

DISRUPTION OF SOCIAL BONDS AS A CAUSE OF DELINQUENCY OF ADOLESCENTS

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Abstract: *Disrupted social bonds in adolescence have direct connection with the delinquency of young people. Adolescence is a period of stabilization of mental and physical development; the main developmental task is to find and develop their own identity. Family environment plays an important role and has a big influence on further personal life. The work deals with the importance of family, family relationships and peer contacts in particular, and describes social deviation briefly. The objective of the work was to find out the connection between the delinquency of adolescents and disrupted social bonds, specially feeling of the absence of parental love and attention and to find out the main motives for the delinquency of adolescents. The work pointed out the friends as the most important factor of delinquency of adolescents and finally pointed out the fact the most of adolescents saw the same or similar delinquent behaviour in the family.*

Key words: *adolescents, delinquency, family, peers, social bonds*

Introduction

Adolescence covers the period approximately from 11 to 20 year of life, where there are important physical, mental and social changes. They run somewhat parallel and are in mutual interaction. They are not essential as personality is determined by the conversion of a number of other factors - social, cultural, economic, etc. (Langmeier, Krejčířová, 2006).

One of the most important factors is the family environment that surrounds an individual from birth, and in which virtually all life takes place. What an individual gains during his life in the family has an irreplaceable impact on his personality, relationships and every area of his career. The first identification educators and role models for children are parents. They represent an irreplaceable source of love for them. Their job is to ensure a universal mental and physical development, emotional support, moral and intellectual growth for their children (Koteková et al., 1998). Among the relevant factors of the child's social development belongs creating a lasting emotional bond between the child and the person close to it (parents), so-called attachment. It is

created from birth and is normally developed at the age of 1.5 years. This is a cyclic model, consisting of four phases (1. child has a need, 2. child gets the need, 3. parent meets the need, 4. child feels comfortable). The more often the cycle is repeated, the more it strengthens the attachment. A child who can create this bond can later create safe and stable relationships and build trust with others (Children Welfare League of America, 2003). Hewstone, Stroebe (2006) and others confirm that the quality of family relationships determines the quality of other relationships of the individual. These links provide children and adults with the primary sense of security, allowing individual to better face the threats and uncertainties outside. For adolescents harmonious family relations are a base of security and social support. While seeking autonomy, which demonstrate different manifestations of defiance, the family is often a model for them to solve problems (Ruiselová, 1997). On the other hand, the family that does not meet the basic demands of society and does not adequately fulfil its functions, negatively affects the personality development of children. Negative relationship of parents with a child largely frustrates its need for security, protection, understanding, care, and so on. As a result, emotional deprivation, disordered emotions, sociability, self-esteem, behavior, etc. arise (Ďuricová, 2005). Blackburn and Raine believe that certain types of families or other social groups stimulate antisocial behaviour. For example, parents with criminal background are at increased risk of a similar behaviour in their children (Vágnerová, 2008). The development of undesirable behaviour is also affected by neglected care, harm by parents, but also the overall strengthening of negative behaviour patterns and family disharmony. However, some authors doubt the direct connection with crime in dysfunctional families, relying on the findings of solid family ties in some deviants. They argue that a certain kind of functional families directly determines criminality of its members and on the other hand, the majority of survivors of family crisis who came from dysfunctional families, is non-criminal (Nevřala, 2005).

In the adolescent period, sibling and peer contacts play an important role. Peer group provides a platform for the acquisition of various social skills, it is the source of certain standards of conduct and has a specific role in building a sense of their own autonomy. Through relationships with peers adolescent clarifies the relationship to himself. The way how individual evaluates himself, depends largely on whether he is accepted by his group. Relationships and interactions within the group have an impact on decisions of individuals in everyday situations, allowing the download of new roles, imitation, modeling, and also provide feedback. It is a common example in adolescents with low self-esteem, whose parents are not desirable behavioural patterns (Macek, 2003). Behaviour that violates any social norm, not only legal, religious or moral, is known as social deviance (Krářová, 2006). The deviation includes concepts such as criminality, lawlessness, delinquency, while the latter is in our environment mainly linked with criminal activity of youth. Risk factors for committing deviant acts are divided into two main categories: subjective (psychological, physical characteristics of a person) and objective factors (family, school, company, etc.) (Sejřová, 2006). Based on the preferences of one or several risk factors various theories of deviant behaviour have been formulated. There are two basic groups of theories, *the traditional theories of social deviance* (e.g., psychological and psychogenetic theory, sociological theory, the multifactorial theory, etc.) and *theories based on the paradigm shift* (e.g., labelling theory approach,

the theory of social control and prevention, etc.) (Ondrejko, 2001). Although no theory perceives the causes of crime in its entirety, many criminological, psychological and other approaches give prominence to the theory of social control and also multifactorial conditionality of crime. According to this theory, deviant behaviour is the result of multiple internal and external factors (innate dispositions, situational factors and environmental influences). The environment is especially meant to be family, school and peers (Vágnarová, 2008).

The aim of this work was to establish a link between adolescent delinquency and social disorders, especially with the perceived lack of parental love and attention and identify the main motives of adolescent delinquency.

Materials and methods

The survey focused on inmates in re-education centres belonging to late adolescence, i.e. on 15-18 years old youth. However, due to the fact that the boundary between early and later adolescence is not strictly given, possibly because experts concede some individual variability, we also accepted the questionnaires completed by 14-year-olds. The questionnaire was administered to 56 respondents, the response rate was 52 questionnaires. Due to the incomplete data, we have not included 3 questionnaires into the evaluation. Thus, our exploratory sample consisted of 49 respondents, of which:

- a) 16 inmates were from re-education centre Horný Bankov
- b) 16 inmates were from re-education centre Sološnica
- c) 17 inmates were from re-education centre Tornaľa

Participants in our survey were almost homogeneous in terms of gender - 46 boys and 3 girls. This fact is the result of the availability of samples, since the target institute clients are predominantly male. Aged 14-15 were represented by 22 respondents, aged 16-18 were represented by 19 respondents, eight respondents did not state their age.

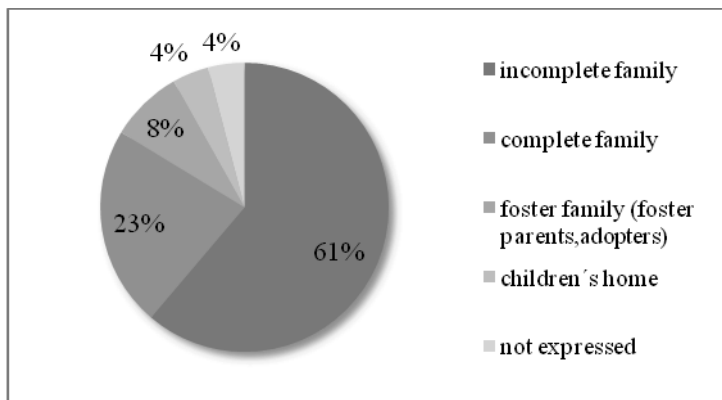
Sampling was both random and targeted. The re-education centre Horný Bankov was selected for our survey because of our proximity to the place, other centres were included in the survey on a random basis. The questionnaires for the re-education centre Horný Bankov were delivered personally, to the other two centers they were mailed.

The method for obtaining data was a questionnaire consisting of 37 questions, 22 of which were semi-closed and 15 closed. The questions were based mainly on the level of subjective feelings, opinions of respondents about the relationship and behaviour of (foster) parents towards them, about the motives of delinquency, relations with friends, and attitudes toward oneself.

Results

Due to a limited extent of the contribution only the most important survey results have been published. In the scope of the research problem we set out four scenarios. In **the first hypothesis** we assumed that at least 70 % of adolescents experience a lack of parental love and attention. This assumption should be proven by the answers to the

questions related to family environment and access, behaviour and relationship of (substitute) parents with their children. The information on family patterns of respondents is recorded in Graph 1. We can see that most adolescents come from broken families, i.e. families, consisting of one parent and another relative, or other relatives only. If we include the category of single parent family and adolescents growing up in a foster family, or in foster homes, we find out that their share out of the total is 73 %. Only 23 % of respondents grow up with both parents.

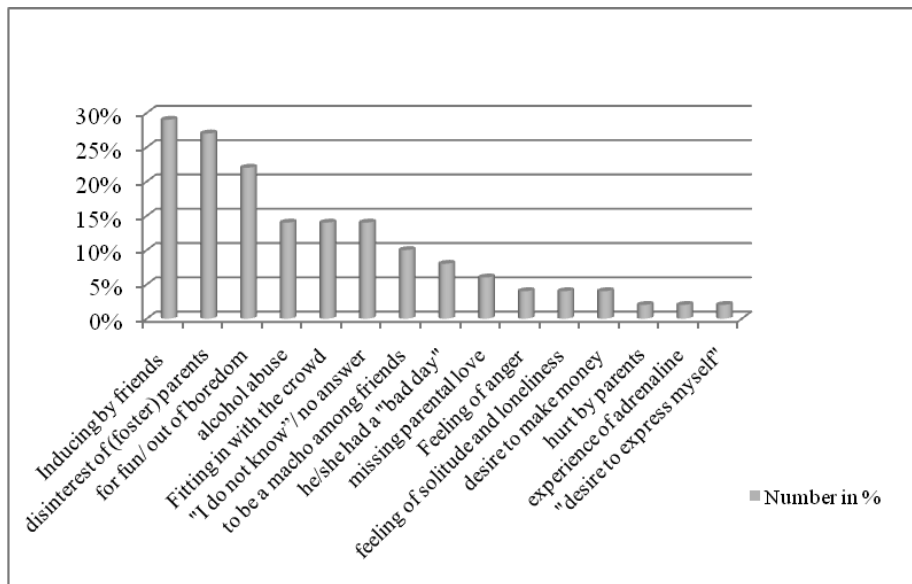


Graph Nb. 1 Family models

The answers to the question what expressions of parental favour adolescents missed most should also point out the lack of parental affection. Only 10 % of respondents identified love alone, but from our point of view the expressions of love can also include trust, embrace, support, praise and understanding. In this case, the absence of love is present in 81 % of respondents. Similarly, it is the same with the interest of (foster) parents in their children. Only 16 % of adolescents identified especially the lack of interest, but including interviews, time spent together, reading stories and trips the final number of respondents will increase to 72 %. On the other hand, 74 % of respondents felt that the (foster) parents care about them. Feeling that their (foster) parents love them had almost half (49 %) of adolescents and feeling that adolescents are not loved by their (foster) parents had only 12 % of respondents (39 % of respondents were not able to answer). Desire to be loved more was expressed by only 18 % of respondents, 20 % of adolescents would like to have more parental care. The fact that our respondents did not perceive the lack of attention from the parents indicates that most of them did not like the fact that their (foster) parents were arguing and angry (88 %) more than the fact that the parents neglected them, did not encourage their talents, hobbies and were indifferent to their school performance (16 %). We see therefore that the findings are inconclusive. While from the objective point of view we could conclude a lack of parental love and attention, the subjective testimonies suggest rather the contrary. Therefore, based on the fact that our assumption concerned just the subjective side, we consider this hypothesis rather **unproven**.

In **the second hypothesis** we assume that in at least 60 % of the adolescents the main motive for deviant behaviour was lack of parental love and attention. For the

verification, we focused mainly on the testimonies about what led them to their offenses, but we were also looking for a link with the absence of love of (foster) parents or undesirable parental behaviour towards them. As a matter of interest first we will list the case frequency of deviant respondents. Most represented are repeat offenders who have committed such action three times or more (57 %) followed by juveniles with a double offense against standards (16 %), 14 % of adolescents claimed that they had committed “only” truancy offense and no other offences, and 10 % of respondents have performed deviantly once, one respondent did not express himself. Furthermore, we have shown an overview of motives for adolescent delinquent behaviour in graphical form (Graph 2).

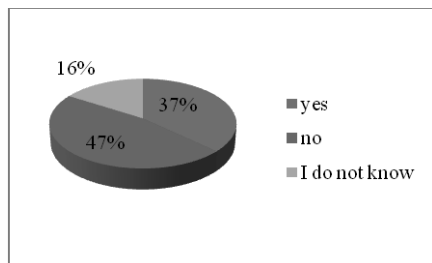


Graph Nb.2 Reasons of delinquency behaviour

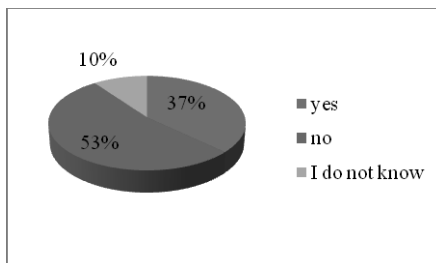
As we can see, the most common cause of offense was that they were persuaded to do so by friends (29 %), immediately followed by a reluctance on the part of (foster) parents (27 %). Taking into account all the testimonies received, however, we find that the influence of friends was also reflected in other contexts, namely in the form of efforts to fit in with the crowd (14 %) and desire to be macho among friends (10 %). Calculating all these motives, we find that friends influencing the delinquent behaviour of adolescents amount to 53 % of cases. Also, we have seen the influence of (foster) parents not only in the entry disinterest of (foster) parents, but other reasons were lack of parental love (6 %) and hurt by parents (2 %). Also action due to a feeling of abandonment and loneliness indirectly points to a lack of parental affection (4 %). Together, these results represent 39 % of the cases due to a lack of parental love and attention. We tried to infer the motives for behaviour from the answers to the question whether some of them had ever fled from home and especially what led them to do it. This item, however, did not demonstrate significant findings. The escape was confessed by 47 % of adolescents, but the reason why was given by only 18 %. Three respondents fled because of a quarrel

with their parents, also three respondents left the house because of the desire to be with friends or enjoy themselves, two adolescents reported as a reason for fleeing a fight with a sibling, or bullying by their stepmother, and one respondent did not feel well at home. It is interesting to mention the fact that 22 % of adolescents considered their action to be good. The reason for such perception of the offense was especially the fact that they also saw the same behaviour in their friends. This also points to the above finding that friends are an essential element of delinquent behaviour of adolescents. Summarizing the results obtained we conclude that this hypothesis **has not been proven**, since the lack of parental sympathy to justify the delinquent action was reported by less than 60 % of adolescents. The influence of friends in various forms showed to be the strongest motive. On the other hand, as shown in the first hypothesis, most adolescents lacked parental love and attention and also came from broken families, which can be, apart from the subjective views of adolescents, a direct or an indirect factor in delinquent actions.

In the **third hypothesis** we assumed that at least 50 % of adolescents who committed delinquent actions saw the same or similar behaviour in their (foster) parents. Graph 3 shows that 37 % of (foster) parents committed the same deviant act as their child and 47 % did not commit any such action. According to Graph 4, there are also more (foster) parents who did not commit the same deviant act (53 %) than those who did (37 %).



Graph Nb. 3 Equal deviant act



Graph Nb. 4 Similar deviant act

Since our assumption allows for both variants of deviation simultaneously, the resulting sum represents 74 % of substitute) parents who, according to the statements of juveniles, committed the same or similar deviant act. Thus, we consider our hypothesis in this case as **proven**. **Hypothesis number 4** assumed that at least 50 % of delinquent adolescents have lower self-esteem and feel not accepted by their environment. We wanted to identify these facts using questions about the value of their personality, feeling of loneliness, their own abilities, or the behavior of others to their person. More than half of respondents (55 %) did not think that they have lower value than other people, 41 % of respondents felt inferior. The respondents saw the reasons for the perception of themselves as inferior in their placement in re-education centres in particular. 86 % of adolescents believe in their own success in life. The object of our interest was the question whether they know the areas at which they are good. Except for one respondent, each of them said something that they were good at. Talent for physical activities and ability to advise and help others if necessary dominated (39 %), as well as fulfilment of duties and keeping promise (37 %). One of the features of a healthy self-esteem is also setting specific life goals. An overview of the ambitions of our respondents offers Table 1.

Table Nb. 1 Life ambitions of adolescents

Ambitions	Number of answers	Number in %
finishing the school	29	59 %
desire to be better	27	55 %
starting a family	25	51 %
Finding a job	23	47 %
Willingness to look after myself	19	39 %
return to (foster) parents	16	33 %
apologizing to sb	14	29 %
Doing sport	3	6 %
no answer/ „I do not know“	3	6 %

Adolescents have many remarkable plans. The desire to finish school dominated (59 %), as well as to be better than ever (55 %). Confidence is not just a matter of individual attitude and mindset. This may be affected by the fact whether the person feels accepted and loved by someone. We found out that 43 % of adolescents often heard their (substitute) parents say that they are important to them, 31 % heard it sometimes. The feeling that they mattered to their (substitute) parents in childhood had, as we know, 74 % of adolescents. Finally, we wanted to find out the opinion of respondents about their adoption and feedback from their friends. We learned that 55 % of the adolescents in the centre have four or more friends, 20 % have two or three friends, 10 % of adolescents have no friend. 88 % of respondents have good friends outside the re-education centre, three of them reportedly have no friends. The most common is a joint activity of listening to music and watching television (57 %). Up to 82 % of adolescents feel accepted and supported by their friends. On the other hand, only three respondents do not feel the friendship of friends. As for the survey of negative behaviour, most adolescents indicated that they did not experience such behaviour because their friends like them (35 %). The last survey was about a sense of loneliness and abandonment. Up to 53 % of adolescents experience solitude and loneliness sometimes, and 27 % of adolescents often feel that way. About a third could not give the cause of this feeling (33 %). The principal reason was the absence of parents (24 %). Based on the above findings, we conclude that the hypothesis **has not been proven**, as it has been shown that more than half of the juveniles do not consider themselves inferior, a significant majority believes in their own success in life, and at least sometimes their parents / substitute parents let them feel that they are important to them. In addition, most adolescents have significant friendships and support. Findings about solitude and abandonment felt by more than half of respondents could lead to the validation of the hypothesis. However, we consider this fact understandable, since the most reported reason for these feelings was a lack of parents. As we are dealing with the natural reaction of someone who is separated from their loved ones, we do not consider this finding as a guide.

Conclusion

Based on surveys we came to some interesting findings, the most important are: adolescent behavior is largely influenced by two elements. First, the conduct of their

friends who act as direct or indirect indicators of delinquent behaviour of adolescents (talking sb into an offense/pattern of delinquent behavior, trying to fit into the crowd, etc.). For adolescents, it is very important to be accepted and be part of peer crowds, and to achieve this objective they are also willing to resort to deviant behaviour. Another important fact is that most offenders saw a pattern of deviant behaviour in their parents /foster parents. It has been proven that an essential factor of delinquency in terms of a family system is the behaviour of parents /foster parents that adolescents normally see at home. They see that as a natural and right, and therefore they imitate it themselves. Thus, the issue of personal models here seems to be a key in minimizing juvenile delinquent activities.

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NARUŠENIE SOCIÁLNYCH VÄZIEB AKO PRÍČINA DELIKVENCIE ADOLESCENTOV

Abstrakt: Narušené sociálne väzby v adolescencii majú priamu súvislosť s delikvenciou mladistvých. Adolescencia je obdobie stabilizácie psychického a fyzického vývinu; hlavnou vývinovou úlohou je hľadanie a rozvoj vlastnej identity. Dôležitú rolu tu zohráva rodinné prostredie, ktoré vo veľkej miere vplyva na ďalší život človeka. Príspevok sa venuje predovšetkým významu rodiny, rodinných vzťahov a rovesníckych kontaktov v živote jedinca a stručne opisuje sociálnu deviáciu. Cieľom práce bolo zistiť súvislosť delikvencie adolescentov s narušenými sociálnymi vzťahmi, najmä s pociťovaním nedostatku rodičovskej lásky a záujmu a zistiť hlavné motívy delikvencie adolescentov. Práca poukazuje na fakt, že na delikventné správanie adolescentov majú najväčší vplyv kamaráti a väčšina delikventov pozorovala rovnaké alebo podobné deviantné správanie v rodinnom prostredí.

Kľúčové slová: adolescenti, delikvencia, rodina, rovesníci, sociálne väzby