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CHILD NEGLIGENCE AND CRIMINAL ONSET IN EX-PRISONERS' EARLY LIFE STORIES

Abstract. Sociological analyzes of the etiology of criminal behavior are distinguished by a number of criminogenic factors, among which a particular importance is attributed to the environmental context of the individual's functioning. The initiation of criminal activity frequently takes place in the period of early youth. Hence, special attention is paid to individual's relations in socializing environments. At the same time, studies and analyzes of biographies of criminals indicate that a significant part of offenders were raised in communities experiencing deep marginalization in many important aspects of functioning in social life, thus providing further evidence for the long-recognized connections of social exclusion and crime processes. The aim of the article is to characterize the environmental conditions of entering the path of conflict with the law in the biographies of criminals. The author refers to empirical material collected in the course of his own research – narrative interviews with convicts and former prisoners.

Keywords: criminal onset, ex-prisoners, neglected childhood, social exclusion, biographical method, narrative interview.

1. Introduction

The relation between crime and social exclusion is undisputed in contemporary criminology (see Bradley 2005). It is widely recognized that these phenomena remain in a strong mutual relationship. Both, the experience of multidimensional marginalization may increase the risk of the individual getting involved in criminal activity, as well as violation of criminal law may lead to one's exclusion from the society *via* imprisonment (Reiman 2001; 1999; see also Wacquant 2009a; 2009b). Due to a relatively high exposure to criminogenic factors, the marginalized communities, children and adolescents experiencing negligence in particular are considered groups of high risk in this context (Farrington 2010a; 2005).

The sociological category of "negligence" applies to situations of failure to fulfill obligations towards a protégé in relationship of dependence of one person to

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another (Nóżka 2012: 60–61). This phenomenon may refer to many dimensions of social life of an individual: relational, economic, psychological, emotional, biological. A unique social group in this context are children, whose neglect is well recognized both in sociology and criminology. This is a particularly serious problem, noticed not only by representatives of the science, but also by the creators of strategies and programs in the field of social policy, on national and international level. Children and adolescents as a subject of neglect and related consequences are an exceptional group for several reasons. First of all, as a category constituting the future shape of societies, youth are a subject of special social sensitivity when manifestations of antisocial behavior are observed (Hołyst 2009: 435). Hence, situations that pose a risk of young people *drifting away* (Matza 1964) from the conformist society tend to be interpreted as particularly dangerous not only for themselves, but also for the contemporary and future social order. Secondly, the barriers concerning children's implementation of needs, social roles and participation in social life are related to their position in a dependency relationship (i.e. deficits of care and upbringing), and not considered as a consequence of their life choices and attitudes. As "dependent" individuals, children and adolescents do not usually have their own resources, with help of which they could improve their living conditions singlehandedly (see Nóżka 2012: 60–65). The situation of neglect usually requires external support. Therefore, the fight against the problem of neglected childhood is thus perceived as both a moral obligation of societies and an investment in children's future well-being (Warzywoda-Kruszyńska 2012: 7).

The literature on the subject of childhood negligence indicates that there is a strong relationship between the phenomenon and etiology of criminal behavior. As numerous studies on this subject show, young delinquents are disproportionately often raised in families with a wide span of experience of deprivation (see e.g. Farrington 2010a; Glaze, Maruschak 2008; Social Exclusion Unit 2002; Maxfield, Widom 1996; Brownfield, Sorenson 1994; West, Farrington 1973; Hirschi 1969). In this context, the researchers are particularly concerned with social, economic and cultural deficits observed in childhood and youth. Those tend to constitute single barriers or create specific barriers (*systemic obstacles*) (Borzycki, Baldry 2003: 2), thus limiting the participatory possibilities of the individual in various dimensions of social life. Most Polish researchers attest to this by indicating a wide range of problems identified in the environment of parental relations of young delinquents. Those, in general, attribute to functional disorders of the family and unfavorable upbringing atmosphere: families with history of alcohol or drug addiction, criminal history, physical, mental or sexual abuse (e.g. Szymańska 2003; Balińska 1986; Żabczyńska 1974). The list of familial criminogenic factors is, however, much longer. It includes, among others, such circumstances as: intergenerational poverty, parental unemployment, low level of parents' education, lack of patterns in implementation of social roles or – more broadly – shortages

or disturbances of socialization content (see Kiliszek 2013; Nowak, Wysocka 2001: 122).

The article discusses familial circumstances that contribute to initiation of individual criminal careers, provided on the example of former prisoners' biographical experiences. The presented analyzes also discuss the role that, eventually, peer groups play in this process, when negligence encourages children and adolescents to look for personal patterns outside their families. The analyzes provided are based on author's own research.

2. Methodological note

Factors contributing to criminal activity can be divided into two groups in the most general way: internal (*endogenous*), which explanation is dealt with by biological and psychological analyzes, and external (*exogenous*), which are of particular interest to sociology and sociologically oriented criminology. In this study, it was decided to omit the discussion of biological factors as the author's own research methodology does not provide the possibility of detailed analysis of these conditions. The focus was therefore turned to environmental factors.

The purpose of the undertaken analyzes was to indicate the links between neglect of children in the family environment and criminal onset. The empirical basis are 36 biographical interviews¹ conducted by the author in the years 2011–2015 as part of the research project *Freedom – an analysis of life strategies and life stories of people leaving prisons. Conditions and barriers to social readaptation* (grant under the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education, targeted subsidy for young scientists). The research group consisted of 28 male former prisoners and 8 convicted males imprisoned at the time of participation in the study. According to the assumptions made at the stage of conceptualizing the research, the group was very diverse in terms of the age of the respondents (from 22 to 60 years), profile of their criminal activity, number of sentences served in prison (from 1 to 7 times), length of individual sentences, total time spent in prison (from 10 months to 27 years) and the type of facilities in which they were imprisoned.

In the study it was decided to use "biography as a means", i.e. using the information obtained via biographical interviews to answer the sociological questions raised (Helling 1990: 16). This methodological approach was popularized in sociology by Daniel Bertaux, who claims that analysis of biographies of people of similar social origin provides a "relatively objective" image of structures and processes that shape one's biography (1997, cited in:

¹ At the stage of conceptualizing the research procedure, narrative interviews were planned. In almost half of the narrative cases, however, the researcher was not able to get – they were then biographical and based on the questions asked by the researcher or additional questions.

Kaźmierska 2012: 117). At the stage of conceptualization of the study it was assumed that spontaneous narratives will be used, according to the methodology of Fritz Schütze (2012). However, the specifics of the interviewees required some modification of the biographical approach in the study as constructing a spontaneous narrative caused most of them much difficulties. Despite the difficulties in obtaining the narrative, the formula for initiating narrative interviews had been preserved. At the beginning of each conversation the research goal was presented. Next, the essence of the narrative interview was explained, the interviewees were informed that their anonymity will be preserved, and after switching on the recorder, respondents were asked to tell the story of their life. Therefore, 17 narrative interviews were obtained during the research. Remaining 19 interviews carried out were supported by the researcher's questions.

Criminal onset is understood by the author as a combination of circumstances leading to the commission of the first crime or crimes and followed by identity transformation towards persisting in crime. In most of the analyzed biographies, these events took place in childhood or early youth of the respondents², most notably between ages of 12 through 17. Criminal onset description includes the environmental context of interlocutors childhood, especially their family environment, experienced difficulties and barriers occurring in various fields of their social lives. In the presented analyzes, particular attention was given to deficits in the material, relational and normative sphere, i.e. at the level of internalized patterns of behavior, available personal models and more broadly, the environmental axionormative system.

3. Description of the family of origin environment

While the narrative about the conditions of individual's criminal onset can to some extent be seen as a form of rationalizing his attitudes and behaviors (see Sykes, Matza 1957; see also Williams 2003: 117, cited in: Killengrey 2009: 7), the images of the social environment emerging from the narratives are sufficiently coherent. Therefore a certain regularity can be drawn (Seale 1999: 11). The vast majority of respondents came from environments with cumulative marginalizing factors, known from the literature on the subject and identified as criminogenic.

A characteristic feature of most ex-prisoners' narratives is an image of the family of origin as an environment, which inner dynamics was, for various reasons, somehow disturbed. A model example in this dimension are, in particular, biographies of the respondents who were raised in broken families, with at least

² Some of the interlocutors began their criminal career as adults. Their criminal onset was particularly associated with failures in the implementation of adult social roles, e.g. parting with a life partner or divorce, destabilization of the professional situation or deepening addiction "pushing" these roles to the background.

one of the parents not permanently participating in child's upbringing. In almost all cases, the missing parent was the father. The reason for lack of his presence in family life was most often separation or divorce due to his destructive lifestyle e.g. alcohol abuse, domestic violence, unfaithfulness, e.g.:

He was an alcoholic and he is an alcoholic... He tormented my mother and me all the time and eventually she chased him out of the house [...] I was 12 years old then, my father used to beat me up my whole childhood [...] he's somewhere out there, but I don't keep in touch with him and I don't want to [Przemek/25].

My father left me when I had a year and eight months. He was not an alcoholic. Besides, there were no alcoholics in my family. However, he was a womanizer. Well, it was has treasons that drove mom to throw him out. After that she was alone. She raised me by herself [Jan/54].

Those of the respondents who originated from broken families were most often brought up by single mothers. Fathers appear in their narratives as strictly negative figures, and form an anti-model to relate to both in early and adult lives of the interlocutors.

In the analyzed biographies, the departure of the father figure is perceived as a multi-dimensional turning point. Therefore, it plays a particularly important role in narrators' description of events leading up to the criminal onset. One of the dimensions, most noticeable of this event, is the causation financial problems for the family. Alongside direct economic impact on the household, also indirect problems appear, one of them being the necessity to redistribute roles of individual members among the household. Usually, mothers took on the whole burden of gaining financial resources, e.g. by obtaining additional jobs or working afterhours (*Mama sacrificed and spent all her life to raise us [Jakub/29]*). On the other hand, children took over the roles of household watchmen. If they had siblings, the older ones took over the care of the younger ones: (*I took care of my younger brother and the way I had always followed my dad, he always followed me [Jacek/36]*). If the respondents were the only children, they took care of themselves instead of being supervised: (*I did not have any control as such and no one told me that I should be at home at any particular time... I had an absolute freedom [Przemek/25]*). While in the second variant mentioned above, the narratives concerning freedom were usually rather enthusiastic, both patterns sooner or later reveal signs of a prematurely interrupted childhood. Reorganization of family life meant the necessity of premature entry into adulthood and fulfilling roles of adults. Roles that young people were not always able to cope with due to excessive pressure or responsibility, as one of narrators describes:

I couldn't cope with the fact that my father left, he left me, my mother, my brother, right? It seems to me that I wanted to quickly grow up, right? Replace my father at home, because I was "the man" in family, the older brother [Radek/31].

Another reason for problems with adapting to difficult economic situation appears to be their lack of involvement in other areas of life, characteristic of

young people, most importantly education. Most of the narratives barely touch the subject of school life and educational career. This feature suggests that education was of little importance compared to other duties or informal activities. The research material reveals that in school environment was often devalued and they usually ceased their educational careers at the early stages, e.g.:

I submitted my application for high school and I was accepted. But it turned out that no! My grandma had a friend in a car technical school, she said: "You have to have a profession first, you have to know how to earn money. You can study later and do whatever you want, but first you must have a profession and go to work" [Stanisław/51].

Although it should be mentioned that the cases of interrupting or changing education history due to a bad financial situation of the family were a form of counteracting *ad hoc*, long term effects of low level of education perpetuated low material status in intergenerational transmission (see e.g. Rek-Woźniak 2016; Warzywoda-Kruszyńska, Golczyńska-Grondas 2010; Warzywoda-Kruszyńska et al. 2005).

Apart from financial situation of the family, the second important aspect of upbringing negligence in broken families was the deficit of mature role models. However, it should be noted that while the mothers figures of the interviewed men are usually assessed in their narratives as very positive or extremely idealized, their fathers are usually presented in a completely different, negative light. Most of their mothers after breakup of the relationship did not enter into new long-term partnerships, e.g.: *Mama, she's a woman of golden heart. She raised me alone, because my father left, he just drank vodka and was a disgrace, so she divorced him and raised us alone* [Krzysztof/35].

For most of the respondents in this group, patterns of male behavior known from their households were associated with the figure of an absent father, usually portrayed as a model of destructive behavior. For those whose mothers did not form romantic relations after the breakup, they were the only man figures met in a family environment. In only two cases this "gap" was filled by a new permanent partner. In both however, the new masculine figure turned out to be another anti-role model. As one of those interviewees states:

When I was 12 years old... mama remarried... a man who seemed very decent, because he did not drink, he had a quite high position at work... But then it turned out that he was a sadist. For many years he tormented me and my mother [Jan/54].

In the analyzed material, the problem of the lack of male patterns or their uniquely negative character is, however, much wider, as it also appears in biographies of many respondents coming from full families. This was signaled both, by those whose childhood was marked by growing up under "care" of fathers who were source of various dysfunctions in family life, as well as those whose fathers were absent from family life due to the preoccupation with other duties, e.g. work. In both variants they are viewed rather as a "negative" of a man

interviewees would like to look up to than as a role model, who would be inspiring and serve as a source of positive references in their youth and adult life.

The narratives concerning masculine role models in family life are therefore distorted, seriously disturbed or completely absent. This feature reveals the crisis of male personal models at the stage of early youth, which was a recurring pattern in most of the analyzed biographies. What is particularly striking in this context is the tendency to reproduce the same scenarios by the narrators in their adult biographies, despite viewing them as destructive.

4. Description of peer and *quasi-peer* groups

Due to the absence of adult masculine role models in the family environment, respondents drew them most often from peer groups. Research and analyzes of juvenile delinquency indicate that family conditions constitute a group of factors with particularly significant potential. John Laub and Robert Sampson (2003; 1993; see also Hirschi 1969) view them as mostly preventive as family has the strongest potential to restrain the individual from criminal activity. This is particularly concerned with the level of informal social control in the family environment. Notably, other researchers indicate lack of intrinsic emotional ties between children and parents as well as *laissez-faire* or *chaotic despotism* parenting styles as especially strong predictors of problems with adapting to social norms (Hołyst 2009: 1071; Błachut et al. 2004: 335–337; Farrington 2010b). The analyzed biographies tend to confirm these assumptions. The inability of family to provide social control triggered narrators to turn away from the family environment towards their peer groups: *I started looking around, well kind of unwillingly, a 13-year-old kid needs a model, some kind of mentor, idol in his life* [Jacek/36].

Peer groups play a complex role in the construction of the narrative. They are simultaneously fulfilling a ludic function (to fill leisure time), fatical function (creating group bonds), status-building (raising the position in the local environment). Within them, the respondents gradually begin to realize their neglected needs: affiliation, safety, respect, self-fulfillment, emotional support, and having masculine role models. On the other hand, affiliation to peer groups means a certain level of identification with their members, and therefore also with their axionormative system, attitudes, opinions, views or interests:

I have never been anything of a thief-kind-a-guy or something like that, but... you know when there are people and you spend much time together, one becomes similar to them, well... kinda automatically... something takes over [Stanisław/54].

Group affiliation shapes the identity of the individual, and with a low degree of family/guardians' social control, the socializing content of the peer group tends

to become dominant (see Sampson, Laub 1993). It is worth underlining that the majority of interviewees' deviant behaviors, and in particular, offences and crimes committed during youth took place in groups or under pressure of other peers. The narratives indicate that interlocutors tie the beginnings of their individual criminal paths to their peer group settings, e.g.:

Generally, I think that all my problems with the law, etc., are largely the merit of friends [...] first cases, first beatings [Przemek/25].

It was a stealing... a short-time car theft, right? [...] there was a party, but no way to go. I said "I know how to drive a car" [...] So I broke into a "mini", stole it and drove everyone to the party. And then got arrested for the first time [Zbigniew/47].

The role of peer groups in the analyzed biographies can be identified as a powerful source of norms and values, particularly perceived by the society as deviant or anti-social. The period of criminal onset of a large majority of the interviewed ex-prisoners coincides with their gradual relegation from their families and a parallel increase of the importance of their peer groups, which seem to take over an educational role in their biographies (see Thrasher 1963: 32–33, cited in: Michel 2016: 367).

Analyzing the way in which the interviewed men construct the narrative over their motivations for entering deviant groups, one can observe that they tend to tie them to their psycho-social needs, implementation of which was not possible in the home environment. The stories about the first offenses or crimes committed within deviant groups were usually accompanied by the motive of "rebellion" or "escape". Those tend to be related to excessive pressure from educational environments or parental expectations, often inadequate to their age, e.g.:

My mother always said: "you are the man at home now 'cause your father is a drunk, so I can only rely on you" [...] and I treated [drug-taking with peers – add. AK] as a kind of escape, from the system, from school, from parents, to absolute freedom, right? [Lukasz/34].

Elsewhere, the respondents entering into a deviant group sought a way of escaping from the negative experience of staying at home and the atmosphere prevailing in it: *Maybe those... my escapes to the worse side of the society were because it was the easiest to escape, but in the end it was my sadistic stepfather that contributed, so I ran away from home [Jan/54].*

Others considered joining the group as a way of finding an emotional counterweight for excessive sense of responsibility or (unjustified) guilt for the difficult situation of their families, e.g.:

I had such a rebellion in me, self-anger that... my dad left me [...] For the first time I did not return home for the night, I approached the group that my father always warned me against. Well, there was some kind of... I rebelled against the whole world, since everything is my fault, let it be that way [Jacek/36].

It is worth emphasizing that the environments described were rather *quasi-peer* groups than peer groups, as they mostly gathered older youth or young adults, who are often presented as an object of specific fascination and a point of reference at early stages of criminal careers (*They were people who were criminals, thieves, drug addicts, but I liked it, I liked it back then, it suited me* [Radek-S5/31]). Older colleagues were also – apart from the aforementioned being the object of admiration for respondents – a source of valuable tips and instructions that would improve the skills necessary to become professional, i.e. specialized criminals, e.g.:

This colleague who was 8 years older than me [...] took me under his wings, he explained a few things to me, taught me this profession. Very good thief. And I owe him a lot of things. Well, I started with "polonaises", slowly, gradually, then better cars, better, better, better technology, better equipment for everything [Radek/31].

Participation in the group, often notorious in the local environment, had an ennobling character in the light of the analyzed narratives. It raised the sense of independence and self-worth, satisfied the need for acceptance and (at least to a certain extent) security, in contradiction to family environment which failed to provide them, e.g.:

I felt good in this company, because no one blamed me, no one said something was my fault, I was even patted on the shoulder "well done, Youngblood", so I felt comfortable, I felt good [Jacek/36].

The ex-prisoners' narratives also indicate a specific role peer groups play in the process of identity construction, in terms of providing expressive personal models: men featuring independence, respect, prowess, insensibility for weakness, sybaritism or nihilism (see also Michel 2016: 368–370; Kacprzak 2012), e.g.:

They were older than me [...] They knew the city. They could make money on everything [BS8-Ryszard/57].

They were older than me and it impressed me so much, I was staying with them, with recidivists, I was getting tattooed, which was cool, because they had respect in the city, and I wanted to be the same [BS2-Krzysztof/35].

The narratives show that the identity construction process is strengthened by confirmation of one's usefulness among the group. The psychosocial gratifications accompanying participation in the group occur in the narratives as particularly powerful components of group impact on the individual. The interviewed men often had their first life successes as teenagers in their peer groups. They gained prestige, new acquaintances, earned their first money through theft, which helped to identify as adults or even view themselves as smarter and better than others, considering the ease of organizing funds:

Back then I considered someone who went to work in the morning as some kind of mentally ill. Why, I say, would you go to work, get all fucked up, earn some pennies, when here I am and once [claps his hands] I make a dub and I have [laughing] your annual salary?! [Krzysztof/35].

Simultaneously, a young individual is empowered in terms of having an impact on his own life situation, therefore gaining sense of strength and control over his local reality (Michel 2016: 367–369).

The first antisocial and criminal behaviors were not always justified by the psychosocial benefits themselves. This way of rationalization is especially characteristic for the respondents who at the time of the interview were recovering from addiction, mostly after several months of therapy. They clearly defined their life goals and recognized their addiction as the main reasons for their life's failures. Most of the respondents, however, defined their motivations in a more prosaic way, pointing directly at e.g. bad financial situation, lack of financial resources or their socio-economic insecurity, for example:

It was hard for all of us. And I... maybe it would not be like it was, but it all originated from the fact that, for example, at school children came well dressed... I was always the one dressed worse [...] our mom couldn't afford some better clothes, and... there was such jealousy... I just wanted to look not like the poor one. I just had to do something to have money, that's what got me started. My first some minor thefts, these were... trips to pocket thefts, it was famous in [city name], at least where we were living [Krzysztof/35].

In this context, individual criminal onset is presented as a form of coping with poverty and striving to raise social status. Offences and crimes committed before reaching the age of 18 were usually met with quite strong reactions from formal institutions: three respondents were expelled from school, four were placed in juvenile social rehabilitation centers, the vast majority found themselves at least once at the police station, some were also arrested, sometimes repeatedly. What is specifically characteristic of the narratives is that at the same time, family milieus tend to be presented as either distancing themselves from one's criminal activity or, in some cases, giving their silent consent or even supporting it. Those cases are further discussed in the following section.

5. Family support towards children's offending

In the light of the narratives, criminal onset is a complex process, which is often presented as an effect of "being raised by the street" due to lack of family interest in child's upbringing. As Sampson and Laub (1993) indicate, the process of criminal onset is conditioned by individual's attachment towards conformist and non-conformist socializing milieus and most importantly, it consists of socialization content coming from various sources. Most importantly: family, peer groups and formal institutions (e.g. school, the police) (see also Hirschi 1969). Although, characteristically for criminological research on social control, the mentioned researchers tend to view family as the source of conformist norms and values, the analyzed biographies suggest that family may as well be the source for deviant socialization content. This is particularly the case of those

biographies, in which various manifestations of breaking with the conformist order were accompanied by the lack of informal control in family environment: lack of time or the opportunity to fulfill the role of care and education, indifference or excessive leniency.

Narrators' first criminal behaviors are usually preceded by certain "warning signals": minor offenses, acts of insubordination, school truancy, repeated intoxication, all of which were not necessarily adequately interpreted by the family environment and often trivialized, e.g.:

At the end of the summer I was brought to the police station again, drunk, I was destroying timetables at the bus stop with my friends [...] I don't even remember what happened exactly, when I found myself on the mask of the patrol car with my hands on it. My parents would pick me up again from the command again. But it all went down without any consequences... Honestly? I regret it, because maybe at that moment, if I had any consequences put on me, I wouldn't do this kind of circus stuff in the future [Mateusz/34].

Some of the narratives draw a clear dissonance between the messages coming from the formal control institution (e.g., teaching staff, school management, law officers, town court) and the environment of informal relations. While the reactions of the formal institutions seem to be usually rather strong, the interviewees tend to picture family environment as a "buffer" to those sanctions. In fact, this mitigation of negative consequences following deviant behaviors serves in the narratives as a discrepancy in socializing content and an enhancement towards antisocial attitudes. For example, one of the interlocutors reminisces: *As of today, when I look back at it, it turned out to be disastrous for me, because this comfort and tolerance to which they³ got me used to, it directed me in the wrong direction* [Maciej/34].

Despite the possible unpleasant consequences in the form of more or less serious formal legal sanctions, antisocial behavior was met with tolerance, indulgence or even approval or recognition in informal milieus. That is, above all, the case of respondents raised in families with criminal traditions, especially if they had strong links with the criminal milieus, e.g.: *I did not brag about it but it really impressed me that my father was in prison. He was a "grypsujący"⁴, he was "stiff"⁵... I could not be different* [Maciek/34].

In all cases of "criminal traditions" in the family, their carriers were male figures. Most often interlocutors' fathers or to a lesser extent, older brothers. The analysis of the material indicates that while the family itself could have been a carrier of criminal traditions, a decisive role in the process of counter-socialization could

³ The interviewee refers in this passage to his grandparents who acted as his legal guardians.

⁴ The term "grypsujący" refers to a dominating group in informal prison subculture, others (dominated) being "frajerzy" and "cwele".

⁵ The term "stiff" (pl. "sztywny") refers to the traditional values and norms in the prison subculture, shared among the "grypsujący".

also be played by friends associated with interviewees' family members. Such a situation took place particularly when criminally-involved fathers suddenly disappeared from family life i.e. due to getting arrested, imprisoned or, in two cases, being killed in connection to his criminal activity. One of the interlocutors remembers:

Well, in general, it all started, my criminal activity, when my dad got killed... it turned out that there were just some sort of [...] people he knew and he was killed somewhere. I can say that I was mentally deteriorated after that. Lack of any financial support... I was taken under, so to speak, the wing of his colleagues, who showed me a wider, completely different world. I was drawn into the theft of cars [Radek/31].

Positive reactions and support of the family members towards criminal behavior are part of a wider socio-economic context in which the criminal onset takes place, specifically in which the interlocutors were raised. In the following excerpt, one of the men interviewed, Leszek explains how poor financial situation of his family contributed to regular criminal activity, in which most of his family was involved, either directly or indirectly:

Me and my brothers, we stole whatever we could steal. To make a living, to live [...] Mom was happy because we were investing the money in our home. She knew the money came from thievery, but what could she say? I remember that maybe at the beginning she said something about not bringing this money home, but when she saw that we were investing everything in the house, that we were buying things, she was happy. Later it turned into something like... that everything was already at home, but we kept on stealing anyway [Leszek/35].

The same interlocutor goes on to further draw the distinction between his family and the "mainstream" society, represented by the order of the law. In the next fragment a permanent conflict with law-makers' institutions is depicted:

There were rows, with police too, later... They had established a special police unit for [our family – add. AK] when there was a row [...] Our family, it was just really frightening. When my brothers drank, they started to cut themselves, make noise [Leszek/35].

In Leszek's large family criminal behavior, particularly thefts, burglaries and robberies are presented as the most important source of income, in particular his older brothers specialized in these types of crime. The father figure falls into the scheme of a sadistic alcoholic and the mother figure into the scheme of the family hero who is singlehandedly taking care of the household. Recurring random incidents, such as father's disappearance with his salary, growing indebtedness due to the need to provide children with their basic needs, all contribute to a family's extreme poverty. From sociological perspective this context might depict Leszek's family's criminal activity as a "normal reaction of normal people to an abnormal social situation" (Plant 1937: 248, cited in: Merton 2002: 196).

6. Conclusions

The criminal onset in the narratives presented is an indirect process, in which the state of negligence plays a particularly significant part. The socio-economic situation of the families from which the narrators originated, in the light of the analyzed empirical material, created a climate conducive to breaking with the conformist order. However, it is not to be considered a determining factor for a deviant and especially a criminal future. From the criminological point of view, the problem of child neglect, however, gains strength especially when it comes to an environment with dominant antisocial patterns, such as behavioral and personal models and values that are contrary to commonly accepted norms. For this reason, “poverty, unemployment, lack of life prospects and other manifestations of material exclusion are considered in criminology as genetic factors of crime” (Stępniaak 2001).

The analysis indicates, however, that the group of factors pushing young people towards criminal behavior is accompanied by relational deficits. The lack of significant role-models, in connection with the family structure and its internal dynamics, as well as the presence of deformed reference patterns, such as family criminal traditions tend to push the individual out of the family environment towards external milieus. The narratives indicate that during criminal onset offending was, firstly, prone to get justified (e.g. rationalization of theft by reference to a bad financial situation or lack of material resources) (see Sykes, Matza 1957). Secondly, possible negative sanctions were associated mostly with the formal institutions, located outside the local environment. This connotation could consolidate negativism towards the rest of society and its normative system. Thirdly, psychological, social and economic gratifications are viewed as strengthening the individual's identity with their sources, particularly criminal milieus. In turn this legitimizes persistence in crime in the future. Fourthly, behaviors – although colliding with criminal law – can be viewed as *de facto* conformist attitudes, at least within their peer-groups. From the respondents' perspective, the need of acceptance and affiliation with milieus outside their family environment is cohesive with negligence experienced in their households. Finally, for the respondents crime became the *spiritus movens* of their possible status advancement, giving a sense of control over their own fate and influence on the reality that previously appeared to be mainly irrespective.

Numerous studies confirm that early criminal initiation is a strong predictor of a long and rich criminal career (see Farrington 2010a; Laub, Sampson 2002; Moffit, Caspi 2001, cited in: Biel 2011). For the interviewed men who initiated their criminal careers during their teenage years, it was particularly difficult in the later stages of their biographies to desist from crime. Strong identification with criminal circles has been identified in the course of the analysis as one of the most important barriers in the process of later attempts to integrate into society

and desist from crime. Moreover, since early criminal onset took place, crime was often the only known sphere of income activity. With the abundance of criminal life comes a corresponding lack of conforming social roles. Early initiation was usually accompanied by falling out of school structures, as well as substituting labor activity by routine criminal activity, which – over the life course – tends to become the dominant or the only form of obtaining income. This characteristic correlates with “richness” of early initiated criminal career, i.e. a large number and variety of crimes committed in the future (see also Farrington 2010a). These attitudes made it difficult to perform conformist social roles also in the adult life, hence the social resources of the respondents were usually quite limited. Due to their involvement in criminal life in their youth they gave up education at its early stages, did not gain professional qualifications, did not function in the labor market, did not have social capital in the form of friends unrelated to the underworld. Thus, a situation of exclusion in early life of an individual reflects on and strongly affects the offender’s chances for desisting from crime in the future. In order to address the issue of social reintegration of individuals leaving prison, it is therefore necessary to recognize sources and consequences of child neglect, as well as to constantly monitor dynamics of the phenomenon.

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ZANIEDBANE DZIECIŃSTWO I INICJACJA PRZESTĘPCZA W BIOGRAFIACH BYŁYCH WIĘŹNIÓW

Abstrakt. Socjologiczne analizy etiologii zachowań przestępczych wyróżniają szereg czynników kryminogennych, wśród których szczególne znaczenie przypisuje się środowiskowemu kontekstowi funkcjonowania jednostki. Inicjacja aktywności przestępcozej ma najczęściej miejsce w okresie wczesnej młodości. Stąd też badacze problematyki zwracają uwagę na relacje społeczne jednostki w środowiskach socjalizujących. Jednocześnie badania i analizy życiorysów przestępcołów wskazują, że znaczna część z nich rekrutuje się ze środowisk doświadczających silnej marginalizacji w wielu ważnych aspektach funkcjonowania w społeczeństwie, dostarczając tym samym kolejnych argumentów na rzecz związków między wykluczeniem społecznym i przestępcością. Celem artykułu jest charakterystyka środowiskowych uwarunkowań wejścia na drogę konfliktu z prawem w biografiach przestępcołów. Autor odwołuje się do materiału empirycznego zebraanego w toku badań własnych – wywiadów narracyjnych ze skazanymi oraz byli więźniami.

Słowa kluczowe: inicjacja przestępcoza, byli więźniowie, zaniedbane dzieciństwo, wykluczenie społeczne, metoda biograficzna, wywiad narracyjny.