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Social maladjustment as an expression of negative attitudes towards norms

Abstract: The aim of the study was to determine attitudes towards the norms of socially maladjusted youth. Reference was made to C. Czapów's claim that social maladjustment is the result of an individual's negative attitudes, understood as a reluctance to engage in compliance with standards. A diagnostic survey was used. 132 wards of juvenile detention centers and youth educational centers took part in the study.

Confirmed was the assumption that socially maladjusted adolescents had negative attitudes towards the tested standards and a low degree of internalization. It was established that young people associate the application of legal, religious and moral norms with values, but these views do not correspond to their observance. The results obtained determine the implications for the rehabilitation practice – they indicate the need to intensify educational efforts in supporting the moral development of socially maladapted individuals.

Key words: social maladjustment, socially maladjusted youth, negative attitudes towards norms.

The literature on the subject presents diverse views on the etiology of social maladjustment. While there is a consensus on the areas (biological, mental, social) from which the determinants of social maladjustment originate, the concepts of social maladjustment point to multiple causes. In the approach presented by C. Czapów (1978) in Poland, social maladjustment, called social derailment by the author, is a manifestation of destructive antagonism. The author defines it

as an internal attitude responsible for the orientation towards opposing all social norms, regardless of their content and character (Czapów 1978). This position is consistent with the view represented in America that social maladjustment is a pattern of commitment to deliberate, antisocial and destructive criminal behavior (Merrell, Walker 2004, p. 901). Persons who are not socially adapted present the so-called criminal style of thinking (Walters 1995), which eliminates the controlling influence of norms, causing the individual to persistently and entirely consciously break them.

The cause of the formation of destructive antagonism are egocentric, aggressive and antisocial attitudes (Bandura, Walters 1968). Destructive antagonism is responsible for the so-called negative attitudes, i.e. the subject's unwillingness to undertake socially imposed behavior (Czapów 1971). It manifests itself in behaviors that are more clearly in opposition to values, violating legal, moral and social norms (Pytka 2001, p. 90). These include: brawls, thefts, truancy, running away from home, notorious lies, arson, vandalism, drinking, smoking, drug use, suicidal attempts Bowlby 1988; Collins, Read 1990; Clarizio 1992a, 1992b; McGhee, Short 1991; Stouthamer-Loeber 1986; Pytka 2001) as well as prostitution, promiscuity, aggression, non-compliance with regulations and interpersonal conflicts (Pytka 2001).

The accumulation of negative attitudes towards socially accepted norms makes individuals susceptible to engage in deviant behaviors, potentially predisposing them to violate norms, therefore these negative attitudes may be considered as symptoms of social maladjustment.

The research presented below addresses the issue of negative attitudes of young people maladjusted to norms.

Selected aspects of negative attitudes of youth maladjusted to social and legal norms – own research

Research assumptions and procedure

The issue of social norms is closely linked to the issue of values. In the social sciences, values are treated as structures (systems) separated in personality, including beliefs (cognitive representations) determining preferred target states or behaviors (Kmita 1985; Rokeach 1973; Schwartz 1992; Wojciszke 2002). Values define socially desired goals, thus orienting motivation, their role is to guide individual choices and to assess behavior and events. They are of a normative nature, i.e. they set the norms of conduct by delimiting the scope of acceptable behavior. The standard, in turn, is defined as a value-oriented directive court, which defines the behavioral patterns acceptable in a given society, community (Kmita 1985; Jaśtał 2004). Norms are rules that define socially preferred behav-

ior, and include a prohibition or prescriptive approach in a particular situation. The relationship between values and norms is revealed in their roles – while the role of values is to set goals, the role of norms is to make values a reality in social life. It should also be noted that norms provide a reference point for the assessment of individuals in their social environment – those who violate the norms are considered to be “misfits” and, as a consequence, are subject to stigmatization (Włodarczyk 2003).

The controlling nature of values depends on their internalization, i.e. the extent to which an individual accepts it and recognizes as own aspiration.

A high degree of internalization of values and related norms is a guarantee of maintaining social order, while their low internalization encourages social maladjustment (Florczykiewicz 2016; Pytka 2001).

Knowledge of the degree of internalization of values and related norms by young people is the starting point for the design of actions aimed at the assimilation of norms by the pupil and is therefore crucial for pedagogical and re-socialization practice. In view of this, the internalization of values and norms by socially maladjusted young people has been made the subject of research.

Referring to Czapów’s concept (Czapów, Jedlewski 1971), it was assumed that the low degree of internalization of values is accompanied by negative attitudes towards social and legal norms that favor their violation.

The aim of the research is to identify negative attitudes of socially maladjusted youth to selected axionormative standards, i.e. values and related norms.

The following research questions were formulated:

1. What are the attitudes towards norms presented by socially maladjusted youth?
2. Is there a correlation between the knowledge of the norm by socially maladjusted young people and its observance, i.e. reflection in behavior?

The study took into account two values – honesty and dignity. The associated norms – respect for property, religiousness, honesty, respect for others were given the status of independent variables. The response to a norm was taken as an indicator of its internalization, as expressed in the views and declarations of behavior (Table 1).

Table 1. Variables and indicators

Values	Independent variables – norms	Indicators – response to norms
Honesty	respect for property	views on the acceptability of theft, theft
	religiousness	views on respecting religious rules
	sincerity	views on the acceptability of cheating, cheating

Values	Independent variables – norms	Indicators – response to norms
Dignity	respect for other people	views on the acceptability of hate speech views on the acceptability of denigration of others

Source: authors' own research

A diagnostic survey was carried out. Questionnaires were sent to selected rehabilitation centers, where they were carried out by counselors. The study was of a quantitative nature.

To determine the frequency, percentage indicators were used, while co-occurrence of variables was determined by means of the χ^2 independence test.

Research sample

The study covered 132 socially maladjusted people, including: 32.6% (43 persons) – correctional facilities [CF] charges and 67.4% (89 persons) – youth detention centers [YDC] charges. 25.6% of the examined CF charges were girls and 74.4% – boys, while among the YDC charges 23.6% were girls and 76.4% boys. An indicator of social maladjustment was the fact of being sent to a rehabilitation center. The age of the studied group ranged from 14 to 22 years ($M=16.76$; $SD=1.64$).

The attitudes of socially maladjusted young people towards norms

The attitudes of socially maladjusted young people to norms were examined in reference to honesty. Questions concerning views on the observance of legal, religious, and moral norms were asked (the terms “rules” and “norms” were used interchangeably).

The first question concerned compliance with legal norms: “Can you live an honest life without complying with legal norms?” Almost half of the respondents (49.2%) associate honesty with the need to observe legal norms (answer: “no”). CF charges more often associate their observance with honest life (58.1%), compared to YDC charges (44.9%) – the difference is 13.2 percentage points (Chart 1).

It was also examined whether views on compliance with legal norms are accompanied by conviction that they are being respected and that legal norms are being observed. Theft was used as an indicator. The compatibility between the view on the admissibility of theft and declarations on commitment of theft and the view on the respect of legal rules and norms was examined. It was found that there is a correlation between the views on the acceptability of theft and the views on compliance with legal norms – $\chi^2 (2.132) = 26.135$, $p < 0.001$,

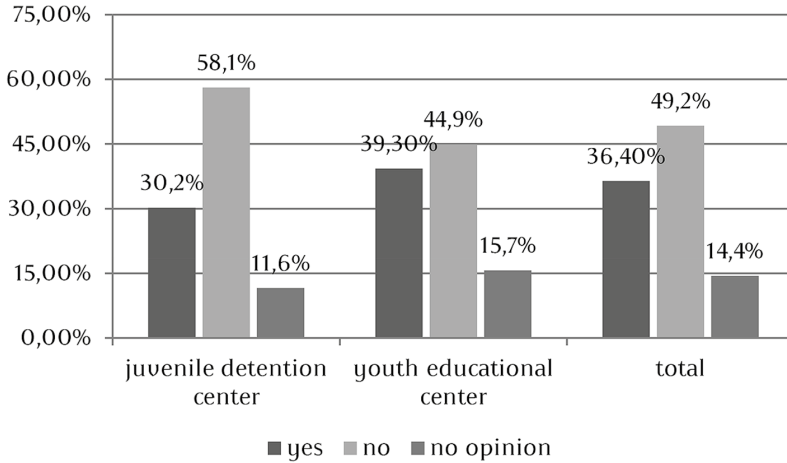


Chart 1. Can you live an honest life without complying with legal norms?

Source: author's own research.

Cramér's $V = 0.315$. The majority of respondents declaring the need to comply with legal rules and norms consider theft to be unacceptable (73.8%), while more than half of the respondents (54.2%) who do not consider it necessary to comply with legal rules and norms consider theft to be acceptable (Table 2).

Table 2. Necessity to respect legal norms and acceptability of theft in the opinion of respondents, $n = 132$

	One can live an honest life without complying with legal norms		One cannot live an honest life without complying with legal norms		No opinion		Total	
	n	%	n	% of	n	%	n	% of total
Theft is acceptable	26	54.2%	10	15.4%	3	15.8%	39	29.6%
Theft is unacceptable	16	33.3%	48	73.8%	11	57.9%	75	56.8%
no opinion	6	12.5%	7	10.8%	5	26.3%	18	13.6%
Total	48	100%	65	100%	19	100%	132	100%

Source: author's own research.

A high percentage of respondents admit to committing thefts and that this act is independent of the views on the necessity to observe the norms (Table 3) – there is no relation between committing an act violating a legal norm (theft) and the views on respecting the norms (χ^2 is not statistically significant).

Table 3. The need to respect legal rules and norms and committing theft, n=132

	One can live an honest life without complying with legal norms		One cannot live an honest life without complying with legal norms		No opinion		Total	
	n	% of fraction	n	% of fraction	n	% of fraction	n	% of total
Committed theft	41	85.4	52	80.0	15	78.9	106	82.2
Did not commit theft	7	14.6	13	20.0	4	21.1	23	17.8
Total	48	100	65	100	19	100	132	100

Source: author’s own research.

Socially maladjusted young people do not associate respect for religious rules with honesty. Most of the respondents (62.9%) gave a positive answer to the question “Can one live honestly without complying with religious rules?”, and only 18.9% of the respondents gave a negative answer. The difference between the views presented in the surveyed groups is negligible (Chart 2).

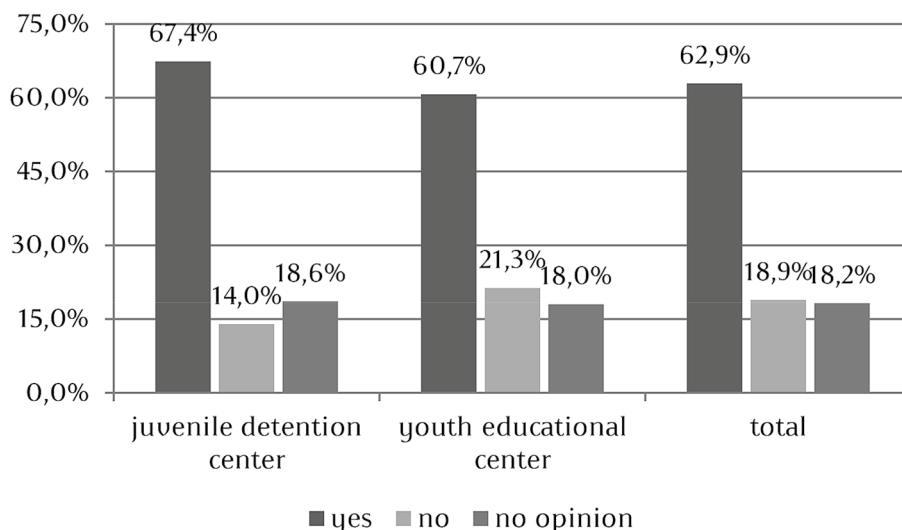


Chart 2. “Can one live honestly without complying with religious rules?”

Source: authors’ own research.

The question was to determine the views on linking integrity with respect for moral principles: “Can you live an honest life without complying with moral principles?” Slightly more than half of the respondents associate honesty with

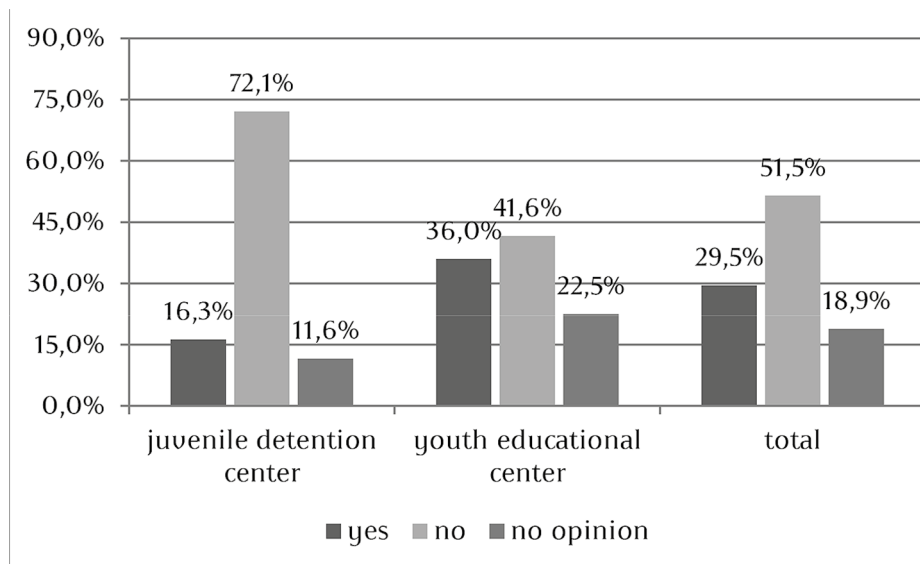


Chart 3. Can you live an honest life without complying with moral principles?, $n = 132$
Source: authors' own research.

observing moral principles (answer: “no”). Views vary from one institution to another, the majority of CF charges (72.1%) associate honesty with observing moral principles, while among YDC charges this conviction is held by less than half of the respondents (40.9%) – the difference between the surveyed groups is 31.2 percentage points (Chart 3).

It was examined whether the conviction about observing moral principles are consistent with the views about the behaviors violating them and about undertaking such behaviors. The following indicators were used: cheating, using hate speech, slandering others, where cheating was associated with honesty and using hate speech and slandering others with dignity.

Slightly more than half of the respondents (53.4%) consider cheating to be unacceptable, a much lower number of respondents deem it acceptable. Similar views are presented by respondents from both institutions (Chart 4). The view on the unacceptability of cheating is co-existing with the conviction that an honest life includes observing moral principles (Table 4). There is a relationship between the studied views – $\chi^2(4.132) = 15.820$; $p < 0.01$, the value of Cramér's V was 0.245, which means that the correlation is low.

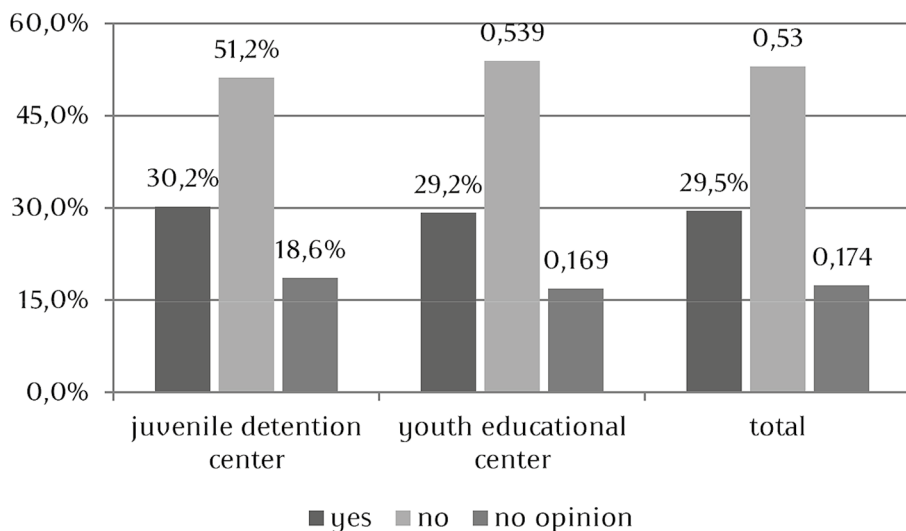


Chart 4. Is cheating acceptable?

Source: authors' own research.

Table 4. Necessity to respect moral principles and acceptability of cheating in the opinion of respondents, n = 132

	One can live an honest life without complying with moral principles		One cannot live an honest life without complying with moral principles		No opinion		Total	
	n	% of fraction	n	% of fraction	n	% of fraction	n	% of total
Cheating is acceptable	19	48.7%	16	23.5%	4	16%	39	29.0%
Cheating is unacceptable	17	43.6%	41	60.3%	12	48%	70	53.4%
No opinion	3	7.7%	11	16.2%	9	36%	23	17.6%
Total	39	100%	68	100%	25	100%	132	100%

Source: author's own research

The views presented by the respondents regarding the necessity to respect moral principles do not always correspond to their behaviors. As many as 67.6% of the respondents declaring to respect moral principles committed acts of cheating (Table 5). There was no correlation between these variables (χ^2 not statistically significant).

Table 5. Necessity to respect moral principles and cheating, n = 132

	One can live an honest life without complying with moral principles		One cannot live an honest life without complying with moral principles		No opinion		Total	
	n	% of fraction	n	% of fraction	n	% of fraction	n	% of total
Committed acts of cheating	30	76.9%	46	67.6%	16	64%	92	69.7%
Did not commit acts of cheating	9	23.1%	22	32.4%	9	36%	40	30.3%
Total	39	100%	68	100%	25	100%	132	100%

Source: author’s own research

More than half of the respondents consider using hate speech to be acceptable, such views are presented by a greater number of YDC charges than CF charges (difference of 11.7 percentage points).

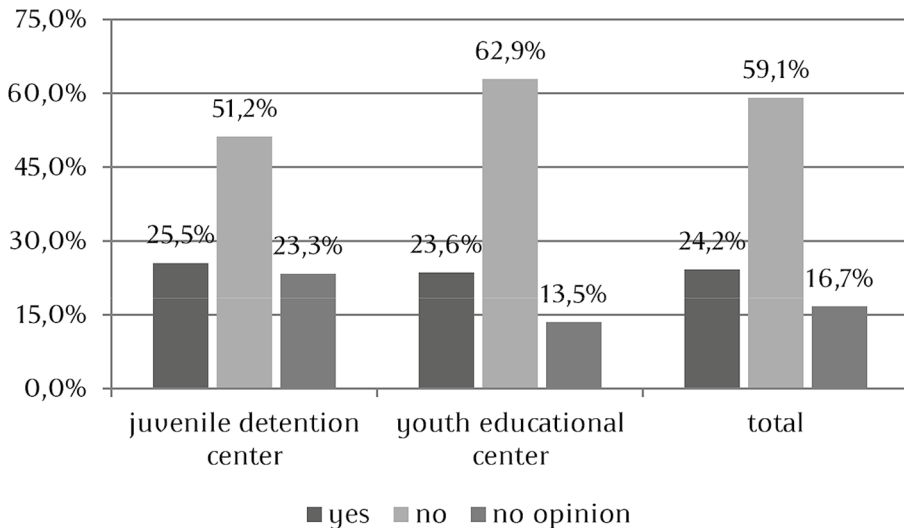


Chart 5. Is using hate speech acceptable?

Source: author’s own research

The views on the respect for moral principles are consistent with those on the acceptability of using hate speech (Table 6). 66.2% of the respondents who acknowledged the need to respect moral principles present a view on the accepta-

bility of using hate speech – however, no correlation was obtained between these variables (χ^2 not statistically significant).

Table 6. Necessity to respect moral principles and using hate speech in the opinion of respondents, n = 132

	One can live an honest life without complying with moral principles		One cannot live an honest life without complying with moral principles		No opinion		Total	
	n	% of fraction	n	% of fraction	n	% of fraction	n	% of total
Using hate speech is acceptable	13	33.3%	12	17.6%	7	28.0%	32	24.2%
Using hate speech is unacceptable	22	56.4%	45	66.2%	11	44.0%	78	59.1%
No opinion	4	10.3%	11	16.2%	7	28.0%	22	16.7%
Total	39	100%	68	100%	25	100%	132	100%

Source: author’s own research

More than 1/3 of the respondents deny slandering others, the views of the charges from both examined institutions are consistent in this respect (Chart 6).

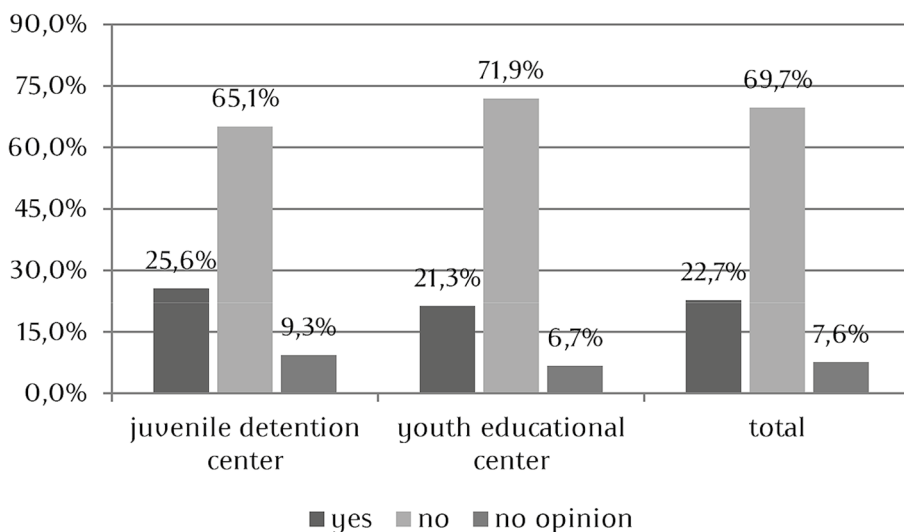


Chart 6. Is it acceptable to slander others?

Source: author’s own research.

There is a correlation between the views on compliance with moral norms and the admissibility of slandering others – $\chi^2(4.132)=32.291$; $p < 0.001$, the value of Cramér's V was 0.350, which means that the correlation is low. 82.4% of those who consider it necessary to observe moral principles also deem it unacceptable to slander others (Table 7).

Table 7. Necessity to respect moral principles and slandering others in the opinion of respondents, $n = 132$

	One can live an honest life without complying with moral principles		One cannot live an honest life without complying with moral principles		No opinion		Total	
	n	% of fraction	n	% of fraction	n	% of fraction	n	% of total
Slandering others is acceptable	14	35.9%	11	16.2%	5	20%	30	22.7%
Slandering others is unacceptable	24	61.5%	56	82.4%	12	48%	92	69.7%
No opinion	1	2.6%	1	1.5%	8	32%	10	7.6%
Total	39	100%	68	100%	25	100%	132	100%

Source: author's own research

Discussing the results

The views of socially maladjusted youth regarding compliance with legal norms are consistent – approx. half of the respondents associate this norm with honesty, with a better result obtained from CF charges (72.1%). Despite the knowledge of the norm, the behavior does not comply with the directives it contains. Individuals declaring the need to comply with legal rules and norms commit theft on an equal footing with those declaring their lack of compliance. The result obtained indicates a low control impact of the norm – it is known, but it is observed only to a low degree, which means its low internalization.

Also, the observance of moral principles is associated with honesty by more than half of the respondents. The result obtained is an indication of understanding of the norm, but does not guarantee that it will be respected. In the case of the respondents, the declarations do not go hand in hand with their behavior (no statistical relation was found). More than half of the respondents declaring to respect moral principles committed acts of cheating, which indicates low internalization.

The influence of religiousness on behavior manifests itself in its inclinations to morality – identification with God possessing attributes of being infinite and holy determines the basic axioms of ethical action that religious people implement in their behavior. However, socially maladjusted young people do not equate observing religious principles with being honest, which indicates rather low participation of religiousness in shaping desired behaviors.

The knowledge of the norm relating to the use of hate speech associated with dignity presents itself slightly differently. More than half of the respondents deems it acceptable, where more is more commonly accepted by YDC charges. The obtained result proves an incorrect understanding of the norm of dignity – no statistical significance was obtained between the view on the necessity to observe moral principles and the acceptability of using hate speech. It should be noted that the understanding of the norm connected with using hate speech should be considered in the context of the current online communication norms that became a part of culture.

The respondents, on the other hand, are familiar with the norm relating to lying aimed at discrediting another person (slandering). This is evidenced by the obtained correlation – views hailing the necessity of obeying moral principles correspond to the conviction that slandering others is unacceptable.

The findings are consistent with the results of the survey on the understanding of values and related norms by socially maladjusted young people and their insufficient internalization (Florczykiewicz 2016).

Conclusions

The obtained results confirmed the initial assumption that socially maladjusted young people have negative attitudes towards the studied norms and a low degree of their internalization – this is evidenced by the disregard for the requirements specified in the norms, despite being familiar with them. These findings have significant implications for the practice of rehabilitation – in their perspective, it seems justified to intensify educational efforts to support the moral development of socially maladjusted individuals. At the same time, they set the direction and subject of further research on mechanisms of social maladjustment.

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