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Study to investigate the links between crimes committed by youth offenders and the nature of their migratory movements

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Abstract

For some time now, the principal Spanish authorities responsible in the fields of education, youth and justice, have observed with great concern and astonishment, a considerable rise in criminal activity, particularly since 1998, whose protagonists are mainly youth offenders of foreign nationality. Given this situation there is a growing concern for establishing and understanding all the processes and factors that affect these individuals and whether, if these are not acted upon with the necessary care and efficiency, they may lead to the emergence and development of this type of crime. Furthermore, whether there is sufficient conclusive empirical evidence to date that can establish, without a shadow of a doubt, the existence, or not, of a significant relationship between said type of crime and the fact that the main protagonists are immigrants, who at the time of committing an offence, were undocumented in Spain. Based on this, this descriptive study will use the analysis and study of the triggers that cause young immigrants to commit offences and will investigate the factors that exert most influence on these individuals, as well as the relationship between these criminal activities and the fact that the protagonists are minors, and at the time of offence, are undocumented in Spain. The results obtained are of interest in order to provide future scientific profiles of immigrant youth offenders. Likewise, they show good prospects for improving the current image of immigrant youth offenders, but they could be improved.

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1. Background

Modern day society in developed countries is concerned with the rise in a new form of crime perpetrated by youth offenders. This situation causes greater unease when these minors, apart from committing crimes, are of foreign

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nationality, because social and public authorities feel overwhelmed, from a conceptual and methodological viewpoint, dealing with the consequences of this new form of crime; in addition to ensuring that these youths renounce crime and can return to society as fully entitled and active citizens (Fernández-Campoy, Aguilar-Parra y Álvarez, 2013; Garrido, Stangeland y Redondo, 2006).

If we analyse fully the predominant features and factors that define these young immigrants and that can explain the beginnings of their criminal career, it is essential to mention that the main research in this area has all coincided in highlighting the great amount of mobility they have experienced, which causes profound changes in family structure, largely due to the complex process of family regrouping and the loss of the educational and nurturing role of the extended family, which has ever less presence in their lives (Becedóniz, Rodríguez, Herrero, Paíño y Chan, 2005).

All of these aforementioned circumstances explain the deep uprooting these immigrant minors suffer when they arrive in a foreign country. They do not have the majority of their family and peer group with them and therefore it is harder for them to overcome limitations and hardships when they have lost their social and emotional bonds. The loss of this support system that would have guaranteed them a quick and effective process of integration into these environments, in turn leads to the development of antisocial and unhealthy behaviours (Fernández-Campoy, Pérez-Gallardo, León y Salguero, 2014).

In addition to the loss of family, social and emotional bonds, severe challenges of integration into the educational system also arise, which becomes a serious obstacle for them being able to achieve a high level of academic and professional education. For this reason they will be rejected by the labour market or in the best case scenario, will be destined to undertake poorly qualified labour that has little social recognition and with which they will not be able to obtain the economic resources needed to provide for and maintain their families, thus being forced into criminal activity in order to obtain easy and quick money (López, Carpintero, Campo, Lázaro y Soriano, 2011).

Faced with this scenario of social and employment upheaval, it is not insignificant that approximately a third of these immigrant minors end up consuming narcotic substances, according to leading clinical studies, in an attempt to find an escape route, if only temporarily, that allows them to run away from their deeply unsettling social, emotional, family and employment problems. (Markez y Pastor, 2010).

Focusing on the purely criminal aspect, as shown by the few criminological studies that have been carried out to date, immigrant minors commit crimes less than other minors, and these crimes are more likely to be attacks against the state and socio-economic order, attacks against collective security, attacks against freedom, theft and public disorder (Montero, 2014).

Consistent with this more behavioural line of thought held by experts in juvenile delinquency, throughout this study we aim to identify and describe all of those cognitive and interpersonal aspects that seem to be present in immigrant youth offenders and that once known, will be able to accurately describe all of the behavioural aspects that influence the character of a young immigrant offender and which can determine their initiation into the criminal world at a young age. According to the most prominent studies and scientific investigations that have been developed in the last few years, these aspects seem to greatly affect whether immigrant minors will embark on a criminal career or not (Salvador, 2013). Similarly, knowing about these behavioural aspects will allow for the creation and implementation of effective juvenile delinquent prevention programmes, as well as appropriate educational and training models that ensure their full reintegration into society and employment.

In summary, this study aims to investigate those cognitive and interpersonal aspects that can be useful to describe and identify the way in which the immigrant youth offender's character works and which could greatly contribute to the development and implementation of effective juvenile delinquent prevention programmes and educational and training models that enable full reintegration into society and employment of these minors in the near future, with the aim of ensuring they return to society as active citizens and highly qualified professionals who contribute to the growth and improvement of social structures.

2. Objective

The implementation of this study aims to achieve various objectives, among which can be noted:

- 1) To find out the different workings and factors which affect immigrant minors and if not sufficiently detected and treated, can end up determining their initiation into the criminal world at a young age.

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