

Position Paper EFCAP - May 14, 2021

Children and youngsters who are incarcerated often have a long history of psychological problems, trauma, neglect and severe behavioural problems. The primary goal of incarceration is protecting society from (further) potential harm caused by criminal behaviour. In ideal circumstances, treatment and incarceration are focussed on preventing recidivism. Evidence-based medicine is essential to make this possible. In addition, incarcerated children and youngsters should be handled according to the European Convention on the Rights of the Child.¹

However, not all European countries have the right facilities in terms of treatment, safe forensic youth hospitals and following the European Convention. This is worrisome and alarming because the scientific state-of-the-art- shows that aggressive and antisocial behaviour is strongly linked to child and adolescent psychopathology such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), conduct disorders, trauma-related psychopathology and substance abuse disorder, as well as with psychosocial adversity such as dysfunctional families and low socio-economic status. There is ample evidence from research and clinical practice that juvenile offender therapy reduces relapse and recidivism.

EFCAP - the European Association for Forensic Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Psychology and other involved Professions - is an organisation, which serves as a Think Tank for Forensic child and adolescent psychiatrists and psychologists all over Europe. EFCAP organizes biennial congresses where new scientific results in the field are presented and professionals connect. So far, congresses took place in the Netherlands, Switzerland, Germany, United Kingdom, Portugal and Italy.

All members of EFCAP are aware that, especially now and in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, economic hardship might worsen. As juvenile offending is often associated with disadvantaged economic circumstances, Europe might be confronted with a rise in juvenile criminal behaviour. The time is right for a call to action! To this end, EFCAP is willing to be a partner for the European Commission with regard to juvenile offending behaviour, especially regarding development of possible strategies in terms of prevention, assessment and treatment. As a society uniting experts from various European countries, we carry the spirit of Europe and believe that a unified strategy to prevent youth criminal behaviour should be a future target for European policy.

Warm regards,
On behalf of the Board of EFCAP,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be "Prof. dr. Chijs van Nieuwenhuizen", written over a horizontal line.

Prof. dr. Chijs van Nieuwenhuizen, president EFCAP

¹ See: https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/rights-child/eu-strategy-rights-child-and-european-child-guarantee_en