

4-1-2018

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Recommended Citation

Niquice, Fernando Lives Andela; Damásio, Bruno Figueiredo; Poletto, Michele; and Koller, Silvia Helena (2018) "The Profile of Young Offenders in the City of Maputo, Mozambique," *African Journal of Criminology and Justice Studies*: Vol. 11: Iss. 1, Article 2.

Available at: <https://digitalscholarship.tsu.edu/ajcjs/vol11/iss1/2>

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The Profile of Young Offenders in the City of Maputo, Mozambique

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Abstract

The present study describes the profile of 172 young people who were attending their prison sentences in three Maputo prisons. We examined their Certificates of Judgment and Execution of Sentence based on descriptive statistics and statistical tests. Most participants were male. Young people, especially men, committed a large number of crimes against property. There was higher prevalence of women committing crimes against people's physical integrity and health. The number of young people charged increased as they progressed in age. The major part of the sample received correctional penalties, were convicted for the first time, had no occupation or worked in the informal sector, and came from the suburban neighborhoods of Maputo City. Our results show the need for focusing on the prevention of criminal acts in young people and in the monitoring of this population during and after incarceration.

Keywords: Offender behavior, young offenders, young offenders' profile, Maputo, Mozambique.

Introduction

International data on violence and crime show an increasing criminalization of young people (Coyle, 2002; *United Nations*, 2004), as well as a significant incidence of victims of delinquent behavior worldwide (*International Centre for the Prevention of Crime*, 2010). During the 1990s and early 2000s, homicide rates increased all over the world, particularly among young people from developing countries and economies in transition (Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi, & Lozano, 2002). Violence among youth is a worldwide public health problem (Krug et al, 2002). Several psychosocial factors have been associated with this phenomenon.

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Aspects related to the peculiarities of the age group, individual personality characteristics, belonging to disadvantaged socioeconomic groups, school failure, and gender-specific issues have been systematically analyzed and related to delinquent behavior in this population (Feijó & Assis, 2004; Gentle-Genity, 2010; Green, Gesten, Greenwald & Salcedo, 2008; Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Moffitt, 1993; Selke & Anderson, 2003; Shekarkhar & Gibson, 2011). Although a link between these variables and antisocial behavior has not been established and certainly cannot be done directly, since they are often studied in research that focuses on antisocial behavior.

Three distinct groups of individuals with antisocial behavior (disruptive acts characterized by covert and overt hostility and intentional aggression toward others) can be found: one group with temporary or transitory antisocial behavior, another with persistent antisocial behavior (Moffitt, 1993), and the third one composed by recidivists (Carcach & Leverett, 1999; Contreras, Molina & Cano, 2011). The first group, which includes most people, is made up of young people, whose deviant behavior begins suddenly in adolescence, extending through young adulthood, and usually fading as the individual matures. The second includes a smaller number of people who present a more permanent form of anti-social behavior, starting in early life and progressing into adulthood, taking on a psychopathological character. Persistent anti-social behavior is inflexible and repetitive; there are evolutionary changes in the antisocial behavior, starting with small crimes and progressing to greater ones (Moffitt, 1993).

The third group consists of those returning to commit new offenses and who can develop a criminal career (Carcach & Leverett, 1999; Molina & Cano, 2011). The level of recidivism may reflect the degree of rehabilitation of the inmate and the role of rehabilitation programs in their reintegration and may be an indicator of the impact of prisons on the rehabilitation of convicts (McKean & Ransford, 2004). These authors also reported that high levels recidivism involve high costs in terms of public security, court proceedings for re-arrest and sentencing, and the impact on the community, the family, and the individual himself.

Aspects related to the contexts of poverty and school failure have been explored to explain behavior in young offenders (Feijó & Assis, 2004; Gentle-Genity, 2010). These authors described the context of the vulnerability of most families, leading youths to find themselves in a condition of poverty and social exclusion (lack of financial, material, and emotional resources and support from public institutions). They also found that all had low levels of education and had discontinued school before turning to a life of crime. This panorama led to the definition of a phenomenon called poverty criminalization where young people of the working class and minorities are generally seen as dangerous and arrested, while those of middle and upper-middle also involved in antisocial behavior are not (Sprinthall & Collins, 1988; Zamora, 2008).

One important aspect to note on the criminal literature is that the research is mainly concentrated on male populations, and more data needs also to be available

on women (Brennan, Breitenbach, Dieterich, Salisbury, & Voorhis, 2012; Vitopoulos, Paterson-Badali, & Skilling, 2012; Wright, Voorhis, Salisbury & Bauman, 2012). This situation has led to an over-generalized understanding of the criminal phenomenon and public policy development (Brennan et al, 2012). Despite this shortcoming, there is some consensus evidence available in the literature on gender and crime. According to the United Nations (2004), the number of crimes committed and the amount of deprivation of liberties are significant in young males, and being male is a demographic risk factor for involvement in violence situations (Krug et al., 2002). There are some explanations for this situation.

Young girls are more subject to strong family control than boys. Cultural issues suggest that societies are intolerant of the deviant behavior of young girls, and aggression and violence play an important role in the construction of masculinity in patriarchal societies (United Nations, 2004). Associated with these ideas is the fact that women are less exposed to risk factors and have greater tolerance toward them (Wong, Slotboom, & Bijleveld, 2010). Another explanation that justifies gender differences in the commission of crimes is the capacity for self-control (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Shekarkhar & Gibson, 2011). A lack of self-control translates into impulsive acts, physical contact, and poor assessment of the consequences of ones' actions in the long term (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990).

The issue of gender in the commission of offenses was also mentioned in the United Nations report (2009) that indicated that women represent a small proportion of the overall prison population in the world, with an average of approximately 4%. Therefore, interpretation by gender is important for a deeper and more specific understanding of the problem of young people's criminal behavior.

Criminal panorama in Mozambique and Maputo

The Republic of Mozambique is located on the southeast coast of Africa. The country has an estimated population of 23,049,621, and Maputo City, Mozambique's capital city, has 1,194,121 people (Instituto Nacional de Estatística [National Institute of Statistics of Mozambique], 2010, 2012). Maputo is the largest city and economic center of the country and consists of seven municipal districts that comprise approximately 44 neighborhoods.

As the international reality, Mozambique presented a significant number of young people involved in infractions in the recent times. For example, during the years of 2009, 2010 and 2012, a total of 80% of prison inmates (among those who were on remand and convicted) belonged to the 16- to 35-year age group (Serviço Nacional Penitenciário [National Penitentiary Service of Mozambique], 2009, 2010, 2011). This national reality was also found in the city of Maputo, where in the same period the percentage of inmates in this age group was estimated to be 81% (Serviço Nacional Penitenciário [National Penitentiary Service of Mozambique], 2009, 2010, 2011). It is important to explain that in the Mozambican context, a young

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person is considered to be anyone who is in the range of 15 to 35 years old (Boletim da República [Official Publication of The Republic of Mozambique], September 21, 2006), and the age of criminal responsibility starts at 16 (Código Penal [Criminal Code of Mozambique], 1886).

Studies on the prison system in Mozambique (Amaral, 2000; Brito, 2002) have revealed data that contribute to the understanding of the dynamics of delinquent behavior. Amaral (2000) coordinated a survey in 27 prisons in the country and found that 63% of inmates were aged 25 or younger and that a significant portion had committed minor offenses equating to more lenient penalties (zero to two years in prison). The author explained that this population was divided between those who had a relatively low level of education and those who had not passed through school; a significant portion was composed of individuals linked to the informal sector of the economy or unemployed. Amaral (2000) also mentioned the fact that the general female prison population was six percent.

A study entitled "Os Condenados de Maputo (The Convicted of Maputo)" was performed by Brito (2002). Many of its findings coincided with Amaral's (2000) survey data, namely that most inmates were young, had committed minor crimes with an emphasis on theft and robbery, were linked to activities in the informal sector, and had little education. The percentage of women was approximately five percent. Brito (2002) explained that the social origins of the convicts were linked to the most vulnerable urban population groups of Maputo. He concluded his analysis by referring to the existence of two distinct types of "delinquency": One linked to social exclusion, lack of skills, and employment, which he called "petty crime subsistence"; and the other connected to ambition to have wealth and material goods, which manifests itself in the more serious and violent crimes, especially armed robbery and car theft. Considering the young offenders behavior an important topic of public policy and criminal justice all over the world, including Mozambique, the aim of this study was to describe the profile of imprisoned young people in Maputo City.

Method

Design

This documentary research used the information from the "Certidões de Sentença e Liquidação da Pena (Certificates of Judgment and Execution of Sentence)". This certificate is a document issued by the Court in the act of judgment and that formalizes the conviction of the offender. It contains data that allows aspects of the convict's profile to be understood: Age, occupation, housing situation, crime committed, length of sentence, and criminal record. Extracts from 2009, 2010, and 2011 were used for the present study. We chose these years due to the existence at the "Serviço Nacional Penitenciário (National Penitentiary Service of Mozambique)" of systematic data on the national prison population starting from the year 2009. Because it was important to base the study on this national information, we decided to take the year 2009 as the starting point for the analysis of Certificates of Judgment and Execution of Sentence. Data collection took place from January to March 2012.

When we design the project of this study the initial plan was to use the “Ficha Individual de Readaptação do Recluso (Individual Record of Inmate Rehabilitation)” as the data collection source. The individual record is a tool for recording information about and monitoring the inmate during his sentence and has a variety of items on the convict. However, there were significant data reliability and completeness problems, so we decided instead to use the Certificate of Judgment and Execution of Sentence, an official document signed by the judge who tried and convicted the offender.

Sampling

Context

The present study was restricted to young people aged 16 to 25 years who were in prison. This age group was selected because the age of criminal responsibility starts at 16, and the conviction for the individuals of 16-25 has the special purpose of education and they are considered young criminally chargeable (Código Penal [Criminal Code of Mozambique], 1886). Also, it is a group of people who are in the process of forming and consolidating their identity (Arnett, 2010), and psychosocial investment in this population is fundamental.

The Certificates of Judgment and Execution of Sentence were taken from three prisons: Cadeia Central de Maputo (Maputo Central Prison), Centro de Reclusão Feminina de Ndlavela (Ndlavela Women's Prison Center), and Estabelecimento Prisional de Recuperação Juvenil de Boane (Boane Prison Establishment of Young Persons' Rehabilitation). Maputo Central Prison is the country's largest and houses inmates from the city of Maputo and elsewhere. The Ndlavela Women's Prison Center houses inmates from various parts of the country. The Boane Prison Establishment of Young Persons' Rehabilitation started operation in June 2011 and houses young people aged 16 to 21 years who were previously interned in Maputo Central Prison.

Based on some available statistical data of the three prisons, there were approximately 1259 certificates filed from 2009 to 2011 relating to inmates in the 16- to 25-year age range. Of this total, 1234 were for male inmates and 25 for female. The initial expectation of this project was, therefore, to work with the total of the 1259 Certificates of Judgment and Execution of Sentence. However, due to difficulties in accessing these records, particularly those of male inmates, data were extracted from a reduced number of certificates.

Sample

In total, 172 Certificates of Judgment and Execution of Sentence were accessed, an estimated percentage of 13.66% of the total. From these, 20 were from 2009, 74 from 2010, and 78 from 2011. The sample consisted of certificates that the researcher was able to obtain from prison employees who were responsible for

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identifying the certificates. It was therefore an availability sample. The average age of inmates on the certificates was 20.77 years ($SD = 2.76$).

Procedures

Access to prisons

To access the prisons and the Certificates of Judgment and Execution of Sentence, a formal request was made to the “Serviço Nacional Penitenciário (National Penitentiary Service), an institution of the Ministry of Justice that is responsible for the administration of prisons in Mozambique. After authorization, the data collection process was initiated in Maputo Central Prison, Ndlavela Women's Prison Center, and Boane Prison Establishment of Young Persons' Rehabilitation.

Data collection

The information was taken from the Certificates of Judgment and Execution of Sentence and recorded in the “Protocolos de Coleta de Dados Sociodemográficos (Sociodemographic Data Collection Protocols)”. We created the sociodemographic data collection protocol instrument to record individual information contained in the sentencing certificates. Variables of interest were age, gender, crime committed, length of sentence, number of convictions/prison terms, provenance, and occupation. These variables were recorded and categorized to allow grouping, reading, and interpretation of the data based on descriptive statistics and statistical tests.

Data analysis

Initially, the variable age was subdivided into three subgroups of age 16-18, 19-21, and 22-25. This subdivision was based on the age distribution model made by the National Penitentiary Service in the organization of statistical information. According to Arnett's (2010) perspective, the age of 18 marks the end of adolescence and the beginning of the process of preparation for adult life that extends up to age 25. In this context, it can be argued that individuals of 16-18 years of age are still in their mid-teens. Making this distinction allowed comparison analyses of the criminal behavior of some variables in younger and older groups of young people. Comparative analyses were also performed on the basis of gender.

To analyze the variable crime, we considered the classification described in the Criminal Code of Mozambique (1886). Among various crimes stipulated in this document, there are the following: crimes against persons, which includes crimes against life (murder, infanticide), crimes against physical integrity and health (injury, castration), and crimes against personal integrity (indecent assault, rape, violation, violation of a minor, kidnapping); and property crimes which includes thefts and robberies, fraud, fire damage, and abuse of trust.

For the length of sentence, the Criminal Code establishes correctional prison sentences and longer prison sentences. Correctional prison sentences range from three days to two years and longer prison sentences from two to 24 years. Based on these parameters we analyzed the length of sentence they attended in the prison. Regarding the number of convictions or sentences we established the

frequency with which young people committed infractions and two groups were created: those convicted for the first time and those convicted twice or more.

The second group is linked to the phenomenon of recidivism, but we avoided the use of this term because the Mozambican Penal Code is restrictive and does not include all cases of two or more crimes. For example, it explains that the term is specific to cases where the new offense is identical in nature to the one previously committed and within eight years of the original sentence (Article 35). In this study a comprehensive perspective was adopted in which the frequency with which young people were convicted was analyzed. Finally, we analyzed the neighborhoods of the origin of young people and their occupation before the arrest.

In addition to descriptive statistics, statistical tests were used for data interpretation. The chi-square test (X^2) evaluated the association among the different categories of crimes with age and gender. The non-parametric Mann-Whitney test was employed to evaluate gender differences in the length of the sentences, and the Kruskal-Wallis test was employed to evaluate differences in the length of sentences according to the age groups (16-18, 19-21, and 22-25). Monte-Carlo simulation procedures, with exact p-value were for both the Mann-Whitney and Kruskal-Wallis test to correct for possible bias on the group sizes (Field, 2009).

Results

Our results are presented and discussed in this order: distribution of young people by age and gender, types of crimes committed, length of sentence, number of convictions or prison terms, occupation before conviction, and neighborhood of origin. The distribution of young people by age and gender is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Distribution of Young People by Age and Gender

| Age | Total population | | Men | | Women | |
|-------|------------------|------|----------|------|----------|-----|
| | <i>n</i> | % | <i>n</i> | % | <i>n</i> | % |
| 16-18 | 44 | 25.6 | 41 | 23.8 | 3 | 1.7 |
| 19-21 | 56 | 32.6 | 48 | 27.9 | 8 | 4.7 |
| 22-25 | 72 | 41.9 | 64 | 37.2 | 8 | 4.7 |
| Total | 172 | 100 | 153 | 89 | 19 | 11 |

In addition to the difference that is noted between men and women, we also observed a tendency for the number of young offenders increased as age increased. There was greater participation of both males and females in the age ranges of 19-21 and 22-25 years than 16-18, with a marked concentration of men in the latter. In relation to type of crime committed the data are shown in Table 2.

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Table 2

Types of Crimes Committed and their Respective Frequencies

| Type of Crime | Distribution of Prisoners | |
|---|---------------------------|------------|
| | <i>n</i> | % |
| Crimes against property | 145 | 84.3 |
| Crimes against people's physical integrity and health | 16 | 9.3 |
| Crimes against personal integrity | 7 | 4.1 |
| Crimes against life | 2 | 1.2 |
| Others | 2 | 1.2 |
| Total | 172 | 100 |

Crimes against property occurred with the greatest frequency, followed by crimes against people's physical integrity and health. Crimes against personal integrity and against life were less common. Crimes against property included thefts and robberies, fraud, arson, and criminal damage and abuse of trust. Among these, theft and robbery (91%) were the most frequently committed by young people. Crimes against people's physical integrity and health included physical offenses and threatening behavior. Of these, physical offences (94%) were more prevalent. Crimes against personal integrity included indecent assault, violation, violation of a minor, and rape. Most of these were indecent assault, violation, and violation of a minor, with two cases each.

The item others was created to encompass two isolated crimes (loitering and bribery) for which the creation of a category was considered inconvenient because these crimes did not fit within the existing categories and were infrequent. Regarding the type of infraction, the vast majority of young people committed crimes against property (particularly thefts and robberies).

An attempt was then made to determine whether there were differences in the types of crime committed by men and women. The χ^2 test showed statistically significant differences between the two groups ($\chi^2 [2] = 6.56, p < .05$). Adjusted residual values were used to identify differences between groups. Residual values of 1.96 or above mean that there were differences between groups in the studied variables (Field, 2009). The data illustrating these differences are shown in Table 3.

Table 3
Comparison of Type of Crime by Gender

| Type of crime | | Gender | | Total |
|---|-----------------------|----------------|------------|-------|
| | | Male | Female | |
| Crimes against property | <i>Count</i> | 133 (88.7%) | 12 (66.7%) | 145 |
| | <i>Expected Count</i> | 129.5 | 15.5 | 145 |
| | <i>Adjusted</i> | 2.6 | -2.6 | |
| | <i>Residual</i> | | | |
| Crimes against people's physical integrity and health | <i>Count</i> | 12 (8%) | 4 (22.2%) | 16 |
| | <i>Expected Count</i> | 14.3 | 1.7 | 16 |
| | <i>Adjusted</i> | -1.9 | 1.9 | |
| | <i>Residual</i> | | | |
| Crimes against personal integrity | <i>Count</i> | 5 (3.3%) | 2 (11.1%) | 7 |
| | <i>Expected Count</i> | 6.3 | .8 | 7 |
| | <i>Adjusted</i> | -1.6 | 1.6 | |
| | <i>Residual</i> | | | |
| Total | <i>Count</i> | 150 | 18 | 168 |

The data in Table 3, evaluating the adjusted residuals, show a higher percentage of male convicts than female convicts committed crimes against property. On the other hand, a higher percentage of the women committed crimes against personal integrity and health, although this difference was marginally significant (adjusted residual = 1.90). Regarding crimes against personal integrity, there were no differences between the two groups. This analysis did not include data on crimes against life ($n = 2$) and other crimes ($n = 2$), due to their small number, therefore leaving 168 analyzed cases.

Regarding the length of sentence the data indicated that a significant proportion of young people were sentenced for a period ranging from three days to two years, i.e., correctional prison sentences (82%). The remaining (18%) served longer prison sentences, i.e., ranging from two to 24 years. To evaluate whether there were gender differences in the length of sentences (evaluated by months), the Mann-Whitney test with Monte Carlo simulation was performed. Non-parametric tests were chosen because the prison term variable did not present a normal distribution (Kolmogorov-Smirnov = 0.29, $df = 172$, $p < 0.001$). The results showed no differences between men (median = 10.5 months) and women (median = 10 months; Mann-Whitney $U = 1367.5$, $p = 0.71$).

Next we examined whether there were age differences in relation to the length of sentence using the Kruskal-Wallis test with Monte Carlo simulation. The results showed no significant differences among the age groups in relation to the length of sentence ($H [2] = .98$, $p = .95$). Group 1 ($n = 44$, formed by young people between 16 and 18 years) had a median sentence of 12 months. Group 2 ($n = 56$, formed by

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young people between 19 and 21 years) had a median sentence of 10 months. Group 3 ($n = 72$, formed by young people between 22 and 25 years) had a median sentence of 10.5 months.

Then we analyzed the number of convictions or sentences. We found that 137 (79.6%) young people were sentenced for the first time, 28 (16.3%) for the second time, 5 (2.9%) for the third time, and 2 (1.2%) for the fifth time. The majority were therefore convicted for the first time, although it should be noted that 20.4% had had a previous term in prison.

The occupation variable aimed to describe the activities that young people performed before conviction and was subdivided into the following categories: 1. work in the formal sector, 2. work in the informal sector, 3. no occupation, 4. student, and 5. no information. To distinguish between formal- and informal-sector activities, the concept of informal employment was taken as a basis, which includes activities without an official record, that do not incur taxes, are based on casual employment, kinship, personal, and social connections, and lack formal guarantees (Mula, 2009; Tembe, 2009).

The category "no occupation" included all cases with a record of unemployment, the "student" category those whose record indicated it, and the "no information" category referred to cases in which there was no record, which made up a considerable portion of the accessed files. However, the available data does provide some indication of the behavior of this variable in the population studied. Table 4 presents the data on occupation before conviction.

Table 4
Type of Occupation prior to Conviction of Young person

| Type of Occupation | Distribution of Prisoners | | |
|--------------------|---------------------------|------|---------|
| | <i>N</i> | % | % Valid |
| No occupation | 60 | 34.9 | 49.2 |
| Informal sector | 48 | 27.9 | 39.3 |
| Student | 11 | 6.4 | 9.0 |
| Formal sector | 3 | 1.7 | 2.5 |
| Total | 122 | 70.9 | 100.0 |
| No information | 50 | 29.1 | - |

The data was available on 122 certificates. Most of the young people had no occupation (49.2%), and the rest worked in the informal sector (39.3). A minority were students or working in the formal sector.

Finally, data on the young persons' origins were analyzed to identify the neighborhoods of Maputo where they were from. The survey data included records of 36 neighborhoods of origin, but we only mentioned those with highest

concentration. The most common neighborhoods of origin were Chamanculo ($n = 20$, 11.6%), Maxaquene ($n = 17$, 9.9%), Polana Caniço ($n = 16$, 9.3%), and Hulene ($n = 12$, 7%). These neighborhoods belong to the suburban area of the city. According to Araújo (1999), the suburban area of Maputo contains the largest population concentration and is where the most populated neighborhoods are located, with a significant portion of the population living in poverty. The remaining 107 young people were distributed among the remaining 32 neighborhoods.

Discussion

The analysis of the information contained in the Certificates of Judgment and Execution of Sentence made it possible to ascertain the profile of young people imprisoned in Maputo, Mozambique. Males made up a significant part of the sample (89%), reflecting a global trend among people in conflict with the law (United Nations, 2009; United Nations, 2004). Some sociocultural aspects, such as the strong family control to which young female people are subjected, less exposure to risk factors, and the expression of aggression and violence as forms of the construction of masculinity in patriarchal societies (Wong, Slotboom, & Bijleveld, 2010), can explain this trend. Psychological aspects relating to females' high levels of self-control and greater tolerance to risk factors can also partly explain this difference (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Shekarkhar & Gibson, 2011; Wong et al., 2010).

Our data indicates the progressive nature of participation of the 16- to 25-year-old population in the commission of illegal acts. The number is relatively low in the 16-18 group, with an increase starting to occur in the 19-21-year range and peaking in the 22-25 year range (see Table 3), this increase being most noticeable in the case of men. This trend of an increasing number of convicts with age warrants an analysis of the dynamics of the developmental context of these young people. On the other hand, it could be an indication to discuss the effectiveness of public policies for the prevention of juvenile crime. Taking this into account, most of this population probably belongs to the group with transient antisocial behavior (Moffitt, 1993), effective monitoring actions for those who are in conflict with the justice system can contribute to their psychosocial rehabilitation.

Regarding the types of infractions, the young people of Maputo committed a large number of crimes against property (84.3%), with a higher prevalence among men. Within this category of crimes, thefts and robberies appeared in greater numbers. Taking into account that a significant proportion of the young people (82.1%) served correctional prison sentences (three days to 2 years), it can be concluded that the crimes committed against property were of a relatively minor nature. This finding agrees with the research conducted by Brito (2002) and Amaral (2000). These authors found that most of the young prisoners had committed minor crimes, mainly thefts and robberies. Brito (2002) designated this group "petty subsistence criminals" who belong to socially excluded groups, lacking professional qualifications and employment. The social vulnerability of most of the

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young people in conflict with the law has been mentioned in the international literature.

We noted a higher prevalence of women than men convicted for crimes against people's physical integrity and health (assaults and threats), although the difference was marginally significant. This means that a notable proportion of the situations that lead young women to imprisonment may be related to circumstances involving violence and physical contact. This reality contradicts with the data of international reports on the dynamics of violence in the world, which highlight the fact that men are generally most prone to violence (Krug et al., 2002; United Nations, 2004). The city of Maputo may be an isolated or unique case, but this finding highlights the need for comparative studies with representative samples in order to analyze this trend in the Mozambican context.

As mentioned above, most of the young people were serving correctional sentences, which mean that they had committed infractions of a relatively smaller dimension. This has been the general trend of criminal acts perpetrated by young people over time and has been observed in earlier studies by Brito (2002) and Amaral (2000). In fact, of the 82.1% of convicts serving correctional sentences, sentences of six months and one year predominated. This situation occurred equally for men and women, and there were no statistically significant differences in sentence length between the two genders, nor between the three age groups (16-18, 19-21, and 22-25 years). Therefore, men and women as well as young people from different age groups fared equally with respect to prison term.

Most young convicts (79.7%) had served only one prison term. However, this means that 20.4% had been convicted multiple times. Although small by comparison, this number is an important indicator of the need for reflection on the process of monitoring young people in conflict with the law. According to Carcach and Leverett (1999), repeat conviction may be a precursor to the development of criminal careers and is associated with problems of personal and socio-economic development and justice system responses. This phenomenon was interpreted by McKean and Ransford (2004) as indicative of the need to monitor the impact of prisons on convict rehabilitation.

Prior to sentencing, a significant proportion of young people had no occupation (49.2%) or worked in the informal sector (39.3%). As explained earlier, the category "no occupation" included cases in which the Certificates of Judgment and Execution of Sentence stated "no occupation" or "domestic," and the "informal sector" included activities without official registration and without formal guarantees, based on spontaneous employment. According to Brito (2002), these young people generally belong to the most vulnerable segments of the urban population. Several studies addressing the issue of crime among young people have referred to the issue of unemployment and belonging to socioeconomically disadvantaged sections of society as risk factors for committing offenses (Feijó & Assis, 2004; Green, Gesten, Greenwald & Salcedo, 2008). In this context,

structured programs of professionalization and integration in the labor market may be protective factors for community reintegration and improved quality of life.

Finally, the neighborhoods of Chamanculo, Hulene, Polana Canico, and Maxaquene had the greatest concentration of young people in prison. These are neighborhoods of the suburban area of Maputo, where the largest settlements are found which include the most people living in poverty (Araújo, 1999). Two interpretations can be made on the basis of this finding. The first is that people living in contexts of social and economic disadvantage are more likely to commit crimes, although a cause-and-effect relationship has not been established.

The second refers to the perspective that associates this reality to the so-called criminalization of poverty. According to Zamora (2008), international studies show a trend of criminalization of poverty in which poor young people are often seen as dangerous. Sprinthall and Collins (1988) explained that in some cases, young people from lower socioeconomic levels who are suspected of crimes are usually arrested, whereas those from more favored social groups are not.

Final considerations

The aim of this study was to describe the profile of imprisoned young people in the city of Maputo. We found that a significant portion of the young offenders were men. The young people, especially men, committed a large number of crimes against property. There was a prevalence of women committing crimes against people's physical integrity and health. The studied population gradually committed more crimes as they aged, starting with lower numbers in the 16-18-year age range, increasing in the 19-21-year range, and peaking in the 22-25-year range.

Most young people were sentenced to correctional penalties, and there was equivalence in sentence length between men and women and between young people across all age groups. A significant number of young people had a single sentence on their record, but the "recidivism" numbers were still alarming. Prior to sentencing, a large portion had no occupation, and a large number also worked in the informal sector. The highest concentration of young people was in the suburban neighborhoods of Maputo.

There is a need to pay attention to the prevention of crime committed by young people through the evaluation of the effectiveness of various measures, depending on the context of the person's development. Such efforts can contribute to the continuous improvement of public policies that minimize the propensity of this group toward criminal acts. The growing trend in the number of young people in prisons should be a warning sign of the need to implement effective measures aimed at promoting protective factors and resilient processes. Associated with these aspects, it is essential to invest in activities consistent with psychosocial

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support in prisons and the post-sentence period. The percentage of recidivism can be an important indicator of this investment.

Finally, it is important to comment on two major limitations of the present study: The rather small sample compared to the initial design, and the choice of Certificates of Judgment and Execution of Sentence instead of the Individual Record of Inmate Rehabilitation.

Regarding the small sample, it was difficult to obtain the necessary cooperation from employees who were required to identify and provide the Certificates of Judgment and Execution of Sentence, particularly in the male prisons, because the certificates had to be extracted manually from a large information archive. According to the employees, the activity involved an additional effort, and it also needed to be performed by the same people who dealt with the convict due to the sensitive nature of the documents concerned. Ultimately, therefore, only a small number of male prisoners' certificates were obtained.

Further studies should be conducted with larger samples containing significant numbers of both men and women, so that evidence is presented that can be generalized. Research involving a considerable number of women is particularly important because the literature points to the tendency of generalizing information about the dynamics of criminal behavior for both genders when it has been based on mostly male samples (Brennan et al, 2012).

The second limitation, as noted in the design, was that the Certificate of Judgment and Execution of Sentence was chosen. The Individual Record of Inmate Rehabilitation, a document that would allow the collection of more varied information, was abandoned due to problems encountered in the field:

1. Difficulties in finding the files due to poor organization of the prisons' Social Action Sector database. For some prisoners, the file was missing.
2. Contradictory information between the data in the files and the Certificates of Judgment and Execution of Sentence. The certificate was therefore chosen because it is an official document signed by the judge who ruled on the conviction. However, by its nature, the certificate does not contain some data that would be important for the study, such as the degree of education, health condition, family profile, and others.

Due to these limitations, mechanisms must be adopted that allow for the adequate completion of all documents, so that reliable information is maintained. Detailed and accurate data on young people in conflict with the justice system are essential for this population, for the institutions that address this problem, and for society in general, allowing it to be sure of the effectiveness of the decisions that may be taken in this regard (Hoge, 2012).

Cases were also found of prisoners without an ID card or other official individual identification document. This calls into question the reliability of information about their age. In many cases the record is completed only at the time the convict

is admitted, and then it is filed, so later situations regarding the life of the inmate while serving the sentence are not registered. The Individual Record of Inmate Rehabilitation model is the same for everyone, and there is a need to rethink the appropriateness of its diversification according to inmate specificities. For example, the creation of a different record for the younger group of young people may be justified.

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