



## SPECIFIC FEATURES OF PREVENTING GROUP OFFENSES COMMITTED BY JUVENILES IN FINLAND

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20824039>

**Abstract.** This article analyzes the specific features of preventing group offenses committed by juveniles in Finland. Particular attention is paid to the Finnish model of juvenile crime prevention, which is based on early intervention, educational inclusion, family support, social welfare policies, community policing, and interagency cooperation. The study examines the role of schools, social services, law enforcement agencies, youth outreach programs, and restorative justice mechanisms in reducing juvenile group delinquency. The article also explores contemporary challenges related to youth gangs, social media, cyber risks, and social exclusion. The findings demonstrate that Finland has developed one of the most effective preventive systems in Europe by addressing the social, educational, and psychological factors associated with juvenile group offending.

**Keywords:** Finland, juvenile delinquency, group offending, youth gangs, crime prevention, early intervention, social welfare, community policing, restorative justice, youth policy.

The prevention of offenses committed by juveniles has become one of the most important priorities of criminal policy in modern democratic societies. Particular concern is generated by offenses committed by groups of minors because criminological studies indicate that adolescents are more likely to engage in unlawful behavior when acting collectively rather than individually. Group dynamics often increase risk-taking behavior, reduce personal responsibility, and encourage participation in activities that an individual might avoid when acting alone [1, p. 41]. Peer influence, social pressure, the desire for acceptance, and the search for identity frequently contribute to the formation of delinquent youth groups. Consequently, preventing group offenses among juveniles requires comprehensive strategies aimed not only at suppressing criminal behavior but also at addressing the social, educational, and psychological factors that facilitate collective delinquency [2, p. 67].

Finland is widely recognized as one of the most successful countries in Europe in terms of preventing juvenile crime and maintaining relatively low levels of youth offending. The Finnish approach differs significantly from traditional punitive models because it prioritizes prevention, social support, and rehabilitation over punishment. Finnish policymakers view juvenile delinquency as a complex social phenomenon influenced by multiple risk factors, including family instability, educational difficulties, social exclusion, mental health challenges, substance abuse, and negative peer relationships [3, p. 55]. Therefore, prevention policies are designed to identify vulnerable young people at an early stage and provide support before criminal behavior develops.

A distinctive feature of the Finnish model is the belief that juvenile offending can be prevented through strong social institutions and equal access to public services. The Finnish welfare state provides extensive support to children and families, reducing many of the social

inequalities that often contribute to youth crime [4, p. 89]. Public authorities regard investments in education, healthcare, family support, and youth development as long-term crime prevention measures. This philosophy is based on the understanding that social inclusion significantly decreases the likelihood of involvement in delinquent peer groups.

Educational institutions occupy a central position within Finland's juvenile crime prevention system. Schools serve not only as centers of learning but also as important mechanisms for monitoring students' well-being and identifying potential risk factors associated with delinquent behavior [5, p. 94]. Teachers, school psychologists, counselors, and social workers cooperate closely to detect signs of social isolation, aggressive behavior, declining academic performance, truancy, and involvement with problematic peer groups. When such indicators are identified, intervention measures are implemented immediately to prevent further deterioration of the situation.

Research conducted in Finland demonstrates that strong attachment to school significantly reduces the probability of juvenile involvement in criminal groups [6, p. 117]. Students who feel connected to their educational environment, maintain positive relationships with teachers, and participate in extracurricular activities are less likely to engage in delinquent behavior. Consequently, Finnish schools emphasize inclusiveness, equal opportunities, and individualized support for students experiencing difficulties. Educational success is regarded as one of the strongest protective factors against juvenile offending [7, p. 73].

Another important characteristic of Finland's prevention strategy is the extensive cooperation between educational institutions and social welfare agencies. Multi-professional teams consisting of educators, psychologists, social workers, healthcare specialists, and law enforcement representatives regularly exchange information and coordinate interventions aimed at supporting vulnerable young people [8, p. 61]. This collaborative approach enables authorities to address multiple risk factors simultaneously rather than focusing on isolated problems. By providing coordinated support, institutions can significantly reduce the likelihood of adolescents becoming involved in delinquent groups.

Family support services represent another fundamental element of preventing group offenses among juveniles. Numerous studies indicate that family conditions play a decisive role in shaping adolescent behavior [9, p. 132]. Young people who experience parental neglect, domestic violence, inconsistent supervision, substance abuse within the family, or severe economic hardship are more likely to seek support and acceptance from delinquent peer groups. Recognizing these risks, Finland has established comprehensive family counseling services, parenting programs, and child welfare interventions designed to strengthen family relationships and improve parental capacity [10, p. 145].

The Finnish child welfare system operates according to the principle of early intervention. Social workers are authorized to intervene whenever there are indications that a child's development may be endangered. Such interventions often occur long before criminal behavior emerges and may include counseling, educational support, psychological services, family mediation, and financial assistance [11, p. 102]. The objective is to eliminate the social and emotional factors that increase vulnerability to group offending. By addressing problems at an early stage, Finnish authorities reduce the need for more restrictive measures later in life.

Youth outreach programs constitute another distinctive feature of the Finnish prevention model. Outreach workers engage directly with adolescents who may be disconnected from



education, employment, or social support networks. These professionals establish trust-based relationships with vulnerable young people and provide guidance regarding educational opportunities, vocational training, employment prospects, and social services [12, p. 88]. Outreach work is particularly effective in preventing the formation of delinquent groups because it targets young people who are most vulnerable to negative peer influence.

Community policing also plays an important role in preventing juvenile group offending. Finnish police officers maintain close cooperation with schools, youth centers, sports organizations, and local communities [13, p. 54]. Unlike traditional law enforcement approaches that focus primarily on punishment, community policing emphasizes trust-building and partnership. Police officers participate in educational programs, awareness campaigns, and youth activities designed to strengthen positive relationships between young people and law enforcement institutions. This proactive engagement enables police to identify emerging risks and intervene before criminal groups become established.

The prevention of youth gangs and organized juvenile groups has received increasing attention in recent years. Although Finland has historically experienced relatively low levels of gang-related crime compared to many other countries, authorities have observed the emergence of youth groups involved in violence, vandalism, drug-related offenses, robbery, and cybercrime [14, p. 167]. In response, specialized intervention programs have been developed to address the social dynamics of youth groups. These initiatives focus on disrupting recruitment processes, strengthening positive peer networks, and providing alternative opportunities for social participation.

Restorative justice mechanisms represent another important component of Finland's juvenile justice system. When group offenses occur, authorities frequently utilize mediation programs involving offenders, victims, families, and community representatives [15, p. 98]. Restorative justice seeks to promote accountability, empathy, and behavioral change rather than relying exclusively on punishment. Research demonstrates that young offenders who participate in restorative processes are less likely to reoffend and more likely to reintegrate successfully into society [16, p. 122].

Mental health services contribute significantly to preventing juvenile group delinquency. Studies indicate that many adolescents involved in delinquent groups experience emotional difficulties, trauma, depression, anxiety, behavioral disorders, or other psychological challenges [17, p. 74]. Finland has invested heavily in accessible child and adolescent mental health services. Early identification and treatment of psychological problems reduce the likelihood of antisocial behavior and strengthen young people's resilience against negative peer influences.

The rapid expansion of digital technologies has introduced new challenges for juvenile crime prevention. Social media platforms facilitate communication among peer groups and may contribute to cyberbullying, online harassment, hate speech, extremist recruitment, and digital forms of delinquency [18, p. 113]. Finnish authorities have responded by implementing digital literacy programs, online safety education, and cybercrime prevention initiatives. Schools regularly educate students about responsible internet use and the legal consequences of online misconduct.

Evidence-based policymaking represents another major strength of the Finnish prevention model. Public authorities continuously collect and analyze data regarding juvenile

behavior, crime trends, educational outcomes, social conditions, and risk factors [19, p. 58]. Prevention programs are regularly evaluated to determine their effectiveness and identify areas requiring improvement. This commitment to empirical research ensures that prevention strategies remain responsive to changing social conditions and emerging threats.

The Finnish experience demonstrates that preventing group offenses committed by juveniles requires a comprehensive approach involving educational institutions, families, social welfare agencies, healthcare providers, police authorities, and local communities. Successful prevention depends on identifying risk factors at an early stage and providing coordinated interventions that address the underlying causes of delinquent behavior [20, p. 183]. Rather than relying exclusively on punitive measures, Finland prioritizes social inclusion, youth development, and community engagement as the foundations of crime prevention.

In conclusion, Finland has developed one of the most effective systems for preventing group offenses committed by juveniles in Europe. The success of this model is based on early intervention, educational support, family-centered policies, youth outreach work, community policing, restorative justice, mental health services, and evidence-based decision-making. By addressing the social, psychological, and environmental factors associated with juvenile group offending, Finnish authorities have significantly reduced the risks of youth involvement in criminal groups. The Finnish experience provides valuable lessons for policymakers and practitioners seeking to strengthen juvenile crime prevention systems and improve public safety through preventive rather than exclusively punitive measures.

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