



The European Union  
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# Secondary Prevention of Juvenile Crime - Relevance of Existing Needs and Services

## Recommendations For Service Development



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SECONDARY PREVENTION OF JUVENILE CRIME  
RELEVANCE OF EXISTING NEEDS AND SERVICES

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SERVICE DEVELOPMENT

*Protection of juveniles from criminal behavior and intervention for prevention of recidivism are the key components of juvenile justice!*

In recent years, the Georgian government has planned and implemented a number of activities resulting in introduction of preventive, child-centered and individualized approaches to rehabilitation, socialization, and the use of alternative punishments within the frames of juvenile justice reform. The new approach takes into account the best interests of the child and greatly ensures his or her involvement in the process.

Despite the reforms, preventive and intervention services are still scarce and do not fully meet the needs of various groups at risk of committing crime. In this regard, it is particularly noteworthy that there are no mental health, family support or additional educational and / or other types of services aimed at early identification, intervention and reduction of risky behaviors.

Adolescence is a period of turbulent, diverse, and complex changes that makes adolescents particularly vulnerable to environmental factors. Studies show that a large proportion of the country's latent crimes is committed by juveniles, although they make up only 16-18 percent of the country's population. Due to its age-related, biological and psychological characteristics, juvenile crime is normalized in society, which means that almost all juveniles have violated the law at least once. Accordingly, the problem for the public is not the juvenile offenders, but the juveniles who chronically repeat the crime - "chronic offenders", against whom the state must plan and implement flexible preventive measures .

The "normality" of juvenile crime makes it particularly important to know what causes the recurrence of crime, what specific risk factors affect it and how to prevent re-offending. Moreover, the cause of the juveniles' criminal activity is often due to their social belonging and risk factors in this environment, along with individual characteristics .

Prevention of juvenile crime, which is regulated by the Juvenile Justice Code, requires close cooperation between many agencies. Given that juvenile delinquency is the result of interaction of many factors, planning and conducting effective preventive measures is the responsibility not of any one agency, but of all the institutions the child has contact with. This makes it possible to plan and implement preventive measures in a coordinated and rational manner. Putting all the weight on one particular agency will cause it to overload and work inefficiently in the near future. Agreed-upon and coordinated work will help to create new legislative norms and plan result-oriented prevention.

In addition, it is necessary to change the practice of prevention in the country based on the analysis of the achieved results, i.e. it is necessary to precisely determine how well the existing interventions / services meet the needs and how much they achieve the set goals.

Therefore, in order to introduce targeted, preventive and intervention services to reduce risks of crime, it is necessary to identify and study the needs of different groups of juveniles, at individual, family and societal levels.

Organizations "Global Initiative on Psychiatry - Tbilisi" and "Georgian Center for Psychosocial and Medical Rehabilitation of Torture Victims (GCRT)", with the support and funding of the EU project - "Juvenile Justice Reform in Georgia", conducted a study, the aim of which is determining the relevance of existing rehabilitation-resocialization programs/services to the needs of various groups at risk of committing crime.

The study had two main directions: (1) identifying the needs of various groups of juveniles (juveniles participating in diversion and mediation program; internally displaced juveniles who are in risk group, and juveniles in general population - school students) and (2) analyzing the existing services in relation to the identified needs – relevance and accessibility.

**Studying the needs of juveniles:** (1) The needs of juveniles and young people involved in the diversion and mediation program were studied using quantitative and qualitative methods (case analysis). The aim of research, in this particular direction, was to study the

profiles of juveniles participating in the diversion and mediation program and to identify individual, family and social factors related to repeated crime; (2) Based on quantitative research, the study determined how the development of emotional, behavioral and social areas varies across juveniles with different social statuses (general population, IDP-s, juveniles involved in diversion and mediation program), what these juveniles have in common and what difficulties they face in different age subgroups.

**Findings and conclusions of the study**

A case study of 100 adolescents (81 boys and 19 girls) involved in the diversion and mediation program shows that the following predictors are identified at the juvenile / individual level: emotional regulation and behavioral difficulties; lack of social skills; low learning motivation; juvenile values and attitudes towards crime - high acceptance of criminal lifestyle and activities, neglect of established social norms, experience of violence; experience of psychoactive substance use and gambling addiction.

It is noteworthy that the research found expressed difficulties of mental health in only 3-5% of the analyzed case studies, indicating that the mental health of a juvenile cannot be a reliable predictor of juvenile criminal behavior.

Among the factors influencing the social level, several important characteristics were identified, including the influence of the school environment, the influence of peers, and community-related factors.

Most juveniles have problems with school and general education. The drop-out rate out of school is high, with 19% for boys and 21% for girls. The following problems are also identified: lack of motivation to learn; frequent absence from school; low academic performance; grade retention; frequent change of educational institution. A high rate of difficulties related to school and learning can be considered as one of the predictors of committing a crime, which can be visible much earlier than an adolescent actually commits a crime.

In data analysis, factors related to family environment of juveniles make up a large part, including economic factors (a large part of adults have low socioeconomic status, boys 49.4%, and girls - 63.2%), as well as difficulties in communication between children and parents (in 15% of boys, conflicts in the family are registered, and in case of girls, this figure increases almost three times - 43%); Peculiarities of guardianship and raising children, and domestic violence. According to the study, females experience physical violence the most - 26%, in case of boys this figure is only 6.2% of the described cases. An important factor is the criminal behavior of family members, substance use by a family member, etc.

**A study on the needs of juveniles involved in the diversion and mediation program and their social environment reveals that observing the child and his environment and analyzing risk factors makes it possible to identify the risks of juvenile crime in a timely manner. Certain factors, at the individual, family and societal levels, are predisposing risk factors and, by influencing them in combination, better future for the child can be ensured. Early identification and prevention of these factors is the best mechanism for ensuring a better future for juveniles.**

In the second phase of research, studying mental health (behavioral and emotional characteristics) of three high-risk groups of juveniles - internally displaced persons, juveniles in conflict with the law (participants of diversion and mediation program) and the general population - was planned. 596 juveniles and young people participated in the study.

Research explicitly showed that while belonging to a social group has a certain effect on the level of anxiety, depression and behavioral difficulties in juveniles - **juveniles with different social statuses experience approximately the same difficulties** - which should be more related to their age than their social status. For example, the anxiety rate in the general population of juveniles and in diversion and mediation program participants is the following: the average level of anxiety and highly expressed anxiety in the general population is 24.4%, while in juveniles involved in the diversion and mediation program the same characteristic is 21.8%. According to data, the anxiety rate is higher in the general population. However, research analysis shows that the rate of expressed anxiety is higher in juveniles in conflict with the law (7.3%) than in the general population (5.4%). Approximately the same picture is seen when comparing depression rates, i.e. moderately expressed and highly expressed signs of depression in the general population are 29.8%, and in juveniles participating in the diversion and mediation program 27.8%. But juveniles in conflict with the law (13.0%) are also more likely to have severe depression, compared to 10.8% of the general population. Interestingly, the mean rate of behavioral problems also differs only slightly in the general population (2.88) and in diverted juveniles (2.81).

Research also explicitly showed that in all social groups, only a very small part of juveniles has severely expressed difficulties that require individual psychological intervention or rehabilitation.

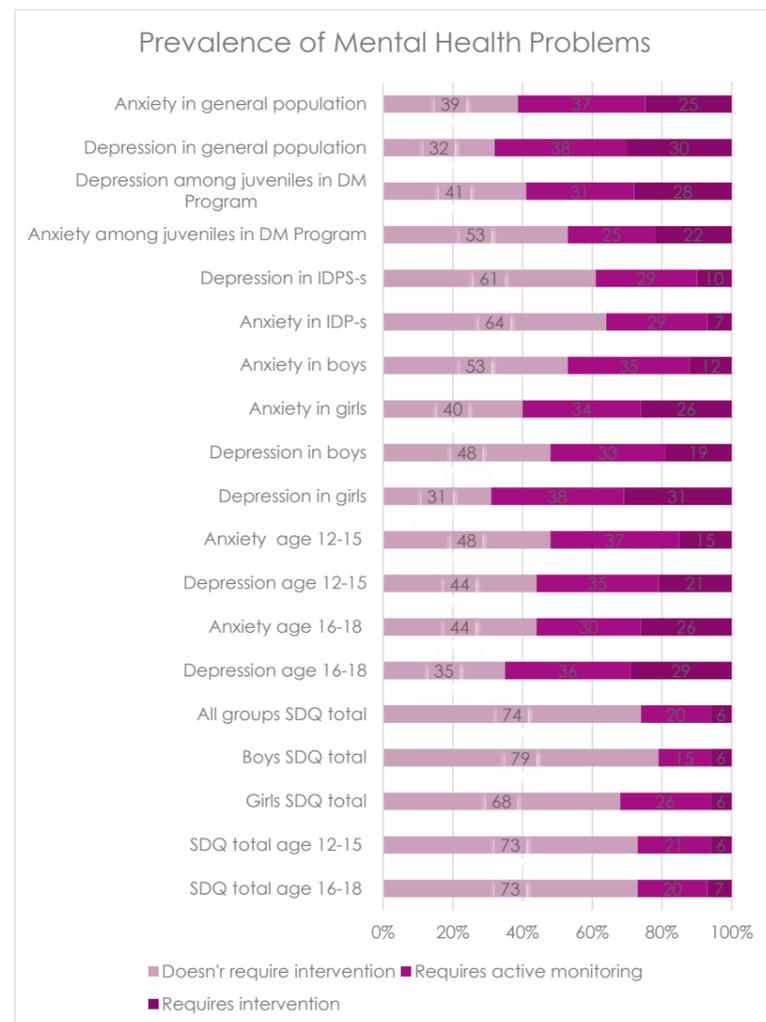
**The results of quantitative study show that a large part of juveniles (21-24%) have mental health problems such as anxiety and depression, and their equal distribution across different groups casts doubt on the connection between mental health problems and criminal behavior. These results are consistent with qualitative research data that independently refute the predictive value of adolescent mental health for criminal behavior.**

**Based on this data, we can say that in general, adolescence is a risk period for manifesting mental health problems, but in terms of crime prevention, juveniles with additional family, school and community related problems are the ones who need special attention, which itself indicates that introducing relevant programs is necessary.**

1 - შალვაშვილი მოხის, მიქანაძე გივი, ახასხუწლოვანთა მართლმსაჯულება, თბილისი, ფრანკო-სტუდენტთა კავშირი, 2016.

2 - გობიაშვილი ი. ახასხუწლოვანთა დანაშაულობის დეგრადაცია, 1998; გვ. 189-190 იხ. აგხეთვე ღლონტი გ. (ხეც.), 2008, გვ. 292.

INTERVENTION



Analyzing the needs of juveniles naturally raises the question of availability, accessibility, diversity, and efficiency of appropriate services. The study looked at 20 of the largest programs that provide services to young people aged 14 to 21, their families and schools in Tbilisi and the regions at the secondary prevention level. Out of these, 14 are fully funded by the central / local budget, and 6 programs are implemented by the non-governmental sector with the financial support of donors. Out of the services described in the study, only six are implemented throughout entire Georgia. These programs are implemented by the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labor, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia, the assistance agency for state care and victims of trafficking (rehabilitation programs, 12 sub-programs oriented at psychosocial and pro social behavior development of juvenile probationers and diversion program participants; financial assistance, promotion of vocational education, mental health and behavioral assessment, non-monetary medical assistance). The other 14 programs, including the psychosocial center of Resource Officer's Service of Ministry of Education, Science Culture and Sport, function in 9 major cities and are not available in small towns, especially in rural areas.

The content analysis of the existing services showed that the services available to juveniles are often directed only at them (individual as well as group counseling, psychotherapy, emotional regulation training, anger management, etc.) and do not address the challenges of the juveniles' environment and society. The data obtained from the study show that problems at the social level become a major prerequisite for juvenile delinquency/crime, it is also noteworthy that existing services are not diverse and accessible to all juveniles.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF PREVENTIVE SERVICES / PRACTICES

*"Systemic and interconnected problems need systematic and interconnected solutions"*<sup>3</sup>

Based on the findings of the study, it became possible to develop various efficient recommendations relevant to the needs of young people, at the secondary prevention level.

At the level of secondary prevention, we mainly find targeted and specialized services, but based on research, we can state that the school is a universal space where it is possible to predict and identify the criminal activity of juveniles, as well as carry out preventive measures with minimal costs.

Unfortunately, there is no research on the cost-effectiveness of juvenile justice services in Georgia. However, according to the National Center for School Involvement in the United States, dropping out of school by each adolescent costs the state about \$ 200,000 in the future, as juvenile support services are quite expensive: family support, social services; psychiatric services, etc. Based on the cost analysis and assessment of effectiveness of targeted and specialized services, the Washington State Legislative Body recommends developing and implementing programs to prevent the delinquent behavior of juveniles as early as possible at the school, family, and community levels.<sup>4</sup>

The study clearly showed that the main need that juveniles face today is preventive measures at the school and family levels, because many factors related to school / education and family have been found to be a predictor to juvenile criminal behavior. Research has shown that often juveniles' problems begin long before they commit a crime.

### Recommendation № 1

It is important to introduce large-scale prevention measures, including timely detection of juvenile needs and intervention at an early stage of development, both at family and school levels, and to identify issues such as poverty, child abuse, early detection of child's behavioral, emotional, educational needs, activation of an efficient mechanism of family-oriented economic and social support programs, where inter-agency cooperation plays a crucial role.

With the development of education system and multiple alternative family support services, we can help juveniles with any social status - to overcome the difficulties of the transition age consistently, which will give each of them the opportunity to escape criminal activities and develop themselves.

Based on the results of the juveniles participating in the study, we know that their needs, despite small differences, are almost the same and that most of them (70%) **do not require** either targeted or specialized services. These are juveniles who have low and mild rates of anxiety, depression, and behavioral difficulties. However, their participation in targeted preventive measures tailored **to their individual needs is highly desirable**.

**Based on research results, introduction and monitoring of targeted services is necessary for 15-38% of Adolescents.** These are teens who have moderate levels of anxiety, depression, and behavioral difficulties; **7-30 %** of them with severe anxiety, depression, and behavioral difficulties require specialized, professional intervention, and monitoring.

### Recommendation № 2

1. It is important to plan preventive and interventional services according to the identified needs, where the main focus will be on family and school activities;
2. When planning preventive measures and programs, it is crucial to allocate more resources to explore the needs of risk groups so that the planned prevention programs adequately address the existing challenges;
3. In terms of risk reduction, it is important to involve juveniles in programs where it will be possible to equip them with the psycho-social skills necessary for healthy functioning, it is also important to provide families with positive parenting skills and effective communication with children;

3 - Brown and Wyatt, 2010 p.35

4 - Juvenile Justice Guide Book for Legislators

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4. It is important to create evidence-based psycho-social intervention programs for juvenile crime prevention; to promote and study the services and programs that provide psycho-social services to juveniles;

The study of all existing services on the whole territory of Georgia showed that apart from accessibility, quantity and diversity, most services are focused only on juveniles, their “correction” and “improvement”, while introducing effective and efficient services means orienting at juvenile’s harmonious development, understanding the relevance of educational, social and other needs of juveniles in conflict with the law, considering individual approach and different environmental aspects. Such approach is aimed at recognizing the complex causes of crime and the psychosocial factors that determine crime, **which not only places responsibility on the individual, but also on the environment in which the individual is formed and developed.**

### Recommendation № 3

1. It is important to increase access to services throughout Georgia - to create a unified, sustainable mechanism for juvenile crime prevention, where close cooperation between local governments, local government agencies and non-governmental organizations plays a leading role;
2. It is important to assess the cost-effectiveness of the service and to introduce large-scale preventive measures;
3. It is important to develop and widely spread the alternative services throughout the country.
4. Ensuring the continuity and sustainability of services;
5. Raising awareness of the general public on juvenile justice and gaining support to prevent the stigmatization of adolescents participating in the diversion and mediation program and to facilitate reintegration.