

Research article

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Impact of Criminal Subculture on Social Interaction of Juvenile Offenders

KIRILL V. ZLOKAZOV

Ural State Pedagogical University, Yekaterinburg, Russia, zkirvit@yandex.ru, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0664-8444>

Abstract

Study relevance: significance of social environment of a minor for adaptation and overcoming difficult life situations is substantiated. It is shown that social environment exerts a psychosocial influence, forming minors' ideas of themselves and their self-esteem. The role of minors' social environment in various areas of social interaction is studied and importance of criminals' social ties for inducing crime and forming criminal ideology is shown. Besides, the impact of social ties on prevention and suppression of adolescents' crimes is proven. At the same time, the influence of a criminal subculture on establishment of relations with social environment remains insufficiently studied. In particular, the subculture impact on changing minors' ideas about interaction with other people and social groups is unclear. Understanding this will allow us to assess a degree of negative influence of a criminal subculture on minors. *Study purpose:* to identify social ties of juvenile offenders who share criminal subculture values, including by comparing with similar characteristics of law-abiding minors. *Methods:* the method of data collection is a questionnaire describing parameters of social relations, such as volume, stability, homogeneity, subordination and reference. Procedures of descriptive statistics and a nonparametric analogue of one-way analysis of variance (Kruskal-Wallis H-test) are used as methods for processing acquired results. The study sample consists of 229 people aged 13–17, 64.6% of whom are male, 91 of the surveyed are either convicted of crimes or are attending specialized institutions. The rest of the sample (138 people) is characterized by law-abiding behavior; during the survey period they are not suspected or accused. *Results and novelty:* new data on the specifics of social ties of the delinquent youth are received, in particular, small volume of relations, homogeneity of participants, low reference of social environment; prospects for studying social ties under conditions of social regulation of interaction with regard to gender and socio-cultural specifics are determined.

Keywords: crime prevention; social environment; criminal subculture; social isolation; self-esteem.

5.3.9. Legal psychology and psychological security.

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Relevance of the research is substantiated by the necessity to improve effectiveness of programs to counter criminalization of minors. The efforts currently taken by law enforcement officers and educational organizations contribute to reducing the level of juvenile delinquency [10]. However, along with this, the public danger of crimes is growing, cases of the use of weapons against peers and teachers are becoming more frequent.

In order to reduce criminalization, it is advisable to improve psychological and pedagogical violence prevention programs that harmonize minors' interaction with social environment. Effectiveness of such programs has already been noted in specialized literature [11]. They are based on scientific ideas about age-related specifics of adolescence: pursuit of emancipation, desire to oppose oneself to adults, reactions of grouping with peers, focus on self-development and self-determination. These programs are aimed at forming a value-motivational sphere, self-concept and self-esteem of a teenager. At the same time, it is not only formed personal qualities that can reduce violence risks.

The socio-psychological direction is an alternative direction to prevent minors' criminalization. It is aimed at forming interaction of minors with the people around them. Social environment plays an essential role in the life of a minor, performing resource-supporting, protective, educational, expert and other types of functions. The ability to form social relationships that provide support and assistance is a significant condition for the life and psychological well-being of a minor. Believing that adolescents from disadvantaged families are more likely to experience difficulties with satisfying their own needs, it is justified to consider them a target category for the formation of such skills. At the same time,

researchers point to the insufficient level of social competence and difficulties of social interaction of this category of minors [3; 13].

Considering that the disrupted interaction may be caused by distorted ideas, attitudes and values of adolescents, we assume that subculture is one of the reasons for their formation. In this study, we consider the influence of a criminal subculture on social interaction of minors, assessing its impact on perceptions, attitudes and values. As part of the study, this assumption is subjected to empirical testing on a sample of juvenile offenders.

The purpose of the research presented in the article is to determine the impact of a criminal subculture on juvenile offenders' subjective attitudes to their peers.

The idea of the study is to consider the impact of socio-psychological effects that a criminal subculture has on its followers. We assume that a criminal subculture forms juvenile offenders' perception of social interaction. Being under its influence, juvenile offenders have to comply with certain rules and follow the norms of behavior prescribed by it [12]. As a result, juvenile delinquents' idea of social environment may be distorted by the subculture, and their attitude to a certain extent reflects this impact.

Practical significance of the research lies in the study of the subculture impact on the content of minors' perception of people who make up their social environment. By studying formation of social ties and juvenile delinquents' attitude to others, it is possible to assess a degree of its negative impact on personality and social interaction.

The problem is considered in terms of generalizing socio-psychological knowledge about the influence of subculture on its followers and studying parameters and char-

acteristics of minor's social environment. By comparing three groups of minors living in different conditions of social interaction regulation, differences in the organization of social environment are revealed, then the level of conviction in criminal ideology is determined. The differences caused by the measure of support for criminal ideology are characterized. The conclusion is drawn about the impact of criminal ideology on minors' perception of social environment.

Theoretical foundations of the study. Characterizing significance of minors' social environment, we should mention a great number of works showing its role in formation and development of personality and social qualities of a teenager. Studies of social environment touch upon various aspects of human life, reveal influence of social ties and people's relationships. Social environment has a multifaceted impact on people [23], including their psychological state and life satisfaction [19], as well as their ability to overcome life difficulties [24]. Current scientific concepts describe social environment as an environment that performs protective and supporting functions and mediate interaction between a minor and the world.

The structure of juvenile offenders' social environment is considered in the context of sociological and socio-psychological research. It includes groups of family and close relatives, educational and professional teams, peer groups forming an informal environment. It is established that such features of social environment, as incomplete family or its absence, violations of interaction with peers, etc. negatively affect social development and self-esteem of a minor. As a rule, these problems are reflected in social regulation of behavior.

In general, the influence of these groups on minors, their decisions and actions is not ambiguous. For a minor social environment differs in reference [14]. Peers, in particular, friends, brothers and sisters, are characterized by the greatest reference, while parents and teachers – by a lower one [6]. Variations in reference are due to development of the subject. Reference persons and groups change noticeably, when a person gets older and acquires other life priorities [18].

The role of minors' social environment is analyzed in the context of age development and socialization, and in relation to juvenile offenders – in the context of other people's influence on illegal behavior formation. The research records a role of close relatives, friends and peers in inducing to various types of crimes (for example, theft and murder [21], distribution of narcotic drugs [16], etc.). In particular, foreign researchers state that the majority of crimes were discussed by minors with the people closest to them [17]. Persons from among the social environment have the most significant influence on minors. Thus, studying delinquent behavior of adolescents, D.J. Shoemaker finds out that most often teenagers follow the behavior pattern of adults [22]. Social environment has a significant impact on alcohol abuse, smoking, drug use and other types of addictive behavior [15].

Thus, social environment of a teenager is an essential factor determining adherence to antisocial destructive and criminal influences. Environment can enhance and aggravate this impact, or, on the contrary, act as a deterrent and protect from a negative environment.

To develop the issue of environment influence on a minor, it is necessary to address the question of the meaning and nature of subculture influence.

Socio-psychological impact of a criminal subculture on a minor. Considering the subculture as a social phenomenon, it should be noted that scientific definitions of this phenomenon suggest singling out functional and structural meanings [5].

Within the framework of our research, a functionalist approach is used, which provides for identification of the function that a subculture performs for its adherents. Besides, a significant part of the research is carried out in relation to deviant urban communities (unemployed, homeless, criminals). A deviant subculture was considered an alternative way of self-realization. According to R. Merton, a subculture emerges due to urban slums residents' inability to achieve the goals declared by mass culture [2]. and its existence has legitimized antisocial ways of achieving material well-being and high social status [8]. Thus, the functionalist approach to

the definition of a criminal subculture allows us to present it as a mechanism that provides minors with the opportunity to achieve socially set goals in a criminal way.

Domestic and foreign cultural studies show that Russian criminal subculture corresponds to this definition in a number of ways. It proclaims a hedonistic way of life, legitimizing violence and cruelty as methods of achieving and retaining it, devalues the culture of work and social order [1].

Popularization of a criminal subculture in Russian youth environment is provided by a number of factors: first, by simplifying the social success strategy and declaring the possibility of using violence to gain it; second, by recognizing acceptable social deviations – alcoholism, drug addiction, prostitution; third, by victimization of certain categories of the population (persons without a fixed place of residence, migrants leading an antisocial lifestyle, etc.), contributing to the primary experience of criminal influence [12].

In the context of current social conditions, a criminal subculture can help minors meet life and social needs, contributing to their recognition of values, attitudes and models of criminal behavior, and be used to organize informal communities. As modern research shows, a criminal subculture contains a number of norms and regulations that limit social interaction [12; 13]. These may include prohibitions on contacting law enforcement agencies, distorted perception of certain categories of the population (for example, devaluation of law enforcement officers, persons without a fixed place of residence), subordination of criminal community members to each other depending on the hierarchy, possible violence to lower-status members of the group and likelihood of being subjected to violence by higher-status members of the group, cruelty of punishments for violating certain norms and rules of the criminal subculture, etc. [7]. Besides, employment and vocational training are reprehensible in certain criminal groups.

Summarizing, it can be concluded that a criminal subculture hinders and limits interaction of minors with social institutions, and provokes a hostile attitude towards law enforcement agencies and certain categories of the

population. At the same time, the influence of criminal subcultures on establishment and maintenance of social contacts, formation of relationships with other people, as well as characteristics of the system of relations with social environment is not fully studied. Thus, it is advisable to study organization of interaction between juvenile offenders with different levels of exposure to the criminal subculture and their social environment.

Empirical research. The research purpose was to identify relations between juvenile offenders and their social environment.

The tasks were to study characteristics of social ties and relationships with others; compare characteristics of social ties in samples of minors with different levels of criminal involvement.

The assumption about different characteristics of social ties of minors with different levels of criminal involvement was a study hypothesis.

Methods. Two groups of methods were used in the study, in particular, data collection methods and methods of their statistical analysis.

Data collection was carried out by means of a specially designed questionnaire reflecting basic ideas about characteristics of the interaction between a minor and social environment [25]. The questionnaire included questions describing characteristics of social ties: (1) volume (“How many people do you communicate with during the day?”); (2) stability (“How often do you form new relationships while ending old ones?”) (3) homogeneity (“Are people you communicate with during the day similar to each other?”); (4) subordination (“How many people influence you during the day?”); (5) reference (“How many people from your environment are important to you?”).

To measure the characteristics of volume, barriers to interaction and reference, we used a one-dimensional five-point scale, where the minimum value symbolized the interviewee him/herself. To identify characteristics of homogeneity and proneness to conflict, we used a two-dimensional scale, in which opposite values represented alternative options in meaning (for example: they will conflict – they will be able to be friends).

Assessment of the susceptibility to a criminal subculture was carried out by interviewing with the help of the methodology proposed by M.I. Koshenova and E.A.Krayushkina [4]. Interviewees' attitude to the subculture was revealed

with the help of the questionnaire "Notion of the criminal world". Based on the answers, the respondents were divided into three groups: "positive", "neutral" and "negative" attitude to the criminal subculture (Table 1).

Table 1

Indicators of attitudes towards the criminal subculture

No.	Attitude to the criminal subculture	Group of offenders		Group of law-abiding people	
		respondents	% of the sample	respondents	% of the sample
1	Positive attitude	68	74.7%	9	6.5%
2	Neutral attitude	18	19.8%	17	12.3%
3	Negative attitude	5	5.5%	112	81.2%

Based on the survey, a study sample was formed. It was composed of delinquent minors who expressed a positive and neutral attitude to the criminal subculture (86 people), as well as minors with law-abiding behavior who expressed a negative attitude to the criminal subculture (112 people).

Descriptive statistics measures are methods of data analysis. Statistical differences between the groups were evaluated using Kraskel-Wallis H-test.

All the sample included 229 people divided into two groups: juvenile delinquents and minors with law-abiding behavior.

Initially the group of juvenile offenders included 91 people (average age = 15.4 years, SD = 1.5 years, 74.7% – male). After measuring the attitude to the criminal subculture by the method of M.I. Koshenova and E.A. Krayushkina, 5 people who had a negative attitude to the criminal subculture were excluded from the group.

As a result, 86 juvenile offenders participated in the study. These were persons on the watch list of juvenile affairs inspectorates, as well as those sentenced to imprisonment, studying in specialized educational institu-

tions in Saint Petersburg and the Leningrad Oblast, Yekaterinburg and the Sverdlovsk Oblast. 60.5% of respondents committed theft (48.4 of them were convicted), 19.3% – plunder and robbery.

The group of minors with law-abiding behavior initially included 138 people (average age = 15.9 years, SD = 1.43 years, 54.3% – male). After revealing the attitude to the criminal subculture, the persons who displayed a positive (9 people) and neutral (17 people) attitude were excluded from it. As a result, 112 law-abiding minors with a negative attitude to the criminal subculture participated in the study. All the subjects studied in secondary schools in Saint Petersburg, Yekaterinburg, at the time of the survey did not commit offenses (crimes), were not on the watch list of juvenile affairs inspectorates.

Study results. The results are described sequentially: at the beginning we present values of indicators of social ties, and then statistical differences between groups of offenders and law-abiding minors.

1. Descriptive characteristics of the social communication system are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Differences in subjective characteristics of social ties in groups of delinquent and law-abiding minors

Indicator	Delinquent (n=86)			Law-abiding (n=112)		
	Mean	SD	Median	Mean	SD	Median
Volume	2.1	1.7	2	5.9	1.9	5
Stability	4.1	0.7	4	4.5	0.6	4
Homogeneity	4.4	1.2	4	2.5	1.9	3
Subordination	2.1	1.3	2	2.4	1.2	2
Reference	2.3	1.4	2	5.1	1.1	5

Note: Mean is a mean value, SD is a standard deviation.

2. Comparison of delinquent and law-abiding minors' perception of social ties showed statistical differences in the characteristics of: a) volume (H crit. = 94.7; $p=0.001$, $\epsilon^2 = 0.13$); b) homogeneity (H crit. = 14.65, $p=0.001$, $\epsilon^2 = 0.05$), conflict (H crit. = 15.4; $p=0.001$, $\epsilon^2 = 0.05$) and reference (H crit. = 12.02, $p = 0.001$, $\epsilon^2 = 0.05$).

Indicators of stability of social ties and subordination do not statistically differ in groups of offenders and law-abiding minors (H crit. = 1.29; $p=0.28$ and H crit.=1.17; $p=0.28$) due to the specifics of age and social development common to both groups of subjects.

Results discussion. The research is aimed at the empirical study of delinquent youth's social ties as an important element of building a social space of personality. Its results generally confirm the hypothesis of specific differences in delinquent and law-abiding youth's ideas about social ties.

The volume of interaction with others among the delinquent youth is limited to a small group of people for 77.5% of the surveyed and to dyads and triads for 37.9% of them. 14.2% speak about loneliness and only 6.5% – interaction with several groups. These data are confirmed in the longitudinal study of convicted minors' social ties, carried out by N.A. Zwecker and co-authors. They indicate that criminals' social ties are small and closed, the average volume is only 1.8 people [26].

Of course, in absolute terms, our results differ, since in the foreign sample 20% of the surveyed are single or have friendly relations with only one person. In addition, in the group under study the majority indicates relations with peers, and the foreign study participants – with family members. Despite differences in the qualities of participants in social relations, their small volume is noted in similar studies [21]. Comparison of groups of delinquent and law-abiding minors shows that the volume of interaction is statistically different (Kruskal-Wallis H-test: H crit. = 94.7, $p=0.001$, $\epsilon^2 = 0.05$). 75.8% of the surveyed law-abiding adolescents and young people indicate the volume of two or three small groups, and only 1.2 of the respondents talk about loneliness. Micro-group interaction is characteristic only of 22.7% of the surveyed, in contrast to 37.9% of the offenders.

Homogeneity. The indicator of social environment homogeneity describes the perceived measure of closeness, similarity of people with whom a minor interacts. High homogeneity is attributed to people with similar goals, values and attitudes, and low homogeneity (i.e. heterogeneity) is attributed to people with absolutely different ones. Inconsistency of views and ideas in social environment is an additional characteristic of homogeneity. Its increase leads to proneness to conflict of social environment. The characteristics were calculated on the basis of assessed similarity of offenders' environment and likelihood of contradictions between them (the evaluation indicators are satisfactory: -Kronbach = 0.55, the correlation between them is significant ($r=0.38$, $p<0.05$)).

Social environment is perceived by juvenile offenders as predominantly homogeneous, as reported by 60.4% of the respondents. 23.1% indicate strong differences between people of their daily communication, and 14% note complete dissimilarity. These results correspond to the conclusions of D.L. Haynie, made in 2002 based on the results of studies of social environment of American juvenile delinquents [20]. Her work assessed the role of social environment of delinquent and law-abiding adolescents in inducing criminal behavior. According to the research, delinquent adolescents make up half of the total number of social connections of future offenders, forming an ideologically consistent environment that forms criminal beliefs.

Proneness to conflict. The study of proneness to conflict consisted in assessing contradictions in values and beliefs of the persons who make up the social circle.

Among offenders, the level of conflict of beliefs is low in social environment, as reported by 72.8% of the surveyed. Only 27% consider their social circle as potentially conflictual, anticipating contradictions between its participants. These views determine significance of statistical differences between groups of delinquent and law-abiding minors (Kruskal-Wallis H-test: H crit.=14.65, $p=0.001$, $\epsilon^2 = 0.05$).

The majority of law-abiding teenagers deny the possibility of conflicts in their social environment (96.1% of the surveyed), only 3.1%

assume contradictions between views of people they know. So, differences within social environment of law-abiding adolescents do not lead to conflicts between them due to: a) absence of the subject of contradictions, b) ability to resolve contradictions in a non-conflict way [9]. Hence, social environment of offenders is more conflictual.

Reference. The results obtained show that the volume of reference persons of 69.3% of the surveyed offenders is limited to a small group. Only 3.6% speaks about more than one middle-size group.

It can be concluded that the volume of reference persons roughly corresponds to the volume of relationships between minors and, as a rule, is focused on close people. This is evidenced by the indicator of interest in the opinion of other people. It is weak for 43.2% of the surveyed and completely absent for 11.2%. Only 36.7% of the surveyed consider it useful to know what other people think about them.

The study of reference in the group of law-abiding minors indicates statistical differences in attribution of reference with the group of offenders (Kruskal-Wallis H-test: $H_{crit}=16.97$, $p=0.001$, $2 = 0.05$). Law-abiding people mention a larger number of people whose opinion is interesting to them – on average, the volume of the reference group is close to 15 persons, while for offenders it is 5 or less persons.

Conclusions. Summing up, we will note that the study showed differences in juvenile offenders' perception. The results received demonstrate criminal subculture impact on social interaction in terms of minimized volume, homogeneity of social environment, increased conflict and reduced reference. The reason for it is psychological features of relations with persons who make up social environment of juvenile offenders.

Thus, minimization of volume is due to person's mindset on a limited social interaction. Undoubtedly, such a restriction reduces delinquent minors' ability to receive help and support from people, unlike law-abiding persons who do not limit their interaction.

Revealed homogeneity of social environment is derived from a decrease in the volume of social contacts. It can be concluded

that a juvenile offender's communication circle consists of persons with similar values and beliefs, while law-abiding minors' social environment is characterized by a variety of orientations and values. As a result, offenders find themselves in a homogeneous information space containing similar ideas, values and meanings. In the case when they have an antisocial, criminal orientation, it is difficult for a teenager to realize their wrongness, since the people who form his/her social environment support these ideas without offering new ones.

Increased proneness to conflict in social environment of juvenile offenders established in the study, in our opinion, reflects value attitudes of criminal subcultures. Members of such groups consider violence to be an acceptable and justified way to achieve necessary goals, defend interests, and demonstrate their status. Thus, competition within such groups is either absent, being blocked by fear, or manifests itself in the form of violence.

Decreased reference of social environment is due to neglect of people who adhere to traditional culture values. Propaganda of a hedonistic lifestyle, which is part of the criminal ideology, downgrades professional work, education, family and social order. It is a good luck and criminal community's support that is considered as a value [3].

Thus, influence of criminal subcultures on social interaction of juvenile delinquents can be recognized as socially destructive. This, in our opinion, is evidenced by the following socio-psychological features:

- regulation of social interaction by assigning its subjects to different categories (for example, "friends–strangers", "criminals–victims-), prescribing an appropriate attitude towards them;
- homogenization of social environment by excluding persons with prosocial values and beliefs, purposefully maintaining relationships with criminals;
- increased hostility due to recognition of violence as an acceptable form of interaction with other people;
- formation of a hedonistic orientation of interaction by promoting the idea of quick wealth accumulation, including by committing a crime.

Criminal subcultures limit interaction, distorting perception of its participants, provoke manifestation of selfishness and neglect of other people. Being an outwardly attractive way to raise the status of a minor in the eyes of others, criminal subcultures significantly limit his/her social opportunities, primarily by reducing social resources, such as help and support of people. Triggering competition with peers, opposition to adults, flaunting their proximity to the criminal world, criminal subculture is no longer able to increase social self-esteem of a teenager. Along with this, it has the ability to distort the worldview, romanticizing the world of criminals and creating alternative strategies for gaining well-being.

Supporting expediency of criminal prosecution of persons promoting criminal ideology, we note that the measures to prevent criminalization of minors and the youth should be not only of a punitive, but also an involving

orientation. Countering the spread of criminal subcultures should be based on the opportunities provided by widen social interaction, such as increasing a number of social ties and promoting self-realization of minors through joint, socially useful activities. Active involvement of teenagers in various socially useful initiatives can form a socially valuable worldview and social orientation of the younger generation.

Conclusion.

The study disclosed features of social interaction of juvenile offenders involved in criminal subculture. The features of their social interaction are determined and the destructive role of criminal subculture on social interaction is shown. The findings of the study show prospects for studying social ties of delinquent adolescents and young people in order to prevent their criminalization.

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE AUTHOR

KIRILL V. ZLOKAZOV – Candidate of Sciences (Psychology), Associate Professor, Doctoral Candidate of the Ural State Pedagogical University, Yekaterinburg, Russia, zkirvit@yandex.ru, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0664-8444>

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