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CONFLICTS WITH PARENTS AS A FACTOR TRIGGERING ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOR OF YOUNG PEOPLE – BASED ON RESEARCH CONDUCTED AMONG POLISH HIGH SCHOOL YOUTH AND THEIR PARENTS

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Abstract

The text presents research on conflicts between young people and their parents/guardians recognized as a trigger for young people's antisocial behavior. The research was carried out among Polish high school youth (middle and high school) and their parents. In total 150 people participated in the study. The study was based on the author's questionnaire addressed to parents and the scale of social maladjustment developed by Lesław Pytka, addressed to young people. The aim of the study was to indicate the existence of possible correlation between conflicts of youth with parents/guardians and manifested antisocial behavior. The study referred to those antisocial behaviors that are most often manifested by young people. These are: physical aggression, verbal aggression, alcohol consumption, truancy and atypical forms of sexual behavior. The statistical analysis was based on the IBM SPSS program.

General conclusions from the study: conflicts of young people with parents/guardians determine the manifestations of antisocial behavior, but this significance has not been fully confirmed for all assumed variables.

Keywords: *antisocial behavior (physical aggression, verbal aggression, alcohol consumption, truancy and atypical forms of sexual behavior), conflicts family.*

Introduction

The family constitutes the basic environment for the development and education of children and young people. There are many different factors that are dysfunctional, pathological but also protective, which directly (or, sometimes, indirectly) affect the young generation. Such a generally observed increase in dysfunctional (pathological) factors can often determine the problems and/or conflicts that the family experiences. Basing on appropriate indications found in both pedagogy and psychology, conflicts are divided into internal and external. Internal conflicts are recognized as one of the types of difficult situations and thus are not the subject of analyzes (Skwarek, Herberger, & Sępowicz-Buczko, 2017). In this instance, the author's attention will be solely focused on external conflicts. According to A. Olubiński (2001, p. 3), conflict in the family should be considered in interpersonal terms; such an approach focuses upon the type of interaction between partners, in which they become aware of the existing differences of interests, needs, and/or aspirations that divide them, and therefore take actions aimed at striving to meet mostly their own needs, often at the expense of the needs of their own partner's (or spouse's). Following Olubiński (1997), all conflict situations in the family are considered to be negative, or even destructive factors, that disturb the achievement of educational goals towards children and young people; from this point of view all family occurring conflicts have to be considered as largely unfavorable for them.

The specificity of difficult situations in the family that may lead to the appearance of many conflicts between young people and their parents/guardians are factors directly related to both parents and their children, many specific interactions between them included. The factors related directly to parents entail their personality traits (e.g. nervousness), disagreement between parents, negative parental attitudes, destructive behavior resulting from the occurrence of the problem of alcohol abuse, the addiction of one or both parents, or incurable disease in eh family (Borecka-Biernat, 2014; Przybysz-Zaremba, 2019; Cummings, 1994, pp. 73-112; Ramchandani, Stein, O'Connor, Heron, Murray, & Evand, 2008, pp. 390-398; Przybysz-Zaremba, 2015, pp. 26-32). While analyzing factors related to parents that have a destructive impact on the process of raising children it is indicated, among others, that such factors like: the absence of parents (parents too professionally active), lack of time to talk and discuss with young people about, e.g. their problems may result in the appearance of quite many family conflicts (Acion, Ramirez, Jorge, & Arndt, 2013, pp. 1418-1425); excessive control or lack thereof (Chao & Aque, 2009, pp. 342-354; Przybysz-Zaremba, 2017, pp. 133-146). The source of the conflicts between young people and their parents/guardians can also be found in the occurrence of characteristic forms of behavior of young people, that manifest themselves, in the absence of compliance with the family rules, failure to comply with school-related obligations or household duties, for example.

Conflict situations in a family depend on many – sometimes integrated – factors that should be considered in the context of each of the conflict-involved person. These situations are often accompanied by negative emotions, which are revealed in the form of crying, shouting, aggression, and – in the case of young people – also by means of manifesting dif-

ferent forms of anti-social behavior, e.g. reaching for alcohol, truancy, or unconventional, atypical sexual behavior. Due to the complexity, diversity and multidimensionality of the factors leading to conflicts between young people and their parents/guardians, the presented research investigated the significance of correlations between these variables, abandoning the analysis of conflict types (they remain the subject of another research project), what was the principal aim of the research analyses presented in the text.

1. Research Methodology

The aim of the study was to find out whether conflicts with parents/guardians determine the manifestations of antisocial behavior of young people. The study analyzed the significance of the correlation between conflicts of young people with their parents/guardians, and their antisocial behaviors (such as alcohol consumption, truancy, physical aggression, verbal aggression and atypical sexual behavior). Referring to the indicated aim, the following research problems were posed:

1. *Can conflicts with parents/guardians experienced by young people determine their antisocial behavior?*
2. *What is the significance of the correlation of the conflicts between young people and their parents/guardians on the one hand and such antisocial behaviors as alcohol consumption, truancy, physical aggression, verbal aggression and sexual behavior, on the other?*

The study uses the author's questionnaire addressed to parents and the scale of social maladjustment developed by L. Pytka (2005) addressed to young people. The survey questionnaire consisted of 37 questions about getting to know the family of the respondents and the factors inherent in the family, which may determine the manifestations of anti-social behavior of young people. The scale of Pytka's social maladjustment, addressed to young people, consisted of six parts (subscales): 1) family maladjustment (FM), 2) peer/peer maladjustment (PPM), 3) school maladjustment (SM), 4) antisocial behavior (AB), 5) accumulation of adverse biological factors (BF), 6) accumulation of adverse socio-cultural factors (SCF). The study used subscale four related to antisocial behavior displayed by adolescents (AB). This subscale refers to such behaviors as: lies, verbal and physical aggression, excessive alcohol drinking (alcoholization), truancy, atypical sexual behavior, escaping from home, thefts, self-aggression, disclosed crime. The significance of the correlation was examined between the conflict of young people with parents/guardians and the following variables: drinking alcohol, truancy, verbal and physical aggression, sexual behavior. These are the variables that obtained the highest percentage rate in the study. For statistical analysis, the IBM SPSS statistical program was used. The correlation coefficient was interpreted according to Guilford (Dutkiewicz, 2000, p. 127). The empirical material presented in the publication constitutes a small part of the research – under my supervision – conducted as part of a scientific seminar.

The subject of the study were the issues related to the antisocial behavior of adolescents (alcohol consumption, truancy, physical aggression, verbal aggression and sexual behavior) manifested as a result of conflicts with their parents/guardians).

150 people participated in the study. The sample selection was random. There were 75 students of Masovian secondary schools aged 13-18, as well as the same number (i.e. 75) of their parents (they were in the age range 36-65). All our respondents were informed about the purpose of the research; they were assured about their anonymity; finally, all of them gave their free (oral) consent to participate in the study. The survey was conducted in 2018.

2. Research results and discussion

The analysis of the conducted research showed that conflicts with parents are experienced by 84.6% of the surveyed youth, of which 23% declared that the conflicts occur very often. On the other hand, the parents' most-shown antisocial behaviors included: drinking alcohol, truancy, verbal aggression, physical aggression, and atypical sexual behavior. Chart 1 below presents a detailed distribution of percentages.

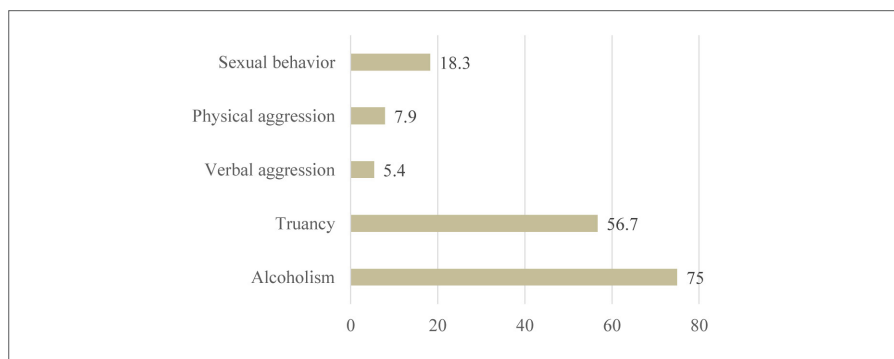


Chart 1. *The forms of presented antisocial behaviour of the youth in the opinion of their parents*

Source: *own elaboration based on own research results*

Statistical analysis showed that the correlation between conflicts with parents/guardians and alcohol consumption by adolescents was 0.157. This is a weak positive correlation, which means that conflicts with parents/guardians slightly increase the likelihood of young people reaching for alcohol. Research indicates, however, that alcohol is the psychoactive substance most often used by adolescents (De Looze et al. 2015, pp. 69-72). Young people use alcohol for various reasons and in different situations. The cited researchers point to genetic risk factors (Velleman & Templeton, 2007, s. 25-30; Gromadecka-Sutkiewicz, Dziwak, & Kłos, 2008, pp. 293-296; Cloninger, et al., 1981, pp.

861-868; Hrubec & Omenn, 1981, pp. 207-215). Children of alcoholics, significantly more often than children of non-alcoholics, start drinking at the time of adolescence (Grzegorzewska & Cierpiałkowska, 2015, pp. 221-233; Chassin, et al., 1991, pp. 449-463) and become of them become addicted (Cotton, 1979, pp. 89-116). They also point to psychosocial risk factors, among which parents, family and peers can determine alcohol consumption by young people. Incorrect behavior and attitudes of parents related to alcohol drinking correlate positively with the start and continuation of drinking by young people (Okulicz-Kozaryn & Borucka & Raduj 2014, pp. 99-108; Kandel & Andrews, 1987, pp. 319-342). During adolescence, one more important factor associated with the family is also the poor relationship with parents, which leads to many conflicts between the adolescents and their parents; these, in turn, can contribute to reaching for alcohol by young people (Sadowska-Mazuryk, Tomczuk-Ismer, Jakubczyk, Wojnar, 2013, pp. 166-185; Przybysz-Zaremba, 2018, pp. 91-105). Lack of support and control from parents, as well as poor communication in the family are significantly associated with the use of alcohol by young people and the frequency of drinking it (Conger, et al., 1994, pp. 55-86). Also, harsh, inconsistent discipline, and hostile, or rejecting attitudes towards children are important predictors of drinking and alcohol problems in adolescent youth (Conger, et al., 1994, pp. 55-86).

Truancy was another of the variables analyzed by the research author. The correlation between conflicts with parents/guardians and truancy of young people was at the level of 0.251 – it is low. This relationship is clear, but small, which indicates that the occurrence of conflicts between young people and their parents/guardians increases the likelihood of occurrence of this segment of risky behavior of young people (i.e. truancy). Research in this area indicates that the negative impacts of the family environment, including conflicts with parents, may contribute to school absenteeism (Marynowicz-Hetka, 1987). According to the researchers, truancy can be treated by young people as compensation for poor family conditions and poor interpersonal relationships. Compensating weights can be a reaction to incorrect parental attitudes, e.g. excessive requirements (March, 2013, pp. 103-120; Romanowska-Tołłoczko, 2012, p. 50; Łobocki, 1989, p. 47).

Statistical analysis showed that the correlation between conflicts with parents/guardians and atypical sexual behavior manifested by young people was 0.161, is weak positive, and therefore almost insignificant. This means that the increase in the value of the variable x – conflicts with parents/guardians, slightly increases the value of the variable y – atypical sexual behavior. Researchers indicate that more often various forms of atypical sexual behavior are demonstrated by young people from reconstructed and incomplete families rather than from the families with both biological parents; statistically significant differences concern only boys (Woynarowska, pp. 193-199). Therefore, the statistical analysis of empirical material did not show any significance between the variables studied. Atypical sexual behavior of young people is manifested under the influence of various factors, among which the Internet is becoming relevant today. Using this medium, young people make contacts with people from all over the world, often without realizing that on the other side of the monitor there may be a person who wants to use them. A new phenomenon among young people is sexting, consisting of sending undecided photos or short video

clips of erotic content to another person. Usually, such materials are sent via a mobile phone (MMS service) and the Internet (email) (Ronatowicz, 2014, p. 135). Researchers indicate that adolescents with experience of sexting are four to seven times more likely to engage in various forms of atypical sexual behavior compared to these adolescents, who have never experienced the transmission of nude photos (Houck et al. 2014). The Internet Watch Foundation (2012) research report shows that 88% of teenagers' erotic photos taken are copied (stolen) so as to place them on pornographic websites.

The variables of physical and verbal aggression were also subjected to statistical analysis. The correlation between conflicts with parents/guardians and physical aggression manifested by young people was at the level of 0.266, whereas parents/guardians related conflicts and verbal aggression – at the level of 0.234. This means that the relationship for these variables is clear but small. At the same time, these data indicate that an increase in one variable x – conflicts with parents/guardians causes an increase in the other variable y – verbal aggression/physical aggression. Thus, the increase in conflicts of young people with parents/ guardians increases the likelihood of verbal or physical aggression in the behavior of young people. Numerous instances of the research (e.g. Epstein, Hill, Bailey, & Hawkins, 2013, 1151-1164; Elliott, Carey, & Bonafide, 2012, pp. 1774-1785; Cudak, 2011, pp. 7-10; Przybysz-Zaremba, 2014, pp. 229-239; Chęć, Potemkowski et al., 2016, s. 19-28; Bebes et al., 2015, pp. 882-890 et al.) indicate that a family in which there come up various conflicts between parent – parent and/or parents – young people (children) adversely affects the behavior of children and/or young people. Longitudinal studies (Avci & Gucray, 2010, pp. 65-76) confirm that all kinds of conflicts in the family in which there occurs aggressive (violent) behavior between family members have a six-fold greater impact on the aggressive behavior of boys and fourfold on the aggressive behavior of girls. Aggressive behavior of young people can sometimes have the nature of violent aggression directed not only towards parents, but also male/female colleagues, acquaintances, or other adults.

Conclusions

The current state of research in the field of risky (anti-social) behavior undertaken by young people indicates that the family is one of the most important environments affecting children and young people. There are many different factors in it, including shortages and/or deficiencies of parenting (i.e. educational) skills; inappropriate attitudes towards the use of disciplinary measures; disturbed family relationships (often observed in vulgar domestic rows), repeated psychological and/or physical violence between parents; difficult economic situation of the family resulting from experiencing unemployment, poor living conditions or classical poverty; excessive preoccupation of parents with work, which implies all kinds of neglect in relation to raising children (young people). These neglects are externalized and can be spotted in, among others the educational difficulties of adolescents (children); their aggressive (or even violent) behavior; various forms of risky behavior (children and adolescents who do not have supervision and control on the part of their parents very early reach for various types of stimulants, drugs, afterburners, etc.); in

the manifestations of social maladjustment, which, as a consequence, often leads to social derailment (Przybysz-Zaremba, 2015a, pp. 243-260). These (and many other) improper forms of behavior of young people are revealed as a result of the impact of various, integrated and multiform factors, related to the family. In the conducted research, only one of the selected factors was analyzed, which were youth conflicts with parents/guardians.

The following conclusions follow from the research:

- conflicts with parents are experienced by $\frac{3}{4}$ of the surveyed youth, of which $\frac{1}{4}$ indicate that they occur quite often;
- in the parents' opinion, antisocial behaviors, most often manifested by young people, included: drinking alcohol, truancy, verbal aggression, physical aggression, atypical sexual behavior (unconventional);
- conflicts between young people and their parents/guardians constituted selected antisocial behaviors they showed. The significance of the correlation was found between: conflicts and such anti-social behavior as: verbal and physical aggression and truancy. For these variables, the correlation is small, but distinct.
- no significance of correlation was found between conflicts of young people with parents/ guardians and drinking alcoholic beverages on the one hand and performance of (atypical) unconventional forms of sexual behavior by the young people on the other.

The presented research results confirm previous studies showing that the family performs the key functions in the education of children and adolescents. It is when various problems begin to appear in it, or different conflicts tend to arise, then the behavior of children and adolescents begins to take the form of antisocial behavior. These can be some problems in school education, or truancy, recognized as the first symptoms threatening social maladjustment, which over time transform into more and more dangerous forms of anti-social behavior, e.g. aggressive behavior, excessive alcohol consumption and/or use of other psychoactive drugs, or even undertaking different unconventional forms of abusive sexual behavior. In the situation the first symptoms of adolescent anti-social behavior can be spotted, it is recommended that the school undertake appropriate diagnostic measures in this direction. The school authorities got to learn about the causes and conditions the adolescents have found themselves to be and – in cooperation with specialists (psychologists, pedagogues and/or others) took actions to eliminate these behaviors. It is also important to establish some forms of co-operation with the families of such adolescents and agree on joint assistance/support activities, as it is always a „healthy” and well-functioning family which is the best environment for the development and upbringing of children and youth.

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CONFLICTS WITH PARENTS AS A FACTOR TRIGGERING ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOR OF YOUNG PEOPLE - BASED ON RESEARCH CONDUCTED AMONG POLISH HIGH SCHOOL YOUTH AND THEIR PARENTS

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Summary

The text discusses the issue of conflicts that occur between young people and their parents. The study aimed to investigate whether many conflicts that occur between young people and their parents (guardians) can be recognized as the manifestations of youth's anti-social behavior. What was mostly focused upon was the significance of the correlation between conflicts of young people with parents/guardians and the following antisocial behaviors manifested by young people: alcohol consumption, truancy, physical aggression, verbal aggression and in appropriate sexual behavior. The study used the modified version of the questionnaire addressed to parents and the scale of social maladjustment, originally developed by Lesław Pytko (2005) and addressed to young people. This modified by us version of the questionnaire consisted of 37 questions that concerned both getting to know the family of the respondents and the principal factors inherent in the family, any of which might be able to determine the manifestations of antisocial behavior of young people. At the same time, the scale of Pytko's social maladjustment that addressed to young people consisted of six parts (subscales) only. The study used Subscale Four related to antisocial behavior displayed by adolescents (AB). For statistical analysis, the IBM SPSS statistical program was used. 150 people participated in the study. The sample selection was random. The research participants were 75 students of various Masovian secondary schools (the age range was 13-18) as well as the same number of their parents (the age range was 36-65). The study analyzes have shown that 84.6% of young people experience conflicts with their parents, of which 23% declared that such conflicts occur very often. In the opinion of the researched parents, the most common antisocial behaviors of the youth were: drinking alcohol (75%), truancy (56.7%), verbal aggression (5.4%), physical aggression (7.9%), and inappropriate sexual behavior (18.3%). Statistical analysis showed that conflicts with parents/guardians determine the selected forms of antisocial behavior of young people. The significance of the correlation was found for truancy, verbal and physical aggression. On the other hand, conflicts with parents/guardians slightly increase the likelihood of young people reaching for alcohol and/or unconventional forms of sexual behavior. Although not all the analyzed variables confirmed the significance of the correlation, (one has to include – apart from the conflicts – also other deficiencies and/or inappropriate forms of parenting (educational) skills, such as: improper attitudes towards the use of disciplinary measures; disturbed family relationships, problem alcoholism, lack of work etc.), it has to be concluded that the family as well as various other

factors related to it that influence different forms of behaviors of children and young people determine many (anti-social) forms of functioning of both sides of the research.

Keywords: *antisocial behavior (physical aggression, verbal aggression, alcohol consumption, truancy and atypical forms of sexual behavior), conflicts family.*

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