

**Which school related factors  
are associated with delinquency?  
Can bullying and delinquency be prevented  
in school programmes?**

**Essay for the  
Criminological and Legal Psychology  
course**

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### Can bullying and delinquency be prevented in school programmes?

*'We don't need no rules!'*  
(Reaction of a high-school student  
in a conflict resolution course)<sup>1</sup>

#### 1. Introduction

Identifying the causes and the possible remedies to delinquency in schools has been a major goal in criminology, especially in recent years, when disruptions, assaults, vandalism and violence have become more intense in schools<sup>2</sup>. While examining the processes and effects of the institution of school, we face a very complex system, where not only its values, but also its possible dangers have to be taken into account. On one hand, the school, as the secondary socializing agent for youths - according to the social control theorists - provides opportunities and incentives for them to develop attachments to prosocial others and commitments to conventional pursuits<sup>3</sup>, and on the other hand, symbolises 'machinery through which the needs of different segments of the population are met through conventional institutes' (Shaw and McKay, 1969, p: 384-385)<sup>4</sup>. Delinquency, one of the 'products' of this ambiguous role, and its possible causes will be detailed in following lines.

In the first part of this essay, after defining school delinquency and summarizing some of the main theories, I intend to map the major factors, and those interconnections among them that have been empirically tested. In the second part, I will summarise the most significant characteristics of the main preventive programmes which have been developed over the last two decades as answers to school delinquency and bullying. Besides mentioning that the dysfunctions and failures of these

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<sup>1</sup> The course was an experimental programme of our research team based on restorative justice principles in 2001 in my country. In this situation the task was to create our own, general rules in the group as an initial step of the whole course. Initially, we had planned to save 20 minutes for this purpose, but the quoted reaction caused us to spend one month discussing the issue of the roles of rules. See more about the course on page 12.

<sup>2</sup> Bybee, R.W., Gee, E.G. (1982), *'Violence, Values and Justice in the Schools'*, Massachusetts: Allyn and Bacon, p: ix

<sup>3</sup> Cited by Gottfredson, D.C. (2001), *'Schools and Delinquency'*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p: 3

<sup>4</sup> Cited by Ibid p: 1

programmes are possible, I would like to stress that school delinquency and bullying *can* be prevented, if the preventive programmes are well prepared and have incorporated previous findings about conditions which are essential in order to realise an effective preventive programme. In order to illustrate some of the mentioned issues, both in part one and part two, I intend to use examples of two research projects<sup>5</sup> I have been involved in.

## **2. School-related factors associated with delinquency**

### **2.1. Definition of school delinquency**

If we don't narrow the definition of delinquency to only illegal acts, it can mean all the problem behaviours by minors which have 'the inability or unwillingness to curb natural impulses to pursue pleasure or to relieve sources of irritation', starting from e.g. cussing at a teacher, or biting a classmate through bullying classmates, fighting, stealing and leading to assaulting, robbing or also murdering, etc.<sup>6</sup> Even if a behaviour is not against the law, but - according to Gottfredson and Hirschi's definition - disruptive, disobedient, uses force or fraud, and cause harm to self or others, it should be considered as delinquency<sup>7</sup>.

In my opinion, it's important to analyse the different stages of delinquency as parts of one scale: firstly, the continuum between these stages is theoretically unquestionable; secondly, the basic elements of these behaviours are very similar (socio)-psychological mechanisms. Hence the analysis of less serious wrongdoings and effective answers to them might lead us to methods of handling more serious forms of delinquency.

### **2.2. The main criminological theories relating to the connection between delinquency and schools**

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<sup>5</sup> One of them was about conflict resolution methods in school, the other was about implementing restorative justice techniques into a high-school for dropout students.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. (n. 3 above, p: 4)

<sup>7</sup> Gottfredson, M.R., and Hirschi, T. (1990), *A General Theory of Crime*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

As socialization is a key concept in social sciences, and school is the second most important socializing agent following the family, almost all of the classical criminological theories analyse the functions of the school related to delinquency. In the following, I only mention some of the theories just to demonstrate how the role of the school itself is differently defined in the specific theories.

Views, emphasising that schools create crime by causing a loss of self-esteem, and by excluding persons with below-average intelligence or those who have an impulsive, hostile or suspicious attitude toward schooling, are variants of **labelling theory**. According to these theories, the labelled students become 'failures' of teachers because of being stigmatised, and are thrown into the company of similarly labelled youth. As a result of a 'self-fulfilling prophecy' these students become marginalised in the school, and victims of the biased perception of teachers who judge the acts of these children as inappropriate behaviours to the 'middle-class' standards.

Views arguing that school frustrates those youths whose behaviour does not conform with the teachers' expectations or youths feel strain associated with failure causing rebellion against middle-class norms, are examples of the **strain theory** approach.

**Subcultural learning theories** emphasise the mechanisms through which school provide an area within which certain young persons become friends by sharing their rejection of the values of middle-class society.

**Social disorganisation theorists** consider schools as a part of a larger community disintegration process allowing delinquency to increase.

And finally, according to the **social control theorists**, when schools fail in their role as secondary socializing agents, youths are more likely to act toward their self-gratifying and delinquent behaviour.<sup>8</sup>

### 2.3. The main school related factors associated with delinquency

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<sup>8</sup> Wilson, J.Q. and Herrnstein, R.J., '*Crime and Human Nature*', New York: Simon and Schuster, p: 266-267., and Gottfredson, D.C. (2001), '*Schools and Delinquency*', Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p: 2-3.

As I mentioned in the introduction, school can protect from delinquency but at the same time, it can generate it as well. Hence, the school related factors, which have effects on delinquency, can also be divided into two categories: **protective factors** that might directly reduce a dysfunction, and **risk factors** that increase the likelihood of disorder or disease in a school.<sup>9</sup>

In the following, I intend to map those main protective and risk factors which are strongly related to the school. These factors not only create a list of the most significant empirical findings about school delinquency, but also show the necessary directions that school preventive programmes should follow. Hence, these aspects are the conclusions of previous programmes and experiments rather than simply the basic, theoretical findings, which means that by listing these factors it is unavoidable to also ‘run’ into the issue of prevention.

According to Hawkins, Arthur and Catalano (1995), the three broad categories of **protective factors** are *cohesion*, *warmth*, and *bonding* during childhood.<sup>10</sup> In Hirschi’s social control theory, *strong bonds to conventional institutions*, high educational *aspirations*, more *commitment* to school, beliefs in the validity of conventional social rules decrease the possibility to engage in delinquent activities. Among the ‘Big 5’ personality factors, development of *conscientiousness* and *agreeableness* by parents, teachers, and peers can also be considered as protective mechanisms. *Teacher satisfaction* and commitment (Witte and Walsh, 1990), the ‘*sense of community*’ in a school, *shared values*, expectations for learning, behaviour, and for student achievement, meaningful *social interactions* among school members, the ‘ethos of caring’, *communal organisation* (Bryk and Driscoll, 1988.), a balance of intellectually able and less able children in the school, a positive school environment, opportunities for all members to take *responsibility* and to *participate* in the running of the school, *clear goals*, good group management (Rutter et al., 1979.), discipline management, clear, fair and consistently enforced rules, perceptions of

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid. (n. 3 above, p: 26)

<sup>10</sup> cited by Ibid.

procedural justice, flow of resources and information can significantly reduce problem behaviour in schools.

As for the **risk factors**, besides the possibility to list the inverse of all the factors mentioned above, there are still numerous findings, emphasizing other, and typically negative factors in or from schools associated with delinquency on the level of individual, family, peer-group, school, community and society.

On the level of the **individual**, school successes and failure can be predicted by *early aggression, conduct problems, impulsiveness* and *low self-control*.<sup>11</sup> *Lower IQ* – especially in verbal tests<sup>12</sup> –, hence *poor school performance*, and *lower level of emotional intelligence*<sup>13</sup> can also lead to delinquency in schools. Perinatal difficulties, physical trauma to infants, minor physical abnormalities and brain damage also might cause academic and behavioural difficulties in school.<sup>14</sup>

Poor **family** management practices, the *lack of clear expectations* from the parents for their children's behaviour, poor *supervision, monitoring, harsh* and/or *inconsistent punishment, violence* in the family, and *abusive* or *neglectful parents* can result violence in adolescence.<sup>15</sup>

By the interactions with **peers**, their rejection by conventional peers and/or *association with delinquent peers, rebelliousness* and *favourable attitudes toward violence* are the main risk factors leading to delinquency (e.g. the internalization of violent group norms, ritualised fighting for reputation in the school group as a symbol of status consideration).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid. (n. 3 above p: 27-30)

<sup>12</sup> Lynam, D., Moffitt, T., Stouthamer-Loeber, M. (1993), 'Explaining the Relation Between IQ and Delinquency: Class, Race, Test Motivation, School Failure, or Self-Control?', *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 102: 187-196.

<sup>13</sup> Schutte, N.S., Malouff, J.M., Hall, L.E., Haggerty, D.J., Cooper, J.T., Golden C.J., Dornheim, L. (1998), 'Development and validation of a measure of emotional intelligence', *Personality and Individual Differences*, 25: 167-177.

<sup>14</sup> Summary based on several research findings cited by Hawkins, J.D., Farrington, D.P., Catalano, R.F. (1998), 'Reducing Violence Through the School', in Elliott, D.S. et al. (eds), *Violence in American Schools: a new perspective*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p: 189.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. (n. 3 above p:32-34 and n. 14 above p: 189-191)

On the level of **schools**, the highly *departmentalised* institutes, where *teachers* are rather subject matter specialists and *less responsible* for non-subjected aspects, reduce the opportunities for meaningful interaction between teachers and students<sup>17</sup>. Other risk factors include *large, interpersonal* schools, the *lack of school discipline, inconsistent* enforcement of rules, arbitrary and unnecessarily *punitive* enforcement of rules. In schools, having a system of high competition, *low availability* of rewards, *unfair* distribution of rewards, students' failures might also cause aggression against the rewarding system. It has also been empirically tested that student violence is higher where the curriculum and instruction are *not aligned with* the interests and *needs of the students*, and where they feel they have little influence over what happens to them.<sup>18</sup>

Considering the level of **community**, the school results and climate might be strongly determined by the same factors and characteristics as the community it is surrounded by. Dropouts, problem behaviours and increased delinquency can be influenced by the concentration of educationally and socially *disadvantaged students, urban* location, high *density* and *mobility* in communities characterised by social disorganisation and *low socio-economic status*. Due to the 'Matthew effect' – schools that have, more will be given and those that have not, even what they have will be taken away (Matthew 13:12) –, schools, serving the most disadvantaged populations, *lack the resources*, have even more difficulties recruiting high quality teachers and garnering community support. In a school surrounded by a disorganised community, the *lack of shared values, social bonds, strong normative climate and teacher satisfaction* - caused by their professionally and financially undervalued work - can significantly increase the probability of delinquency.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid (n. 3 above p:26-92)

<sup>18</sup> Ibid (n. 2 above p: 4) and Stewart, E.A. (2003), 'School Social Bonds, School Climate, and School Misbehavior: A Multilevel Analysis', *Justice Quarterly*, vol. 20, no.3: 575-604.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid (n. 3 above p: 26-92) and Sampson, R.J., Raudenbush. S.W., Earls, F. (1997), 'Neighbourhoods and Violent Crime: A Multilevel Study of Collective Efficacy', *Science*, 277: 918-924.

'Yes, there is a caste system in the pedagogue society, as well. We are teachers of the poorest, roma children with special needs, and we are the most undervalued among teachers.

*Doesn't it symbolise something to you?*

Yes, it does! It's the same as with our students who form also the lowest class of the society. It is said, the miller is predestined to become covered by flour<sup>20</sup>. But we carry on, even if people say, while we are taking our students to somewhere, that they are stinking. We don't care, we do our job...'

*(interview with a teacher from a small village in Central-Europe)*

Similarly to the issue of delinquency in general, there are several ongoing **arguments** about the interconnections, the directions, and the significances of specific school related factors, as well. One of the main differences among approaches is about the role of the school itself: according to the 'common cause' model, both difficulty in school and delinquency are the results of preexisting personal traits, while the 'intervening model' suggests that schooling is an important intervening variable that converts some preexisting personal traits into a disposition to commit crimes.<sup>21</sup> There are differences among approaches according to the question, whether the *causal factors* are relatively *stable* from early childhood (Hirschi and Gottfredson, 1983)<sup>22</sup> or might *develop* over the life-course (Moffitt, 1993)<sup>23</sup>. There are still arguments about the *causal direction between IQ and delinquency*<sup>24</sup>, or also numerous unresolved questions have been raised by e.g. the *social control theory*: what is the detailed identification of the phenomena, called low self-control, isn't it a tautology explaining crime (which is low self-control by definition) by low self-control<sup>25</sup>, what about white-collar crime which cannot be explained by low self-control, or what about those whose delinquency has resulted from over-controlling mechanisms in the school?

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<sup>20</sup> Proverb in my country

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. (n. 8 above p: 266-267)

<sup>22</sup> Hirschi, T. and Gottfredson, M. (1983), 'Age and the explanation of crime', *American Journal of Sociology*, 89:552-584.

<sup>23</sup> Moffitt, T.E. (1993), 'Adolescence-limited and life-course persistent antisocial behavior: A developmental taxonomy', *Psychological Review*, 100: 674-701.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. (n. 13 above)

<sup>25</sup> Akers R.L. (2000), '*Criminological Theories: Introduction and Evaluation*', Los Angeles: Roxbury, p: 93.

As earlier mentioned, the analysis of school related factors associated with delinquency might help us to implement effective preventive programmes in school. In the next, I will summarise how theoretical findings have been adapted for practical innovations in school crime prevention.

### **3. How can bullying and delinquency be prevented in school programmes?**

#### **3.1. What is bullying?**

Bullying among children encompasses a variety of negative acts (physical, verbal and psychological) carried out repeatedly over time. It involves a real or perceived imbalance of power, with the more powerful child or group attacking less powerful children causing short- and long-term psychological effects on both those who bully and those who are bullied<sup>26</sup> Based on research I have been involved in, I can say that in some - mostly secondary - schools there is a ritualised and 'formalised' institute for bullying, accepted by teachers, as well, by which older students 'introduce' the new students in the school's life by ignominious acts. 'Silent co-operation' of teachers is not rare even in very serious cases, e.g. in a boarding-school, where everyone knew that, when someone said 'Johanna' in the speaker, it was an 'invitation' for the older students to go into the cellar and beat a boy, called 'Vince', just because he was a little bit shy and strange for everyone.<sup>27</sup>

#### **3.2. Preventive programmes in general**

According to Hawkins, Farrington and Catalano, there are four ways in which schools can inhibit violent behaviour: use of management and instructional practices in classrooms, developing social bonds to school and academic success; promotion of norms antithetical to violent behaviour;

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<sup>26</sup> Ericson, N., 'Addressing the Problem of Juvenile Bullying', U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, [www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org](http://www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org)

<sup>27</sup> The summary of the research can be read in Ligeti, Gy. (2003), *Gyűjtés - Iskola, demokrácia, civilizáció [School, democracy, civilization]*, Új Mandátum Publisher

teaching skills for non-violent conflict resolutions; and minimizing the availability of weapons and their use.<sup>28</sup> School-based preventive programmes intended to alter individual behaviours, attitudes, or beliefs to reduce problem behaviour, primarily focus on teaching self-control, social competency, self management, problem-solving, and communication skills. Key elements of the programmes are behaviour modification using counselling-, social work-intervention, increasing individual attention, recreational possibilities, changing classroom-management, changing norms or expectations for behaviour, building a sense of community, changing rules, school processes, etc.<sup>29</sup>

D.C. Gottfredson collected and analysed the structures and effects of 110 school-based preventive programmes<sup>30</sup> providing a complex view about the interventions and about the basic elements which help to implement preventive programmes effectively. The collection of these successful and less successful programmes unquestionably shows that delinquency and bullying can be prevented if some standards are in focus during the implementation. In the following, I only intend to detail the characteristics, which are crucial for the effective prevention, and some specific programmes where efficiency has been empirically proven.

### **3.3. Not only being *preventive*, but also being *effective***

According to D.C. Gottfredson's summary<sup>31</sup>, the following aspects are crucial to implement **effective preventive programmes**:

1. related to the **structure** of the programmes, it is important to:  
have instructional programmes that incorporate behavioural modelling, role playing, rehearsal and practice of new skills; avoid didactic presentation; have use of counselling programmes, but not too much; start at the level of elementary schools; focus on long-lasting effects as well; and consistently observe the programmes.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid. (n. 14 above p: 196-197)

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. (n. 3 above p: 132, 226)

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. (n.3 above)

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. (n 3. above p: 226-227, 237-241)

2. related to the effective process of **implementation**, it is important to have: careful examination of the needs of the school before the implementation; explicit, clear curriculum for the teachers; multicomponent and complex programs; clear program goals; high-quality materials and staff training; teacher participation in the process of implementation; teacher commitment, strong communication skills, self-efficacy; stable, supportive and stimulating leadership and school climate, and no history of failed implementation.

A previously proven, successful program method is still not a guarantee for the effective prevention, if there is not enough attention paid to the proper process of local adaptation, because, for example, crucial principles, techniques might change or disappear during implementation.

Based on a well-known American program, called *Step By Step*, a very effective method was used in an elementary school of a Central-European village. The program primarily aimed to improve the academic and social skills of disadvantaged – mostly Roma - children by focusing on the use of co-operative learning techniques.

‘In the classroom, all the desks were put together forming circles and letting the children sit face to each other during their work. Only one desk was alone in the corner, where *Zolika* was sitting. When we asked the teacher why *Zolika* is alone in the corner, showing his back to the class, the teacher answered:

“*Zolika* is there, because he is not able to integrate into the class, and can’t work with the others.”

My question is that how will *Zolika* be able to integrate later to the society, if he is segregated even in an ‘innovative’ pedagogical programme, already at age 6?<sup>32</sup>

Finally, to illustrate the theoretical aspects by practical **examples**, let me write about three - subjectively chosen - programmes where efficiency has been empirically proven.

The *Olweus Bullying Prevention Program* is one of the best known initiatives designed to reduce bullying among elementary, middle and junior high school students. It involved the school staff, students, and parents in order to raise awareness about bullying, improve peer relations, stop intimidation, develop clear rules, support and protect victims on the level of the school (survey about the prevalence of bullying and teacher training about the implementation), the classroom (discussions, meeting about bullying involving parents), and the individual (staff intervention with

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<sup>32</sup> Based on a participate observation and an interview during our research in 2003

bullies, victims, and their parents). Due to this programme, bullying dropped by 50 percent during two years, behavioural changes, the improvement of school climate, and the decline of antisocial behaviour have been experienced in the school.<sup>33</sup>

The programme, called *Linking the Interests of Families and Teachers (LIFT)* was an intervention including a classroom-based teaching in social and problem-solving skills to students, training sessions for parents to reinforce these skills, and testing of these skills on the playground. The programmes reduced the aggressive playground behaviour by a third, significantly decreased the future inattention, impulsivity and hyperactivity of the children. Those, who didn't receive the programme in the fifth grade, were 59% more likely by the eighth grade to have a pattern of drinking alcohol, and twice as likely to have been arrested during middle school.<sup>34</sup>

Our research team from a non-governmental organisation also implemented a pilot programme at a high-school, based on restorative principles and techniques in 2001, called '*Conflict Resolution Face to Face*'.<sup>35</sup> This program was the first in my country, which used restorative justice and the conference model for conflict resolution in a secondary school that has, so called, dropout students. The six month research program provided the teachers and the students with the opportunity to take part in team work and facilitator training, focusing on team-building and changing people's attitudes. Besides this, our team used the conference method called 'Real Justice' to tackle the current conflicts within the school. When the project finished, the feedback based on qualitative and quantitative evaluation showed several results. The 'sense of community', the school climate, the effective resolution of the actual conflicts had significantly increased, the number of wrongdoings had decreased, a peer- facilitator's training had been implemented, and ten new

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid. (n. 26 above)

<sup>34</sup> Fox, J.A., Elliott, D.S., Kerlikowske, R.G., Newman, S.A., Christeson, W. (2003), 'Bullying Prevention is Crime Prevention', [www.fightcrime.org](http://www.fightcrime.org)

<sup>35</sup> My summary about the programme can be read on the following web-site:  
<http://www.restorativepractices.org/Pages/nl03/nl03sessions.html#using>

students have been certificated as facilitators since then. As a result of this innovation, the conferencing method could become an important part of the school's everyday life, providing an alternative way to the traditional punishing system for handling school conflicts and delinquency.

#### **4. Summary**

The institution of school has a significant effect on delinquency firstly, because it concentrates large numbers of teenagers in one place for long periods, secondly, because – as the second most important socializing agent - by its protective and risk factors, can highly influence the tendencies to wrongdoing among adolescents.

In the previous lines, the main school related factors associated with delinquency have been listed, predicting the necessary content of preventive school programmes which aim to address conflicts and crimes. However, in order to have successful preventive programmes, understanding the 'know-how' of the effective implementation processes is also crucial.

If we are able to focus on both the conceptual and procedural aspects of successful implementation, we save a part of the budget to evaluate and monitor previous and future programmes, then there is a possibility to prevent delinquency by school programmes.

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