The Development of Youth Crime in the Czech Republic

Daniela Květenská a*

a Institute of Social Work, University of Hradec Králové, Rokitanského 62, Hradec Králové 500 03, Czech Republic

Abstract

The paper deals with the delinquency of children and young people, looks into the change of the structure of the criminal activities of children and young people over the past ten years. It especially focuses on the violent criminal activities of children and young people. The paper presents options of methods of working with child abusers and their families.

Keywords: juvenile delinquents; remedial school functioning

1. Introduction

The school provides education to children and also forms their development, standards, and opinions. Children come from the family environment to a different environment where they are brought face to face with the world beyond their family. Giddens (2001) even mentions the opinion, which says that the main aim of the school is the supervision of children, the school encourages passive consumption and that the hidden message to the child says that his role in life is “...to know your place and sit still...”. We are not questioning the positive educational significance of the school. The truth is that the children in the school are being shaped by teachers, who are also educators, as well as its peers. Teachers should be aware of this role and try to lead the children to pro-social behavior. Teachers should know the registered trend in the development of the children delinquency so they are able to preventively act in the timely manner. Also, the influence of the school on the family in the broader context is important.

Some display of delinquent behavior stems from the symptoms of a psychopathological disorder. Gerrig and Zimbardo (2002) state, that when it comes to the development of a psychopathological behavior it is always

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +420-493-331-545.
E-mail address: daniela.kvetenska@uhk.cz
necessary to assess the socio-cultural context. The same holds true for the development of social pathology, each country has different rules, different laws, and different criteria for the assessment of delinquent behavior. For example, it is not possible to evaluate the degree of pathology in the society according to the seemingly growing aggression. Gerrig and Zimbardo (2002, p. 571) define aggression as a behavior that causes psychological or physical harm to another individual. However, human aggression is important from an evolutionary standpoint.

We can therefore evaluate the breaking of the rules that the society has established by its laws. The paper is focused on the development of young people in the Czech Republic over the past ten years. It monitors the changing of the structure of criminal activity, and what delinquent behavior threatens the children the most.

2. Types of Crime

According to Siegel and Senna (1995), the delinquency is defined as illegal activity, including violent, property and drug-related crime. We are going to focus on the mentioned categories, and also assign the morality criminal activities. If we talk about the overall criminal activities, or overall criminality, then other major categories of criminal activities are also included, such as crimes of an economic nature (tax evasion, fraud, etc.).

Violent crime is based on how the offence is carried out and includes those offences whose major characteristic is damage, destruction of the target object of a negotiation. These are crimes against health and life: e.g. the crime of murder, bodily harm, robbery, etc. (Kuchta, Válková, 2005; The Criminal Code..., www.zakony.centrum.cz)

Property crime, the most common form of which are theft and embezzlement, represents the vast majority of overall criminality in a number of countries in the recent years. Thus, it can be said that the development of the property offences is being largely predisposed by the overall criminality development (Novotný, Zapletal, 2001).

Some criminological schools use the term sexual offenses; however, the most used is the broader concept of vice crime. The category of sexual crime therefore includes all human behaviors that are not acceptable by the society. However, it is not criminological equivalent to the psychopathological concept of sexual deviance. Not all sexual deviations are sanctioned by the criminal law and not all sexual deviants violate the codified social standards with their sexual behavior. The opposite claim also applies, that not all sexual offences are committed by sexual deviants. So the sexual crime can be closely defined as a class of crimes motivated by sexual need. (Kuchta, Válková, 2005)

Drug-related crime involves the illicit production and distribution of narcotic and psychotropic substances and poisons.

3. Research questions

How has the criminality of children under 18 years of age developed in the Czech Republic over the past ten years? Is the violent crime committed against children growing?

4. Method

4.1. Instruments

Analysis of crime statistics of the Czech Republic (2003 - 2013) was used. The acts committed within the property, vice, drug-related and violent crimes of children under 15 years of age were compared with the crimes of children over 15 years of age and the adult criminality. The age categories of children under 15 years of age and children from 15 to 18 years of age are monitored. The limit of 15 years of age is set for the criminal liability in the Czech Republic, 18 years of age is the age-limit of the legal full age - adulthood. Data were obtained from the statistical surveys of the Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic; these data are published for each year on the website of the Ministry. Data on the drug-related crime in the years 2010 - 2013 failed to be obtained.
4.2. Research sample

The statistical data published by the Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic for the years 2003 – 2013 were compared. The population of the Czech Republic was 10,517,408 at the 31st of March 2014, of which were 1,560,000 children under 15 years of age. The population of children under 15 years of age constitutes about 15% of the total population. The number of persons between 15 and 18 years of age is not cited. (Population, www.čsu.cz)

4.3. Procedure

The categories that are going to be compared were established. Selected categories of crime: violent crime, property crime, vice crime, drug-related crime and overall crime.

5. Results

Children of school age are not innocent – it is always possible to find a child among them who commits a crime. The article describes how the juvenile crime transformed over the past ten years in the Czech Republic. The paper emphasizes the important information for teachers – how the crime is developing and what its trends are.

Table 1: Crime of children under 15 years of age in 2003 - 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Violent crime</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>37.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property crime</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>90.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice crime</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug-related crime</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall crime</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>174.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| The proportion of crime of children of 15-18 years of age on overall crime in % |
|-------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
|                               | 0.97    | 0.58    | 0.63    | 0.71    | 0.68    | 0.80    | 0.70    | 0.28    | 0.38    | 0.33    | 0.40    | 0.58    |

From the above Table no. 1, it is evident that the crime of children under 15 years of age has a generally declining trend. The violent crime and the property crime significantly decreased compared to the year 2003. It can be said that the vice crime and the drug-related crime do not change that much in these categories and have similar, very low numbers. Children under 15 years of age commit vice and drug-related offenses in exceptional circumstances. Overall crime of children under 15 years of age declined substantially after the year 2010, this downward trend can be attributed to the recodification of the Criminal Code, which occurred in that year. The proportion of offences committed by children under 15 years of age on the overall crime significantly decreased, the
difference is 0.57% between years 2003 (0.97%) and 2013 (0.40%). After the year 2010, this proportion since its lows (0.28%) has again a slightly upward trend. Violent, property and overall crime show decline when compared to the average value over the total monitored period. The proportion of offences committed by children under 15 years of age does not exceed 1% of the total number of offences committed by children and adults together. The highest proportion of the overall crime over the monitored period was recorded in the year 2003 (0.97%) and the lowest in 2010 (0.28%).

In Table no. 2, where the crime of children over 15 years of age is shown, we can see that the violent crime has declined since the year 2003 (103 acts) compared to the year 2013 (35 acts) of 68 acts. Coincidently, it is the highest and the lowest value of the monitored acts of violent crime. Property crime of the children over 15 years of age has the highest frequency in the year 2003 (176 acts) and the lowest in 2010 (40 acts). In 2010, the Criminal Code was recodified, and there is only a slight increase in all the categories of types of crime from that year. Vice crime and drug-related crime had again low value and there are not evident any bigger fluctuations. A significant change can be noticed in the decrease of the overall crime committed by the children older than 15 years of age. Since 2003 (739 acts) until 2013 (222 acts) the number of offences committed by the children over 15 years of age decreased by 517 acts, almost by 70%. Just as interesting is the decline in the proportion of children over 15 years of age in the overall crime. In 2003, this share mounted to 2.48%, in 2013 it is only 0.78%.

Table 2: Crime of children from 15 to 18 years of age in 2003 - 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Violent crime</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>74,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property crime</td>
<td>454</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>307</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>347</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice crime</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14,1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug-related crime</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall crime</td>
<td>739</td>
<td>389</td>
<td>513</td>
<td>476</td>
<td>525</td>
<td>772</td>
<td>712</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>431</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>488,6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comparing the crime of children under 15 years of age and the crime of children from 15 to 18 years of age, we find out that the monitored values exhibit a similar tendency. However, the acts committed by children over 15 years of age show higher frequency in all of the monitored categories of crime. The criminality of children over 15 years of age show higher average values. In general, the statistics show a decline in the crime of children under 15 years of age, as well as the crime of children over 15 years of age, as well as crime of adults.
6. Discussion

Statistics from the past ten years show a significant decrease in violent crime committed by children under and over 15 years of age. We can as well conclude that property crime committed by children under and over 15 years of age also decreased in the last ten years. There is also a significant decline in the overall crime committed by children under and over 15 years of age. It seems that the tendency of decline is the same for both categories, the values of the past years significantly differ from the average of the past ten years. The same for both age categories remains the level (line) of vice and drug-related crime, this crime does not show neither downward nor an upward trend.

Teachers in the Czech Republic, however, complain about the growing aggression among pupils. But the statistics do not confirm this trend. How to explain this fact? It is possible that the pathological behavior that is growing among students is not legally actionable. In contrast, recodification of the Criminal Code brought about evident decline of statistically reported crime. Therefore we cannot ignore even the less severe pathological behavior, for example bullying, but it does not have a characters of the offence. This behavior is best perceived by the teachers, particularly in classrooms where they teach in the long term.

A statistical drop in crime can be explained in various ways. One of them is that the statistics of the crime corresponds with the state of the police, confidence in the police or the codification of the criminal law (as was showed in the above evaluated data). We can also talk about the ability of feedback regulation of the society, the ability of some kind of a homeostasis of the society or as described by Maturana (in Ludewig, 2005) homeodynamics. Maturana defines this ability for living organisms; however, it is a subject of discussion, whether the ability of homeostasis cannot – in exaggerated sense – relate to the entire society. This theory is also close to the commonly known Einstein’s theory of equilibrium in the universe. Cannot the statistical tendencies of return to the standard in data relating to the crime be also considered as an effort to maintain the “equilibrium state”? It would mean that the statement in the sense of deterioration of the moral state of the society is only emotional and accompanies mankind since time immemorial. This fact requires further empirical validation.

In practice, it has proven that there is a need of a closer multidisciplinary cooperation in addressing a specific cases which were looked into by more subjects at once (for example, the organ of the socio-legal protection, family, school, low-threshold facilities for children and youth). The effort for various multidisciplinary co operations arose from this need, such as multidisciplinary teams, forms of case managements, case conferences or family rehabilitation. Multidisciplinary team is according to Matoušek et al. (2005) based on the idea of cooperation between specialists and coordination of procedure. It is not a hierarchical system; representatives of individual professions bring specific skills to the team and collaborate with other institutions and also persons belonging to the client’s social network. Family and school should be included in the multidisciplinary cooperation.

7. Conclusion

As the society changes, the children’ crime changes too. The statistics show a decrease in the crime committed by children under 15 years of age, crime committed by children over 15 years of age and also the overall crime, yet we can not underestimate the inappropriate behavior, which can culminate in a offense. Teachers may indicate such behavior and participate in the multidisciplinary team within the solving, in cooperation with the family, authority of the social and legal protection and other appropriate institutions. Children spend a significant part of the day at school. School is a place where they can find security and also threats. Teachers often know the so-called dark faces of children better than their parents. The important thing is that this participation of a person, who knows and sees the delinquent child every day, will always be in favour of the child. Teachers can significantly contribute to the prevention, timely detection and social rehabilitation of the child jeopardized by his own misbehaviour.
Acknowledgements

The research study was supported by the European Social Fund grant number CZ.1.07/2.3.00/20.0209 Development and Support of Multidisciplinary Scientific Research Team for the Study of Contemporary Family at UHK.

References


Obyvatelstvo. [Cit. 5. 8. 2014]. Dostupný také z WWW: http://www.czso.cz/csu/redakce.nsf/i/obyvatelstvo_lide
