leading to the death of the victim has been stable since 1980. Victim surveys and self-report studies show also a stable pattern (Qvarnström & Mårtensson 1996; SCB 1998, Ward 1998).

Summary of results

A summary of the results together with references to the most important sources is presented in *Table 2*.

Table 2. Summary of results. Underlying trends in juvenile crime, trends in juvenile violence, key sources.

Country	Underlying trend 1950-1995	Key sources	Trends in juvenile violence 1980-1995	Key sources
Austria	Model 2: Stable since first half of 1970's.	Grafl 1989	-	-
Denmark	Model 2: Sharp upward trend to first half of 1970's, followed by 'levelling off'.	Kyvsgaard 1992; PI	Contradictory indicators. Increasing during 1990's according to assault statistics. Stable according to hospital data.	Balvig 1995 Brink et al 1997 Kyvsgaard 1993
England	Model 1: More or less unbroken increase throughout the period.	Farrington 1992 Mirrlees-Black et al 1996 Rutter et al 1983	Rising throughout the period according to both assault statistics and victim surveys.	Mirrlees-Black et al 1996; PI
Finland	Model 1: More or less unbroken increase to 1990, followed by reduction during the 90s.	Kivivouri PI Törnudd 1984	Contradictory indicators. Increase according to assault statistics. Decrease according to victim surveys.	Aromaa 1991 Heiskanen & Aromaa 1996 PI
Germany	Model 1: More or less unbroken increase during the entire period.	Kaiser 1992 Pfeiffer et al 1996 Walter 1996	Stable between 1984-89. Thereafter sharp increase during 1990's according to official crime statistics.	Pfeiffer et al 1996
Holland	Model 2: Sharp upward trend to beginning of 1980's, followed by 'levelling off'.	Junger-Tas 1992; PI SCP 1995	Stable to end of 1980's. Thereafter rising during 1990's according to both assault and alternative statistics.	Franke 1994 Junger-Tas 1996; PI Kester et al 1994
Norway	Model 2: Sharp upward trend to first half of 1970's, followed by 'levelling off'.	Christie 1982 Clausen 1996 Falck 1994	Contradictory indicators during 1980's. Increase during 1990's according to both assault statistics and victim surveys.	Clausen 1996 Olaussen 1995
Scotland	Model 2: Upward trend to beginning of 1980's, followed by 'levelling off'.	Anderson et al 1996 Scottish Office 1979-1995 Young 1997	No increase according to victim surveys and assault statistics.	Anderson et al 1996 Scottish Office 1979-1995
Sweden	Model 2: Sharp upward trend to first half of 1970's, followed by 'levelling off'.	Estrada 1995 von Hofer 1985 Ward 1998	Contradictory indicators. Increase during 1990's according to assault statistics. Stable according to self-report data and victim surveys.	von Hofer 1995 Olsson & Lindström 1995 Qvarnström 1996 SCB 1998

Switzerland	Model 2: Sharp upward trend to beginning of 1970's, followed by 'levelling off'.	Niggli et al 1997 Reber 1993	No increase during 1980's. Possible break in this trend and increase during 1990's.	Eisner 1993 Niggli et al 1997 Reber 1993
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The table shows that the *underlying trend* for the number of juvenile offenders follows the ‘levelling off’ hypothesis in a majority of the countries included in the study (and perhaps most importantly in four of the six countries where the data was judged to be most reliable). *This means that the the postwar period is not characterized by an ever expanding population of young criminals.* The exceptions to this rule are England, Germany, and perhaps Finland, where postwar upward trend seems to have continued at a more or less undiminished rate during the entire period.

In several countries trends in juvenile violence deviate from the underlying crime trends (we have to remember that violence only accounts for a small proportion of the total of juvenile offences). More or less all countries crime statistics display a rise in juvenile violence. In England and Finland this rise has been continuous throughout the period 1980-1995. The increase in Denmark, Germany, Holland, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland is probably the result of a trend-shift at the end of the 1980’s. Junger-Tas (1996) shows that it is primarily violence of a less serious nature which has contributed to the rise in juvenile violence in various European countries. Violence leading to the death of the victim has not increased (ibid). Junger-Tas points out that it is difficult to quantify the size of the increase since crime statistics and alternative statistics paint somewhat different pictures. The present study shows that this is especially true for the Scandinavian countries. In Western and Central Europe however both alternative statistics and crime statistics indicates that the level of violent juvenile crime has increased during the 1990s. The question of recent trends in juvenile violence certain merits further research.

The German criminologist Pfeiffer (1997) has recently carried out an analysis of juvenile crime in Europe. He describes juvenile crime trends as *falling* in Denmark, England,

Switzerland and Sweden. The trends in Germany and Austria are judged to be stable until the end of the 1980's, at which point they begin to rise. Juvenile crime in Holland is presented as having been stable since 1985. Finland, Norway and Scotland are not mentioned. There are certain differences between Pfeiffer's interpretation and my own but the general picture is much the same. Where there are differences, these are due in part to Pfeiffer's reliance on only official crime statistics and in part to the fact that his study covers a shorter period (1980-1995). On the question of trends in violent juvenile crime, Pfeiffer's results and my own are on the whole very similar. We both find indications of increasing violence among juveniles in the 1990s according to crime statistics in several countries.

A central question is the extent to which the described trends are real, or simply the result of amongst other things procedural changes in the criminal justice system or variations in reporting behaviour (see above). The most obvious answer is of course that both alternatives are true to a varying extent. In most of the countries studied here for example statistics concerning *convicted* juveniles indicate a clear *reduction* over the last twenty years or so. Those indicators which lie 'closer' to the crime event however, and which are thus less sensitive to changes within the criminal justice system (such as statistics relating to suspects), suggest that the reductions are not real but are rather the result of "system effects" (see for example von Hofer, 1985; Grafl, 1989; Ahlberg, 1992; Farrington, 1992; Junger-Tas, 1992; Estrada, 1995; Clausen, 1996; Walter 1996). It is nonetheless important to remember that for most countries these sources do not indicate that the number of juvenile offenders has continued to increase at an undiminished rate during this period. This interpretation is reinforced by alternative statistics. In those countries where self-report studies are available over time they suggest a stable level of juvenile offenders. In addition, with the exception of England, the available victim surveys suggest that the underlying crime trends have probably

levelled off over the past fifteen years, and that the increased crime levels portrayed in the official crime statistics are to some extent the result of changes in reporting behaviour (Aromaa, 1991; Kester & Junger-Tas 1994; Olausson, 1995; SCB, 1995; Anderson & Leitch 1996, Mirrlees-Black et al, 1996). The data from several countries suggest that the rise in crime that remains to be explained once changes in reporting behaviour have been taken into account, ought really to be ascribed to adults rather than juveniles. Crime trends for adult offenders over the last twenty years are essentially different from those for juveniles in Denmark, Holland, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland.

In summary, it is likely that trends in juvenile crime are no longer uniform to all West and North European countries. In many countries the available material suggests that the steep upward trend in the number of juvenile offenders which characterised the first half of the postwar period, has been broken. In some countries however the increase seems to have continued.

Discussion: How well do the explanatory models fit the juvenile crime trends?

It was pointed out in the introduction that explanations of juvenile crime trends often try to account for a continuous upward trend. This study indicates however that what ought in fact to be explained is a situation where the number of juvenile offenders first increases (circa 1950-1975) and is then stable during the subsequent decades. My intention here is to limit myself to a brief discussion of how well the explanatory factors that were presented in the introduction cope with this empirical pattern.

For the *routine activity approach*, the structural changes affecting the availability of crime opportunities in the postwar period are of central importance. Here we are dealing with an

empirical question that goes beyond the scope of this article. It is nonetheless reasonable to contend that the sharp postwar rise in the availability of crime opportunities has levelled off in parallel with the slowing economic trends that followed the oil crisis of 1973 (Korpi, 1992:55, 108). At the same time, faced with the sharp postwar crime increases, most western countries have made use of situational crime prevention measures in order to reduce or at least limit the number of crime opportunities (Garland, 1996), and these measures have principally been targetted at typical juvenile offences such as theft and criminal damage. This description fits rather well with the observed slow-down in juvenile crime. A stabilization in the availability of opportunities for crime is moreover primarily assumed to affect those groups of juveniles who have not yet become 'persistent' offenders (Wikström, 1995). For those who are already embarked upon a 'criminal career', restrictions in the number of opportunities for crime are rather less important (ibid). This line of argument could thus also provide us with a way of making sense of differences in the crime trends displayed by adults and juveniles over the last twenty years. One might however object that economic trends have varied from country to country (Korpi, 1992). In Norway for example, the oil crisis of 1973 initiated a period of accelerated growth rather than an economic slow-down.⁷ If we in fact have a slow-down in juvenile offending whilst structural conditions still favour a continued increase in crime, then the changing trends in these countries demand a different explanation.

The arguments from *Control theory* present problems in that rises in the levels of the important social phenomena (divorce rate etc) take place at a time, around 1965-1975 (Hess 1995), which fits with neither the sharp rise in juvenile crime between 1950 and 1975 nor the subsequent levelling off that can be seen in several European countries. The explanatory value

⁷ A common objection to the importance of the availability of crime opportunities is that economic trends in Japan have been similar to those in western European countries without there having been a corresponding rise in the level of crime (see e.g. Wilson & Herrnstein, 1985).

of these factors is thus unclear. Another argument often raised in connection with the control approach is that the level of social control exercised by adults over juveniles has been significantly and continuously reduced in postwar societies due to a increasing "generation gap" (see for example Wilson & Herrnstein 1985: 436; Friday, 1992; Smith, 1995). This segregation of young people from adult society has been helped along by such factors as the increasing length of educational careers, a later and later entrance into the labour market and the growth of a youth focused popular culture. To evaluate this argument properly would require an extensive comparative analysis of the changing trends in juvenile social control in Western Europe. There is room here for no more than a brief description of the situation in Sweden.

The modernization of Sweden led to a massive expansion of popular culture which quickly became focused on young people. As early as the 1930's and 1940's the increasing 'gap' between youth culture and adult society was a matter of much debate. After the war, and especially during the 1950's and 1960's, the pace of this modernization process increased dramatically. In 1960, the number of students aged 15-19 was five times the number in 1940 (Bjurström & Fornäs, 1988). Between 1960 and 1970, the number of teenagers in work in Sweden was cut by very nearly half (ibid). If the trend towards a generation specific youth culture can be said to have started in the 1930's and 1940's, then the youth revolts at the end of the 1960's can be seen as the peak of this growing divide between the generations. It seems reasonable to suggest that the development of a gap between young people and the adult world has not continued at the same pace since the beginning of the 1970's. The generational divide which has impacted upon the social control of juveniles may well have been more or less complete by this point. Couched in these terms, the social control model fits much better with the apparent slow-down in juvenile crime trends than with the hypothesis of a continuous

increase with which it is usually associated (eg. Wilson & Herrnstein 1985; Friday 1992; Smith 1995). Indeed, self report studies from Denmark and Sweden indicates that the youth of today are more and not less disciplined than juveniles in the seventies (Kvysgaard 1992, Ward 1998).

In sum, this study suggest that the usual accounts of postwar trends in juvenile crime don't fit well with the factual development. For the majority of the Western European countries, what needs to be explained is not a continuous upward trend in the number of juvenile offenders but rather an initial increase followed by a levelling off.

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The criteria used to estimate the validity of the material from the various countries are presented in *Table 1*.

Table 1. Collation of validity indicators

	Convicted persons	All crime types	Crimes of violence	Good representativeness	Juveniles and adults	Suspects	Victim surveys	Theft	Domestic debate	Detection rate	Self-report studies
Sweden	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Norway	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-
Denmark	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	-	+
Holland	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	-	+
Germany	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	-	+	+	-
England	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	+	+	-	-
Finland	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	-	-
Scotland	+	+	+	+	-	-	+	-	-	-	-
Switzerland	+	+	+	-	+	-	-	+	-	-	-
Austria	+	+	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-

+ = yes - = no

Explanation of the column headings

Convicted persons: statistics covering convicted persons.

All crime types: statistics covering juvenile crime trends for all types of crime.

Crimes of violence: statistics covering trends for crimes of violence committed by juveniles.

Good representativeness: see above.

Juveniles and adults: separate presentation of crime trends for juveniles and adults.

Suspected persons: statistics covering persons suspected of having committed offences.

Victim surveys: victim surveys that allow for comparisons over time.

Theft: statistics covering trends in thefts committed by juveniles.

Domestic debate: a documented domestic debate regarding juvenile crime trends.

Detection rate: a control for possible changes in the detection rate.

Self-report studies: self-report studies that allow for comparisons over time.

