



Young Offenders' Perceptions On Procedural Justice and The Legitimacy of Law

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Abstract

Young offenders are a huge challenge for European justice. The re-education needs of these young people often clash with justice systems that are unable to adapt judicial procedures and language to the youngest developmental characteristics and specific needs. As Tyler's theory of procedural justice (1990) argues, in obeying the law procedures are more important than results. Thus, being treated with respect and fairness has a greater effect on the acceptance of a court's decision than whether or not the decision is favourable. The aim of this study was to analyse perceptions of procedural justice and the legitimacy of the law among young offenders serving a detention order in an educational centre as a result of a criminal conviction. 47 young male offenders between 13 to 20 years-old answer the Penner et al.'s "Youth justice system procedural justice" and "Youth justice system legitimacy" scales (Penner et al., 2014). The results show that procedural justice, but not legitimacy, is related to the precocity and criminal versatility of young offenders, as well as to certain types of offences. It was also found that procedural justice is a good predictor of legitimacy, with the dimension of respect being particularly important. The discussion focuses on the need to strengthen mechanisms that promote respect for young offenders at all stages of the judicial process as a way of ensuring the basis for their re-education and obedience to the law.

Keywords: delinquency; judicial procedures; juvenile justice; re-education; youth