

BEHAVIOURAL AND FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS OF VIOLENT AND NON-VIOLENT ADOLESCENT OFFENDERS

MILKO MEJOVŠEK · IRENA CAJNER · MRAOVIĆ · ALEKSANDAR BUĐANOVAČ

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A number of studies has shown that violent adolescent offenders have serious behaviour and personality disorders, and that they live in families overloaded with problems and disturbances. The aim of this study was to compare two representative samples of adolescent offenders, 605 adolescents who committed violent offences, and 592 who committed non-violent offences, in respect of their behavioural and family characteristics. Data was collected from the court archives using a questionnaire. The results show that behavioural variables are more important in explaining differences between violent and non-violent offenders than family variables. Violent offenders commit more crimes, manifest more difficult behavioural disorders, and live in less favourable family setting than non-violent offenders. They are more aggressive and relationships between members of their families are disrupted in a greater extent, consisting in more verbal and physical aggression. In the domain of family variables, differences between samples, were significant in the variables of negative family processes (sociopathology) and not significant in the variables of family context (structure and socioeconomic status). The results provide support to the intergenerational transmission of violence hypothesis.

key words: violent offences, juvenile delinquency, behavioral disorders, family disorders

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary world, we are witnesses of many forms of violence. Violence and terrorism increase every day. The reasons for this phenomena are searched for in the man's nature and his social environment. Still, there is no generally accepted aggressiveness theory which could explain violent behaviour and violent crimes. However, no one denies the influence of the child's family on behaviour. The only question is, how big is the family influence, and which parts of family life mostly influence aggressive and violent behaviour.

Violent crimes are the ones, where offender caused victim physical and/or psychical pain and injury by means of physical force or threat. Non-violent crimes do not include physical force or threat. They are mostly property crimes, except robbery. Violent crimes are more dangerous to

society; so violent offenders are considered to be more serious delinquents than non-violent offenders. The criminal carrier of violent offenders mostly start early, committing non-violent property crimes, and they are persistent in criminal activity. They are rarely focused only on violent crimes. Violent crimes frequency increases with the global crimes frequency increase. Percent of violent crimes is relatively low in total amount of crimes (Farrington, 1982). Because of this low frequency, persons who committed at least one violent crime are usually considered as violent offenders.

Milko Mejovšek, Ph.D., is a professor at the Department of Behavioural disorders, Faculty of Special Education and Rehabilitation, University of Zagreb. Irena Cajner-Mraović, Ph.D., is an assistant at the Department of Police academy, Zagreb. Aleksandar Buđanovac, Ph.D., is an assistant at the Department of Behavioural disorders, Faculty of Special Education and Rehabilitation, University of Zagreb.