Some Explanations of Crime Among Four Ethnic Groups in the Netherlands

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Since 1950 there has been large-scale immigration to Western Europe, mainly from Muslim countries. This paper focuses on the degree of involvement in crime of ethnic minority boys as compared to indigenous boys and on the possible causes of these crime involvements. A random sample from three ethnic minority boys (Moroccans, Turks, Surinamese) was taken. A control group consisted of indigenous boys with a comparable socioeconomic background as the minority respondents. Data were gathered about self-report and recorded delinquency, family and school life, leisure time, traditionalism, migration problems, and socioeconomic status. It appears that the arrest rates among the minority youths are substantially higher than among the comparable Dutch boys. A number of explanations are considered: strain, lack of social control, cultural dissonance, and migration problems. Results show that only social control factors explain criminality within the groups, indicating that the causes of criminality among ethnic minority boys may essentially be the same as those among the indigenous boys.

KEY WORDS: ethnic minorities; social control theory; migration; the Netherlands; crime theories.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the 1950s and 1960s there has been a large-scale migration of laborers from Muslim countries to Western Europe. Although this type of migration almost stopped after the oil crisis (1973), family reunification brought many women and children to join their husbands and fathers. As a result there are large Muslim minorities in many European countries. For

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example, it is estimated that there are about 350,000 Muslims in The Netherlands, 400,000 in the United Kingdom, 1.7 million in West Germany, 2.8 million in France, and 200,000 in Belgium (for an introduction see Gerholm and Litham, 1988).

It is generally believed that these workers will remain in their host countries, although most of them originally planned to stay only temporarily (Gerholm and Litham, 1988). The presence of the minority communities has led to speculations about future developments. For example, will these communities assimilate, or will they integrate but keep certain distinctive traits? Can we expect growing tensions between different ethnic groups?

All over Europe, Muslim immigrants confront greater social problems than most other immigrant groups (Gerholm and Litham, 1988). In addition, it appears that in many countries several ethnic minority groups are overrepresented in official criminality statistics. This has been established for the United Kingdom, France, the Netherlands, Sweden, Belgium, and Germany and in the United States (see, among others, Gould, 1969; Chambliss and Nagasawa, 1969; Nadjafi Abrandabadi, 1983; Stevens and Willis, 1979; Hindelang et al., 1979; Sampson, 1985; Block, 1985; Jäger, 1984; Craen, 1984; Albrecht, 1984, 1987; van der Hoeven, 1986). In general, blacks are overrepresented in the judicial system but Asians are underrepresented in most countries.

The assessment that ethnic minorities who immigrated to the Netherlands will most probably stay and concern about the growing numbers of ethnic minority youth entering the juvenile justice system have led the Research and Documentation Centre of the Ministry of Justice to start an investigation that focuses on two questions. The first concerns involvement in crime: What is the level of involvement in crime among youths of different ethnic minority groups? And if the involvement in crime among youths of ethnic minorities is higher than among Dutch youths, can this difference be accounted for by the relatively weak socioeconomic position of ethnic minorities in Dutch society? The second question is whether the factors related to crime are similar among ethnic minority youths and Dutch juveniles, or whether factors specific to their culture or their migrant status affect their crime rates.

To answer these questions it was decided to study select samples of youths coming from the three largest ethnic minority groups in the Netherlands: the Turks, the Surinamese, and the Moroccans. They are compared with Dutch youths from a similar socioeconomic background.

This article briefly reviews some of the main results of this study. We proceed as follows: First, the research design is introduced (Section 2). Second, a short introduction to the three ethnic minority groups in the Netherlands is given (Section 3). Third, the main results are presented (Section 4).