REPORT,
WORK STREAM I

What is girls' violence?

- Existing theory and research on girls and violence

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PROLOGUE

This report is written as part of the Girls Using Violence – Intervention and Prevention (VIP) project. The main objective of the project is to increase knowledge about girls who commit violence and to learn from good practice/experience internationally. The VIP project is co-financed by Daphne III of the European Union and the seven project partners.

This paper seeks to reveal some of the literature that has been written about the issue of girls' violence. The report is based on secondary literature, and is meant as a literature review of the existing theories on girls' violence in Europe.

The contributors to this text are the project partners, more specifically the Zora Group and School Project & IMMA, Munich, Instituto Alicantino de La Familia, Alicante, GUTS – Angered District, Municipality of Gothenburg, Harrow Council, London, Swansea Youth Offending Service, Wales, Polish Association for Legal Education and the Youth Section of Sagene District, Oslo. This text is thus a result of conclusions and data mainly drawn from literature from these seven countries, and we are well aware of the possible bias that this may imply. This means there are seven countries facing different challenges related to these issues, with different priorities in the crime prevention field. However, this report focuses on the common features, which it does appear are the majority of them.

The report is furthermore based on qualitative rather than quantitative methods, and does not mainly focus on the scale or extent of girls' violence. This aspect will be presented in our second report (Report, WS II) which explicitly focuses on the statistics connected with this issue.

When the issues of girls committing violence is discussed here, it is based on an understanding of gender as a partly socially constructed concept. The meaning is therefore not to highlight the differences between the male and female genders, but to put violence committed by girls on the agenda, as the issue of male violence has been for so many years.

This report has chosen to examine the phenomenon of girls' violence, and does not include the debate about nature versus nurture. This means that we do not go into the specific causal explanations or provide conclusive answers. How we perceive girls who are violent may be about

both heredity and environment. It thus is conceivable that there may be a genetic and biological component here, but what it consists of and how it affects behaviour is linked to much uncertainty. It is therefore not in our interest to go further into this discussion in this report.

The report will furthermore only briefly discuss the relationship between gender and violence, only through references to research comparing the violent behaviour of boys with that of girls. This is not because this discussion is not important, but because it requires a thorough analysis and review that is out of reach for a report of this extent.

It has been expedient to use several theoretical approaches when trying to understand and analyse the phenomenon of violence committed by girls, when striving to create a comprehensive picture of the multifaceted concept of girls as perpetrators of violence .We have mainly chosen theories and basic knowledge from several disciplines like psychology, medicine, pedagogy, philosophy and sociology. This is the starting point / basis for the further project work.

I.   GIRLS´ VIOLENCE – WHAT AND WHO?

1.1 Historical context and contemporary situation

The focus on girls as perpetrators of violence is a relatively controversial subject. Historically, the subject has not gained a high degree of acceptance or attention. It was not until the 1970s that female criminal and violent behaviour gained a higher degree of attention. In contrast with the classical theory pointing to biological aspects at the root of male-female differences, a new group of theories focuses on the role of socialisation and its relationship to gender.

Tove Pettersson, Associate Professor of Criminology at Stockholm University, is fascinated by how women's crimes are "discovered" by the media - again and again.
Pettersson (2011) states that women's crimes are always depicted as something new. Interestingly, the discussion has been running for a long time, but it is always understood to be new. It comes again and again. According to Pettersson, this phenomenon is not unique to Sweden. She describes how her criminology colleagues have been responding to journalists since the 1970s about the "new" girl gangs ravaging the cities of Sweden (Petterson, 2011).

However, the literature shows that the conception of girls being less aggressive compared to boys is incorrect. When speaking of violence, there is a range of *levels* and *forms* of violence that should be taken into consideration. Olweus (1991) describes how, when speaking about violence performed by girls, it is usual to refer to indirect/psychological violence (excluding, ridiculing) (Benitez & Justicia, 2006). Verbal abuse is the most common form of aggression performed by girls, followed by exclusion and direct physical violence (Cerezo, 2007). However, this paper does not focus on the indirect/psychological violence, but the physical violence preformed by girls.

Walc from Poland claims that more than half of the girls looked at in her research admitted that they used physical violence against their brothers or sisters (Walc, 2006). The prevailing view in the literature is, however, that when comparing the intensity and forms of aggression among juvenile boys and girls, girls display less physical aggression but more indirect manipulation, for example psychological wounding and gossip (Raj, 2009; Stańdo-Kawecka, 2000; Kossowska, 2007; Stadnik & Wójtewicz, 2009; Rode, 2009; Surzykiewicz, 2000; Różańska-Kowal, 2009). Indirect aggression may be, however, a precursor to physical aggression and violence (Biel, 2008).

When it comes to the extent of female violence today, there is a widespread perception that violence among females is increasing; however the literature does not provide a clear picture. According to authors like Chesney-Lind & Belknap (2004) there is an increase in female violence. Newer literature, however, supports the perception that the reason for this might be that violence by young women has been underreported in the past. According to Granath (2013), violent girls are being reported more and more frequently, an increase that is faster than for boys. He sees several possible explanations for this trend. One reason is that more assaults are formally reported. It does not necessarily mean that more young people are actually involved in violence, but might have to do with the fact that it is easier to alert police today than it was previously due to technological developments. For example; today, most crime witnesses always have a cell phone available for reporting an offence. It is now common that someone other than the victim formally reports street violence. Because of factors like this, the increases are likely to be due to the previous grey area now gradually disappearing. Granath (2013), also argues that the increase in female violence is due to a decreased societal tolerance of violence.

This is supported by research from the USA by Chesney-Lind (2001) and Steffensmeier, Schwartz, Zhong and Ackerman (2005) suggesting that girls are being prosecuted more readily for offences that may not have been prosecutable in the past. Some research suggests furthermore that there are an increased number of interventions with girls at the pre-court disposal/conviction stage. In the United Kingdom in 2009, the Youth Justice Board (YJB) published a paper regarding girls and offences that identified several key points in relation to girls and violence. This study refers to how girls and young women also suggest a normalisation of violence within their lives (Eagle, 2005; Batchelor, 2005; Ness, 2004; Philips, 2003) and that, in addition, violence by and among women may have been underestimated or underreported in the past (Ness, 2004; Philips, 2003). According to this study, research has suggested that violence by females has increased not due to their behaviour changing but due to a shift in the reaction of institutions and individuals within those institutions in how they approach and deal with this behaviour (Steffensmeier et al, 2005; Chesney-Lind, 2001). Additionally, Western society has become less accepting of low-level violent offences, resulting in an increase in arrests for such offences.

The issue of the extent of female violence is further elaborated in our research projects Report II, where statistics from the project's seven partner countries and qualitatively analyses the cross-time changes in the different countries is examined.

1.2 How is girls' violence perceived and explained - victims or perpetrators?

It may seem as though there is a great ambivalence in our society related to girls' violence. Unlike boys, young girls are often not met with acceptance and an underlying cultural acceptance when they start to get angry, aggressive or somewhat violent. Girls are to a huge extent expected to be kind. This is a question of girls and boys who end up in an encounter of gender-specific attitudes and expectations. Boys use a culturally more "legitimate" expression that originate from the adult world of literature and films, which can help to maintain a masculine, assertive and coping self. Girls, on the other hand, engage in expressions that increasingly confirm a feminine self-image. While girls often tend to show their problems through introverted behaviour, the boys show it through outreach action (Prothrow-Stith & Spivak, 2005). The girls are perceived, on one hand, as funny or exotic, and neither their violence nor the girls themselves are taken seriously. Violence and the girls are ridiculed and belittled, and the violence is not regarded as detrimental or as severe as

boys' exercise of violence. Violent girls will thus become so-called *double deviant*, which means that they differ from norms in two ways; both when it comes to the traditional female role, and as perpetrators or criminals (Natland, 2006). It is also possible to say that the female perpetrator breaks two stereotypes: both the portrait of a "decent" woman and of an obedient child (Woźniakowska-Fajst, 2010). It is also possible to argue that a double standard is applied when describing crime committed by girls or women. Since men are expected to be aggressive, aggressive behaviour by women is seen as contrary to their nature and therefore unacceptable. In the context of physical violence a woman is portrayed (unless being a victim) as unfeminine, dishonourable, irrational, as well as deliberate and detached from nature (Desperak, 2007). Felipe Estrada turns this the other way around and states that the reason why women on average might have a lower crime rate, might be partially due to the social norms in the society – girls don´t want to be "too different", at least not during their formative years (Estrada, 2011).

Crimes that involve women do more often than crimes that involve men tend to be portrayed by the media as related to the girls having emotional problems or mental illnesses. They emphasise woman's role and focus on their behaviour both during the action and at the hearing (Woźniakowska-Fajst, 2010).The phenomenon of "monsterising" women is also noticeable in the media. Female perpetrators of violence are portrayed as monsters or psychopaths, their acts are impossible to justify and pathological beyond measure. Women involved in committing a murder are often described as cold manipulators (Desperak, 2007). In Sweden, Tove Pettersson studied a group of young people who, when faced with descriptions of a number of crimes, approached them quite differently depending upon whether the offender was said to be a woman or a man. While explaining the criminal behaviour of men, it was to a large extent described as a natural part of how guys "are." The female perpetrators, however, was described as "strange", "sick" or "embarrassing" (Pettersson, 2011).

Girls using violence are often presented as being thoughtless, rude, with no acceptable behavioural patterns, vulgar in dress and in behaviour. It is also often described as if the girls copy a male behaviour, which is - according to the media - a consequence of the progressive empowerment of women ("if a boy can, a girl can too") (Drzewiecki, 2010; Gmiterek-Zabłocka, 2011; Grzelka, 2009; Piątkowska, 2012).

Furthermore, girls who fight are occasionally portrayed as tough and vigorous, and sometimes even as "sexy". Others look upon the phenomena of girls fighting as something funny (see for example "catfight" on humor.com). It is striking how easily violent girls are considered as objects, and not taken seriously. In other contexts, women's violence is considered as more legitimate than male violence, as in the case of self-defence, where the man is often regarded as the "abuser". In this way, girls who use violence can be considered victims.

In the United Kingdom, it appears that most recent research into girls and violence tends to be focused on females as victims rather than perpetrators of violence.

When perceived as victims, girls can easily be deprived of the opportunity to settle or stand trial for what they have done. In addition, explanations for girls' exercise of violence are often given in a perspective of gender equality, where the girls have "taken after" the boys' behaviour, and consequently resolve conflicts in the same way as boys/men have done "forever". I.e., none of the explanations for the girls' violence is connected to how they are seen as subjects or that they are not viewed as "actors in their own lives," and thus not responsible for their own actions.

The focus on, and media representation of, "girl violence" is often highly newsworthy. It can be understood from the events that violate the everyday understanding of who practices violence. It is often presented as a new and overlooked social problem, and it thus is related to both current actuality and uncertainty - but also particularly - the fact that girls also can act violently.

The term "girl violence" is problematic because it implies that violence committed by girls is a specific "female" type of violence, as opposed to a male type. It does not make sense to describe a gender solely by comparing it with a counterpoint, we will therefore emphasise that it is violence committed by girls that we want to focus on, in other words: young girls and the violence they exercise. In order to perform research in this field, it is important to attempt to study the possible gender-specifics that characterise the violence without thereby contributing to a dichotomising view on gender. This means that one must study gender and violence with a view to the fact that there are both similarities and differences between the practise of violence and motivations for violence by boys and girls, especially by focusing on the differences within the groups and levels (Messerschmidt, 2004).

1.3   Attributes of girls practice of violence

Knowledge about girls with a violence and aggression challenges is far sparser than the equivalent challenges amongst boys. The studies that have been conducted suggest however that these girls generally have more, and more serious, symptoms of psychological and social problems, and that they often exhibit socially deviant behaviour (Chamberlain & Moore, 2002; Wood, Foy, Gogue, Pynoos & James, 2002).

One part of this is linked to drug misuse. Studies indicate that girls with violence challenges tend to be more exposed to drug misuse than boys with similar challenges (Pape & Falck, 2003; Storvoll, Wichstrøm & Pape, 2003). The reason for this is not clear, but it seems that the threshold for the girls to show behavioural problems is higher than for boys. Thus, girls are more heavily burdened by their problems when they show the same severity of behavioural problems as their male counterparts (Tiet, Wasserman, Loeber, McReynolds & Miller, 2001). Studies also indicate that girls with violence and aggression challenges are at increased risk for later internalised problems such as mental disorders, suicide, substance abuse, dropping out of school, early pregnancy, and are frequent users of public support and often remain in violent relationships (Chamberlain & Moore, 2002). Furthermore, research shows that anti-sociality amongst boys predicts violence towards their partner at a later stage. This very same pattern has also been revealed in studies of anti-social girls (Woodward, Fergusson, & Horwood 2002).

Relational violence, is a term that often is referred to in the literature about female violence (Little, Henrich, Jones & Hawley, 2003; Salmivalli & Nieminen, 2002).This may be because boys and girls are aggressive in different ways. Research shows how girls' aggression is primarily relational; while boys' aggression is mainly open (Little et al., 2003). Open aggression involves the physical attack that is intended to harm others, in addition to the verbal actions with threats of physical attack. Relational aggression is defined as a type of aggression that mainly is intended to harm others through deliberate manipulation of their social status and relationships (Olweus, 1991).

Violence performed by girls and young women has been referred to as *co-violence*, that is, they take an active-passive part in the preparation and execution of a violent act that is carried out by one of them (Jansen, 1999; Bruhns & Wittmann, 2002; Silkenbäumer, 2007). Bruhns and Wittmann (2002)

from Germany explain how violence is often exercised as a consequence of emotional arousal rather than to increase their own status and gain recognition, which is more common for boys. While girls often use violence in intimate relationships or towards the people they know, boys are more likely to use violence in a public setting and towards victims they do not necessarily know personally (Chamberlain & Moore, 2002). Furthermore, girls' problems tend to be more hidden, and can often be linked to problems in their personal relationships, or seen as symptoms of depression (Andershed & Andershed, 2013). According to research, it appears that peers more often dislike physically aggressive girls than physically aggressive boys. Despite examples of girls who exercise violence against boys, girls mainly fight with other girls (Chamberlain & Moore, 2002).

When describing female violence, it is not only the individual violence that should be interpreted. Gang violence is also a significant form of female violence practice. However, there is not much analysis that specifically describes female gangs in Europe. There has been an internal academic critique on the lack of a gender perspective in the field of gang activity and violence (Miller, 2001; Chesney-Lind & Belknap, 2004; Messerschmidt, 2004). The result of this absence of sufficient focus on girls and the gender perspective in the research is that we know little about how the girls perceive themselves and their involvement in a gang and/or violent actions. However, researchers on gang activity agree upon the fact that violence and crime increases for young people in a criminal gang, compared with similar young people who are not in a gang. This may be linked to factors like the group dynamic processes that develop in groups that take the form of gangs; the norms, logic and procedures that are central for the gangs' comprehension of the reality and is conducive to the legitimisation of their crimes, or loyalty and cohesion (Klein, 1995; Klein, Weerman & Thornberry, 2006). Most gangs with this type of value system are most likely heavily male dominated, and the girls usually step into the role of girlfriends. However, this image has gradually changed, and American studies find girls in both the more traditional criminal gangs and more specifically: girl gangs. In the girl gangs, much of the same aggressive and violent behaviour patterns that are found in male gangs were observed (Miller, 2001; Maccoby, 2004).

II.   CAUSES & CONSEQUENCES OF VIOLENCE

2.1 Why violence?

There are a small number of qualitative studies that have looked at girls' attitudes towards offending behaviour and thus sought to 'bring the voices of young women to the centre of theoretical and methodological debates' (Batchelor, 2005). When trying to understand the underlying causes for girls' violence, it is necessary to understand female violence as a multifaceted and intricate field of study.

However, there are a range of factors that are frequently reported. Bachelor's study (2005) indicates many of the risk factors. Batchelor from the United Kingdom found in her interviews with young women that half of the women had not lived with both parents and that there were high levels of family disruption. She found that three-quarters had previous social work involvement and two-fifths had been sexually abused. Furthermore, her study showed that four-fifths of the offences were committed while they were intoxicated with drugs or alcohol, four-fifths had previous convictions and half had served a prior custodial sentence. Finally, two-fifths had regularly witnessed 'serious' violence in the home and there was a high level of witnessing violence in general. According to Yourstone from Sweden, women who use violence have more widely been victims of sexual abuse and mental illness in the family, than men. There is also a clear link between violence and mental illness. At the time of the crime, however, men and women are quite similar in terms of the psychosocial situation (Yourstone, 2008).

Uhnoo (2011) points to how trigging factors for girls' violence, in contrast to boys, often can be linked to their gender. The violence is often described as a reaction to a genderised insult, for example after being called a "whore" or being criticised for her looks or her appearance.

We know less about the factors that predict or protect against the development of serious violence and aggression problems amongst girls. Studies show that the path into a violent identity, as well as the path of dealing with issues, differs somewhat between girls and boys (Prothrow-Stith & Spivak, 2005; Chesney-Lind, Koo, Kata & Fujiwara, 1998). A key aspect of this is how girls with violence and aggression problems often describe how they are concerned about what could be called *relational chaos*. The girls explain this through lengthy descriptions and stories about the intricate

relationships as a basis for their use of violence (Flekkøy, 2000). This can be described as the girls acting out of *relational rationality*. This means that girls' actions are understandable in the interest of their relationships, and that if one is to understand the girls' use of violence, these analyses must be based on such an understanding.

Reputation and status are key factors for both boys and girls, and a central part of both genders' justifications for their violent actions. There are yet clear gender differences in how their reputations arise and are maintained. While boys' reputations are based on physical strength and whether they support each other in a conflict, the girls' reputation are increasingly based on private actions, often related to sexuality. Fighting over boys and sexual reputation is therefore the most common source of fights between girls. This difference in the content of boys' and girls' reputations, and what influences their status, means that while the boys' reputations are based on actions in the public sphere, girls' reputations are based on what others say about them and how others evaluate their private actions (Flekkøy, 2000; Nyhus & Thorsen, 2000).

In the Dunedin study in New Zealand, Terrie Moffitt and her colleagues focused particularly on gender differences in anti-social behaviour (Moffitt, Caspi, Rutter, &Silva, 2001). In their study, they claim that women are antisocial less often than men, and that this has two explanations. The first one is a neuropsychological developmental disorder, a type of anti-social behaviour, which mainly affects boys. It begins very early, and is very rare, but persists throughout the person's childhood and adolescence. The second is a less severe form of anti-social behaviour, which affects girls as much as boys. According to Cudak underage girls' deviant behaviour results from boredom, a need for emotional experiences, a reduced level of self-esteem, and a lack of pro-social attitudes (Cudak, 2007:76).

A different, and more historical perspective, is presented by Yourstone (2008). Yourstone argues that the extent of female violence is connected to the changes in the structures of the society connected to gender roles and the role of the woman. Yourstone argues that a strong factor in violent crime committed by girls has to do with girls increasingly moving into the same environment as boys, for example the pubs, where the setting for violence is more "normal" than other spheres of the society. According to Yourstone, this is closely connected to the fact that nowadays, it is more common also for girls to use alcohol and be an active part of the social life of

youths than before. This is supported by Granath (2013) who states that the extent of female violence can be seen as an expression of greater equality.

The results from a questionnaire survey of the criminological institute in Niedersachsen, Germany, in 2005 shows an increased proportion of violent girls with a migrant background (Baier, Pfeiffer, Rabohl, Simonson, Kappes, 2007). However, the survey indicates that immigration itself is not the cause of violence, but that the social environment plays a major role. These are low educational status, domestic violence, a violent lifestyle, life between cultures, especially when the children of immigrants are born in the local country. The peer group is an important social network and important factor for social backing and reassurance in the lives of juveniles, especially when they do not feel they are supported at home (Stauber, 2001).

DiNapoli (2003) found that the biggest predictor for girls' violent behaviour was a previous experience of victimisation by violence, although a range of other factors such as drug use, other delinquency, delinquent friends and having friends who fought were also associated. She concluded that normative behaviours were particularly influential on girls' use of violence, such that those with 'large friendship networks of largely older friends who also engage in violence' (DiNapoli, 2003:146) were those most likely to use violence. She further suggested that this group of girls lacked a sense of competency to make other decisions and that interventions should therefore focus on developing those skills and supportive, positive relationships・ (YJB, 2009:29)

Research shows how violent offences by girls in this study appear to have a common pattern – there is usually a relationship with the victim and it is most often perceived that the victim did something to "deserve" it (Batchelor, 2005; Ness, 2004; Pettersson, 2005; Philips, 2003), there is also the suggestion that girls' violent offending is similar to boys, involving principally the same gender and activated by status and hierarchy (Pettersson, 2005; Smith-Adcock and Kerpelman, 2000; Batchelor, 2005; Ness, 2004; Philips, 2003).

2.1.1 Environment, family background and childhood conditions

An overwhelming body of research shows that children and young people with violence and aggression problems have had very challenging childhood conditions (see, for example, Patterson,

Dishion & Yoerger, 2000; Stattin & Kerr, 2000; Tremblay & Nagin, 2005). According to Bruhns & Wittmann (2002) girls who are violent more often live in violent families than non-violent girls. Socialisation within the family is often characterised by a neglecting and inconsistent environment. Siudym and Moleda indicate that girls using violence often are raised in an atmosphere of permanent tensions and conflicts, emotional coldness, overprotection and excessive sensitivity (Siudym, 2004; Moleda, 2010). Budrewicz indicates factors contributing in her opinion to deviant behaviour of girls: 1) family pathology manifested in behaviours such as parents' alcoholism (especially of fathers), drug addiction and prostitution, 2) disorders of family relationships (incomplete or broken families), 3) weak bonding and emotional ties with parents (especially with a mother), 4) inadequate parenting attitudes (inconsistent parenting style of child's raising, improper rewarding, use of harsh penalties) (Budrewicz, 1992).

It is common that girls who use violence have divorced parents and live with their mother (Faldet, 2013). Having divorced parents or growing up with a single mother is not a risk factor in itself. However, when the divorce is accompanied by a enduring high level of conflict between the parents, it can turn into an important risk factor (Rutter, Giller, Hagell, 1998). Another risk factor that in some cases are connected to divorce is a high level of environmental change, like moving a lot or other frequent changes in the girl's everyday lives (Patterson, Reid, Dishion, 1992).

Experiences of violence in the family are common, ranging from an occasional slap to heavy physical abuse. Sexual abuse within the family is sometimes added. The girls have little or no trust in their parents. Some researches also highlight the troubled daughter - mother relationship. This is characterised by mistrust, disappointment of the mother not protecting her daughter (especially in cases of sexual abuse or ill-treatment) and ill role modelling by the mother often due to alcoholism (Silkenbäumer, 2007; Geiger-Battermann & Kreutzer, 2009).

Some studies indicate that the financial situation and the living conditions in the families of violent girls are often precarious and modest. This is especially visible in Poland, where the studies of Biel show that the parents of teenage female offenders are often poorly educated. Also, according to Biel (2008), a large part of Poland's teenage female offenders' parents are unemployed (in his study 44.2% of mothers and 44.4% of fathers where unemployed). He describes how if they work, they carry out work mainly as skilled or unskilled workers. However, despite this adverse environment, a

linear relationship between familial and socio-cultural conditions and the violence of girls cannot be proven empirically. Violent youth behaviour can also occur in families who offer a stable environment (Bruhns & Wittmann, 2002).

Some emphasise the correlation of children witnessing violence between parents and violence later in their life, while others focus on growing up in families in which parents are affected by mental and physical disorders and/or alcohol abuse. Others stress how direct exposure to violence, abuse, sexual abuse and neglect are typical experiences of those who later develop violence and aggression problems. It thus is well-documented that there is a relationship between various forms of violence and neglect in childhood, and problems later on with their own aggression and violence. At the same time, research shows that the majority of children who have been victims of violence and abuse do not end up as perpetrators themselves. Having been exposed to violence may therefore not be the sole explanation for the development of a violence and aggression problem (Borge, 2003; Kvello, 2007).

Although the research does not conclude unequivocally, there may be reason to believe that girls and boys tend to react differently to the same type of family turbulence. Some studies suggest that women as a group are affected more by family conflicts than boys (Gaylord, Kitzmann & Lockwood, 2003; Beyerss, Bates, Pettit, & Dodge, 2003). This might be related to girls' expectations of the concept of "family life", and the fact that girls are going to be mothers. The family we are born into is important in terms of who we are and what kind of life we get.

According to Biel (2008) the absence of parental authority of both parents is a worrying phenomenon. Such a situation prevailed in more than half of girls' families. Another factor that has an impact on girls' violent behaviour is their upbringing (Noszczyk-Bernasiewicz, 2010:164). The main style of parenting used by parents of the girls who use violence is an inconsistent style (Biel, 2008).

The research led by Woźniakowska-Fajst (2010) shows that teenage female perpetrators are more frequently raised by single mothers or by mothers and stepfathers. Their mothers often have limited parental authority. Similar data is indicated by Baździmirowska-Masłowska who led the study in a group of juvenile homicide offenders. She claims that juvenile women grew up having abusive

relationships with mothers. Those relationships are caused mainly by improper relationship between mothers and daughters as well as mothers' parental inefficiency – they often fail to cope with their own problems (Baździmirowska-Masłowska, 2000).

Some research shows that in the violent girls' families, there seems to exist an obscure family hierarchy, often leading to a situation where neither of the parents appear to be distinct adults, which may often lead to an indistinguishable generation gap. That is, they practice a so-called permissive parenting style characterised by love and devotion combined with low control and supervision (Stattin & Kerr, 2000; Kvello, 2007). The mothers often require little of the girls' behaviour, are permissive in terms of rules, are often inconsistent in their limit-setting and do frequently consult the girls on important decisions. This might lead to a situation where the girls repeatedly receive strong support for their opinions, and the limits will therefore be designed the way the youngsters argue.

Studies furthermore indicate that children who are raised with a permissive parenting style are considerably more experimental in relation to alcohol and drugs than children raised with a more democratic parenting style. Studies show that a permissive parenting style gives kids a lower degree of self-esteem, and that the children receive less social support from peers than children raised with a more democratic parenting style (Kvello, 2007).

2.1.2 Socialisation - the role of the school and peers

According to some research, female violence occurs with the beginning of puberty - with previous aggressive behaviour in kindergarten and primary school (Silkenbäumer, 2007; Bruhns & Wittmann, 2002). The most violent crimes occur from the age of 12 up to the age of 21 (Silkenbäumer, 2007). According to Jansen (1999) the so-called "action-centred" violence takes place from the age of 14 up to the age of 17.

With the onset of adolescence, parents and society expect certain gender roles. Girls have to be peaceful, communicative, good at school and they have to care about their outer appearance. Furthermore they are seen as future key elements of family building.
Other studies identify similar expectations (Stauber, 2001). The girls have the transition period from

girl to woman to live up to these challenging role expectations and on top of that develop the air of being able to achieve everything, handling family and career with ease while acting with a caring, courageous, self confident and self-sufficient attitude.

A common phenomenon among juvenile girl offenders is that they fall behind with school obligations (Wójcik, 1978). But it can be associated with their difficulty in focusing attention and in concentration, rather than with a deficit of intelligence. The link between parental alcohol abuse and underage girls' failures in learning has also been noted (Biel, 2008). Reluctance towards school may be caused not only by educational failures but also by a teacher's approach to the pupil (humiliation or mocking). It happens that teachers are not always able to diagnose a student's behaviour problem correctly and in fact join the process of his or her stigmatisation (Biel, 2008).

In coping with these demands, girls experience feelings of powerlessness, disintegration, exclusion and hopelessness. Thus violent behaviour could be an opportunity for girls to act (Stauber, 2001). Violent behaviour can also be an expression of autonomy aspirations of girls who are limited in their range of motion by parental prohibitions at home (Heeg, 2009; Bruhns & Wittmann, 2002; Silkenbäumer, 2007). If conflict and violence are prevalent at home, violence may be an act of self-protection and survival strategy for the young women. These girls reject the role of victims, evade restrictions from home and try to gain control over their life (Silkenbäumer, 2007; Bruhns & Wittmann, 2002; Stauber, 2002). Violent behaviour in this context is equivalent to power and self-awareness. It is countering the powerlessness in school and family. Violence is the power to set limits and is in their self-perception regarded as ability (Silkenbäumer, 2007).

It is emphasised that girls have a strong need to participate in a solid peer group (Stadnik, 2009; Biel, 2008). Sometimes the impact of such a group can be, however, devastating. That is a threat especially when an individual feels rejected in his or her family and in school, while a peer group behaves in an illegal way, incompatible with social norms (Biel, 2008). It is therefore worth mentioning that girls often commit crimes of violence not alone, but by two, three or more – in a group (Woźniakowska-Fajst, 2010). Experiencing self-efficacy through violence in stages of difficulties has an identity-promoting effect on these girls (Stauber, 2001). As a result, according to Jansen (1999), some violent girls might acquire their identity primarily from violent situations.

Regarding the influence of friends, it seems like the girls mostly follow the same pattern as the boys. However, the Dunedin study showed that friends influence girls to a greater extent than boys in adolescence, whereas early childhood problems and experiences are the strongest predictors of an anti-social path for boys. The study showed that girls with a propensity to break norms tend to commit more crimes the earlier their puberty begins. They are often seeing older delinquent guys who can include them in criminal activities, and this has a potential of becoming a vicious circle that is hard to break. Girls' friendships in adolescence are also characterised by greater intimacy than friendships among boys. Girls may thus be more vulnerable to negative influences from friends (Moffit, Caspi, Rutter, & Silva, 2001).

As described above, some research indicates that violent crime committed by girls is primarily exercised on peers. In peer groups they seek the support and understanding they lack in order to regain their self-respect (Heeg, 2009; Bruhns & Wittmann, 2002). Girls and young women engaged in violence are more often part of deviant peer groups than their cosexuals. Youth groups are of high emotional and social importance for the young women (Bruhns & Wittmann, 2002).

2.1.3 Individual factors

Several studies explain the development of a violence and aggression problem with individual factors. But although studies show results that link violence and aggression problems to the individual's personal qualities, this does not necessarily mean that these qualities caused the problems. Recent trauma research is concerned with what this has to do with complex interactions. Some authors indicate that severe abuse might potentially have a strong negative impact on the structure, function and organisation of the brain (Cicchetti & Toth, 1998), and that early trauma can cause neurophysiological changes in the brain vital for aggression (see www.childtraumaacademy.com).

Data from other comprehensive studies has discovered a number of cognitive factors that characterises youth who have violence and aggression problems. They emphasise how young people with such problems make an attribution mistake or fallacy in their interpretations of the environment. They often interpret the intentions of others as hostile (Novaco, 1975, 1977; Bjørnebekk, 2008). This can often lead to involvement in aggressive conflicts, where they look upon their own actions as retaliations of the assumed hostility in others. Youths often justify their

violence by this. Furthermore, these studies emphasise how over time this results in classmates and peers⸗ distrust of these teenagers, and that this leads to exclusion and isolation from other pro-social peers, which again can lead them into subgroups.

Many of the girls who commit violence have a challenge with their impulse control. A diagnosis that has been in the centre of much attention over the recent decades and that often is linked to youth's violent behaviour is ADHD - Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, or "Hyperkinetic disorders". International literature points to the relationship between ADHD and violence problems among adolescents (Moffitt, 1993). Diagnostic criteria for ADHD are high incidence and intensity of attention problems (concentration challenges), and a higher degree of impulsivity and intense activity than is normal for children of different ages. One finds that children with ADHD have major problems in interaction with other children. They are often in conflicts and experience rejection and exclusion from peers. Many have learning disabilities and can often fall further and further behind their peers in school achievements (Burt, Krueger, McGue & Iacono, 2001; Levy & Hay, 2000). ADHD is diagnosed three times more often in boys than in girls (Zeiner, 2004). Some explain this with the thesis that there is an underdiagnosis of girls with ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder) or ADHD. This bias is likely to derive from the gender stereotypes of clinicians and researchers. Once one discovers that girls have ADHD, they will often have severe symptoms and more alarming conditions than peer boys (Rucklidge & Tannock, 2001). It is nevertheless worth noting that the ADHD diagnosis in and of itself does not provide any explanation for the behaviour, but describes it in a given period of time. The diagnosis does not explicitly describe the origins of the case of the specific person, nor whether the condition is chronic or temporary. Obviously, not all girls who commit violence have ADHD, but lack of impulse control is a contributing factor that is often mentioned, both in girls own descriptions of their violence, and in research on the topic.

Kosterman and his colleagues (2001) examined the extent to which early individual characteristics such as hyperactivity, seclusion and aggression and early anti-social influences such as immoral attitudes, availability of drugs, friends with anti-social behaviours and parents who allow kids to act violently, were associated with subsequent violence. They found that these variables were significant and could predict whether or not an individual will act violently during adolescence. According to Kosterman, Graham, Hawkins, Catalano & Herrenkohl, 2001), it thus appears that it is more important to focus on the early antisocial influences many children are exposed to in their

local neighbourhood and close relationships than various personality traits like temperament, aggression and impulsivity. Only then will we have the opportunity to break the vicious circle of violence.

Violent youths have an increased stress physiology, which clearly affects their ability to exercise self-control (Jansen, 1999). According to Bruhns and Wittman (2002), the combination of individual dispositions and characteristics such as increased irritability, poor impulse control, low self-esteem and limited social and emotional skills and certain influences by the social environment can result in violent behaviour.

Many girls have conditions of anxiety, depression, feelings of alienation and worthlessness before puberty. To alleviate these symptoms they begin to soften them with drugs, alcohol and medicine. Juvenile violence perpetrators show a greater extent of violent behaviour, self-injurious behaviour, symptoms of anxiety, depression, alienation and drug use (Jansen, 1999).

2.2 Consequences of girls' early-age violence

According to Andershed and Andershed (2013), girls with aggressive behaviour patterns are likely to repeat this pattern in different environments, and pass it on as it affects many aspects of life, during adolescence and adulthood.

During adolescence, most people will practice some kind of violation of rule or law (Moffitt, 2006). One can say that this is expected and partly normative. For example, Moffitt found in one longitudinal study that almost all of the participants reported that they had participated in some kind of illegal behaviour before the age of 18. It is important to distinguish between what life cycle studies call "life-course persistent" and "early onset", and problem behaviour limited to adolescence, (known as "adolescent-limited" or "late onset"). These are also called early starters and late starters compared to developed problem behaviour (Moffitt & Caspi, 2001). Cognitive underevolvement and difficult temperaments are typical risk factors associated with early-starters, especially combined with tough and inconsistent parenting practices, limited family resources and inadequate emotional connection with a person's care-givers.

Compared with girls, boys are ten to fifteen times more likely to end up in early-start developmental trajectories (Moffitt & Caspi, 2001). The probability of a young limited-development scenario is

about the same for boys and girls. This type of problem behaviour does not appear until puberty and is probably highly context-dependent (Moffitt, 2006). Studies indicate that while boys with violence and aggression problems in adolescence often had a childhood marked by antisocial and aggressive behaviour, girls develop antisocial behaviour only when they arrive at adolescence. At the same time there are other studies that have not found this difference and that claim that starting point and development scenarios are relatively similar for girls and boys, but the symptoms and expressions of problem behaviour are somewhat different (Chamberlain & Moore, 2002).

III.   SUMMARY

The purpose of this report was to gather a theoretical understanding of girls' violent behaviour and to reveal the complexity of the phenomenon, by examining the existing literature from in Europe about girls who use violence.

It seems that girls who are violent are perceived as double deviant: both in their role as a woman and as a perpetrator of violence. This means that when a young girl is involved in violence, she differs from both the cultural norms of the female role (the way the society expects or imagines that a young girl should behave) and the notion of the typical violent and criminal perpetrator - namely a man. When the boys are involved in violent situations, the violence is often only termed *violence* or *youth violence*. As soon as girls are involved in violence, it's described as *girl violence*. In this way, violence is not violence – girl violence is perceived as another form of violence. It is, at the same time, possible to argue that viewed from another perspective, women's violence is also to a great extent considered more legitimate than the man's violence, in the sense that the violent girls are very easily described as the "victims" and not as individuals responsible for their actions.

The girls' violence can be understood on the basis of their previous experience and infraction, but at the same time, such a perspective implies that girls are only seen as "victims". This gives a one-sided picture and a conceptualisation of the concept favourable for neither the society nor the girls. It is important that girls' exercise of violence be taken seriously and not get explained away, and be understood in the light of a girls' past experiences, while being held accountable for their actions at the same time.

Research also shows that while boys' violence is fairly often explained by social and cultural conditions, girls' violence is more often explained by referring to individual and pathological factors. "Boys will be boys - they're used to fighting," while girls are "damaged", "bad-acting" or "mentally ill". Guys are to a greater extent than girls met with acceptance and underlying cultural approval when they start to get angry, aggressive or even violent. Girls are increasingly expected to be kind. Violence as a "coping method" does not have the same effect for girls as for boys - they are rewarded differently. Studies suggest that peers more often dislike physically aggressive girls than physically aggressive boys.

It is well-documented, for both boys and girls, that there is a relationship between their own perpetration of violence and failure of care and various forms of violence in their childhood. The details of this relationship are, however, more uncertain. Although the research does not conclude unequivocally, there may be reason to believe that girls and boys tend to react differently to the same type of family stress. Some studies suggest that girls as a group is more affected by family conflicts than boys. Some argue that this is related to girls' expectations of family life and that girls will become mothers.

Often, the girls who use violence have a lack of impulse control. Research also suggests that girls often practise psychological violence and their aggression often is relational. Relational aggression is the type of aggression that is intended to harm others through manipulation, rumour-mongering and backbiting. While boys' aggression often involves physical attacks intended to do bodily harm, in addition to the verbal actions with threats of physical attack.

When it comes to the physical violence, it is common that girls engage in domestic violence or commit violence on the people they know. Boys, on the other hand, to a larger extent use violence in public settings, and towards victims they do not necessarily know.

Girls with violence and aggression problems express that they are often concerned with what could be called "relational chaos". They provide lengthy descriptions and stories of complicated relationships as a basis for violence. This is described as the girls acting out of relational rationality. This means that the girls' actions are understandable in the interest of their relationships, and that if one is to understand girls' use of violence it must be based on such an understanding.

Reputation and status are key factors for both boys and girls, and are a central part of both genders' justifications for their violence. Yet there are clear gender differences in how boys' and girls' reputation arises and are maintained. Boys' reputations are commonly based on physical strength and that they are there for each other in a conflict. The girls' reputations, however, are increasingly based on private actions, often linked to sexuality. Fights over boys as well as sexual reputation are therefore the most common basis for fights between girls.

The studies carried out indicate that girls who are violent have severe symptoms of psychological and social problems and tend to be more strained by drug misuse than boys with similar difficulties. The reason for this is not clear, but it seems like the threshold for girls showing behavioural problems is higher than for boys. Thus, the girls are often more heavily burdened with challenges when they show about the same extent and severity of behavioural problems as boys.

As for future prognoses for girls who are violent, research indicates that girls with violence and aggression problems are more likely to simultaneously develop depression than boys. Violence and aggression problems amongst girls increases their risk of later internalised problems, suicide and substance abuse, and that they remain in violent relationships, drop out of school, become pregnant early and are frequent users of public support and ancillary services.

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