

## **The New Ways of Upbringing: Contemporary Trends in Social Rehabilitation. Searching for Effective Methods Influencing the Socially Maladjusted**

### **Abstract**

The paper is a report on the pilot research on socially maladjusted boys, which led to the development of a questionnaire to test their thinking and designate its factors. The starting point of the proposal is the theory of G. D. Walters and his thesis for the criminal mind. A similar project has not been conducted in Poland so far, it is an innovative test, completely adapted to the circumstances and cultural characteristics of minors in Poland. The article shows the importance of this project for working with minors and the possibility of changes that can be achieved in this way.

### **Introduction**

Rehabilitation is a process of changes in the area of human personality. The main pillars of this process include: child care, therapy and education. The overall objective of this process is to eliminate or reduce the manifestations of social maladjustment in people to whom it is addressed. The reintegration process is very complex, and its effect depends on many factors. This rehabilitation may apply to adults and minors whose susceptibility to positive changes is assessed above. Educational activities conducted in a group of socially maladjusted minors whose personality formation process has not yet been completed have a chance to bring a more durable and faster change. Therefore, theoretically speaking, the rehabilitation of minors should be a process easier and faster than that of adults and should bring more durable change (Machel, 2003, p. 20). Practice, however, shows that the

dynamics of the phenomenon of criminality among minors requires the adaptation of methods and forms of work to the style of functioning of the person under court protection. Changes in education must follow the modern man, including these socially maladjusted.

### **The main point of the project**

The fundamental aim of this research in addition to the study of criminal thinking styles in socially maladjusted juvenile offenders, who violate legal norms, is an explication of the degree to which typical elements of this thinking, mainly concerned with the offenders themselves, other people and the reality around them, predispose young people to re-offend. A significant objective of the research, at the heart of which lies the assumption that a permanent change in behavior must be preceded by a cognitive change, is indicating a possible change in juvenile thinking and thus increasing the effectiveness of the work undertaken as part of the rehabilitation process. Glenn Walters claims that crime is committed as a result of an individual taking a decision in a certain context, with the decision being moderated by the individual's cognitive system as well as the environmental conditions in which the individual happens to find him/herself. An individual's cognitive system, his/her thinking style, and the reception and interpretation of information emanating from his/her surroundings form the basis of human behavior (Walters, 2003).

Juvenile delinquency is a very complex phenomenon, not only given its dynamics and structure, but mainly because of the factors which predispose towards criminal behavior. Despite a substantial accumulation of knowledge on the functioning of an individual in their environment and their development with regard to aggravating and mitigating factors, an effective juvenile rehabilitation model in the field of Polish pedagogy has not yet been developed.

Greater individualism in corrective work and a more open attitude towards a socially derailed individual have proven to be, as it turns out, insufficient. As discussed in this article, the thesis points to a very important aspect of the functioning of a criminal individual, their thinking and the factors on which the thinking depends. Moreover, an identification of the key elements of a juvenile delinquent's cognitive system will allow for their modification and appropriate planning of the rehabilitation work, which, combined with behavioral methods employed in corrective institutions, will create greater potential for the desired change in the functioning of the juveniles and, as such, contribute to the appropriate fulfilment of the social roles assigned to them after their return to their own environment and society.

It is well known that only a small percentage of the juveniles' family environments undergo a positive change, it is rather the juveniles themselves who, having undergone various degrees of the rehabilitation process, can introduce changes in their behavior. Therefore, a cognitive change or a correction in the way of thinking will, as a permanent change, increase the chance for behavior in line with the accepted norms and social rules, with the juvenile, having returned to their own environment, interpreting the information they receive in a different manner and being able to select accordingly, and not so defensively, with their level of understanding certainly improved. Any change in behavior must be preceded by a cognitive change.

Clients regularly visit their family homes during holiday time, according to the school calendar (each visit requires the court's permission). Therefore, to a certain degree, the juveniles' functioning and desired change can be verified in an open environment, throughout a 2-3-week period in the case of winter or spring holidays and a nearly 2-month period during the summer.

A clear tendency has been observed for many years now indicating a permanently high level of violent crime involving minors and juveniles, and the lowering of the legal age of criminal liability has not improved the situation but has, in turn, created another problem: namely that of how minors, who potentially have a greater chance of returning to society than adult criminals, should be treated and rehabilitated effectively. What is very important for the project in question is the fact that for several years the period in which minors wait to be placed in a corrective institution, such as an MOW (Młodzieżowy Ośrodek Wychowawczy – Juvenile Education Centre) has been reduced, which has consequently shortened the time in which the rehabilitation process and the work with a particular minor can proceed. At present, a minor is sent to an institution after 2-3 months, after the court issues its decision to place such an individual in an MOW. In the past, however, this period could have been as long as three years. The average length of time a minor spends in an institution is 18–20 months (2 school years). This seems sufficient to effectuate changes in the young person's way of thinking, but it is necessary to work out a specific action model, as well as forms and methods of work.

The primary aim of the project under discussion is therefore to specify and indicate factors typical of the thinking of socially maladjusted juveniles as well as to conduct research into the relationship in which the factors selected remain connected, thereby creating a certain style of criminal thinking, as well as to name the style of thinking which predisposes an individual to commit a crime.

**Assume the following hypothesis:**

Socially maladjusted juveniles present certain (dysfunctional) thinking patterns about themselves, the world and other people with whom they engage in social interaction. The criminal thinking style remains in a direct relationship with the negative or unhealthy behavior undertaken by a particular individual.

**The importance of the indicated way of working – how the approach to the socially maladjusted changes:**

**Firstly**, the implementation of this project seems indispensable for the potential of rehabilitation institutions such as MOWs (open institutions) to be used to its full capacity. Currently, such institutions, under the care of the Polish Ministry of Education, seem to have fallen into an effectiveness trap, i.e., they **are urgently** seeking effective methods and forms of rehabilitation which will make them stand out from the other institutions of this kind, of which there are over 70 in the whole of Poland (the weight of the problem therefore being quite substantial, given the scale of the phenomenon). At the same time, they are dealing with the economics of this problem, counting the costs of each juvenile's upkeep and the expenses which have to be incurred to obtain the desired effect. It is also important to standardise the notion of effect and effectiveness in the rehabilitation process, as it should not certainly be measured solely by whether a juvenile, having left an institution, returns to crime or not.

**Secondly**: an analysis of the patterns, styles and elements of criminal thinking will allow for the factors which shape this kind of thinking to be indicated, thus revealing the way in which socially maladjusted minors perceive themselves, the reality around them and the people with whom they interact in a variety of ways. This will, in turn, form a significant pool of information vital for planning rehabilitation work, whether with an individual, subjective or collective approach in mind.

**Thirdly**: The ongoing change in Polish society connected with the processes of globalisation and the growing level of public space privatisation and the greater economic, cultural and educational challenges for particular individuals who would rather opt to remain in a certain (privileged) area, has resulted in a growing number of 'excluded' individuals, focused around a shortage of work, means of support or a lack of education. The group of socially maladjusted minors constitutes a high-risk community which may become (for the reasons already mentioned) banished to the fringes of society to form an enclave, destructive both to themselves and other social groups. For this reason, equipping maladjusted individuals with certain skills, developed through adaptive and creative thinking,

gives them a chance to successfully return to society, fulfil the social roles assigned to them, and to function without violating law and order.

The current trends in research concerning the etiology of crime clearly indicate that the traditional one-dimensional static model which determines single isolated variables based on cause and effect is becoming a thing of the past. The majority of current research is conducted in a dynamic model style, of which Glenn Walters's notion (Federal Correctional Institution Schuylkill, Pennsylvania) provides an example. The notion stipulates that criminality is a result of an interaction between three groups of variables: conditions, choice and the cognitive system. An individual's cognitive system, i. e., criminal thinking has been shaped in such a way that it reinforces and justifies irresponsible behavior and violation of law and order, and this cognitive system (this type of thinking) serves defensive functions for the 'ego'. Glenn Walters conducted research into the thinking styles of adult and juvenile criminals serving sentences in different US prisons and developed the Criminal Thinking Scales, which help in establishing a particular criminal's thinking profile and in carrying out a specific rehabilitation prognosis.

It should be noted that it was S. Samenow and S. Yochelson (Yochelson and Samenow, 1977) who were in the vanguard of research into the cognitive schemata which determine criminal behavior, since they traced the roots of criminality to an individual's thinking style and the way in which he/ she reaches decisions.

In his monographic study "The criminal lifestyle. Patterns of criminal conduct," G. Walters (1990) presented a number of theses concerning criminal thinking, distinguishing eight specific thinking styles in this kind of individual: mollification (depreciating one's responsibility), cutting oneself off from responsibility, entitlement, power-orientation, sentimentality, super-optimism, cognitive indolence and lack of continuity and consistency of actions.

This type of research has not been conducted in Poland, neither on adult nor juvenile criminals, and for this reason it is innovatory in nature. Moreover, the research discussed goes beyond the notion proposed by G. Walters, the American proponent of this type of research and analysis. Namely, it will open an opportunity to introduce correction and transformation in the criminal thinking style to a more adaptive style, it will allow for the drafting of specific tasks in the individual rehabilitation process and, most importantly, will create a standardised tool adapted to the conditions of Polish culture and lifestyle in a rather homogeneous society (when compared to its American counterpart), and as such it will create an important tool for the diagnosis of criminal thinking as an element of the complementary rehabilitation diagnosis which serves as the starting point for the

entire rehabilitation process and which, when conducted properly, offers a good chance of achieving the desired effect and change in juvenile behavior.

The **methodological model assumed** in the project suggests a need for the duplication of research, both qualitative and quantitative. In the latter, each step complies with the principles of the so-called positivist philosophy which suggest the existence of the objective world (a fragment of reality), the study of which is possible only with the use of precisely constructed research tools. Items belonging to this objective world are therefore measured and correlations sought between them, and their discovery and description allow for the exertion of a more effective influence on social reality – for the research in question criminal thinking and its determinants. The other path – qualitative research – assumes the subjective nature of one's own knowledge and cognition, which nevertheless constitute an important supplement to the quantitative path. The application of qualitative analysis allows for a thorough insight into the life concerns (life path) which have shaped the socially maladjusted juveniles' way of thinking.

The next step, in line with the designated research procedure, consists in selecting an appropriate research method, as well as complementary techniques and research tools. The application of a two-fold research strategy, quantitative and qualitative, will allow for a comparison of the data collected with the aid of various methods such as triangulation. The data gathered will be collated and interpreted through a cross-section approach, but also with a focus on single interesting cases, which will allow for a chance to adopt a model approach towards criminal thinking styles. It will also aid the development of a project of rehabilitation work to indicate a number of possibilities for correction and change within those factors which shape a particular thinking style, leading to permanent change in the functioning of juveniles after they leave an institution and return to the family environment.

The first version of the model employed in the project contained pretest and retest, i.e., an analysis of the factors under discussion upon entering an institution, followed by an analysis conducted a year after an individual's stay in a corrective institution. However, after the pilot research it was changed into a single test indicating the factors which determine the style of thinking, crossing out the clients is the main problem, so the research group is getting smaller and smaller. During their stay in the centre, the minors regularly participate in particular classes, assigned to them through an individual programme, with the workload understood as the implementation of previously planned rehabilitation activities. Besides, this research will focus on the analysis of the impact of the activities on the change in the thinking styles and central cognitive schemata, understood as the knowledge of oneself, the world around and other people.

The methods of collecting qualitative and quantitative data as planned for the application in the research in question:

A questionnaire, juvenile criminal thinking scale – the author's own tool, devised and standardised on a sample of 900 minors (boys) aged 13 – 18 years. The first version of the questionnaire contained 72 entries, after standardisation for the final version it amounted to 56 entries.

#### **Extracts of four factors:**

- I. a feeling of loneliness in matters of everyday life, basing its efficiency only on yourself (the accuracy – 0.71)
- II. a lack of a sense of control over their lives, a lack of connection between the activity of its effectiveness (0.80)
- III. denial based on what each person is in relation to the environment in which he/she lives, a lack of a cognitive analysis of the situation (0.83)
- IV. place the responsibility on others, the location of the source of their successes and failures in an environment outside of themselves (0.70)

#### **What kind of measurable effects can be obtained by examining the thinking of juvenile offenders?**

Juvenile delinquency is a very complex phenomenon, not only due to its dynamics and structure, but mainly because of the factors predisposing individuals to display criminal behavior. Despite the substantial knowledge on the subject of an individual functioning in his/her environment, as well as development as regards aggravating and mitigating factors, Polish rehabilitation pedagogy has not yet developed an effective model of juvenile rehabilitation. Greater individualism in corrective work and a more open attitude towards socially derailed individuals have proved to be insufficient.

G. Walters's notion indicates that criminality is the result of an interaction between three groups of variables: conditions, choice and the cognitive system, whereby the first two influence each other to form the third, i.e., the human cognitive system. A particular style of criminal thinking develops as a result of interaction between these two groups of variables in order to support and uphold a decision concerning the commission of a crime. The cognitive system of a mal-adjusted individual has been formed in such a way (as a result of destructive and aggravating experiences in early childhood, quite thoroughly described in the expert literature as the environmental conditioning of criminality and the deprivation of basic bio-psycho-social needs) that it reinforces and condones the irresponsibility of the individual's actions, self-justification or the intrusion

of interpersonal behaviors. The research described will indicate a very important aspect of a criminal individual's functioning, his/her thinking and the factors which influence it. Additionally, the identification of key elements in the juvenile criminal's cognitive system will allow for their modification and appropriate planning of the rehabilitation procedures, which, when combined with behavioral methods applied in rehabilitation institutions, will create a better chance for the desired change in the functioning of juveniles. This will then contribute to better fulfilment of social roles when they return to their environment and society. It is an established fact that only a small percentage of the juveniles' family environment undergoes a positive change and it is rather the juveniles themselves who, having experienced various degrees of rehabilitation, are responsible for the change in their own behavior. The model of rehabilitation presupposes inclusion of the juvenile's family environment in the process, thus resulting in a number of changes reinforcing the effects of the juvenile's rehabilitation process. Practical experience, however, coupled with a lack of any coherent system of help for socially maladjusted children, shows that the changes in a juvenile's family environment to which he/she returns are, in fact, minimal.

All the more, a cognitive change and adjustment in the way of thinking, as a permanent change, will, after a juvenile's return, increase the chance of behavior which conforms to the accepted norms and rules of social functioning; a juvenile individual will be able to interpret the information he/she receives in a different manner, to select it appropriately and will not react to it in such a defensive way, with their level of understanding significantly improved. **Any change in behavior must be preceded by a cognitive change.**

## **References**

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