

THE PROBLEMS OF CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH DEMAND TIMELY DETECTION, DIAGNOSIS AND COOPERATION OF SPECIALISTS FROM DIVERSE FIELDS

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The study of cognitive functions,
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Institutions in target group

- **Kaagvere Reformatory School** – study completed by 25 girls and 6 members of staff participated in focus group interviews
- **Tallinn Center of Children at Risk** – study completed by 12 boys and 10 members of staff participated in focus group interviews
- **Tapa Reformatory School** – study completed by 0 boys and 5 members of staff participated in focus group interviews
- **Viru Prison** – study completed by 13 boys and 5 members of staff participated in focus group interviews

Schools in comparison group

- Three schools from Ida-Virumaa county:
- **Avinurme Gümnaasium** – study completed by 25 children (14 girls and 11 boys)
- **Kiviõli I Keskkool** – study completed by 7 children (5 girls ja 2 boys)
- **Mäetaguse Põhikool** – study completed by 18 children (6 girls ja 12 boys)

Samples studied

- Teenagers in the study were born between 1996 and 2002 (ages between 12 to 17 years)
- Parents of all participating children gave their informed consent for their children to participate in the study
- Children from age 14 years and above gave also their personal informed consent for participation in the study
- The study was approved by the Tallinn Medical Research Ethics Committee

Variable	Symbol	Closed institutions		Regular schools	
		Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys
Final number of studied children	<i>N</i>	25	25	25	25
Mean age in years	<i>M</i>	15,04	15,28	15,0	15,0
Age, standard deviation (in years)	<i>SD</i>	1,37	1,37	1,17	1,35

The aims of the study

- According to the order the aims of the study were to find the characteristics of cognitive and personality features and the problems accruing from mental health, dependencies and of the social background, influencing law infringement behavior and being considered as behavioral risk factors
- As a result of the study it was expected to reveal the needs of those children arising from their risky behavior and to find out, which their needs are and if they are similar
- Based on the aims of the study specified above, the answers to the following research questions were sought for:

Research questions I

- What kinds of law infringement have been carried out by children sentenced to detention in prison or reformatory school, what are their psychiatric problems, cognitive and personality features, including felonious attitudes?
- How much these children abuse or are dependent on alcohol, illegal drugs and tobacco products, which are the criminogenic needs, including their social background (socioeconomic status, type of family, possible psychiatric disorders in family, education, problems related to study and school, abuse of alcohol, illegal drugs and tobacco in the family etc.) and social networks?

Research questions II

- Which of the needs of those children should be handled for diminishing their criminality, including repeated crimes, or even eliminate their future law infringements, including opinions of the children themselves and what are the risk and protective factors for those children?
- Which children should be handled in detention, which children could be offered intervention programs outside closed institutions and which children should be kept clear of getting into closed institutions?
- How the services provided to children in closed institutions presently fit to their special needs, what the services are and which interventions have been offered to them earlier?

Methods I

- In accordance with the aims the study was carried out as a multimethod complex investigation by using in parallel quantitative and qualitative methods of study
- Different facets of cognitive abilities were measured for establishing the level of general intelligence, of long-term memory, of attention and working memory and for evaluating working memory span
- Questionnaires were used for measuring the potentially problematic core negative self-evaluations (hindrances of attention and attention control, external locus of control and planning-type of control, negative self-esteem, responsibility, psychopathy, narcissism and impulsivity), aggression, anger and hostility, social desirability, positive core self-evaluations, self-efficacy and different facets of negative emotionality

Methods II

- For assessment of relevant possible psychiatric disorders, dependencies and abuse behaviors, selected modules of Mini International Neuropsychiatric Interview for Children and Adolescents (MINI-KID) were used together with cigarette smoking scale
- The second interview was devoted to evaluation of the social background of the participants in the study. Additionally the relevant information was gathered by observations made during test taking, questionnaire filling and interviews
- On the sample of 22 staff members of four closed institutions the focus group interviews were carried out in the semi-structured mode for getting answers to research questions about social background of the children in detention, about their needs, risk and protective factors, the services provided to them and the feasibility of keeping them in detention

Qualitative findings

- Qualitative part of the study revealed typically very problematic family background of institutionalized children
- Normal parenting was lacking, children had experienced emotional neglect, psychological and physical abuse at home, in alternative cases the boundless fostering attitudes of parents
- These children have often undiagnosed and uncured psychiatric disturbances leading to problem behavior, labelling at school, lack of school success feelings, defying, missing school and practicing diverse risky behaviors. As a rule those children miss the adequate support of their family and home
- The greatest unsatisfied needs of these children are needs for attention and love
- The biggest developmental risks are related to problematic family background and of being easily influenced, continued by risky behaviors, alcohol, drugs and tobacco abuse, living in gangs and outside of home, theft and violence

Quantitative findings I

- 50 teenagers (25 boys and 25 girls) from closed institutions (CI) compared to equal sample from regular schools (RS) on the basis of tests, questionnaires and psychiatric interview
 - Cognitive abilities CI < RS (5 variables out of 7)
 - Emotional disturbance CI > RS (5 variables out of 7)
 - Core negative self-evaluations CI > RS (5 variables out of 7)
 - Socially desirable responding CI > RS (1 variable out of 1)
 - Dyssocial control CI > RS (3 variables out of 4)
 - Functional control CI = RS (4 variables out of 4)
 - Core positive self-evaluations CI = RS (1 variable out of 1)
 - Self-efficacy CI = RS (1 variable out of 1)
 - Agression CI > RS (3 variables out of 3)
 - Anger CI > RS (4 variables out of 4)
 - Anger control CI = RS (2 variables out of 2)
 - Hostility CI > RS (2 variables out of 2)
 - Number of ADHD symptoms CI > RS (1 variable out of 1)
 - Dependence on smoking CI > RS (1 variable out of 1)
- Most of measured and evaluated variables are less favourable in children of closed institutions (all differences are significant)

Quantitative findings II

- 50 teenagers (25 boys and 25 girls) from closed institutions (CI) compared to equal sample from regular schools (RS) on the basis of data from social background interview
 - Type of home dwelling CI < RS
 - Amount of books at home CI < RS
 - Number of friends CI < RS
 - Psychological abuse at home CI > RS
 - Physical abuse at home CI > RS
 - Physical abuse out of home CI > RS
 - Number of escapes from home CI > RS
 - Smoking at home by family members CI > RS
 - Becoming the victim of an assault CI > RS
 - Assaulting others CI > RS
 - Bullying others at school and elsewhere CI > RS
 - Problematic and broken relationships CI > RS
 - Experiencing separation CI > RS
 - Experiencing loss of favourite items CI > RS
 - Suicidal ideation CI > RS
 - Attempts of suicide CI > RS
 - Getting under the attention of police CI > RS
 - Punished by leaving behind the home door for night CI > RS
- All of evaluated variables are less favourable in children of closed institutions (all differences are significant)

Conditional portrait of a child in detention

- The child in closed institution differs from a child, studying at regular school by lower cognitive abilities, by strongly prevailing negative emotionality, by higher core negative self evaluations, by higher indicies of aggression, anger and hostility together with numerous unfavourable social background features
- But the greatest difference between the children in detention and in regular schools is in the comparatively high prevalence of various symptoms of psychological disorders, partly diagnosed, partly undiagnosed, the dependencies and abuse of drugs, alcohol and tobacco among the institutionalized children

Conclusions

- Helping these children presupposes early detection of problems and providing integrated services (the time being the crucial factor for potential improvement)
- Among the other adverse circumstances of children at detention it was found that lack of appropriate information about:
 - diagnosis and cure
 - feasible study level
 - possible school violence
 - the educational and other special needs
 - the services provided earlier

is violating the success of help because of a trivial reason – this information has not arrived to the institution of detention together with the child

Conclusions

- Today closed institutions, especially reformatory schools, lack appropriate conditions and specialists for providing on-site help in serious cases
- Among the others there is a great shortage of child psychiatrists and only state-initiated intervention can improve the situation
- Psychiatric help and rehabilitation services should be available on-site at reformatory schools, because most of their children have special psychological needs

Conclusions

- Laws and regulations of personal data protection should not hinder any provider of help to the child from knowing and understanding his/ her special needs of any kind, contrary to the standard situation available today
- Only profound knowledge about special needs of a child is a premise for successful cooperation of specialists from diverse fields in the interests of this child
- Positively, the closed institutions are able to offer secure environment, clear rules and supportive people to help the children in their troubles



Thank you for your attention!

